

THE SOUL OF AMERICA

KNOW OUR PAST.
SHAPE OUR FUTURE.

SCREENING GUIDE

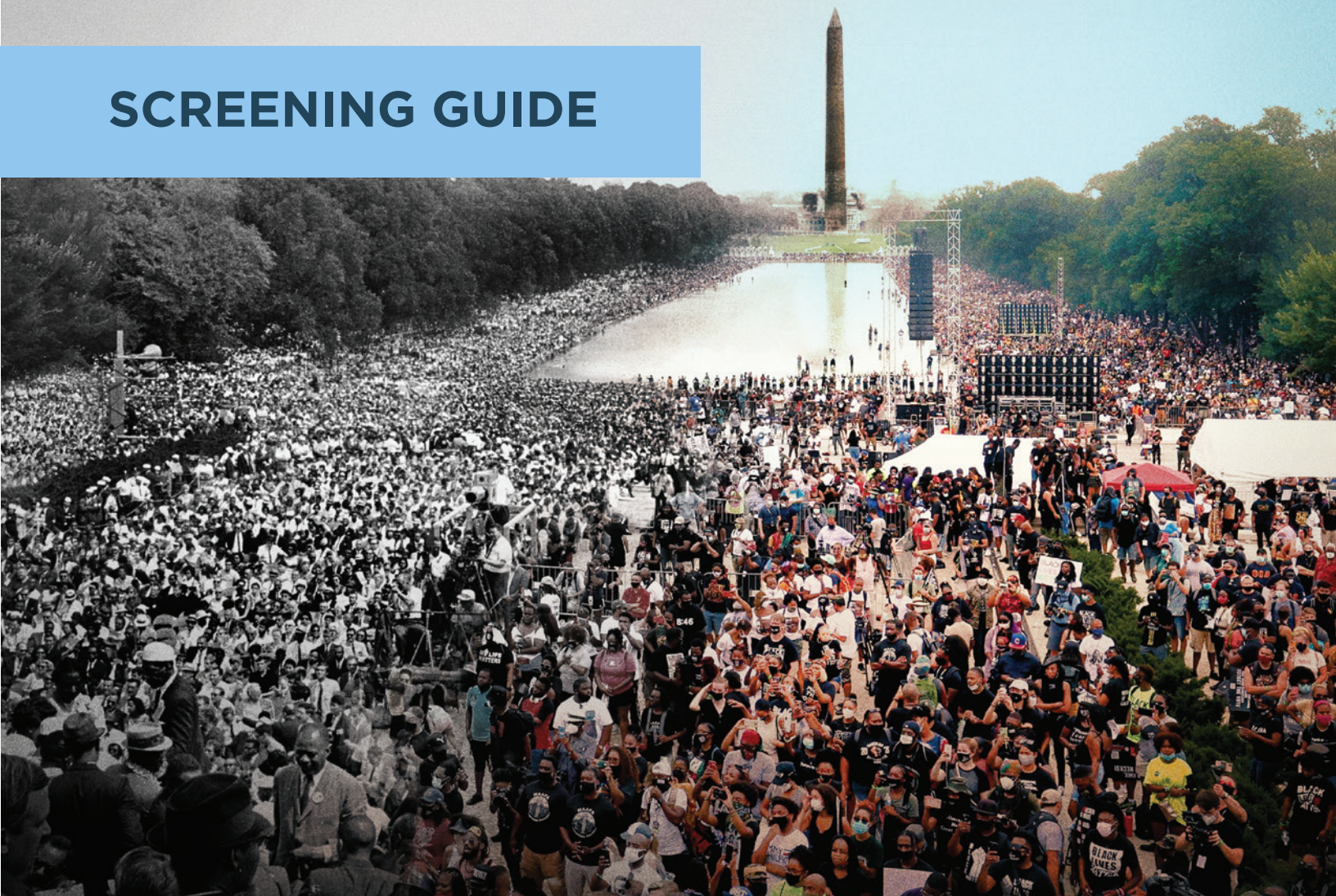




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INTRODUCTION

Many generations, including our own, feel that the conflicts and challenges of their time are unique, even unprecedented. Yet, when we study the history of the United States we see many other periods fraught with divisiveness and tension. Shining a light on these critical moments can be instructive and offer students new insights about who we are as a nation, where we have fallen short of our democratic ideals, and how the civic engagement and morality of leaders—from journalists to activists to our president—can guide us all toward a more equitable and inclusive future.

The documentary **THE SOUL OF AMERICA** shares case studies from our nation's history through the point of view of Jon Meacham, a contemporary historian of politics, presidents, and other topics in American studies. In his talks across the country, his frequent appearances on television, and his writing, Meacham explains that throughout our history two opposing forces cause tension and division - our worst instincts - nativism, racism, sexism, isolationism, and xenophobia - and the better angels of our nature - those qualities and actions that lead our nation to flourish and thrive as a pluralistic democratic republic.



“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, STRETCHING FROM EVERY BATTLEFIELD AND PATRIOT GRAVE TO EVERY LIVING HEART AND HEARTHSTONE ALL OVER THIS BROAD LAND, 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

Using This Guide

This discussion guide is designed for high school classroom teachers, community screening facilitators, and college professors to engage with the feature-length version of **THE SOUL OF AMERICA**. The film covers case studies from American history in which our “better angels” and our worst instincts were in conflict. They address themes of xenophobia, racism, and economic disparity and insecurity while illustrating the significance of civic engagement, moral leadership, and ethical decision-making. The film is an informative and inspiring complement to teaching US history, government, and civics. This guide contains a statement from the filmmaker, background information on Jon Meacham, suggested questions for post-screening discussion of the full-length interviews from the film. Please note these interviews are available in their entirety in the Interview Archive on the Kunhardt Film Foundation website.

“IF WE EXPECT TRUMPETS TO SOUND UNWAVERING NOTES, WE WILL BE DISAPPOINTED. THE PAST TELLS US THAT POLITICS IS AN UNEVEN SYMPHONY.”

— JON MEACHAM, *THE SOUL OF AMERICA: THE BATTLE FOR OUR BETTER ANGELS*

Engagement Goals

The guide is intended to help audiences grapple with Jon Meacham’s historical argument that we can better understand our contemporary age of divisiveness and polarity if we study our history and see that America is in a perennial fight between our worst impulses and our best instincts. The suggested discussion questions invite viewers to reflect on each of the film’s four sections, the overall thesis, and Jon Meacham as a narrative guide. The film and this screening guide help make it possible for groups to:

- **CONFRONT THE FORCES OF FEAR, RACISM, AND ANXIETY THAT HAVE THREATENED OUR DEMOCRATIC IDEALS SINCE THE CIVIL WAR**
- **EXAMINE FOUR PERIODS OF AMERICAN HISTORY THAT REFLECT AND HAVE SIMILARITIES TO CONTEMPORARY STRUGGLES TO PURSUE EQUITY AND INCLUSION**
- **UNDERSTAND THE FORCES OF CHANGE FROM THE PEOPLE, THE PRESS, AND POLITICIANS**
- **REFLECT ON TODAY’S POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CLIMATE ARMED WITH A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMPLEXITY OF HISTORY**
- **INSPIRE CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT AND ACTIVISM FROM THE PUBLIC AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THOSE IN POSITIONS OF POWER**

You may want to connect the film to particular chapters of history, social movements, or current events. Identifying the issues and tensions your community is currently grappling with and putting them in the context of the film will create relevant and dynamic conversation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Film Summary

In **THE SOUL OF AMERICA**, writer, journalist, and historian Jon Meacham offers his timely and invaluable insights into this fraught political and historical moment. From his home in Nashville, TN, Meacham reflects, “I’ve spent a good part of my life thinking about the past and how the past became something worth emulating or avoiding.” Following the turmoil of the 2016 election and the 2017 white nationalist rally and counter protests in Charlottesville, VA, Meacham wrote an article in TIME that eventually became his book **THE SOUL OF AMERICA: THE BATTLE FOR OUR BETTER ANGELS**, in which he outlines America’s ongoing struggles with xenophobia, racism, and sexism. To help understand today’s political climate, Meacham points to record-low trust in the federal government and stark income inequality as ingredients for a populist, nationalist movement that treats “others” as threats.

With insights from historians and civil rights activists George Takei, the late John Lewis, and others, the film looks at how the trends and seminal events of the last 100 years – the women’s suffrage movement, the rise of “America First” rhetoric in the FDR era, the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII, McCarthyism, and the 1960s Civil Rights movement – not only provide context for today’s headlines but also highlight the precariousness of our democratic project. During his frequent media appearances and countless speaking engagements, Meacham is often asked if, and how, America can get out of its current state of deep division, tribalism, and “politics as entertainment.” Citing specific examples from our history, Meacham believes that curiosity (listening to each other), humility (admitting to and learning from our mistakes), and empathy (seeing the world through other people’s eyes) are all good places to start. In America’s ongoing battle between its worst impulses and better angels, Meacham concludes that America’s strength has always come from more generously interpreting what Thomas Jefferson meant when he said that all men are created equal.

“TO KNOW WHAT HAS COME BEFORE IS TO BE ARMED AGAINST DESPAIR. IF THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE PAST, WITH ALL THEIR FLAWS AND LIMITATIONS AND AMBITIONS AND APPETITES, COULD PRESS ON THROUGH IGNORANCE AND SUPERSTITION, RACISM AND SEXISM, SELFISHNESS AND GREED, TO CREATE A FREER, STRONGER NATION, THEN PERHAPS WE, TOO, CAN RIGHT WRONGS AND TAKE ANOTHER STEP TOWARD THAT MOST ENCHANTING AND ELUSIVE OF DESTINATIONS: A MORE PERFECT UNION. TO DO SO REQUIRES INNUMERABLE ACTS OF CITIZENSHIP AND PRIVATE GRACE. IT WILL REQUIRE, AS IT HAS IN THE PAST, THE WITNESS AND THE BRAVERY OF REFORMERS WHO HOLD NO OFFICE AND WHO HAVE NO TRADITIONAL POWER BUT WHO YEARN FOR A BETTER, FREER WAY OF LIFE. AND WILL ALSO REQUIRE, I BELIEVE, A PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES WITH A TEMPERAMENTAL DISPOSITION TO SPEAK TO THE COUNTRY’S HOPES RATHER THAN TO ITS FEAR.”

– JON MEACHAM, *THE SOUL OF AMERICA: THE BATTLE FOR OUR BETTER ANGELS*

Filmmaker's Statement

In August of 2017, there was a visceral and violent cry to protect the symbols of the Confederacy. In the wake of a controversy over the removal of Robert E. Lee's statue in Charlottesville, VA, neo-Confederates, white nationalists, Klansmen, and the like filled the city's streets in a scene that vividly recalled the burning crosses and white hoods of the early twentieth century. The protest, culminating in the death of counter protestor Heather Heyer, was shocking for many in the country, but through the lens of American history, was less surprising.

Inspired by the events in Charlottesville, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jon Meacham set out to explore the history of hate in American life. His exploration would become the book **THE SOUL OF AMERICA: THE BATTLE FOR OUR BETTER ANGELS**, examining the hundred years from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement. Meacham's goal was to show how complex and troubled American history has been, always moving from our better angels to our worst instincts, and back again.

The problems we face today feel endless—political polarization, economic and racial segregation, a pandemic, and one of the lowest life expectancies in the developed world. Many of us have felt that our moment is unparalleled in American history and the worst it's ever been. This view represents a sort of historical amnesia. The long history of racism, sexism, violence, and oppression in American life create a perfect backdrop for the issues we grapple with today. It is by ignoring the lessons of the past that we are doomed to repeat them.

History, at its best, is a kind of mirror. It allows us to look at ourselves through the lens of our shared humanity. Historical patterns represent attitudes and prejudices we cycle and repeat. Through historical self-reflection, we can begin to make changes. With that goal in mind, our team set out to make Meacham's book into a film.

Deciding which moments to highlight presented the greatest challenge. Each and every one of the moments addressed in the film could be its own multi-part documentary. The idea was not to gloss over the complexities of history, but present them as a panorama, so that we can more clearly see the patterns we fall prey to again and again. We decided to highlight moments that reflect our moment, from the ongoing struggle for women's rights to family separations on our Southern border and our ongoing battle to uphold reason and truth in the public sphere. Our hope is that this film will hold up the historical mirror and point to a way forward.

Meacham likes to say, "We grow stronger the more widely we open our arms, not when we're clenching our fists." His emphasis on reason, sanity, and kindness are qualities we believe we need to embrace now more than ever.

We finished this film in a time of heightened fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. It is a test of our resilience as a nation and global community. Future generations will one day hold the mirror to the decisions we make today. Let's learn from the lessons of the past. Let us not denigrate the good, the uplifting, the sincere. Let's look for the best in ourselves and each other and be reminded by American history what it takes for our better angels to prevail.

- KD DAVISON, DIRECTOR

Jon Meacham Biography

Jon Meacham is a renowned presidential historian, contributing writer to *The New York Times* Book Review, contributing editor at *TIME*, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning author. In addition to *The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels* (2018), Meacham's books include *His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope* (2020) *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush*, (2015), *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (2009), which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for biography.

A member of the Council on Foreign Relations and of the Society of American Historians, Meacham is a distinguished visiting professor at Vanderbilt University. He has written for *The New York Times* op-ed page, *The Washington Post*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Garden & Gun*. Meacham is also a regular guest on "Morning Joe" and other broadcasts.

A former executive editor at Random House, Meacham was previously editor of *Newsweek*. He began his career at *The Chattanooga Times*. Born in Chattanooga in 1969, Meacham graduated from The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, with a degree in English literature.

A trustee of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, The McCallie School, and The Harpeth Hall School, Meacham chairs the National Advisory Council of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University. He has received many prestigious awards and honorary degrees.

He lives in Nashville with his wife and children.

"TO KNOW WHAT HAS COME BEFORE IS TO BE ARMED AGAINST DESPAIR. IF THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE PAST, WITH ALL THEIR FLAWS AND LIMITATIONS AND AMBITIONS AND APPETITES, COULD PRESS ON THROUGH IGNORANCE AND SUPERSTITION, RACISM AND SEXISM, SELFISHNESS AND GREED, TO CREATE A FREER, STRONGER NATION, THEN PERHAPS WE, TOO, CAN RIGHT WRONGS AND TAKE ANOTHER STEP TOWARD THAT MOST ENCHANTING AND ELUSIVE OF DESTINATIONS: A MORE PERFECT UNION. TO DO SO REQUIRES INNUMERABLE ACTS OF CITIZENSHIP AND PRIVATE GRACE. IT WILL REQUIRE, AS IT HAS IN THE PAST, THE WITNESS AND THE BRAVERY OF REFORMERS WHO HOLD NO OFFICE AND WHO HAVE NO TRADITIONAL POWER BUT WHO YEARN FOR A BETTER, FREER WAY OF LIFE. AND WILL ALSO REQUIRE, I BELIEVE, A PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES WITH A TEMPERAMENTAL DISPOSITION TO SPEAK TO THE COUNTRY'S HOPES RATHER THAN TO ITS FEAR."

— JON MEACHAM, *THE SOUL OF AMERICA: THE BATTLE FOR OUR BETTER ANGELS*

Letter from Jon Meacham

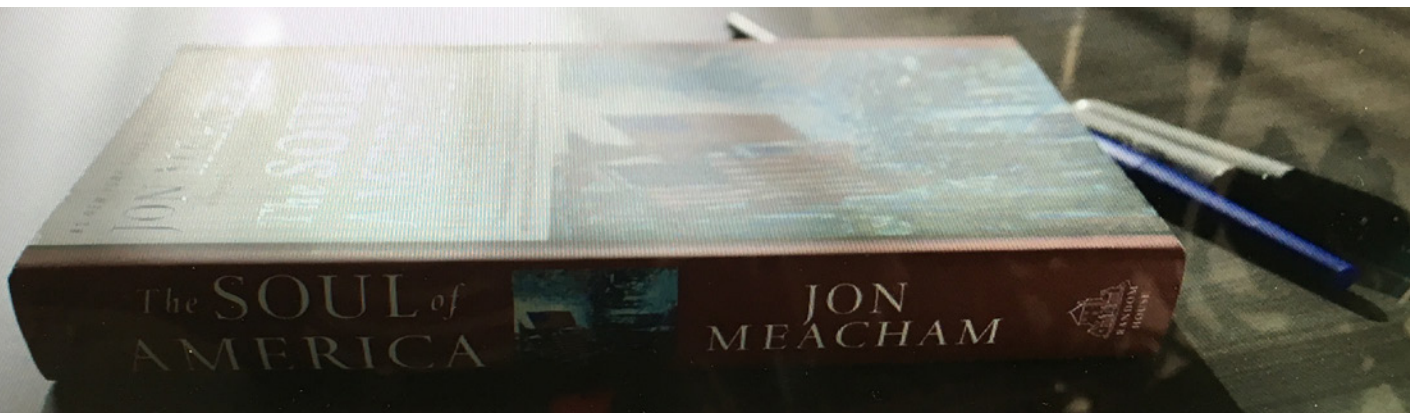
In his final Sunday sermon, days before his death, Martin Luther King Jr. said, “We are tied together in the single garment of destiny. This is the way God’s universe is made; this is the way it is structured.”

A single garment of destiny. “We the People” cannot escape that reality, nor, as Lincoln taught us, can you and I escape history. And we shouldn’t want to, for many of us have been given much: liberty, opportunity, a sense of possibility. The task of our time is to make sure those gifts are available not just to folks who look like me but to all of us.

I write this amid a grave moment in America. Weeks before the release of this film and of the 2020 presidential election, a deadly virus is ravaging our people, our economy is faltering, our faith in the values and practices that bind us together is fraying, and our democracy is threatened. The perennial forces you see in these case studies - extremism, nativism, isolationism, and a lack of economic opportunity for working people - are all preventing us from realizing our nation’s promise. Voting has already begun in many parts of the country, and we face a choice that goes straight to the nature of the soul of America. Humankind has long viewed the soul as the vital center, the core, the essence of existence. The soul is what makes us us. In its finest hours, America’s soul has been animated by the proposition that we are all created equal and by the imperative to ensure that we are treated equally.

America is a mix of light and shadow. Seneca Falls and Selma dwell in the American soul, but so do the impulses that have given us slavery, segregation, and systemic discrimination. The Civil War led to segregation, the New Deal to right-wing reaction, civil rights to white backlash. Yet history, which will surely be our judge, can also be our guide. From Harriet Tubman to Alice Paul to John Lewis, from the beaches of Normandy to the rending of the Iron Curtain, our story is strongest when we open our arms. History also teaches us that neither an incumbent president nor a new administration will immediately heal the divisions we face. Each of us must do our individual part to build bridges, not walls, with our neighbors; to lend a hand and not point fingers; to hope, and not fear.

I believe this film is an opportunity for you to experience four chapters of American history in a profound way - through archival video and photographs - and also through hearing directly from civil rights warriors such as George Takei and Joanne Bland, who lived through hate and discrimination and have dedicated their lives seeking equity and justice. Thank you so much for taking the time to watch and - more importantly - for joining me in seeking a future that is more inclusive and more compassionate.



BEFORE SCREENING



Facilitate a Process of Engagement

Here are some guidelines to follow in creating an environment for close viewing, empathy, listening, and honest conversation before and after your screening event.

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT INCLUSION

Think about how to make your screening event open and invite people with different race, class, and gender identities; national and religious backgrounds; and different physical abilities. Consider partnering with multiple community groups, the League of Women Voters, and diverse political party affiliations.

ALLOW FOR DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The film addresses themes of sexism, racism, and xenophobia while also trying to delicately understand those viewpoints. Encourage your audiences to be mindful of their language and their tone. For example, avoid generalizations, use “I” language to explain a personal point of view, and allow others to finish their thoughts before speaking. Invite participants to try to understand others as they understand themselves.

LISTEN RESPECTFULLY

Allow time to listen to understand, not to respond.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT LANGUAGE MATTERS

The words people choose to use to describe themselves and others hold enormous importance, power, and meaning.

MAKE ROOM FOR VULNERABILITY

As a facilitator, acknowledge that discussing race, religion, politics, and gender with strangers is difficult. Invite the group to decide on the guidelines for how they want to engage with the film before you begin discussion.

Terminology for Discussing THE SOUL OF AMERICA: the Isms

Each of the four case studies from American history presented in the film demonstrates how our worst impulses threatened human rights and democracy. It's important to understand the meaning of each of these kinds of discrimination and prejudice. They are all referenced in the film and certainly continue to be relevant today.

EXTREMISM

Used primarily in political or religious contexts, extremism refers to an ideology that is considered to be fanatical and far outside a mainstream or moderate viewpoint. Extreme acts and views are more likely, though not exclusively, to be employed by marginalized people and groups who perceive more standard forms of conflict engagement as unavailable to them or biased.



RACISM

A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. Doctrines, political programs, or social systems based on the assumption of racism are designed to execute its principles. Dating back to the era of slavery, a system of stratification developed in America whereby white people had more power and privilege than African Americans. The narrative of racial difference created to justify slavery — the myth that white people are superior to Black people — was not abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation or the 13th Amendment, and has survived beyond the era of slavery and continues to shape American life in the present day.

SEXISM

Prejudice or discrimination based on sex, especially discrimination against women. Sexism refers to the behavior or conditions that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex. The sexist attitudes that impeded the women's movement of the early 1900s were narrow views of women as childbearers, homemakers, and wives without the intellectual curiosity or capability to engage in politics or the workplace. These stereotypes continue to impede many areas of gender equity, including pay, reproductive rights, and childcare.





ISOLATIONISM

A policy of national isolation by abstention from alliances, foreign economic commitments, and other international political and economic relations. Isolationist doctrine holds that a country should be devoted to its own advancement. Separated from the affairs of other nations, it remains at peace by avoiding foreign entanglements.

NATIVISM

A policy or belief that protects and favors the interest of the native inhabitants of a country over the interests of immigrants. Although both religion and ethnicity helped identify targets of nativist bias, its motivations are often economic, with immigrants perceived as providing an inexpensive labor market that threatens native workers. Nativism goes beyond xenophobia in also implying a view on state policy. It's a structured way of enacting xenophobic (see definition below) ideology.



XENOPHOBIA

Fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign. The ideology perceives outsiders as a threat and drives a fear of others that sometimes provokes a violent response. Xenophobia is closely tied to racism and racial hierarchy and is often stoked by war, disease, demographic change, and economic uncertainty. The earliest and most profound examples in American history are the colonization of the Native Americans and the institution of slavery.

Introducing the Film

Prepare the audience for the viewing experience by sharing the context of Jon Meacham's book **THE SOUL OF AMERICA**, following the 2017 Charlottesville protests [page. 5] You may also want to read the Abraham Lincoln quote from page 11. Ask a few discussion questions:

- **Meaham was inspired by the events in Charlottesville in 2017. He says what happened is not that surprising if you know American history and if you know that immediately following the Civil War, a reaction set in. How does the context of our past help us understand the social unrest today?**
- **Do you believe that it is possible to have a factual basis for understanding history? Can we take a view of the past that is not partisan?**
- **Do you seek out varying points of view on contemporary issues? If so, why? If not, why not?**
- **Which entity wields the greatest influence - people, the press, or politicians?**

Let participants know that the documentary will use archival footage, primary sources, interviews with scholars and eyewitnesses, and excerpts of Jon Meacham's speaking tour to explore four case studies in American history.



“FEAR IS PREVALENT WHEN TOO OFTEN, PEOPLE VIEW THEIR OWN OPPORTUNITY AS DEPENDENT ON DOMINATION OVER OTHERS, WHICH HELPS EXPLAIN WHY SUCH PEOPLE SEE THE EXPANSION OF OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL AS A LOSS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THEMSELVES.”

- JON MEACHAM

AFTER SCREENING



Discussion Topics

THE “SOUL OF AMERICA”

- Describe the “soul of America.” What are the country’s worst instincts? What are its better angels?
- What individual emotions and experiences stoke its worst instincts? What behavior enlivens its better angels?
- What is the relationship between individuals, social movements, and political leaders in reconciling these forces?

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

- Jon Meacham’s bestselling book was the centerpiece of a national speaking tour, scenes of which are included throughout the film. How does he present his historical perspective about “the soul of America”? What is the impact of these appearances?
- Evan Thomas, who hired and mentored Meacham at Newsweek, says:

HE WAS CONSERVATIVE, KIND OF, BUT HE HAD THIS CAPACITY TO SEE THAT SOCIETY EVOLVES, AND HE WAS SENSITIVE TO THAT. AND HE WAS GOING TO EVOLVE WITH IT. SO, HE WAS LEARNING, YOU COULD SEE HIM. LIKE ANY GREAT STUDENT OF THE LIBERAL ARTS HE’S LEARNING ALL THE TIME. HE’S A CONSTANT SPONGE SOAKING UP PERSONALITIES AND FACTS AND INFORMATION, AND THEORIES TOO. AND YES, HE’S EVOLVING BUT IT’S ORGANIC. HE’S NOT LURCHING FROM ONE SIDE TO THE OTHER. HE WAS MOSTLY A 19TH-CENTURY LIBERAL WHO BELIEVED IN INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS, AND FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY. AND WAS ALSO NOT DOCTRINAIRE. HE WAS A CONSERVATIVE WHO REALIZED THAT CHANGE HAD TO COME. THAT YOU COULDN’T BE STUCK IN PLACE. THAT SOCIETY WAS GOING TO CHANGE, BUT IT SHOULD DO SO GRADUALLY AND WITH REVERENCE FOR THE TRADITIONS THAT CAME BEFORE.”

- How is Thomas’s description of Meacham important in understanding Meacham’s perspective?
- How do Meacham’s particular beliefs and experiences influence his understanding of history? Are there any statements he makes in the film you disagree with?



WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

- In the fight for women's right to vote, direct action and strategies that focused on both the state and federal level ultimately applied pressure on President Wilson. How did women gaining political power threaten the status quo? Who did the movement benefit and who did it leave behind?
- Historian Lisa Tetrault, interviewed in the film, says:

"HISTORICAL STORIES ARE ALWAYS VERY MUCH ABOUT THE PAST, BUT ALSO ABOUT THE PRESENT AND THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE THOSE STORIES...HISTORY IS A CONSTRUCTED NARRATIVE... IT'S A POLITICAL NARRATIVE. IT'S NOT JUST A TRANSPARENT NEUTRAL DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST. IT IS AN ARGUMENT, AND EVERY HISTORICAL NARRATIVE IS AN ARGUMENT. AND EVERY TIME WE LAY DOWN A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE, WE'RE LAYING DOWN AN ARGUMENT IN THE PRESENT"

What does this time in history say about our present? What does the adoption of the 19th amendment teach us about ongoing social movements seeking equity and access to democratic ideals?

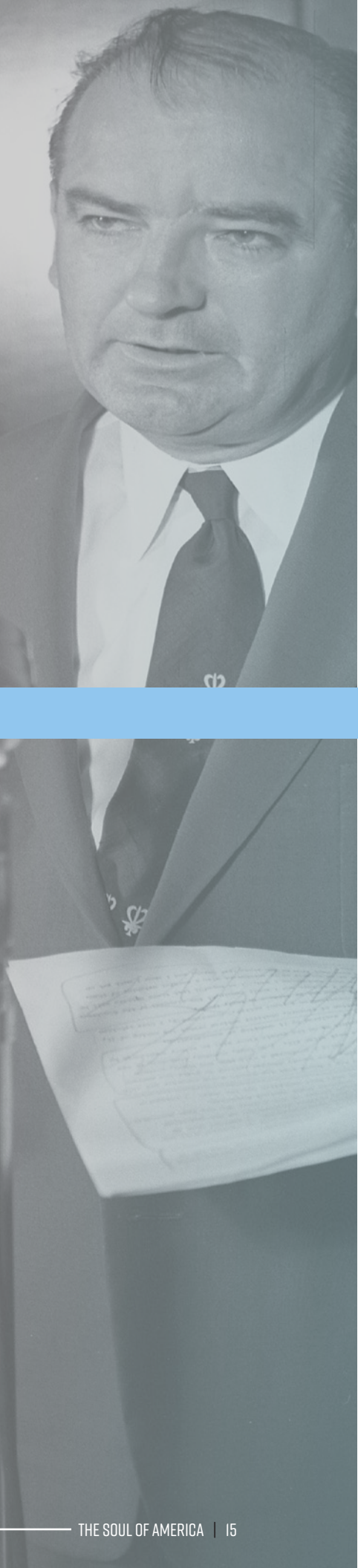


JAPANESE AMERICAN INCARCERATION

"THEY WERE VICTIMIZED BY THE SHAME OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE GOVERNMENT BEARS THAT SHAME. IT WAS A GROSS, EGREGIOUS VIOLATION OF EVERYTHING THAT THE UNITED STATES STANDS FOR. IT WAS A VIOLATION OF DUE PROCESS. IT WAS A VIOLATION OF THE IDEALS OF A JUSTICE SYSTEM THAT WE HAVE SUBSCRIBED TO."

- GEORGE TAKEI

- What preexisting and underlying prejudices created the context for the US government's treatment of Japanese Americans following Pearl Harbor?
- How did the U.S. military justify its actions?



“HE SAID, ‘THERE’S NOTHING TO FEAR BUT FEAR ITSELF.’ HAVE SOME CONFIDENCE IN YOURSELF AND PULL YOURSELF UP. BUT WHEN PEARL HARBOR WAS BOMBED, AND THE WHOLE NATION WAS SWEEPED UP IN WAR HYSTERIA, THE PRESIDENT WAS A HUMAN BEING. HE GOT STAMPEDED. BUT WHEN A GREAT PRESIDENT MAKES A MISTAKE, IT’S A GREAT MISTAKE, AND WE HAD TO PAY THE PRICE FOR THAT HORRIBLE MISTAKE. BUT HE WAS A HUMAN BEING WITH ALL OF THE GREAT POTENTIAL THAT PEOPLE HAVE, (AND) HE HAD THE SAME FALLIBILITY. AND SO HE SAID, ‘OUR DEMOCRACY IS DEPENDENT ON PEOPLE WHO CHERISH THOSE SHINING IDEALS AND ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS.’”

– GEORGE TAKEI

- How does the incarceration of Japanese Americans impact FDR’s legacy? How do we reconcile the economic recovery of the country from the Great Depression with the abuses of civil rights?
- How are human rights, religious freedom, and national security once again at odds today?

MCCARTHY

- What was Senator McCarthy’s motivation in stoking fear and mistrust?
- What does Senator McCarthy’s relationship to the news media reveal about public perception of events?
- What is the reader or viewer’s responsibility in quelling conspiracy theories?
- How was the press complicit? How was the press adversarial?
- How was Congress complicit? How was Congress adversarial?
- Though the news media has evolved in many ways since the 1950s, what lessons can we learn today from the McCarthy era?

“MCCARTHY UNDERSTOOD THE NEWSPAPERS, HE UNDERSTOOD THE MEDIA OF THE DAY. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT HEADLINES SPOKE LOUDER THAN THE DETAILS. HE WOULD HAVE LOVED TWITTER. HE UNDERSTOOD WHEN THE DEADLINES WERE. HE UNDERSTOOD WHEN THE REPORTERS WOULDN’T HAVE TIME TO CHECK SOMETHING. HE WOULD CALL PRESS CONFERENCES JUST TO GET HIS SIDE OUT AND IT WAS THIS ONGOING STORY.”

– JON MEACHAM

CIVIL RIGHTS

“WHEN I WAKE UP EACH MORNING, I FEEL LIKE I’M PARALLELING THE ‘60S AND THAT’S NOT A GOOD PLACE TO BE. THIS WORLD SHOULD BE MUCH FURTHER THAN THAT. AND IT GIVES SOME PEOPLE A SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS. NOT ME BECAUSE I KNOW THAT IT’S GONNA BE ALL RIGHT. WE JUST CAN’T SIT BACK AND LET IT KEEP HAPPENING. SO WE HAVE TO USE THOSE TACTICS WE USED AND BUILD UPON THEM.... THE ‘60S IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HOW WE CAN OVERCOME BUT YOU CAN’T JUST STOP AFTER YOU GET A LAW SIGNED. SINCE IT’S BEEN SIGNED EVERY DAY SOMEBODY’S ATTACKING THAT AND NIBBLING THAT AND THEN BREAKING OFF PIECES OF IT. HOW LONG WILL IT BE BEFORE IT’S GONE? SO WE’VE GOT TO FIND A WAY TO [MAKE] SUSTAINABLE CHANGE.”

—JOANNE BLAND

- What was the relationship between the nonviolent protest movement and the Civil Rights legislation of 1964 and 1965?
- How does LBJ’s will to sign the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act into legislation reflect the Presidency as a “place of moral leadership,” as Meacham put it?
- What is the greatest impediment to equity today? Policy? Education? The economic opportunity?
- Are civil disobedience and peaceful protest as impactful today as they were in the ‘60s? Why or why not?





POLLARD

CERY

AMERICAN

O CO.

WANTO CO.

CONTINUING THE FIGHT

In the film, Jon Meacham quotes Mark Twain - "History may not repeat itself, but it does rhyme" - and challenges us to approach every contemporary issue armed with the perspective and knowledge that "we have been here before" and, inevitably, we will be there again. The case studies in the film assure us that upholding the democratic ideals of our founders must be constant and unwavering work. At the end of Meacham's book, he identifies four areas in which you can take positive action in your community, calling for "innumerable acts of citizenship and private grace:"

- > **ENTER THE ARENA**
- > **RESIST TRIBALISM**
- > **RESPECT FACTS AND DEPLOY REASON**
- > **KEEP HISTORY IN MIND**

First reflect upon the perspectives that are upholding discriminatory policy. Imagine what a more generous and moral stance might make possible. What do each of these ideas look like in theory and practice locally?

"IN OUR FINEST HOURS, THOUGH, THE SOUL OF THE COUNTRY MANIFESTS ITSELF IN AN INCLINATION TO OPEN OUR ARMS RATHER THAN TO CLENCH OUR FISTS."

- JON MEACHAM, *THE SOUL OF AMERICA: THE BATTLE FOR OUR BETTER ANGELS*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Kunhardt Film Foundation Interview Archive hosts these feature-length interviews and their transcripts, recorded during the production of **THE SOUL OF AMERICA**:

- Joanne Bland, civil rights activist
- Jimmy Carter, US President, interviewed by Jon Meacham
- Linda Gordon, historian and author
- Janice Wesley Kelsey, civil rights activist
- Karen Korematsu, daughter of Fred Korematsu and civil rights activist
- John Lewis, former Congressman and civil rights activist
- Dale Minami, civil rights attorney
- Jon Meacham, author and historian
- Keith Meacham, Jon Meacham's wife
- George Takei, actor and activist
- Don Tamaki, civil rights attorney
- Lisa Tetrault, historian and author of *The Myth of Seneca Falls*
- Evan Thomas, author and journalist

Books

Gordon, Linda, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018.

Meacham, Jon, *The Soul of America, The Battle for our Better Angels*. Random House, 2018.

Takei, George, *They Called Us Enemy*. Top Shelf Productions, 2019.

Tetrault, Lisa, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2017.



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