



Coming Apart?

The future of democracy in America

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Kloppenberg lays out a history of political polarization in the United States using a number of sources. What books, films, or cultural touchpoints come to mind as you think about the history of polarization? Which parts of that history do these sources illuminate for you? Are there histories or schools of thought missing from this discussion?

2. In the mid-twentieth century, some condemned the ideological incoherence of American politics, while others applauded it. What are the merits of each position? How has our current rigid ideology changed the conversation around inequality today and the efforts to address it? Are there ways ideology can still be meaningful in democratic politics?

3. In trying to understand why so little has been done about social and economic inequality, Kloppenberg describes both Republicans and Democrats' shared preference for "low taxes and an unregulated economy." How has this deepened the cultural conflicts between the more and less educated? How might the ideals of solidarity and obligation be reintroduced to either party's platform?

4. Through technological changes to the media landscape, Kloppenberg suggests that today's media "offers the illusion of involvement in civic life." Do you agree? How has technologically aided or undermined political engagement? How might a citizen better engage today's media? What should be the role of government in this landscape?

5. Rather than despair, Kloppenberg suggests that the "renewal of democracy is within reach." How can we nurture democratic sensibilities and practices of civic engagement? Why would coalition building be considered both "a practical necessity and a moral obligation"? How might we complete the Third Reconstruction?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Paul Lakeland, "Spiritual Resistance," June 2020:

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/spiritual-resistance>

Clifford Thompson, "An America of One or Many?" January 2023:

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/wendell-berry-race-patriotism-america-farming-environment>

Michael Harrington, "The Other America," May 1960:

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/other-america>

Nicole-Ann Lobo, "Why Data Privacy Needs Legal Protection" September 2019

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/terms-and-conditions>

Mark Phillips, "Elegy for My People," April 2023

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/elegy-my-people>

Eugene McCarragher, "We the People?" August 2018

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/we-people>