

# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

*"Breaking out of partisan echo chambers to listen to one another, to explore what it means to be an American."*

*~ Divided We Fall*

---

This Discussion Guide supports facilitators to have engaging group discussions on the topics depicted in the film, "Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy."

The material in this guide is suited for live discussion and online discussion and for written exercises combined with oral sharing. There are prompts of comments by members of the cast as well as pertinent questions and quotes, that can be used and adapted to support conversations for the time allowance that the group has.

For more variation, personal engagement and reflection, it's encouraged to use some of this material in breakout spaces for dyads and small groups along with the large group discussions. In the breakout spaces, it's suggested to have people connect with people they may not have had a personal conversation with before. When people in the breakout spaces reunite back into the large group, have some of them share what stood out for them in their breakout conversations. It's encouraged to create time limits for all the activities so participants can be concise in their sharing.

---

**"If memory is the thread of personal identity, history is the thread of community identity."~ Carter Lindberg, American Historian**

### **1. Proudest Moment – As an American (0:53)**

**Tiziana requests cast members to share on the moment they were most proud to be an American.**

**What is important to you in claiming and describing yourself in relationship to being in America?**

Khadijah says, "...being Black in America, it's hard for me to have moments of saying I'm an American first because I'm always Black first. My experience is slightly different because of the

# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

color of my skin. That's always what's at the forefront. So it's hard for me think of a time where I'm proud of being American where it's separated from being proud of being Black."

Alex says, "... I didn't come up from a wealthy family, I don't have parents who are doctors. I had lots of college professors, high school professors tell me I couldn't do anything, especially not in medicine, and I graduated med school. I had the ability to create my own path and you couldn't do that in every country."

**In claiming pride in your identity in America, which of these identifying factors comes first, second and third for you?**

- American citizen
- country-place of origin-residence
- race-color of your skin
- ethnicity-culture
- gender- identifying
- religion
- economic achievement
- military-veteran
- political affiliation
- occupation-vocation
- age-generation
- or?

**Why is that? Please explain why you chose the order you did.**

**Does struggle, hardship or challenge contribute to the way we identify? If so, how? If not, why? Did you see any examples of this in the film?**

**Were there people in the film that you could or could not identify with during this segment of proudest moment to be an American? Why?**

**The participants spoke of times when "we all came together," such as during 911. Are there times when our identities are blurred, merged or indistinguishable from others? If so, name some of those times when you've experienced this.**

**What are some of the common denominators of your stories?**

---

## 2. Least Proud Moment – As an American (8:29)

**Tiziana requests the cast to share on the moment they were least proud as an American.**

# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

**Rev. Jennifer Bailey asks, "What was your response hearing what other folks had to say?"**

**What were some of your reactions to the cast members' stories of being least proud as an American?**

**Disappointment to understanding:**

Tommie says, "The state of the country in general... Now we're at a place where no one has an opinion, everyone trumps their truth over other's truth. You have to pick a side and your side issue is determined on your ethnicity, you have to back whatever you are ethnically connected to. Your sexuality, whatever you are sexually connected to, you have to get behind those things and there's no space for understanding, to talk through. America right now, we're in such a sensitive state that everything offends us, everyone wants it to be their way. My life experience should be everybody's life experience. That's just a part of America that I'm disappointed in."

**What would a space for understanding look like? Sound like? Feel like?**

**"Without community, there is no liberation . . . but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist." ~ Audre Lorde**

---

### **3. Breakfast at Elmer's & Breakfast at Valois - Blue table, Red table (16:01)**

Amanda says, "I think communality, sharing food, sharing a table with people is really important. So I love that we started each day at breakfast, sitting at a table with other cast members. It just brought out that humanity. It was like, oh my God, ... I don't care who it is, I care about these people at this table!"

# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

**Why would having Blue and Red sitting down separately at their own tables and sharing food be a part of the agenda for this project? What purpose might this serve?**

**Some comments from cast members from Blue Table and Red Table:**

“Some people threw me for a loop...I totally made assumptions based on appearance.”

“In the beginning... nobody knows where each other stands on your opinions and we all get along. And that’s how it is every day. You see somebody on the street and you’re not going to ask them; Hey, who did you vote for?”

“That was probably not my proudest moment, it was a choice that I made...sometimes you’re maybe not all in on the choice that you made...but you have to make a choice.”

“For freedom, for freedom of speech.”

“... It’s just been building this narrative for years and years and years, what it’s supposed to look like and then when you start to throw things that are the opposite, people freak out. No this doesn’t fit, this isn’t how it’s supposed to be.”

“The time for the political party is over.”

“The extremist part of it... we need to have dialogue, these things need to be talked about but we’ve become so PC in our approaches to everything that it’s crippling.

“Removing those stereotypes, it would change so much.”

“I’m probably ignorant about certain things, just because of the media I consume.”

“I’m gonna remember that everyone’s here for a common thing that we all agreed to do and everyone here is a fellow American and 99% of the stuff out there is propaganda anyway to make us hate each other...”

**What are some assumptions you’ve made about other people based on appearances?**

**What are some assumptions you’ve made about other people that changed, for the better or worse, once you learned more about them?**

**What outside factors may have contributed to the way you thought about them?**

**Do you think sitting down at a table and sharing food with people you don’t know well can lead to more honest and open conversation? If so, why? If not, why?**

# **Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy**

## **Discussion Guide**

### **4. Truth \* Fact \* Knowledge – Do we know what we know? (26:17)**

**To truly listen is to risk being changed forever. ~ Native American Elder, Sa'k'ej Henderson**

**Where are we getting our information? What is our truth? What facts do we have? What don't we have?**

**Is there a difference between truth and knowledge?**

**Some comments from cast members:**

“Are we really looking for other people’s opinion or the facts or are we looking for the facts that we want to hear to keep our own beliefs and our own truths?”

“They’re trying to brainwash you.”

“... the good people that see things the right way.”

---

**Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen. ~ Winston Churchill**

### **5. Immigration – One of our biggest divides (27:43)**

**Come up with important steps that you believe the country could take to address immigration in a way that bridges the divide.**

# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

Lynda says, "I call people illegal immigrants and some people call them undocumented citizens or undocumented people. I've never seen them as undocumented. I suppose that's really what they are. I'm not sure if illegal immigrant is like a derogatory word. It kinda makes them seem bad or illegal, meaning unlawful, which that's how I see it because they're breaking the law by coming in the country. I guess I've learned a lot from other people. Maybe opens my eyes, makes me think about what's important and maybe what's not important."

**During this segment, what stood out for you about yourself? About others? Any surprises?**

---

### **6. Perspective. Do we choose our truths? (32:49)**

**We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.~  
Anäis Nin**

**Make a frame with your fingers. Really take a good look at what's inside it. Now take that frame and shift it in 6 inches in any direction and note carefully what you see in it.**

**Did you see the same thing in the frame both times? Was it actually remarkable different? The second time, did the stuff that was in the frame the first time go away, did it disappear? It was still there, right? It was still real. But was it what you were thinking about, noting, focusing on?**

**Much of what we do is seek to control this, the frame.**

**Do our frames of view change?**

**Do you have a good example of when your view has changed, even a little? What was the impetus for changing or expanding your view? What did you see that you didn't see before? Did it change you in any way? If so, how? If not, why?**

---

### **7. Gun Control / 2nd Amendment – The Chicago cast wrestles with guns (34:34)**

# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

Cesar says, "...He puts a gun directly point blank to my face. That was the first time in my life that I thought to myself, am I really about to die over an altercation that could've been that never would've been anything if I wasn't hanging out with the people that I was, if I wasn't living in that environment."

### **Some comments from cast members:**

"What is the gun control issue? Is the gun control issue the school shootings or is the gun control issues the combination of the school shootings and what's happening in Chicago?"

"With school shootings, it's framed as "mental health." In our neighborhoods it's framed as a "cultural" problem, they're just bad people."

"The same mental illness that he suffers from, we deal with that stuff in the hood."

"We're trusting states to handle guns rather than a uniform federal policy."

"What has the federal government done well?"

"Why would you say ... big daddy in Washington D.C. knows how to handle our business better here?"

"So if one person comes... and just shoots a school and kills... 10, 15, 20 kids... you're saying there is nothing we could do because that person decided to be bad?"

"These automatic weapons are killing our children and so, people have to take a step back and get over this almost romanticized notion about the constitution and be in the now."

"I'm a gun owner. I'm a concealed carry. There are different types of guns. There are assault rifles and there's AK-47's. And my gosh, why does anyone need to have that in their house?"

**What does "safety" mean? Is that a right? If so, how is that right determined for someone?**

---

## **8. Group Dynamics – a different divide (39:49)**

**Why do you think the groups were divided along gender lines? What did that do for the conversations they had? How beneficial or not, would this type of divide be when discussing important topics in our country?**

---

# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

### 9. How different are we? Similarities across the divide (41:06)

Did you have any surprises with who you sometimes resonated with or not resonated with in the film? If so, why was it a surprise?

---

### 10. Sunday Breakfast - Conversation about having better conversations (41:57)

**If the conversation is comfortable you're not having the conversation. ~ Claudia Rankine**

#### Some comments from cast members:

"We're taught... ingrained in us, that we shouldn't bring up like politics because there might be an argument."

"We don't talk about religion or politics."

"That's the reason why things are so bad and that's the reason why things aren't changing because we're not talking about it."

"No one wants to step outside their bubble and be vulnerable or be the bigger person and try to understand the other side of the argument."

"What's really dividing all of us, is anger."

"You can't be angry and listen. It doesn't work that way. When you're angry, you only hear what you want to hear."

"You just have to be willing and committed to put that work in and to take that extra effort to look for those bridges, to look for that shared respect and to find something of value in another person."



# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

What do you think would contribute to Americans having better conversations about the things that matter to us as a nation?

---

### 11. Democratic Conversation – More than just civility (43:30)

**“I have felt increasingly that what we are really talking about is not how we can have more civil conversation. But what we are talking about in the context of our society, for one thing, is how we can learn how to have a democratic conversation.”**

**~ Dr. Vincent Harding**

**Some comments from cast members:**

“Incorporating, purposefully, other views and other opinions even if they are maybe not our own or run somewhat counter to ours.”

“We’ve got to compromise because you know this country is purposefully made up of all different cultures and religions and that comes with conflict.”

“Everybody’s got a different view but we’ve gotta work together.”

**What do you think comprises a democratic conversation?**

---

### 12. A More Perfect Union - Insights from the Preamble (44:48)

**"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the**

# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

**What do those words mean to you?**

**Some comments from cast members:**

"It's hard to be perfect. Some people think they are. Some people think the world is."

"We all have different experiences. It's your truth."

"Understanding that at this time, I wasn't being thought of as, We the People."

"I know I'm a man but I don't feel that society views me as more than 3/5<sup>ths</sup> of a person."

"We all have different experiences. Your experience as a black man is true... that's what you've experienced. Mine is different from yours. We often say... well you have to honor his truth but we never say we have to honor the other person's truth, the fact that they *don't* experience those things."

"Privilege is not about what you have gone through. It's about what you haven't gone through. That's a blessing to not have experienced that negative thing."

"I like that it included everybody. It didn't say white people... black people...rich people, it didn't say poor people, it said people."

"We the people of the United States. The people that are here."

**What insights does hearing the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, stimulate for you?**

---

**Too often, we enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought. ~ John F. Kennedy**

### **13. A More Perfect Union. What can we do? (47:47)**

**Tiziana asks, "How can we today, pursue a more perfect union?"**

**What are some topics and ideas that can help our country pursue a more perfect union?**

# Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy

## Discussion Guide

Now filter these down into a few main ideas. What are the main governing principles demonstrated by these ideas?

---

### 14. Red and Blue, or Purple? – We have more in common than we think (50:47)

Carolyn Lukensmeyer (National Council for Civil Discourse) says, “My guess is that none of you would have predicted that two groups of people would ever have picked the same governing principle for the country: equal access to healthcare, education and fundamental human needs.”

---

### 15. Headlines – Our cast try their hand at headline writing (51:13)

The cast had fun with this exercise to create headlines for their weekend of conversation. What role does humor play in our challenging conversations with each other?

---

### 16. Parting Thoughts (52:28)

**Some parting thoughts by cast members:**

“What this has really asked of us is to put pithy comments aside... and work on instead, allowing yourself to be vulnerable.”

“We actually have a lot of the same things in common... that we want to accomplish in the government and in the communities. I think people don’t realize...we’re not that divided.”

“One disagreement didn’t necessarily result in every disagreement.”

# **Divided We Fall: Unity Without Tragedy**

## **Discussion Guide**

“We have so much in common, whether it’s through the jobs that we do or just the normal everyday activities that we do, we have a lot of common ground.”

“It doesn’t matter who you vote for. We all want what’s best for our kids.”

“To not see things as a conflict but more as a connection. Though we have things that are different, there are so many more things that might connect us universally.”

“I have to think about others and what they have been through and listen rather than speak.”

“I have a lot more to learn.”

“I think there is something to be gained there because we have different viewpoints. There’s not a lot of opportunity to grow when you share the same viewpoints. Gave me something new to go on and so shifted my perspective.”

**What is your parting thought? Why?**

**Whatever America hopes to bring to pass in the world  
must first come to pass in the heart of America. ~ Dwight  
D. Eisenhower**