



*THE HAROLD HODGKINSON LECTURE*

Bill Bishop  
Response by J. Mac Holladay

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The Hodgkinson Lecture was established in 2017 in honor of Harold “Bud” Hodgkinson, renowned lecturer, writer, and analyst of demographics and education. “Bud was ahead of his time in anticipating the resegregation of schools, which is now recognized as a major problem,” Kettering Foundation president David Mathews wrote, shortly after Hodgkinson’s death in 2016. “And he saw what few did at the time: the relationship between race and economic status. In other works on higher education, Bud contributed what I consider to be the most provocative talk at HEW’s 1976 conference on the changing agenda for higher education. . . . To recognize his contributions to Kettering, we are creating the Hodgkinson Lecture. This lecture will be given to our most distinguished guests to make presentations to our meetings and conferences. It is our way of paying tribute to one of our country’s most insightful, witty, and perceptive scholars.”

The first Hodgkinson Lecturer was journalist and public intellectual Bill Bishop, coauthor (with Robert G. Cushing) of the 2008 book, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*. He delivered his talk to the group gathered for Dayton Days in June 2017. Serving as responder was community and economic development consultant J. Mac Holladay, who wrote “Economic and Community Development: Southern Exposure,” a Kettering Foundation occasional paper.

Appearing here are lightly edited versions of both speakers’ remarks, as well as highlights of the ensuing discussion. Brief biographies of both speakers appear at the end of this document.

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## Introduction

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Recent trends, such as growing digital divides, social enclaving, and media polarization are undermining the capacities of citizens to understand each other and work together across differences. Bill Bishop, who has written about these trends of social fragmentation, drills down on this issue to tell us what he's learned about the social and psychological roots of these trends and what we've seen since publication of *The Big Sort*. Are these trends intensifying and what are the consequences? In response, community organizer J. Mac Holladay talks about ways that these trends could be, and are being, reversed.

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The Hodgkinson Lecture (Bill Bishop)

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*The Big Sort* continues. In the last election, 60 percent of voters lived in a county where either Trump or Clinton got 60 percent or more of the vote. That was up from 50 percent 4 years ago. Eighty percent of counties were landslides. That's up from 60 percent 4 years ago. So even though states got closer, as we all know, communities became more polarized.

So all of this got my wife, sociologist Julie Ardery, and me wondering about what was at the root of this, and we began reading largely European sociologists—among them, Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman, and Alain Ehrenberg. They describe a process of how we think people are re-creating the community that's lost, that that is what people are doing as they find others who are like themselves, not necessarily politically but in terms of lifestyle, and that that translates into the political polarization when the polls open.

What Beck and these others are essentially saying is that people are living in the world differently than they were before, that the structures—Julie describes them as a sort of scaffolding—that supported people in community and in work and in religion and in family have all lost their power to hold people up, and that the responsibility for creating one's life has devolved on the individual. In other words, people aren't so much choosing to be individuals as they are condemned to individualization.

In turn, according to Ulrich Beck, jobs for life have disappeared, obliterated by technologically advanced and global capitalism that exalts labor/market flexibility above all. . . . The institutions of marriage, religion and family that once anchored working-class lives have shattered into ill-fitting pieces that each individual must consciously put back together on his or her own.

In some ways, the fragmenting of these institutions offers the promise of emancipation for women, [members of] the LGBT community, who have now greater control over their lives but in a larger social climate of insecurity in which risks are increasingly redistributed away from the state and onto the individual. The freedom from tradition more often leaves them longing for the connections and constraints of the past.

You can see this everywhere and what we thought was driving this was urbanization and diversity. I guess the old saying in France is that when a farmer hit the train platform in Paris, he lost his religion because how can you have one true God when you see all these other gods being worshiped around you?

So, we have urbanization, which introduces this array of choices. Families break down. Divorce rates go up in increasing numbers. You know all the statistics on that. Compulsory schooling increases people's ability to make choices, to choose among different ways of life. In the workplace, 40 percent of people now are sort of free agents; a percentage that is increasing by a percent or two a year. And the economy likes people who are flexible, who can move from one place and job to another. In short, people are now responsible for developing their own skills and their own work lives.

As for welfare, a lot of us know the work of Ron Inglehart, who shows that as people get richer and as the welfare state ensures people's ability to survive, they're less likely to trust in government. They're less likely to obey sources of authority. They're less likely to go to church. So as people get richer, they withdraw from those community institutions that once held their lives together.

The innovation economy enjoys people with loose ties. Individualism as opposed to collectivism "is the central cultural variable that matters for long-run growth," writes economist Yuri Gorodnichenko. But you see this: He cites study after study showing that the fewer ties there are between people, the greater the diversity of the place, the weaker the cultural ties, the better the economy works.

Entrepreneurship increases in cities where collective values decline. New markets demand workers who are willing to move from one place to another, regardless of their ties to a community. High levels of cultural individualism lead to higher rates of innovation. Technology does the same—it really gives people freedom to express themselves on their own.

As for political consensus, it's true that the right wants individuals to have complete economic freedom and the left wants everyone to have complete social freedom. But there's a political consensus in this country that is not often spoken of: both the right and the left agree that these choices and risks and responsibilities should devolve on the individual.

We've moved from voting our interests to voting our identities. We've moved from a police-protection community to open carry and stand your ground: you're responsible for your own police protection. We've moved from obedient children to independent children. When Robert and Helen Lynd did their Middletown study in the 1920s, they asked mothers and fathers what they most wanted from their children. Well, they wanted obedient children. They wanted children to go to church.

And when those same questions were asked again in Middletown in the 1980s, now they wanted independent children. And that's the right choice for children in an economy where innovation and change and flux are important things. In fact, we found this child, in a little town in Germany wearing a T-shirt that said: "Break The Rules."

Now the naming of children is more diverse, and on and on, from marriage as commitment to marriage as personal fulfillment. From community events to event communities: Burning Man takes over for the community events that we have in my little town in La Grange, Texas. We don't want any ties that restrict our choices. We all know the phenomenon of not really wanting to RSVP to an invitation because—you know—you might miss something else.

We've gone from the United Way as a way of giving for philanthropy to individual events. For us, it's the MS-150 bike ride, where people participate and have individual control over their giving. As journalists, we've begun shifting from third person to first person. Third person accounts are now viewed with suspicion. So you see increasing numbers of stories on the front page of the *New York Times* written in the first person because they're more believable. And of course, this has also resulted in a deluge of memoirs that now fill booksellers' shelves.

Art has gone from originality and craftsmanship to curation and free-range creativity. It's primarily conceptual—what comes out of the individual. "We" medicine is becoming "me" medicine as increasing attention is placed on individual genetic manipulation and designing drugs for the individual. There's a good book about that written by Donna Dickinson, emeritus professor of medical ethics and humanities at the University of London.

I think you're getting the idea here. Religion goes from religion of the Word, of the law, and of the place, to religion of the spirit. Everyone gets to choose. We've gone from God's chosen people to people who choose our own gods. And so you have the decline of religion of the dwelling and an increase of religion of the individual. As Putnam and Campbell's book about religion tells us, it's the act of going to the place with other people—not necessarily the religion that's imparted but being in that place that makes people better neighbors, as they say.

People used to serve institutions. Now institutions serve people. . . . There's a group out of Brooklyn called K-Hole (which my nephews tell me is a drug term). They talk about how they had to help the millennial generation overcome the “indignity of belonging.” Zygmunt Bauman writes: “Culture today consists of offers, not prohibitions; propositions, not norms.” The economy once worked best with tight ties. Now it works best with loose ties. You used to have a career. Now you have the startup of you.

In the 1950s, John Kennedy wrote a book about how individuals in the US Senate worked selflessly within the institution in efforts to change the course of history, and that that was how things once worked. We flip ahead half a century, and we have the new president who writes a book about how he was born as an individual and had to overcome institutional pressures to find his place in society—that the change begins with the individual, not within the institution. Or as our friends at K-Hole said: “People once were born within community and had to find their individuality. Now they are born as individuals and have to find their community.”

So, in writing *The Big Sort* we essentially saw four pillars of this new society: diversity, choice, reflexivity, and flux. Diversity is always good. Choice is always good. Reflexivity means everyone gets to choose his or her own source of truth. And flux, of course, means that everything is always ready to change. So we saw that as what was driving the sorting, and causing these real differences in the economy and in the culture.

Economist Raj Chetty who does all the work on inequality, actually went back and looked at the county level and tried to determine which places were best for people to grow up in, in terms of marriage and income. He could track individuals through tax records, and he found what he calls the “neighborhood effects.” Robert Sampson, who wrote *Great American City*, could see the same in Chicago—that, regardless of income,

race, or any other factor, places, have a similarly pervasive impact on how people grew up and what they became.

Chetty and his group went back and looked at the places where rich people and poor people lived and where they had grown up. What did that mean for your income and for your marital status at age 26? Were you more or less likely to be married?

It turned out that the places that were great for the economy—chiefly big cities—were bad places for poor people to grow up in. If you're a poor person, black or white, the best place to grow up is in the Great Plains. If you go to the most rural counties in this nation, 80 percent of them are good places to come from if you want to earn more money at age 26. To be clear, job seekers don't necessarily make more money in the rural counties where they grow up. They make their money in the cities. But they evidently bring with them cultural foundations that help them succeed.

Economically speaking, the Black Belt counties in the South are bad places for people—black or white—to grow up in. Education and social capital are big players in this. At the same time, however, as Mac can tell you, the central cities are where the new jobs are being created, and an increasing concentration of the economy is in the central part of central cities. But in most other ways, those are the worst places for poor people to grow up in. The same is true with regard to marriage. Only 21 percent of those counties with central cities have above-average results for kids to get married by the age of 26, to form a family. So, rich kids who grow up in center-city counties are much less likely to form families by the age of 26. Two-thirds of the kids in the most rural counties are more likely to form families.

And if you put the vote to it, Democrats lost the places that are good for poor kids in terms of the economy and good for people in terms of whether they get married or not. There's a stark difference in the Trump/Clinton vote in terms of just those central-city counties. Trump does much better in places that are better for poor kids. Trump does much better in the places that are good for kids in terms of family formation. And that's true in each geographic category. So there's this economic difference that's a cultural difference, that's a political difference, which is essentially what we were saying in *The Big Sort*. So that's what we're looking at.

We can leave the questions of good and bad for later because what we're looking at is difference. It's not a good or a bad difference. It's a question of whether people are within a tradition or staying out of a tradition. What I'm saying is that there are places that follow tradition, follow norms, and that these places are good for poor kids.

And that gets to the last sort of ticklish thing that all this is pointing toward that we don't ever want to talk about—it's what sociologists call the diversity/community paradox. Almost every study I've seen says that the more diverse a place is—racially, religiously, politically—the less community there is.

Dora Costa at MIT, a fantastic researcher, currently a professor of economics at UCLA writes, "A common theme emerges from these 15 studies: more homogenous communities foster greater levels of social-capital production," on and on and on. The places that are great for the economy are diverse. They have lots of people bringing in all these different ideas. They're bad for community, They're places where people are less likely to vote [and] less likely to be engaged with their neighbors. All the stuff that you all talk about in diverse communities is less evident.

If you want to get political, we like to say that there's a rural/urban divide. It's not rural/urban. Democrats are disproportionately packed into those 54 counties that are central-city counties and in the cities of a million or more. And then they lose, they break even, or win a little bit in metros of a million or more. In every other category they lose congressional or presidential votes. So it's not a rural/urban divide. It's major metro areas, which are great for the economy but are bad for community, and bad for Republicans. And Republicans take everything else.

So I was thinking maybe that would provoke something.

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Response (J. Mac Holladay)

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I do want to say it is always a bit dangerous to disagree with Bill Bishop, but that's my job. I come from a place where I'm on the ground all the time. Our company has worked in 170 communities in 35 states. I'm on the road a lot more than I would like to be. At the same time, it is where the people are. And I want to give you some responses not only to what Bill said but to what we see now that is very different from what it was 10 years ago, certainly very different from when I wrote "A Southern Exposure" 25 years ago.

First of all, what I would tell you is that there is no question that whether it is Grand Island, Nebraska; Columbus, Georgia; Des Moines; Nashville; or Austin, the two things that the business and community leadership that we work with care about are talent and place. And today, they are not ignoring neighborhoods. In the past few years, they are talking for the first time about East Austin, talking about what we can do north of downtown Dubuque.

So I want to argue a bit that that has brought people together in a very different way across all kinds of boundaries. It's interesting, too, that as I read J.D. Vance's book, *Hillbilly Elegy*, having worked a lot in West Virginia and in Kentucky, I found some of it true and some of it not, in terms of his perspective of what has happened there. I would say that the internal focus, the traps that people put themselves in, certainly are part of the culture.

And I will tell you that the culture of a place is vitally important. Take a Tupelo, Mississippi, which is one of the most transformational places in America over the last 65 years. It decided that it was going to be better and, with the leadership of a great newspaper editor and a lot of people one on one, one day at a time, built a great place that continues today to not only lead the state but to have statistics that are just mind-boggling. And part of it is very much about them working together across all the boundaries. There were seven little organizations in 1946 that newspaper publisher George McLean got the communities to merge into one. That community-development foundation remains today as the operational center for what was then a small county of less than 10,000 people and today is the most prosperous county in the state.

It's interesting that they all cared about the community first. They worked on their schools first. They have an amazing percentage of kids that go onto higher education. They have virtually no private schools. They have elected three African American mayors in a town that is 35 percent African American.

It's interesting, too, that what we see again and again is the reality of the changing role of religion. George McLean was strong enough to talk about uneducated religious leadership and call them out, and to call out poor housing, and the other things that we now know are very much a part of culture and what happens there.

I think that there are many places that are working together today in a way that they never have at the local level. And one of the reasons for that is this: they can't get any help from the state, not only because the vast majority of the political leadership doesn't know anything about community and economic development, but because many of the appointments are totally political and not professional.

They didn't have any money. The Great Recession cuts are drastic. You take a state like Oklahoma, where preK-12 funding is down 23 percent since 2008. What kind of future does that say we're going to have if the state is really in charge?

It's interesting, too, to listen to the different pieces that Bill talked about in terms of what's moving things. There is no doubt that the vast majority of jobs—over 80 percent in the past several years—are being created in metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs). And there are many rural parts of the country that are simply fading away.

Remember, though, that we have government structures. I live in a state with 159 counties. Thirty-three of them don't have 10,000 people. Seventy of them don't have 20,000 people. How are you going to create anything in that small a place, isolated totally from the Internet because we have made no efforts in Georgia to do what North Carolina did with high-speed Internet?

The notion of diversity is one that has real meaning in my life, from my days as a naval aviator in Vietnam and all that I saw and did and the people that saved me. Today I have eight grandchildren. Three of them are Irish American. Two of them are Indian American. Two of them are Croatian American, and one of them is African American. We have our own UN meetings. My grandchildren are the future of this country. Their parents are all well educated. I know that because I paid for it.

I have an opportunity to serve on the International African American Museum board in Charleston, South Carolina, for former Mayor Joe Riley. I was there last year with Dr. Gates and Ken Burns talking about America's fault line, which is race. And if you do not believe that that still impacts all of what we're talking about, I think you're sadly mistaken.

What I do see in the innovation economy is a great deal of teamwork, a great deal of small companies that work together, that are diverse, that are teams. I am older than all of my staff's parents except one person. They're all millennials. They're all different. I listen to them. They live in Atlanta because they want to. Whether it is Des Moines or Austin or Tupelo or Nashville, I see people working together at the local level better than ever before, across many lines.

When we did the strategy for Des Moines—which most people don't believe was rated as the number one city for young professionals three years in a row by *Forbes* magazine—we had 5,000 people take the survey. We had 700 volunteers who wanted to be involved. The sponsors were the Community Foundation, the United Way, and the university, among others. There were 15 organizations that wanted to cross the boundaries to make sure that their “capital crossroads,” which is what they called it, was inclusive and really was all about the total community. Remember, now, that Iowa was the first gay-friendly state, and it's had a great impact on their success.

As one of those people who volunteered to serve this country, I think it's very important for us to remember that today less than 1 percent of American families have anyone in the military. It's a disgrace to this country, and I think the abolition of the draft was one of our worst mistakes.

One of my daughters went to Wellesley where she was the president of student government and got into a fierce argument with the president of the school, but managed to stay in the school. After she finished Wellesley, she served in AmeriCorps for two years, went to NYU, and today, she is a capital-punishment lawyer in Durham, North Carolina. The point is simply this: I think there is an interesting crossover between independent children and breaking the rules. Sarah has always been independent. But she is very much about participating and being part of community and working for people who have no defense, who are guilty, but trying to save them.

I see community events in a different way. We have been working in Austin for 15 years. I saw it when it had lost 26,000 jobs paying \$80,000, when there was no immigration, when the per-capita income had gone down \$1,800 per person. One of the things that changed the perception of Austin was a little music festival called South by Southwest, which is now the greatest gathering of geeks you can ever find. If you want to go there and be totally overwhelmed, go and see that the world comes there to talk to these people and to talk to each other in a way that I couldn't possibly have even imagined long ago.

I will say that in some places, like Atlanta, some of the institutions that we have counted on are doing very well. The United Way in Atlanta has raised over 100 percent new money in the last 10 years. The Atlanta Community Foundation is just completing a piece of work on inequality, done by two very thorough economists—a 30-year study looking at mobility. If you start out in the lower 20 percent, economically, in Atlanta, Georgia, 30 years later only 4 percent of you will be in the top 20 percent. So the mobility question is a real one and a difficult one, even in a place as prosperous as we are. I like to say it's important to remember that the percentages related to college graduates in Georgia, and particularly Atlanta, are controlled by those of us who move there, not those people that came from there.

I think it's fascinating to think about some of the changes that Bill talked about and how they kind of fit together. I think that the neighborhoods are really a key to the kingdom here in talking about what can be done. It is difficult for folks in my work, whether it's the Chamber of Commerce or an EDO or a mayor or whatever, I would say that it is fascinating to watch so many cities where the mayor and the leadership are operating on their own because they get no help from the state because, certainly now, they don't know what's going to happen in Washington. But they're trying to figure it out and work on the whole question of how to make things better.

It's interesting, too, to think about the ramifications of *The Big Sort*. My neighborhood in Atlanta, where I've lived for 23 years, is very diverse. My house is probably worth 3.5 times what it was when I bought it on the market. I probably couldn't afford it today. At the same time, we've watched many young people with a lot of money move in. I'm six minutes from my office. I'm in the middle of the city, right by Piedmont

Park. The diversity of people is quite real in many different ways, including Republicans. This is not just Democrats anymore. We're working on it, but it's just what it is. It's fascinating to watch folks walk their dogs, which is what holds us all together—talking about our dogs and talking about our kids and our grandkids.

We are a neighborhood, and I know all the people in the neighborhood. And I care about them. Yes, it is much richer than it was. My house was built in 1946 and is 2,600 square feet. When the lady next-door died about six years ago, the house that replaced hers was 4,500 square feet.

We have worked on two strategies with the Atlanta BeltLine. If you want to see a transformational city project, look up the Atlanta BeltLine: 22 miles of abandoned rail line, which will be the future economy of the city and is very inclusive and very intentional about affordable housing.

I've probably gone on too long. But as someone told me: "Holladay, you may be wrong, but you're not in doubt." That comes from all these years in the field. And at the same time, I see and agree with so much of what Bill said about what's out there. But I think we've got to keep working and do everything we can to make our democracy work, which is very much about what happens in the neighborhood.

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## Highlights from the Discussion

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**Amy Lee:** I guess what I'm hearing from Bill is that people are moving to places where there does seem to be more opportunity. But what does that do to the place where they started from?

**Bill Bishop:** Well, the economy likes one kind of culture—one that has low social capital, loose ties, less connection among people. That's where the economy grows . . . if you look at the counties from the most urban to the most rural, each designation, as it gets more rural, has higher levels of social capital. The counties that have the least social capital . . . are the most urban.

So if we think that social capital and connection among people and all those things are important for democracy, then we're running directly against what the economy wants. That's my point. And the places where people are living in those kinds of societies that have rich social capital and do better—those places are emptying now.

**Maia Comeau:** My community in my rural town is made up of people who are all living like me, and that's a new definition of "community." Is it possible that individualism and the success of the gig economy could lead to a redefinition of community and what that means?

**J. Mac Holladay:** My answer would be "yes." The fact is that we're seeing already a slight move back to the suburbs.

**Female Voice:** Or even rural?

**J. Mac Holladay:** Well, if you're attached to an MSA, yes. If you're in the middle of nowhere, no, that's not happening. And it's not going to happen. Unfortunately, it doesn't look like there's any way forward in lots of places. What I would say is that part of what this economy does is to create new relationships, some of them virtual. . . . We have more people working at home/from home. That will continue. There isn't any doubt about that.

One of the real places to watch what's going to happen—and this goes to the point that Bill made about the poverty neighborhoods that have been that way a long time—is what happens on the west side of Atlanta, on the BeltLine, as we make a serious effort to allow the people who've been there to stay there?

When the BeltLine is finished and the rail service is finished, they will have access to the entire community in terms of jobs and so forth that now they really don't have. So I think it's a both/and answer, frankly.

**Alice Huff:** My work as an urban geographer looks at neighborhood-based political action around schools in New Orleans. I found in those neighborhood-based actions that people are coming to work across difference, and it's very difficult, and it's very uncomfortable. But they're doing it. Are there certain conditions that allow for that kind of work, that precipitate that kind of work, and that support that work across difference, even if it's very rare in communities that are more diverse?

**Bill Bishop:** According to psychologist Gordon Allport's contact theories, most of the time when you get different groups together to meet, unless certain conditions are met, they hate each other more—distrust each other more. If those certain conditions are met, I would think then you can increase levels of trust. But most of the time . . . that will just result in greater polarization.

**J. Mac Holladay:** I would say that I've always believed that crisis is the mother of invention. And part of the reality is how people frame their needs, and how they frame the problem or the issue. And the words that are used are very important, and how they come together is very important.

I remember years ago when I was working in South Georgia, and we were working on trying to assist two counties in working together to build what back in the old days would've been called a business park. We had passed a law to allow them to share the tax revenue across county lines, which, my God, is part of the issue related to money. I asked this one man, "What are you afraid of?" And he said, "I'm afraid they're going to take us over." Well, the two counties didn't have enough powder to blow up the dam. But it was amazing what he was afraid of. When we orchestrated the conversation to the point of him trusting the other person in terms of how we were going to write the agreement together, then it all went away.

So, it has to be thoughtful, and serious, and understanding the local place very well. There are communities 10 or 15 miles apart in southern Virginia that have two totally different cultures, and you have to understand that.

**John McKnight:** This a wonderful discussion, I think, in part because we're discussing a set of questions of which none of us are observers. We are all, in fact, actors.

What I'm wondering about is this: This all sounds like the sweep of history. And most of our discussions here are observing it. But is there any way we could think about public policy that might affect or enhance the growth of social capital, the regrowth? Is this an issue at all where the public domain, where our democracy, becomes publicly expressed and could be active in the regrowth or the maintenance of social capital?

**Bill Bishop:** What works against that is the belief, even among these working class kids, that everybody is responsible for his or her own success or failure. So, it's sort of the neoliberal dream, right? We've inculcated the belief that it's the individual's responsibility to be successful, even within kids who should have clear class solidarity with other kids.

**John McKnight:** I understand that. I'm asking the reverse. What would be public policy that might enhance the maintenance or growth of social capital?

**J. Mac Holladay:** There are any number of things that I would think about, John. Probably starting with free pre-K programs everywhere. . . . I think there are also things, we are experimenting with on the BeltLine in Atlanta, to keep those people in the place they have lived in under very difficult circumstances for years, who are still there, and want a better life for themselves and their kids. . . . We're also redesigning the schools and the neighborhoods dramatically in that part of Atlanta, and giving them many more solid choices and so forth.

One of the things that I see, is how many city governments—their mayors and their councils—are really making serious efforts to do something about their communities working together in a very different way.

**Paloma Dallas:** Now, we've begun to delve into a little bit more of what the issue is. And I guess this question is really for Bill. What do you think the problem is?

**Bill Bishop:** Well, the problem is we have a society set up for governance and how it works with one set of assumptions and institutions, and today those institutions and assumptions no longer hold sway among most people. And as generations pass, that effect will be stronger. So the question is: how do you reconstitute a nation, or a place,

when people live in the world differently than they did when all those institutions and forms of government were created?

**Melinda Gilmore:** I was especially interested by the list of “then” and “nows.” . . . The “nows,” for me, have essentially always been my reality. I’m a younger gen-Xer. We have always distrusted institutions in my lifetime. That distrust has increased. I do not have a golden past to reference in my life, when we would’ve really believed the institutions were a good thing. So, it makes me think about shifts and generational attitudes, and what that means for community.

**J. Mac Holladay:** I wanted to speak to the comment that Melinda made. It is hard for my generation to think about what she said because our parents were children of the Great Depression, and because we were taught to believe in institutions, in government and so forth.

I think it’s a very important point to think about and to talk about. How do we restore it, and how do we think about it in terms of caring? And what do you do, and what kind of place do you create?

I am encouraged greatly by leadership from Topeka, Kansas, to Des Moines to Nashville that really does care and is really trying very hard to improve their places on many different fronts. But I do think it is a giant gap in terms of thinking and how people see the world. And I appreciate you saying that that’s the world that you live in.

**David Holwerk:** I think John McKnight’s question about what public policies would be useful is a good question. I think that for the Kettering Foundation, and for those of us here going forward, one of the things is to recognize that three things we study are all in a state of severe flux: It is not clear what the nature of the emerging institutions are; it’s not clear what the communities are or that the kinds of communities that are emerging can function as communities; and it’s not clear where the citizens come from.

This seems, to me, to be what we ought to be thinking about out of this, much more than whether we are comfortable with this, that, or the other outcome. Because ultimately, the outcome will have profound effects on the nature of what we call democracy.

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Afterword (David Mathews)

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Thinking about the implication for all of this conversation for democracy, I'm reminded of a comment that I got when I asked the head of the Food and Drug Administration if there was some one principle that they could use in determining what was safe and what was unsafe. He said, "Yes, there is, and it's this. Too much or too little of anything can kill you."

So, in a functioning society, too much individualism will eventually kill you. That is, the society will disintegrate and it will cease to function, and just literally fall apart. On the other hand, just the opposite is true. If it comes together so closely, it will be repressive.

There's a good deal of evidence, as Bill knows, that we probably have moved a little bit to the individualistic side, and we're kind of trying to move back. Now, what does all of that have to do with democracy, which seems to have been built around three survival imperatives? One is that to survive you have to have collective effort. Survival is collective. Human beings hunt in groups. On the other hand, we have to be free to forage. And if we get together collectively to do something and we don't distribute the gains equitably amongst the participants, they will leave the group.

So, those get institutionalized over time. And we begin to talk about equitable distribution of goods, and that becomes our notion of justice. And freedom to forage becomes abstracted as freedom, and collective security becomes collective security.

The difficulty is that those are all entwined with one another. In any given situation, what may make us secure may compromise our freedom; what may make us able to operate collectively may impinge on the equitable distribution of goods.

So, democracy is a system. Structurally, it's made up of citizens, communities, and institutions. But it's really made up of these imperatives, these things that are deeply valuable to human beings and have been since we, of all of the species of humanoid hominids, survived. We're the last of 20 or 30 different types of creatures like us. And so, we have these in our DNA.

So what do we make of this conversation in terms of the things that are valuable to us? What do we make of it in terms of what seems to be the imperative? And that is maybe to rev up collective common senses, and maybe not to dampen, but to relate, our individualistic identities. That seems to be the cultural challenge. And so, what we're contemplating today is how that adjustment affects people's ability to live a democratic life, which is important because actually it turns out to be a very effective means for survival.

Democratic imperatives move toward economic survival—and more than economic survival. So, reconciling those, getting the balance right between collective badges and individualistic and identity badges is quite a challenge for us right now. But it probably always has been that challenge, in one form or another. We just have a special dose of it right now. And it's been very difficult.

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## About the Speakers

**Bill Bishop** lives in Austin, Texas. He wrote *The Big Sort* with retired University of Texas sociologist Robert G. Cushing. Bishop has worked as a reporter at the *Mountain Eagle*, in Whitesburg, Kentucky, as a columnist at the Lexington, Kentucky, *Herald-Leader* and on the special projects staff of the Austin, Texas, *American-Statesman*. Bishop and his wife, Julie Ardery, owned and operated the *Bastrop County Times*, a weekly newspaper in Smithville, Texas. They now coedit the *Daily Yonder*, a web-based publication (dailyyonder.com) covering rural America.

**J. Mac Holladay** is founder and CEO of Market Street Services in Atlanta. A highly sought-after community and economic development consultant, he was named by *Southern Business and Development* magazine, in 2015, as 1 of 10 economic development leaders who made a difference. His professional career began in his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee, following five years as a US naval aviator during which he served in Vietnam. Holladay now serves on the board of the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, the board of directors for the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, the Atlanta Educational Telecommunications Collaborative (AETC), and the Community Growth Education Foundation of American Chamber of Commerce Executives; the National Advisory Boards for the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi and the International African American Museum on Arrival Square (IAAM); the advisory board of Washington and Lee Alumni College; and the editorial board of the *Journal of Multistate Taxation and Incentives*.

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About the Kettering Foundation

The Kettering Foundation is an independent, nonpartisan research organization rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Everything Kettering researches relates to one central question: what does it take for democracy to work as it should? Chartered as an operating corporation, Kettering does not make grants. The foundation's small staff and extensive network of associates collaborate with community organizations, government agencies, researchers, scholars, and citizens, all of whom share their experiences with us.

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