

An enduring narrative

We are called into liberation—a freedom that sees not our value as consumers but the dignity inherent in our humanity.

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Recently, [David Brooks](#) lifted up the work of George Packer, who said that America was once held together by the story of the Promised Land. That was our civic mythology, but it no longer works. (You can read some of my criticism, largely constructed after listening to the voice of [Mark Charles](#), [here](#) and [here](#).) Brooks explains four other narratives:

- **Libertarian (GOP)**—America is a land of free individuals who determine their own fate. In this story, Americans consume, innovate, work, and pay taxes. Problem: We are not citizens in this story.

- **Globalized (Silicon Valley)**—The more connected the world is, the better it is. Americans flatten hierarchies, disrupt systems, discard elites, and empower individuals. Problem: When we disrupt systems, then power gets concentrated into very few hands, as the tech industry demonstrates.
- **Multicultural (Education/Cultural Elite)**—Americans are members of groups. We are defined by the sins of our past and present. Problem: Message of inclusion does not define what we are included into.
- **America First (Trump)**—Our country has lost its identity because of the contamination of foreigners. Problem: The story backward-looking and pessimistic (and I would add racist).

I am drawn to the Multicultural narrative and I don't agree with Packer's assessment of it. He says that it is defined by our sins, but I would say that the view includes a healthy acknowledgement of our wrongdoing. Maybe as a Calvinist, I'm not so worried about admitting our tendency to be horrible to one another. We are good, but we always have that propensity for wrongdoing lurking about in all of our endeavors. If our country's mythology cannot bear the truth that we can be the oppressor as well as the oppressed, then it will not be an honest or resilient. It will not be able to make it past an eighth grade history class, when we come to the shocking realization that the Pilgrims and Native Americans weren't always gathering around Thanksgiving tables, sharing squash.

If there is another narrative, I would hope that it would be one of liberation. We are called into liberation—it is a freedom that does not see our value as consumers, but our dignity is inherent in our humanity. When we become empowered, then we constantly use what we have to leverage a fairer system for others. When I look back on the fight for women's suffrage and rights, I focus on the struggle, the overcoming, and the liberation. I am included into something that is clearly defined—a country where I can vote, own property, and have a job. Someday, women might have access to the healthcare that they need and be paid as much as their male counterparts. Hopefully, women will not be victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse.

Meanwhile, we will work with those who face discrimination because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or poverty. We will keep striving together

and welcome a constant de-centering of our story, so that we might listen to and work with one another. [William Barber told the story well to Noah Trevor last night.](#)

The story of liberation is a Judeo-Christian one. We are taught liberation theologies in our seminaries. But it can go far beyond those two faiths. The story of liberation can be one that lifts us all up and keeps us working for the dignity of all.