ELECTION, SOCIAL MEDIA, and RACIAL JUSTICE

APPETIZER: ACROSS the TABLE

FRAMING
Reflect on the following question:
After an election that revealed deep divisions among Americans, what do you want other Americans to know about you that they don't?

INSTRUCTIONS
Listen to this opening clip from “Call-In Special: Across the Aisle,” an episode on The United States of Anxiety, where Anna Sales invites Americans to answer this question during a live call-in show.

LISTEN to the PODCAST

Go around the table and invite guests to share their responses. Listen to responses from the show in between those of your guests if you choose.

Kelly - Black woman living in Portland: On Complexity and Empathy
Gabriella - Hispanic woman living in Austin On Fear and Uncertainty
David - Queer Russian Jewish American On Donning a Kippah Against Hate
Sophia - Half Pakistani, Half Irish German living in Hawaii On Identity and Perceptions
Nora - Republican working on Capitol Hill On Voting for Hillary

LISTEN to HIGHLIGHTS

ENTREE: WHOSE VOICES do we HEAR?

FRAMING
Social media is a public and political tool as well as a deeply personal mode of communication. Beyond images of kittens and vacations, social media has been blamed for offering people an echo chamber that reinforces their own opinions or a platform for hate speech against marginalized groups. For some, it's their primary news source, and for others, the vitriol has them swearing off certain sites. These platforms influenced this and previous elections, enabled communities to organize to effect change, and continue to shape how we communicate with one another.

Start by reading the following excerpt out loud from “Is Social Media Disconnecting Us From the Big Picture?,” written by Jenna Wortham for the The New York Times Magazine.

In April, Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive of Facebook, addressed a room of developers about the importance of his social network. Facebook, he said, has the power to bring people together who might otherwise never have the chance to meet. “The internet has enabled all of us to access and share more ideas and information than ever before,” he said. “We’ve gone from a world of isolated communities to one global community, and we are all better off for it.”

But that’s not what has happened. Zuckerberg’s idealism is belied by his desire to duck responsibility for mediating the content of his site. On Facebook, the political divide has only been entrenched further. It’s the BuzzFeed dress debate, only for our entire lives: We are two countries, one that sees blue and black and the other that sees white and gold. The internet once offered outlets we could use to understand one another. But they are rapidly disappearing.

3 | “Is Social Media Disconnecting Us From the Big Picture?” Nov. 22, 2016.
INSTRUCTIONS

Find a chevruta (a partner) and discuss the following pieces from social media: a Facebook post by Michelle Alexander, Amandla Stenberg on Instagram, and Laverne Cox on Twitter. Read through the texts at your own pace; focus on one, two, or all of them. Discuss the guiding questions and share takeaways with the larger group.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

• Who is the audience for each of the social media posts? What messages does the author hope to share?
• What messages most often fill your social media feeds? Which messages don’t you see?
• How does social media impact our understanding of racial justice?
• In what ways does the conversation at this dinner feel different than the conversations that take place on social media?

TEXT ONE: IS AMERICA POSSIBLE?
MICHELLE ALEXANDER (POSTED ON FACEBOOK), NOVEMBER 13, 2016

MICHELLE ALEXANDER is a professor, civil rights advocate, and author of The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness.

What I will say is that what happened can’t be explained simply as a failure of the political establishment — though it has failed spectacularly. Nor is it simply a problem of racism or sexism — though both are alive and well and flourishing in this moment. Nor is this election simply a matter of economics, though global capitalism and neoliberalism have created a world in which people of all colors are suffering greatly as factories close, work disappears, wages stagnate, and human beings are treated as disposable — like plastic bottles tossed in a landfill — as political and media elites (not just Trump) spew propaganda that encourages us to view “the others” as the enemy.

The problem runs deeper than all of that. The truth is we are stumbling badly in large part because we are just beginning to learn to walk. Roughly 50 years ago, we still had an explicitly racist system of laws and government: a racial caste system. It was not a true democracy by any stretch. We still don’t have a real democracy. And we’ve managed to rebirth a new caste-like system in recent years, a new Jim Crow. In the words of William Faulkner, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

What many of us have been attempting to do — build a thriving multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-faith, egalitarian democracy out of the rubble of slavery and genocide — has never been achieved in the history of the world. Some say it can never be done.

Is America Possible?
Hi all-

I am in shock and in this moment all I can do is express my love and gratitude for you. I feel a responsibility to see how you are because I care about you and the platform you have given me. I am grateful for the community of people I am surrounded by. I am amazed that close to a million people share my beliefs and keep faith in the voice we can cultivate together. I am honored to build this relationship with you and use the love we have for each other to change the world around us.

I’m [expletive] furious and I do not expect you to be brave or optimistic. You are entitled to your pain, fear, and anger. It is important to process those emotions.

However, all I can do is offer up my hope.

It is easy in this moment to feel that our efforts- our dialogue, our fighting, our campaigning, our self-acceptance and growth- has been futile. It’s a slap in the face to recognize that the world is not as we thought it was. It is harrowing and dreadful to feel that our work has been pointless.

But this was a fear driven response. This was a white retaliation against the progress that we have made. This is evidence that we are rapidly shifting the narrative, changing our cultural climate, and demanding equality- and that is a terrifying and immediate threat to white privilege. Trump’s presidency is a final desperate attempt to hold onto the white world of the past that is destined to die. It will die because we are powerful.

If you look around you and at the kids, I know you will see your efforts reflected in the hearts of others- whether that is in the people you see or what you view here on this page. You will see it in the way media and culture is shifting to include us because we are forcing it to.

I am your friend and I believe in your actions. I only believe in myself because you have allowed me to. I hope my page is a space where you can feel safe to speak and be angry. I encourage you to use it as such. I am not denying the concrete and physical danger of the future. I am telling you that your identity and strides are valid- even when you are tired, even when you are just existing as you. I hope you are able to take care of yourself right now.
LAVERNE COX IS AN AMERICAN ACTRESS, REALITY TELEVISION STAR, TELEVISION PRODUCER, AND LGBT ADVOCATE.

@Lavernecox Sitting here with my transgender sisters as we weep.
@chernowa I am thinking about the 3 A’s. Awareness, acceptance action. And the stages if grief. We must feel our feelings tonight And think about the loving actions we can take tomorrow. Let’s love each other harder

@Lavernecox Help i don’t feel safe being trans in america what do i do D:
@JazzHepcat I have often not felt safe in America as a trans woman of color. Often I have no been safe. That trauma is real. The reality of systemic oppression is is ever present in the lives of trans people, women, people of color. But today I am hugging the people I love and who love closer. The system has always been against us but yet we remain strong, we love harder, we fight harder. It’s gon be alright

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@Lavernecox I am so disappointed... will you stay in the usa if he wins?
@marihuanally I will. I still love America. I think the other side was devastated like we are now when Obama won twice..This is the way it goes.

@Lavernecox I've been crying for the last oh hour or so. And not the good kind. The ugly kind.
@BeckyGMartinez I want to live in. I can still spread love, acceptance, pray and work for justice. #ElectionNight #Election2016

@Lavernecox I too am scared. I’m in the midst of transitioning. How do I continue on now?
@teagueloomis We cannot let anyone keep us from being ourselves. Trans people have endured worse. Being true to ourselves is all we have.

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DESSERT: WHAT'S NEXT?

FRAMING

We have choices to make about how we interact with social media, what we consume and what we produce. Social media is a tool and the way we use it will determine the impact it has on us, our communities, our country and the world.

INSTRUCTIONS

Listen to a clip from another call-in special from The United States of Anxiety. This one is titled: "Call-In Special: Where Technology Takes Us." 6

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are social media’s benefits? What are the limitations, or even the dangers of social media? How have these manifested in your life?
- How do you want to use social media in the coming days? For what purpose?

Social media connects (and disconnects) us to those near and far. Sometimes, we need to put down our phones, and spend time with our friends, family, and neighbors IRL (in real life). At Repair, we take seriously Dr. King’s assertion that “everybody can be great because anybody can serve,” and ask you to consider volunteering as a way to get to know those in your community and build relationships with people you may not otherwise encounter.

There are a lot of ways that we can work together toward a more just society. Take a look at the Next Steps document and choose one or more actions that you will follow through on. Then, choose one person at the dinner to be your accountability partner and exchange contact information. Set a time in the next month to follow up with each other.