



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Does a religiously diverse nation need a common story?

David Brooks

In This Episode...

As a record number of young people grow up with little connection to formal religion, New York Times columnist and best-selling author David Brooks reflects with Eboo on how religious narratives shape our lives and impact the spiritual and moral ambitions of a generation.

Episode Guest: David Brooks

Best-selling author David Brooks is a columnist for The New York Times, a commentator on "The PBS Newshour," and a frequent analyst on NPR's "All Things Considered." He has been a senior editor at The Weekly Standard, a contributing editor at Newsweek and The Atlantic, and op-ed editor at The Wall Street Journal. His most recent book, "The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life," was published in 2019.

Suggested Discussion Questions

- David and Eboo discuss personal experiences that demonstrate for them the value of religion and religious traditions. How does this resonate or dissonate for you?
- David and Eboo talk about the way Americans regularly work together across religious diversity. As Eboo says, in America you might find that "a Muslim doctor is working with a Jewish anesthesiologist to operate on a Hindu patient in a room sanitized by a Jehovah's Witness at a hospital started by a Catholic Order run by a secular humanist who was raised by a Buddhist." Have you seen this in your own life? Why do you think it matters?
- David says, "we can't be a diverse nation without a common story," and Eboo quotes Alasdair MacIntyre, who said, "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" How important do you imagine it is that Americans see themselves as part of a common story? What does it mean to have a common story across the nation's increasing diversity?
- David and Eboo discuss the narrative that sees America as "a city on a hill," how that metaphor has been interpreted differently by different people over time, and whether it still fits. What does America as a "city on a hill" mean to you?
- Eboo excitedly envisions a future where a Hindu presidential candidate uses a metaphor from the Bhagavad Gita to describe us as a nation, or a Muslim candidate talks about the charter of Medina. David shares that this vision leaves him simultaneously excited and anxious. What about you? What comes up for you when you imagine an America that takes for granted a broader range of religious or non-religious narratives?