

Greater Good Gathering – Panel II

Cohesion & Commitment: Building Social Movements

Moderator
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Panelists
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The Greater Good Gathering held on February 6–7, 2019 explored the future of public policy and how best to advance the greater good in the 21st century in light of technological innovation, economic disruption, ideological polarization, and governance challenges. Event co-sponsors included Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia Law School, Union Theological Seminary, The Academy of Political Science, and Public Works LLC/Brain Storm Consulting.

TRACY SEFL: This panel is something that gives me a particular honor, and I'd like to explain why. My name is Tracy Sefl. I am a Democratic consultant. I actually was a little bit late getting here this afternoon because I was on phone calls with people in Virginia. If anyone's paying a modicum of attention, they know that the Democratic Party in Virginia seems to be imploding. It struck me as I was finally making my way over here that what is happening in Virginia is in many ways a product of some of the social movements and collective action that's happening right now and that I think this panel will be representative of, in very marvelous and colorful ways.

Number one, there's a #MeToo issue happening. Number two, there are some concerns over people's past usage of racist imagery. Both of those things are being dealt with largely in social media channels and largely with digital activism. I'd like to just take a moment to look at our four panelists here. What I see is a representation of academic understandings, of social movements and social change, and some great people who are in the middle of making that change. To have that spectrum represented here, it is very meaningful for me.

I hope for all of you what is meaningful is that this is going to be the positive panel. That is a rare thing that I get to say, that I'm going to be part of the positive panel. There is so much here, so much that is represented. You of course have everyone's biographies, but I would like to just say briefly a few comments about these four people and things that I've come to know about them. Then I look forward to hearing from each of them and discussing further.

John, welcome. John has been using his voice in incredible ways as a student from Parkland, as we now shorthand your school. We just call it Parkland, I think. I don't know where your energy is coming from, but you have been all over the country. You are working toward, I think, what you call a civil conversation. Those are refreshing words to hear. It is refreshing to

know that a high school student is part of leading that effort—reaching new communities, registering more voters—all good things. As we approach the one-year anniversary of that tragedy, I am very glad for you to have this platform today. I want to thank you for that work.

Avalon, it makes sense to introduce you next. I think that you and John in many ways are aspirational for all of us as to where your energy is coming from. Your work, also with March for Our Lives activities and for women’s issues, has been wonderful. I think we can offer Avalon a slightly belated birthday, you are now 17. I am in admiration of that as well. One thing that I was most joyful about, when I was reading everything that you’re doing, is the picture you’re using as your Twitter profile right now that says the young people will win. I love that, and I love the work you are doing, and I’m delighted that you are here.

Elham, thank you for being here. I am fascinated to hear more about your work, in particular the use of social media to fight oppression. All of those words together in a sentence is, in many ways, still a new thing. It is an even newer thing when we step outside of America. You are looking at Iran, and even more specifically at women in Iran, and what they are doing as they face oppression and the tools that can help overcome that. I have a personal interest. My husband is a first-generation Iranian American, and I am fascinated by what goes on over there. Having never visited yet, I hope that you can really provide some illustrations of your important work. Thank you and welcome, Elham.

Tony down at the end, hello. I studied sociology throughout my whole academic life, and I left to work in politics. You are in some ways my hero because you have so many different subfields of sociology that you are, shall we say, crushing. From looking at the sociology of knowledge, looking at the relationship between technology and race and racism, and looking at the way that technology can be a tool of resistance in minority communities, in particular. I am grateful to know that your work is out there. I encourage everyone to look further at Tony’s CV because there are many interesting things that I would like to read on other topics. Thank you for being here to talk about the technology of resistance.

Final word, and I will turn this over to the panelists. In framing this conference, Eric said something about how do we best make a difference? Do we need to rethink how best to make a difference? We are going to start with John and Avalon because they are not rethinking anything. They are just thinking. John, I would love to hear your thoughts.

JOHN BARNITT: First, thank you so much for that kind introduction. Avalon and I, we are both still in school. We look at our textbooks. We see huge historic events that happened in our past and, especially in American history. We see what people have done to make their voice heard.

Specifically for me, I knew after the tragedy that struck my school, I needed to do something. I saw what other people have done in the past to make their voice heard. I realized that if I am not going to do it, no one else is going to do it, because for so long elected officials have failed to accurately represent the youth’s voice and the voice of the American people in general. I finally realized that I had enough, especially because it affected me personally, and I spoke out about it. That is just something personally for me. What about you, Avalon?

AVALON FENSTER: My name is Avalon. I just turned 17 on Saturday. I am the Northeast Regional Director of March for Our Lives. I am also the National Director of Equity and Inclusion for Next Generation Politics, which is an organization that aims to foster bipartisanship among youth and engage in civil dialogue with those youths. When I joined March for Our Lives, it was not my first take in activism. I had grown up going to NOW meetings with my mother—the National Organization for Women. I had been constantly surrounded by the idea that it is not just okay to be silent and complacent.

I am actually a first-generation American. I always tell this story because I think it is incredibly important to contextualize where my activism came from. My mother was a religious refugee from the Soviet Union in 1975. She immigrated to Jackson Heights, Queens in 1975. She did not speak any English, did not speak any Hebrew. She went to a small yeshiva there, and had no money. All of their furniture in their apartment came from synagogues. I take a lot of pride in my mother's story and how she grew up to eventually go here to Columbia University, and so did my father. My dad is also an immigrant. He was born in Vienna. His father was a Holocaust survivor. I grew up constantly hearing these stories of the trials and tribulations that both my parents went through to get to the heights of their success. They are my biggest inspirations. My father is also a graduate of Columbia University, so it is especially touching to be here today talking about what matters most to me.

When I look at youth movements, especially the current youth movement of March for Our Lives, there is something that makes it different, but there are also some shared common themes with movements before us. Although we are just doing this on the fly, we take great pride in knowing that there were those before us that worked especially hard to create the platforms that we have today. In my opinion when I look at it, I see two things that remain the same—the use of pathos and the use of logos in our youth movement. We capitalize off this sense of urgency and fear that young people have. It is not a manufactured fear.

It's a fear that I have had since I was little, that I didn't really know was wrong until it started coming up more in the media. Other youth started speaking out that this was wrong, this fear of sitting in my history class and thinking that maybe this cabinet was better to hide in if someone came in and started shooting, or if I was in the bathroom, which window was most accessible for me to jump out of and how high was it. These were just thoughts that I found normal. Even days after the Parkland shooting, my 12-year-old brother was talking to my mom in the car and told her that he has these thoughts, but he has never spoken to me about it. That is how normal it was in his mind. He did not feel like he had to address these concerns to his parents.

The use of pathos is one that is paramount to sustaining this movement. We always say it is not just a moment, it's a movement. That is something that we use. Another thing that I found March for Our Lives uses really well is the use of logos. Using facts, statistics, and reality to base our ideas and to base our movement on, because if you are not basing it on that, you are basing it purely off of emotion. Emotion comes and goes. People's feelings towards an issue come and go. People have other priorities in their life if they are not directly affected by it. Those were two consistent themes that we have had beforehand, but I think the thing that really changed was the ethos in our movement.

It was the way young people have created this national network of powerhouses—that they connect with on Twitter, on Instagram, on Facebook, via video calls—to talk about what makes our generation unique. I also think a big part of this is, unfortunately, the “celebritization” of these young people that went through these tragedies. Especially in the case of March for Our Lives, they are young people that I just consider my friends and my cohorts, but they have become celebrities. For example, you all probably know the names David Hogg or Emma Gonzales. They are no different from me. They are just kids, but unfortunately, they were put in a position of either taking action so this doesn't happen again, or staying silent and going through this by themselves.

We forget that these kids are traumatized. It is something I feel like we forget a lot—that all of us are traumatized in different ways, whether we have been directly affected or we have suffered the ramifications of our elected officials not putting in the work. I think that there's a lot that makes us similar to old movements, but our energy is the thing that I feel makes us different. We consistently talk in our circles that this is not just something we do on the side. It

is not just a hobby. It is a matter of survival. When I talk about how it is a matter of survival, it brings me right back full circle to my family story. The very fact that I am sitting here today is because my family survived. That is all it is. My family, if you look back throughout the history of the Jewish people, we were killed, enslaved, oppressed, and discriminated against in this country and in the countries that my parents came from.

For me, March for Our Lives holds a lot of significance today, but it also brings me back full circle to my roots. I know that many young people in this movement can connect with that. One more thing that makes March for Our Lives different is how activism has become so accessible, because of the nature of the fact that it was founded pretty much on social media. Kids that never would have even heard the word ‘activism’ before are now being engaged in their communities. We have resources that we are sending to kids to reach out to us on Instagram or Twitter to help organize their communities to take action.

I think that is really what makes us special. I think that is going to continue making us special, as long as we sustain the same energy that we have now. We are relying on that energy and all the other factors I mentioned before. Thank you so much for having me here today.

SEFL: Thank you for that. John, you spoke very briefly, so I am just going to turn to you quickly with a question. Today, the House of Representatives held a hearing for an incredibly overdue piece of legislation on universal background checks. Do you think that that hearing would have happened without your work?

BARNITT: Realistically, no. After Parkland, it struck a chord in America. Every once in a while you see a mass tragedy that really grabs America’s attention, like Sandy Hook, the Las Vegas shooting, Pulse nightclub. Unfortunately, and fortunately, Parkland was one of those. We were able to capture everyone’s attention, really hold elected officials accountable, and keep that precedent until November 6, when we see these record-breaking youth voter registration numbers. We got to see how the youth really took action, went out, and used their voice and cast their ballot.

Just constantly maintaining that pressure, and seeing so many celebrities speak out about gun violence prevention and voting, especially. It does not even have to be about gun violence prevention, but just youth advocacy in general and making that a part of our everyday lives. I know even before this, no candidates really focused on the 18–29-age bracket for voting and especially for their campaigns. I know that is such an important and key part, that they should really put more focus towards, because this is the future of our country. You can relate to them. 18–29 is the largest voting bracket in our country. If you tap into that age demographic, you can swing any election.

Without us to really speak out and keep this conversation going, I do not think that our elected officials would listen. We would just be going on without having these amazing pieces of legislation that are hitting our House. We have been able to pass more than 70+ pieces of legislation for gun violence prevention across America since our organization has been founded, less than a year, so that is pretty remarkable.

If you check our social media accounts, it is actually amazing because we have, I believe, more than 60 young people in the hearing right now sitting down just watching everything unfold. That is just another factor of showing these elected officials that we are here, we still care, and we are still going to make our voices heard.

Yes we can use our cell phones and utilize social media, which has been a huge help for growing this movement. However, showing up and showing them that this is not something that we’ll just tweet out or make an Instagram post about it. This is something that we care about. As Avalon said, this is our everyday life. This is not just a side job or a fun little hobby.

This is something that we are truly a part of because the youth need to take a step in the political arena and really start to get engaged. Gratefully, we are finally seeing that. I am glad to be a part of that process.

SEFL: Thank you. When I was in graduate school, I studied social movement organizations. They had many characteristics to them. I am thinking now as both of you were talking that March for Our Lives, is that even an organization? We have re-conceptualized social movement organizations in cyberspace. I think that, in and of itself, is fascinating. I am going to take us down a little more of an academic journey now. Elham, I am very curious to hear more about your work and your thinking.

ELHAM GHEYTANCHI: Thank you for inviting me. The story of social movements, and the women’s movement in particular in Iran, did not just start with the revolution. But the revolution allowed a lot of religious women to come to the public arena. Then as their rights were taken away from them, they mobilized. In the past 15 years or so, social media and the internet have allowed them to make connections that were not possible before. Many rural women joined in because now we have the phenomena of mobile and can go anywhere. It is small and it is not like a computer. It also made transnational ties possible. With women who had fled Iran, they could still be connected. It made a huge difference, I think, in how women’s movements have played out in Iran.

It is a cat-and-mouse game, though, that they play with the government because the government does come after them. There is a certain anonymity that they can have within the social movement, but from one point on, that is not possible. Once they are known, then they are arrested and oppressed. I think that is also why after the 2009 unrest in Iran, with all the potential that that social movement had, it was not able to lead anywhere. At the center of it there were no leaders. Social media and internet allowed individuals to make ties and made the circulation of news very accessible to all—but it also meant that it didn’t have the leadership that the previous traditionally organized social movements had. Therefore, it didn’t lead to victory. This is a problem that they are still grappling with, not only the women’s movement but also the oppositional movement in Iran and the reformers. That is about it. I am open to questions.

SEFL: That is just a teaser, I think that there is more. We can certainly come back to it. Tony, take us on a journey of what your thinking is these days and what your research is showing.

ANTHONY HATCH: My name is Tony Hatch. I am a Professor of Science in Society at Wesleyan University. The comments that have already been made about social movements, politics, governance, and power take me back to a situation regarding black people in this country. It takes me back to a gentleman by the name of David Walker. If you do not know who David Walker is, you need to educate yourself about who this man was. David Walker was a free black man and a very early abolitionist in this country. David Walker self-published what he called his appeal to the people, to the colored people of the world, but especially here in the United States.

David Walker’s appeal was in the late 1700s. He lived in Boston. He self-printed this appeal and had it distributed in the most surreptitious, covert way. I guess you could think about it as 18th century encryption. He was a tailor, and he would print copies of this appeal, which was a very radical, revolutionary, militant text that urged the violent overthrow of the slavetocracy that was the United States—and I think still is, for at least vis-à-vis black people. He printed this appeal and stitched it into the coat pockets of the jackets he had tailored. He had them sent down to the slaveholding South where he hoped the Negroes who were doing the textile work would get it off to the plantations. This was a very early iteration of what you can think of as a

technology, a technique, a way of building community, of educating, of radicalizing people to overthrow a political order that in no way regarded their lives as valuable. The March for Our Lives is expressing an urgent demand that our elected officials care for the bodies of our young people as they exist in school. That same dynamic has been in place with regard to people of African descent in this country since our inception as a so-called nation.

The piece that I wrote that I think inspired my invitation to this conference looked at this question of how particularly black people have been subject to technological assault in this country. Technologies have been the instrument of subordination, and at the same time they also can potentially, and this I think is an open question, serve as a means of resistance. To me, that is where my thought is based on what I've heard already today. How are we going to balance that dual-edged nature of technology? Technology both as a set of practices that cut, maim, and harm, and as a set of practices and ideas that can connect, build, and expand what it means to be human and to care for people. I think that both of those dynamics are important, and I would encourage us as we go forward in this conversation to think much more broadly about what we mean when we say technology. It is not just digital and computers. It is a practice. It is a way of doing a thing in a much more expansive sense. The ways of organizing, both in Iran and here in the U.S. are just simply ways of doing this work. That is where my thinking is in a preliminary sense.

SEFL: Thank you for that. The dual use that you described; the cutting and maiming or the building—it harkens to the cat and mouse game that you mentioned and certainly the trolling environment that your activists live in. One of the questions people have when we talk about protest, is that it is a necessity. It is a necessity in a healthy, thriving society to protest that which you see needs change. We could argue that political ads are a necessity in some regards. We could also say there is necessity and pleasure in protest. There is reward that comes from the successes. There is reward that comes from the growth of a movement. Perhaps this is a question for Tony and Elham. How do you see necessity and pleasure in protest in the particular illustrations that you are studying?

GHEYTANCHI: Yes, I think there is a self-growth that comes with it. Technologies in Iran have made it possible for many religious women to move into the public arena for the first time because it allows them to be safe. It allows them to be anonymous to a certain degree and to take part in a greater movement that they did not have the right to or the opportunities before.

It allows them the opportunity to understand who they are, how they were raised and socialized into religious thinking about women, and then how they can free themselves. There is a tremendous growth that comes with it. When I first started working on the women's movement in Iran, I was interviewing a woman who had a magazine for religious women; Farzana was the name of the publication. She was like a religious leader in her own right. She had just come back from Iraq where she had studied. She was completely Mohajaba, completely covered. She was very adamant in her views. Today she lives in Germany. She is no longer veiled, and she has one of the most progressive and amazing views that I've heard. It allowed her to come to a self-realization about herself—how she grew up and what it means to work for a women's movement. I think it is really interesting.

There are many other examples. These examples also indicate that there is a way in which the technology allows women to have access to things that they have never had access to before. They are able to explore things that they cannot explore just by going to university. They cannot explore by just being active. It comes with protesting after you know what is denied to you. That is what I think has made it possible for a lot of women to come to this self-realization. I think

protest has. They pay a huge cost for it too. A lot of them go to exile or go to prison and so forth, but it allows them to grow and find a sense of community that is worth fighting for.

SEFL: To follow up briefly, could you give us a sense of the digital platforms that are being used? We shorthand a lot of conversation, March for Our Lives around Twitter as mentioned. What are the platforms? What are women using?

GHEYTANCHI: Blogs were very important in Iran when they first started in the late 1990s. That is where we saw an outpouring of women's writing. There is some use of Twitter. There is a lot of use of Facebook in Iran, and the blogs have not died. They are still there. A different forum, Telegram, is another thing that is very popular in Iran. It is like WhatsApp that has that kind of a function. I think it works in that way too in terms of the possibilities for distribution of news. That is what they use a lot. These are all that I can think of.

SEFL: Thank you. Tony, did you want to add on that?

HATCH: I am struck by our reliance on these technology companies for these platforms. I have a confession, and it is very simple. I just joined Twitter last week. I instantly regretted my decision. It was an instantaneous moment of revulsion and curiosity. I texted a good friend of mine and she asked why in God's name did I join Twitter?

The great concern I have is that we are relying on our rulers for the platforms through which we protest the fact of our being ruled. That is a paradox I cannot get my mind around. Honestly, we are relying on them to provide us with the means by which we connect with each other to connect, to strategize.

One case in point, is Black Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter has been surveilled, countermanded, and undermined in digital spaces since its inception, and so it is no longer a safe space. It just reminds me that the internet was a military application. I started at Dartmouth in 1994. We knew this. We had Netscape 1.0 operating on our Mac machines. The presumption that the world's masses are going to achieve any modicum of freedom or liberation by using these platforms that have been set up for these purposes, I really question that. I hope that at some point we can talk about that today, or tomorrow if we make it.

SEFL: That paradox makes me sink down in my chair. It is bewildering.

HATCH: This is not a happy panel.

SEFL: We are supposed to be, though. Remember this is the happy panel. I want to take one of your points about access and come back to March for Our Lives. In particular, John, you have talked about and you have written about or Tweeted about finding new communities to be involved. How do you think about the fact that some of those communities may not have access to the same tools as you? How do you reach them?

BARNITT: Well, realistically, I really think that a lot of people, especially young people, have access to social media. Especially the ones we reach, because a big part is gun violence. It happens in inner cities and urban communities so much more than in rural areas. It happened to us once. It happened to my school once. However, this is a day-to-day, common theme in marginalized communities in Detroit and Philadelphia, and all these places that have either gang violence or just do not have the proper resources, as you said.

Over the summer, we went on a tour called Road to Change. It was a voting initiative to target the youth and show them the power of their voice. This was through voter registration, as I said, as well as panels, rallies, and public demonstrations. One of our first stops was Chicago, which is ravaged by gun violence. We were talking to the local kids, and they were really saying that this all stems from schools because their schools are not properly funded. They do not have the proper resources. They do not have clubs that they can go to after school, so kids decide to join gangs. They decide to have ‘alternate hobbies’, if you will. If we fix the root of the problem, our elected officials who decide what the budgets for schools are, it is a direct pipeline to the schools. And from the schools to jails because once you get into the schools that do not have proper resources, it’s inevitable that the students are going to find alternatives that aren’t going to be the best.

One of the girls, Eleya, was talking about how social media was really her outlet because she got to talk and connect and find her own educational tools. She got to learn about what’s happening on the news and give herself the resources because her schools wouldn’t. That keeps her busy. She said that with the power of social media, she learned about March for Our Lives. She learned about Black Lives Matter, and all these other incredible movements that really shaped the way that she perceived the world, what she could do, how she can engage, and how she could use her very own voice. She actually was able to tag along on the tour with us.

We had more than 50 stops over the summer and two tours. We made it a mission to have local kids join our tour every time we made a stop so that we could give them the experience and give them the opportunity to make their voices heard, because we have our own perspective, especially the original co-founders of March for Our Lives. We all were from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. We also lived the same reality. However, it is so much more important to bring more seats to the table with different perspectives. When they have different life experiences and can educate a whole new demographic and a whole new crowd, that’s where you really can get the conversation going.

FENSTER: I think that something really important for me, when I first got involved in March for Our Lives, was understanding that I didn’t know all the answers. Although I have experiences with trauma and pain, there have been communities that have been touched by trauma in ways that I don’t understand. A really interesting quote that I had heard on Martin Luther King Jr. Day—a video of Martin Luther King speaking about the nature of communities of color and black people in this country—how they are different from other immigrant groups in this country. The fact that they didn’t immigrate here. They were forcefully taken out of their own communities and are the only group of people to ever be enslaved on American soil.

Understanding that I don’t have all the answers gave me an idea for the framework that we have to use when organizing, especially in those communities that don’t have access to social media. For example, 85 percent of kids in the Brentwood School District, 35 minutes away from where I live, do not have access to adequate meals on the weekends. They do not have food security. I am sure that these kids do not have the same access to social media and technology that I do or that other kids in this movement do. I think the work really comes all the way back to grassroots organizing. March for Our Lives is not the first gun violence organization to ever exist. We are not the first community organization to ever exist.

There have been countless people that have been organizing their communities for decades, but unfortunately, because of the nature of the intersections of oppression that they are caught in, they have not been heard. They have been suppressed when it comes to voting. Their community leaders refuse to listen to them because they have certain perceptions of what these communities are like, and so they have been disadvantaged.

I think that the one thing that March for Our Lives can do is not take over the organizing in these communities, but rather partner with them, listen to them, understand their pain, and then try to give them the platform and resources that we have—the monetary resources, the public resources in terms of the branding of March for Our Lives. When you hear March for Our Lives, you think of a very specific thing. I think of a group of teens who have made it cool to be involved with activism. But for a lot of teens, this is not a cool thing. It is a matter of survival. I think that the way that you combat the issue of kids not having access to media or technology is by doing the work.

There is a way that people romanticize protest. I think ever since 2016 I have seen it more than ever—the idea that going to protest is a fun Sunday afternoon activity for privileged white women who don't have anything else to do. I think that is a big issue, especially in the progressive movement. It is this idea that protest is something you do for fun, when protest should really be done with purpose. It should be done with a solid message, and it should be done with goals. I think that I am finally starting to see that among youth of all races, backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses.

I think that is the most important thing, not to let protests become an activity, but rather an action step. To not let protest simply cumulate in Instagram posts, but to let it cumulate in tangible change in our communities. I think that begins with really doing the work, really going into communities and being there and being a true ally.

SEFL: Absolutely. An important point on the physicality of the work. You wanted to add to that.

GHEYTANCHI: I wanted to add to what Anthony was saying. It is like a military too, the internet when you come to think of it. In Iran, what is happening is that there is an overwhelming youth population doing this without having the proper discipline. I think you can say the same thing about the Arab Spring too. When you are dealing with a technology that is so deep and so horizontal—it goes around and can connect everybody to everyone—you've got to have the discipline in order to move it forward. But they lack this discipline. They lack the kind of discipline that the non-violence movements, such as the civil rights movement in the United States, had.

These two factors combined have made it extra hard for the youth in these countries to be able to use it. It is something that could further their cause. Being young and not having the discipline that the real non-violence movements need, they go through trainings. It is not easy. You do not just talk about it. You have to have proper leadership, proper organization, to teach the youth how to deal with violence that is being used against them. I think that is what is lacking in the Middle East.

HATCH: This is a great point. I think it really raises an important question for us in this conference. It is about the greater good. Well, whose good are we talking about? What's good? I am from Atlanta, so that's a phrase they have—what's good down there?

I think we would be naive sitting in this room to think that simply because we want a better world, that is somehow going to be enough. There are people who are working actively to ensure that this situation does not change. To your point that movements today, this is true for March for Our Lives, have to think very strategically about how they are going to intervene on systems and institutions that are by definition impervious to transformation. How are we going to transform social institutions that are designed not to change? What tactics and strategies are we going to deploy collectively to achieve transformation and to what end? Who is going to benefit?

I think that is a huge question for us. Seriously, just deconstructing that panel group, what are we going to do? Who is going to benefit? If history teaches us anything, at least in the

last 500 years, it is that every transformation ends up with some new arrangement where those who ruled before rule us now differently. Presumably, we want that to end, right? That is the assumption. What are we going to do?

SEFL: Okay. What are we going to do? I would like to have time to hear from those of you in the audience. I hear various murmurs as we have been talking. To lead us into your questions, I would circle back to some comments in the first panel about working in the interest of me versus working in the interest of us. I would raise the question of transparency in social movements. I would raise the question of the culture of involvement versus just the broader culture, the broader population and the differences that exist. Let's talk more. I think now we'll travel the microphone.

QUESTION 1: I have been wondering specifically about what you just ended with. How do you change these systems and these structures that have been here for so long and feel like they are never going to change, especially in other countries where it is extremely corrupt? Then you also have foreign powers that prefer the system the way it is because it is simply easier to deal with this way? I do not know if you have any kind of insight into when you truly see complete structural change in different societies.

HATCH: I am hesitant to answer because to me it is simple. I will break it down simply from my own point of view. Are we going to reform the institutions we have and keep them more-or-less intact? This would be akin to giving the slave two crusts of bread versus one, give him two pairs of shoes instead of one pair of shoes. We will give you a little bit more but not enough to where you're really going to thrive. This is reform. This is the crisis of liberalism we are talking about. Are we going to open up our minds and our political thought to be much more expansive? I think it is a tired word, but a radical conception of the way our world should be organized. We have a situation where half the people on the planet are barely surviving. It is a situation.

I live in this contradictory space where I want to reform and make good, reasonable, intelligent progress. Only a fool would not want progress, but at the same time I have been yearning for some time for something much more transformative. That is going to mean me giving up privilege and a lot of us giving up the cheddar we hold and hoard.

SEFL: Anthony Hatch 2020, ladies and gentlemen.

GHEYTANCHI: I think it also means being inclusive and understanding that you were never going to exclude or eliminate those who oppose you. This is something I learned from the Mourning Mothers in Iran, the mothers who lost their kids.

One of them told me one time: "I know that the next kid on the next block is from a religious family, totally against our family and what we stand for. He could be one of the killers, but I know in the next Iran that we are trying to create, he is going to be among us. We are not going to eliminate people like him. We will exist with him." The answer she gave me was to be inclusive and understand that you are never going to eliminate religious elements or communities, or people who believe in militant ways, but the idea is to be able to make the greater good appealing to them so that they can have a space in the next society, in the ideal society.

SEFL: Thank you. Mourning Mothers is such a powerful label. I am also reminded of a piece of the American anti-gun-violence and gun safety movement, and that is actually of mothers as well—a massive grassroots organization called Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. It started with a woman who just put something on Facebook after hearing news of the

tragedy at Sandy Hook. There was no hierarchy in mind. There was no structure in place. There was no grand scheme. It was just an act of conscience that they now very proudly use that label, moms. It is a powerful label, much like Mourning Mothers as well. Moms Demanding Action is a very powerful phrase too.

As much as we know that your demographic is carrying water, there are upwards of 5,000,000 moms and people who believe in that cause too. The moment that we are in in this country, I think, is allowing for that. There can be different collective identities that people take on. You are holding on to youth as identity. For some women, it is motherhood as the identity that fuels the activism. It is fascinating to see all this coming together. I think for the sake of this group, for all of us, the goal is to see that change occur.

I am thinking of Kathleen Hall Jamieson's really provocative point about substance-based primaries. I would love to see some gun violence primaries, I think we already had some. I think they were in November, and I think that we may stand to see real change. That could be a marvelous outcome despite the fact that we are indeed living in the very paradoxes that we have also addressed today. More questions please?

QUESTION 2: Thank you for this great conversation. We have been doing community organizing for 50+ years now, so this is a great opportunity for me to talk with the next generation. My question is related to using technology to reach people who are traditionally difficult to reach. Undocumented communities who are skeptical about technology, or traditionally marginalized communities who frankly don't give a damn how fancy your social movement is because they have not seen the material means of their lives, or the lives of their families, improve, no matter who is in office. I would love to talk to you all and hear your reflections on how we can use some of the tools that are so powerful today to reach these folks in a way that is comfortable for them, but that also allows our organizers in communities to do the real work. Getting them in the door, though, seems to require a lot of digital solutions these days, so I would love to hear your thoughts on that.

SEFL: Before we jump in, we just have a couple of minutes left. There may be a necessity to have some of that conversation over cocktails, but if there is a quick answer that anyone would like to provide. If not, I think that bridges us very well into more conversation.

FENSTER: Obviously, I don't have the amount of experience that you would have or that your organization has. I do not have a very clean-cut answer for you, but I think the issue that you're speaking of is this loss of trust. I think that before even talking about the technologies that we need to use to access these communities, and the ways that we can activate these communities, we need to return to the conversation of how do we restore trust in these communities that America has failed for so very long.

As John was saying earlier, I think that comes back to addressing these systems, which have disproportionately disadvantaged so many communities in this country for so long and the need to do actual tangible, meaningful, real change. As Anthony was saying, not just changes that appeal to the masses but real, tangible change; and creating trust so they do not feel that hesitancy to use these technologies. That seems to be the intuitive way to think about it.

HATCH: I know we are out of time, but quickly. It reminds me of something that the great philosopher Flavor Flav once said, "Can't trust it. You can't trust it." The other quick response is we just had a new month. My family, we paid bills. How much was your Verizon bill this month? We do not have unlimited data in my family, but my Verizon bill was \$120. That is like a trip to the grocery store. You cannot overcome the problem of access in a society as patently unequal as

this one. We have got to go back to old-school boots on the ground, walking the neighborhood type of stuff.

SEFL: Amen to that. For those of you who are new to the work, those of you who have been looking at the work, and those of you who have been doing the work for a very long time, thank you. Let us keep going and let's do it over cocktails. Thanks again to our panel.

ABOUT THE PANELISTS

TRACY SEFL is a leading national Democratic communications consultant. She brings significant expertise from Washington, DC in developing messages, shaping media coverage, affecting public opinion, and achieving victories. As a media specialist, the *New York Times* has noted her unique success generating media and her work has garnered national awards and recognition. As a senior advisor and strategist, Tracy is sought for her messaging sensibilities and providing custom counsel for entrepreneurs, authors, celebrities, candidates, and executives. She resides in Chicago where she runs her independent consultancy.

JOHN BARNITT is currently a senior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL. After 17 of his classmates and teachers' lives were unjustly lost, John gathered with fellow students to organize the March for Our Lives. This movement started with a March in Washington, DC that had over 800,000 participants and 850 plus rallies across the nation. After the March, John's activism was far from over. He went on to be one of the lead organizers for the Road to Change: a nation-wide tour that was centered around voter registration and civil conversation. Currently, John is working on projects to increase awareness for gun violence and campaigns to get students involved in the political arena.

AVALON FENSTER spearheaded in March 2018, following the tragic shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, she the organization of the largest March for Our Lives rally on Long Island, drawing more than 3,000 people, victims' families, gun violence prevention advocates and numerous elected officials. The event launched the Long Island arm of the Youth Gun Violence Prevention Movement, mobilizing thousands of young people from high schools across Long Island and inspiring the formation of a dozen school chapters throughout the state. In addition to Avalon's work on gun violence prevention, she is also a passionate advocate for social equity and serves as the National Director of Equity and Inclusion for Next Generation Politics (NGP), where she founded the organization's Women's Caucus.

ELHAM GHEYTANCHI is a sociologist who teaches at Santa Monica College. Her research focuses on women's movements and Information Communication Technology in the Middle East and North Africa. She has published in scholarly as well as mainstream media. She was a producer on "To the Point" radio in NPR in 2000. She has frequently given talks on the politics of Middle East in Washington Think Tanks.

ANTHONY (TONY) HATCH is Associate Professor of Science in Society at Wesleyan University. He is a sociologist who studies the production of knowledge about race and health equity and the uses and meanings of technology in medicine. He is the author of *Blood Sugar: Racial Pharmacology and Food Justice in Black America* (University of Minnesota, 2016), and *New Technologies of Resistance: Racial Power and Protest in The United States* (Duke University Press, 2017).