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How Do We Remain Bridgebuilders During Times of War?

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EPISODE DETAILS / **TRANSCRIPT**

[00:00:00] Eboo Patel: This is the Interfaith America Podcast, and I'm Eboo Patel.

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[00:00:14] Eboo Patel: Amanda Ripley is one of my favorite thinkers and writers and a terrific person. We've been on stage together at the Chautauqua Institution and the Nantucket Project. You may have seen her work in the

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Smartest Kids in the World. Her current book and the focus of our conversation today is *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out*.

We will discuss how the war between Israel and Hamas is playing out in the United States. As an FYI, Interfaith America, quite intentionally, does not comment on matters beyond the borders of the United States, and we don't make official statements about anything. Our work is to bring people of diverse identities and divergent ideologies together to cooperate on concrete projects with common aims right here in America. Amanda, welcome to this special edition of the Interfaith America Podcast.

[00:01:14] Amanda Ripley: It's so good to see you, Eboo. Thanks for inviting me.

[00:01:17] Eboo: Amanda, there have been various reports of hostility here in the United States related to the war in the Middle East. There have been dueling protests on college campuses. Some have gotten quite ugly. There was the beating of an Israeli student at Columbia University for handing out flyers, and in the most horrific incident, 30 miles from where I sit today, there was the murder of a Palestinian American Muslim child for being Palestinian American Muslim. Is this a high conflict?

[00:01:46] Amanda: Yes. There's actually a bright line in the research between healthy conflict and high conflict. High conflict is the kind of conflict that takes on a life of its own, that becomes a perpetual motion machine in which each side sees itself as morally superior, which is always very dangerous, and there's an us and a them, and there's a sense that it's a zero-sum game, and if you win, I lose, and vice versa.

There's a real collapse of complexity in high conflict, whereas you can have conflict even about really hard, deep things where complexity still exists, where curiosity still exists. Whenever you see contempt, disgust, violent rhetoric, and

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a jolt of pleasure if someone else or some other side experiences a hardship, that's probably a high conflict where I've sort of lost the complexity. Literally in high conflict, you lose peripheral vision, so you make a lot of mistakes.

[00:02:54] Eboo: Yes, you're not only losing the complexity, you're losing the compassion, like if you are happy when somebody else is hurt, particularly when that other person is not a direct combatant, they're just randomly part of the other group, and you are happy that that person is hurt, you're not just losing complexity, you're losing compassion. One of the things, Amanda, that struck me about reading the High Conflict, I probably read it three times by now, one of the things that struck me in my first reading of the book is you say, "In a high conflict, you always destroy what's most precious to you."

[00:03:26] Amanda: Yes.

[00:03:27] Eboo: That is another feature of high-- That is how you know it's not a healthy conflict. Contempt, disgust, binary--

[00:03:32] Amanda: Right. You usually don't even know. Right?

[00:03:34] Eboo: Yes.

[00:03:34] Amanda: That's the diabolical thing, is you end up harming the thing you went into the fight to protect, whether it's your children or your country or your faith. You see it in high-conflict divorces. You see it in high-conflict politics. People begin to imitate the behavior of their oppressor, or their perceived enemy, and they begin to destroy the things that they went into the fight to protect. Yes, it is really-- Ah, it is heartbreaking to see.

[00:04:02] Eboo: The thing that I love about this part of the conversation and your book about this, and the definition is it is an opportunity for a combatant in a high conflict to reflect upon themselves and to say, "I don't want to be

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me. That is not a good thing to do." There's a great insight from Buddhism, hating somebody else is like drinking poison and hoping your enemy is going to die.

[00:04:33] Amanda: Absolutely. It is so hard though to get there when you're in it, I mean high conflict is so magnetic, but I do hear from people who have had that awakening. It's a journey. I like to say you can visit high conflict, but you don't want to live there. It's not going to be like, "Okay, this is it. I'll never experience these emotions again," but it is like being aware of it and saying, just like you said, "I don't want to live here. I don't want this to occupy my heart and soul." There's a lot I can't control about the world, but that's something I can work on. It's how I understand the conflict in my own head.

[00:05:09] Eboo: Yes. One of the phrases you've coined, which has been used far and wide, is conflict entrepreneur. Tell us what a conflict entrepreneur is and tell us, frankly, without using names, we're not going after anybody here, and you and I knew that before we started this conversation. Our role is not to go after people in any direct or personal way, but what's a conflict entrepreneur and how are you seeing them play their role in what's happening in the United States right now?

[00:05:37] Amanda: I should say I don't know that I coined the phrase. What I did was apply it to what's happening here. Typically, conflict entrepreneurs in research on conflict are people who are literal, like war profiteers who are selling weapons, but I also think it applies in any high conflict where you have people or companies who are exploiting conflict for their own ends. Sometimes it's profit.

I actually think even more often it's power, it's attention, it's a sense that you matter, which are just as important to humans as money. I think conflict entrepreneurs are right now really rewarded in our country. We have designed our institutions from politics to the news media, to social media, to raise up, amplify, and reward conflict entrepreneurship. For me, I just wake up every day and try not to be conflict entrepreneur, to

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You and me, Eboo, against the bad guys, the conflict entrepreneurs. That is its own trap, isn't it? Because the truth is I have spent many, many hours with people who were conflict entrepreneurs and aren't anymore, and now have done more good in this world than I ever will. There is room for change. We don't want to commit the same sin of high conflict in trying to get out of high conflict by otherizing huge groups of people or even individuals.

[00:07:13] Eboo: Amanda, let's just talk a little bit more specifically about how somebody does shift from being a conflict entrepreneur to being a bridge builder or a peacemaker.

[00:07:24] Amanda: Curtis Toler was the leader of a large gang in Chicago on the south side for many, many years. He, by his own telling, spread around a lot of pain and experienced a lot of pain and violence. He was a conflict entrepreneur. What happened? Well, the thing that happened to him is what happens to everyone I followed who shifted out of high conflict. He reached a sort of saturation point where all of a sudden the cost of the conflict seemed too much to bear.

For him, it happened at his son's elementary school graduation, if you can believe it or not, where he just found himself weeping as the kids were singing, which is not something he was prone to do as you might imagine. He knew he was either going to go to prison for a long time or he was going to be dead, and he was going to leave his kids alone. He just felt like something had to give. Now, many people in conflict go through those moments, but the difference was Curtis had a way out.

Many things happened but he was able to distance himself from the conflict entrepreneurs in his life. He literally moved across town, but we can do this figuratively by changing who's in our newsfeed, who's in our social media feed, who we're talking to about conflict. If you're having conversations

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and you're having those conversations with people who just agree with you but you end up feeling worse afterwards, that's not helpful.

Curtis intentionally disengaged with those things so that he didn't know every twist and turn that the conflict took. Another example of this in our regular lives would be to limit your news intake. I do not, for example, watch TV news, period. It's not helpful. The research on this is very clear. I choose when I'm going to engage with the news, and I choose carefully. The other thing that Curtis did is he had somewhere to go. His identity as a father was made salient again. We all have multiple identities.

Usually, our identities as parents or as children are the most powerful ones. Those of us who want to help people out of high conflict, go there, work on that, help people remember, but they don't want their kids to go through what they're going through. Those are some of the things that Curtis did, and it was hard. He also got counseling, and he also had help from a local priest and from other organizations. He did a lot of work on his own as a Muslim. He is an incredibly brave, resilient human.

Most of us don't have to do all of that, honestly, because most of us have not been shot six times and done two bids in prison. We should not have to go through what Curtis has gone through, and yet he has done it. For me, he's a great example.

[00:10:05] Eboo: Thank you for that. You and I talked about this when we were at the Nantucket Project literally two weeks ago, which is what's the opposite of a conflict entrepreneur. What do we call that person? What do we call the opposite of a conflict entrepreneur? What does that person do?

[00:10:23] Amanda: I have tried to come up with a phrase that is just as catchy, but I haven't succeeded yet. I'd love to buy dinner for any of your listeners who can come up with one.

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creative, surprising, unexpected. It doesn't solve the conflict, it doesn't make everyone agree, but it interrupts that perpetual loop that we can find ourselves in. Usually, historically, conflict interrupters, let's just call them that for now until your listener gives us the much better idea.

The conflict interrupters historically have been faith leaders, elders, and often women for most of human history. They're people who not always, [laughs], but sometimes are on the edge of the conflict. They're trusted by people in the conflict, including conflict entrepreneurs, and they haven't yet severed all ties with the people who are really caught and bewitched by high conflict. They are the ones who tend to issue an invitation to come out of the conflict, which is what Curtis Toler now does at Chicago CRED with gang members. They issue the invitation again and again and again.

They are always looking for openings and opportunities even, and maybe especially at the worst of times. When something really awful happens, like what is happening in the Middle East right now, like what happened in Washington on January 6th, there is an opening there, and you have to kind of prepare for that in advance, which is what I wish I saw more of, but that's when these folks can really be very, very powerful, because here's the thing, no one can leave high conflict on their own. That is not physically or spiritually possible. You need someone to accompany you, you need a new identity, a new group, or you need to make salient an old identity that you have.

[00:12:18] Eboo: Yes. Let's talk a bit about the how here, and I don't think this is going to be deserving of the free dinner from you, but I'm going to use the term bridge builder for now. [laughs] Okay?

[00:12:26] Amanda: Okay. No, that's definitely not winning.

[laughter]

[00:12:31] Eboo: Honorable mention.

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[00:12:36] Eboo: We're going to go with that for now. We're going to talk about how in the midst of this high conflict, recognizing that it's stoked by things that are substantive. I mean, high conflicts are not about nothing. They're about things that matter.

[00:12:47] Amanda: For sure. Yes.

[00:12:48] Eboo: But it's stoked by conflict entrepreneurs. I want to mention it. My first example, the thing that I'm telling people to not do right now, so I get a phone call from a friend. He wants to start a group on his campus that delves into the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, like right now. I'm like, "Brother, I would not do that at this moment." Right?

[00:13:07] Amanda: Timing is important.

[00:13:08] Eboo: Yes. You write about this really beautifully in High Conflict. You have this example from the Rutger Bregman book of these kids who are setting up a society on an island. When the two of them fight, they go to opposite ends of the island for like four hours. Take us through these steps here. Why is a timeout important and is now the time for a timeout between groups experiencing high conflict, the groups that are in dueling protests at the University of Washington or Columbia University?

[00:13:39] Amanda: You know what's funny? I'd actually forgotten about that island. I'm so glad that you reminded me.

[00:13:43] Eboo: I read the book.

[00:13:44] Amanda: Yes. Like Lord of the Flies, that book many of us had to read in high school. It makes you think that this is how kids will behave if left to their own devices, they'll end up cannibals. In fact, in the one example we have, as you described, kids do not do that. They come up with rituals and traditions, not that they're always perfect. Not that there's never violence or conflict, but that they come up with rituals.

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The whole trick in this kind of moment is to slow down the conflict. How do you slow it down in your own mind? Anyone who works in high stress, in combat or high-stress environments, knows about rhythmic breathing as the sort of most obvious basic way to slow down the conflict in your own mind, but also, William Ury, who works in negotiations and conflict zones all over the world. He talks about going to the balcony in his own mind, and he practices this all the time, so he has gotten really good at it, and he can do it in really intense negotiation situations.

It basically means trying to imagine you're watching this conflict from afar. You're up above looking down at yourself, looking at all the pain and all the people fighting and all the different movements around the world, protests and arguments and allegations and harm, and you're trying to think in the long view, and remember what your goal is. Most people don't even know what the goal is. They haven't articulated it. In this kind of conflict, you're kind of going on gut, and your gut will not help you in this kind of conflict. A conflict interrupter does not trust their intuition in high conflict, because it just doesn't work.

You need to go with something counterintuitive. Maybe even consider the opposite of what your first instinct is, not always. Then think about what is my goal here? Because it's very easy to get into magical thinking in moments like this where you think you can have an outsized effect on the conflict or that you can somehow make yourself feel better because you don't want to sit with the pain and the limitations of this moment. This is getting very Zen, but I feel slowing things down is job one. What do you think?

[00:16:01] Eboo: We're an interfaith organization, and we actually have a big paper about the resources that diverse religious traditions have for peacemaking. Getting Zen is part of what we do, in all seriousness, and the fact that it is very often faith leaders, Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, who play important frontal roles

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Bahá'í Faith, the way that Curtis becomes a Muslim and the role that being a Muslim and being a dad plays in him getting out of gang conflict and then helping other people get out.

We are big believers in the resources that religious traditions have for peacemaking, including rituals like rhythmic breathing. I like to say, yoga wasn't invented by Lululemon. Yoga was invented by Hindu rishis in the mountains.

[00:16:56] Amanda: Can I get a T-shirt that says that? Is that your--

[00:16:59] Eboo: Lululemon is probably smart enough to make that T-shirt.

[00:17:02] Amanda: [laughs]

[00:17:04] Eboo: But yes, this notion of slowing things down is so important, it's so important. That's why, we work with this network of college campuses across the country and this terrific network of college students, and the smart and ambitious ones are like, "Now is the time to--" I'm like, "Now is the time to take a step back and to calm things down. You are the cooling saucer."

[00:17:27] Amanda: Yes.

[00:17:28] Eboo: Sometimes you go to opposite ends of the island. It's okay, that is part of this, so--

[00:17:35] Amanda: Eboo, what does that look like to go to opposite ends of the island if you're, say, a college campus activist, how do they help people to get there?

[00:17:45] Eboo: This is what I've been telling the various college actors that we work with. In fact, I've said it on NPR, I've said it on CNN, I've said it lots of times, which is what a college needs to focus on right now is the dimensions of cooperation required for the functioning of the college. If you're the college president, you're the student body president, if you are the dean of students, if you're in any kind

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We understand that people have families on different sides of the battle lines. We understand that people have different loyalties, and that makes perfect sense, but our football team is not going to fall apart. Our laboratories are not going to fall apart and our maintenance staff is not going to fall apart and our kitchens are not going to fall apart. We are going to continue to cooperate on the things that we need to cooperate on to be a college. I feel like that's a big part of resolving high conflict also, it's, you don't have to constantly engage with the elephant in the room. You can look at the other animals in the zoo.

[00:18:51] Amanda: Yes, but what I love about what you just said is that you acknowledge the elephant and you acknowledge that you were hearing, there are these people who are feeling this way, these people are feeling that way. Because that's half of it. People just want you to do it, to know that you are listening, someone is listening. Then you're saying, in a time of unsteadiness, we need to be steady.

[00:19:14] Eboo: More to come with Amanda Ripley after this short break.

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[00:19:22] Eboo: If all we ever did was argue about abortion or the Middle East or trans rights, you'll be at each other's throats all the time, but what we do a lot of is play basketball together and do experiments in laboratories together, et cetera. I'm curious, how does that fit into deescalating high conflict and moving beyond it? Basically cooperating in other things while recognizing the conflict is still there.

[00:19:48] Amanda: It's funny because as you're talking, I'm thinking about how if being at each other's throats about all of those issues helped, I would be like, let's do this, let's do it, like that's fine. Every college campus, let's be embroiled. What I see is it has the opposite effect. Let me just again and again, shaming, blaming, all of this feels like it's working because it's energizing, it creates solidarity, kind of like

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what I mean?

[00:20:23] Eboo: Yes.

[00:20:23] Amanda: We can bond over that and that feels good. It feels like we have a social connection, which is real, but over time, is just going to drive further wedges, and eventually you start thinking, "I wonder what Amanda says about me to other people."

[00:20:37] Eboo: Right.

[00:20:39] Amanda: Based on how humans actually change their mind, this does not work. What does work? Well, what you said, cooperating across lines of difference and then making that explicit, like doing something that matters together, is much more powerful. I love you have this line that I've heard you say in the past about how frustrating it is that Americans feel so helpless and powerless.

It is like, "I get it, I feel that way a lot, but also, most of the world, people have far less agency and autonomy than we do." It's still not enough, I know that, and there's still huge variance within the country. Still, we have access points, and we can do what we can do and start there, as opposed to thinking, "We're going to fix this whole thing by outing this person or shaming this person."

[00:21:40] Eboo: This notion of agency, as an individual, but also as a nation. I wanted to just say, America is impossible if we import conflicts from elsewhere here. We're impossible. We literally resettle refugees from both sides of civil wars around the world. Think about what that means about a deep American belief. It means that identity-based conflicts are not actually core to those people's identities, because you don't expect Serbian Orthodox Christians and Bosnian Muslims to stop being Serbian Orthodox Christians and Bosnian Muslims when you resettled them here in the 1990s. You expect, in a different context, the relationships change.

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actually been since the beginning of the country. I mean, America comes out of the European wars on religion. The decision in Europe, after the European wars on religion, is to separate people of different faiths, France for the Catholics, England for the Protestants.

In America, the European founders of the 1776 generation say, "Actually, Catholics and Protestants here can work together, live together. You just have to change the context." That is one of the reasons that not only am I deeply frustrated when we import a conflict from elsewhere here, however strong our loyalties might be, but I also think to myself, "We're missing the American idea." You can actually make things better over there by how you interact over here because you are proving to people this is not core to your identity. It's about the context, and context can be changed. What do you think of that?

[00:23:25] Amanda: Yes, I think people do import the conflicts where they came from and from other places, but it does change once you're here, and it should change. It's not really a clean slate. I don't think that's what you're saying. There still was Catholic-Protestant conflict for many, many years, including violent conflict. I mean, there's huge power and potential in the fact that it should evolve.

[00:23:53] Eboo: That's right. The idea is, if you change the context, you can change the nature of the relationship and the interaction. Yes, Protestant-Catholic conflict was very ugly here in the United States for a very long time. I think when that gets righted, it sends a signal to the world, people can do it elsewhere. I'm going to give you a very local example. Indians in India and Pakistanis in Pakistan are taught to hate one another from the jump in textbooks. It's like formalized. Those two countries have fought three wars in 50, 60, 70 years, and it almost went nuclear a couple of times. I mean, it's ugly.

When they move to Chicago, this is more in the late 20th century than right now, but when they moved to Chicago, they moved within 12 square blocks in West Rogers Park. West

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Pakistani immigrant sent to the same neighborhood by either a realtor or a refugee resettlement organization. You're being like, "Wait a second, that person I've grown up hating, well, now you're neighbors." I think that's a really powerful story.

[00:25:09] Amanda: You're saying America can be the counterfactual for other places?

[00:25:11] Eboo: That's exactly right. We are and have been the counterfactual. We just don't tell our story that way.

[00:25:19] Amanda: Well, yes, that gets to the news media. I do think, as a journalist, I am constantly feeling like there's got to be a better way to do this. I think in a time of high conflict, it's urgent to not just do traditional journalism. Traditional journalism is malpractice in this moment, and yet that's what people are set up to do, and they keep doing. To your point, if we all had stories in our heads, like the one you just told, of the Indian and Pakistani families living next door despite it all, then it complicates that narrative, but I'm thinking about how easy it is to collapse into the binary and how rarely.

I mean, this morning I opened up the Washington Post in DC where I live, there's a headline that I had to read three times, "300 arrested as Jewish protesters in DC demand Israel-Gaza ceasefire. This is a story about people who are not fitting into the binary.

[00:26:16] Eboo: Right.

[00:26:17] Amanda: They're not-- "I'm on one side or the other." They're not saying one extreme or the other, but the US Capitol Police arrested 300 people protesting inside the rotunda, demanding that Congress pass a cease-fire resolution in this war. They're asking to slow the conflict down, and many, if not most of them, are Jewish. These are the stories that don't get told at times like this, but I actually think are way more interesting. It's not just like, "Oh, we should tell these stories because it's the right thing." That's true, but also that's interesting, isn't it?

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conflict? Right?

[00:26:59] Amanda: Good point. Good point. Yes. Is that really the news here? Because we know those arrests, for those of you who haven't protested in DC, those arrests are theater. They happen all the time and everybody knows. There's like zip ties and you're released right away. I'm not saying that it doesn't matter to get arrested. It does, but you're right, it's not the headline. It's interesting that that was the headline.

[00:27:21] Eboo: I want to end with two questions on kind of opposite ends of the spectrum. One question is, how do we marginalize the fire starters? It's one of your steps for de-escalating high conflict, and obviously, fire starters and conflict entrepreneurs are largely the same thing. How do we marginalize the fire starters? My second question is going to be, how do we tell a story of coming back together again? Because at the end of the day, you got to live together.

This is, I think, one of the great geniuses of the Mandelas and the Kings and the Gandhis of the world. They knew that tomorrow they had to live with the person who is their enemy today. The way they engaged their enemy today allowed for them to live together tomorrow. Those are my two questions. How do you marginalize the fire starters?

[00:28:06] Amanda: It's interesting because they didn't always know that in every case. They came to that through a lot of hard, painful learning and discipline and practice. It reminds me of how I once met a former South African ambassador to the US, and he was saying that, "What we need to do now is what Mandela and others helped people in South Africa do, which was to realize and accept in your bones that the white people were not going to go back to Europe. They were not leaving. We had to live together." As William Ury, who I mentioned earlier, he has this great quote where it's like, "You can't win a marriage," like we are stuck with each other.

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the mythology, it's just in the next election we're going to get rid of these guys, or once this politician dies, things will be better. That is incredibly seductive, and it will always lead you astray, that kind of thinking. Yes, reckoning with it. To your first question about conflict entrepreneurs, part of how we reckon with that is supplying the demand that is out there. I mean, right now, I think the evidence is pretty clear. Tell me if you disagree that most Americans do not enjoy the conflict we are in.

They look at what's happening with the Speaker vote in Congress or what's happening with the presidential election, where it just feels like we're stuck in some kind of dysfunctional time warp. They feel like, desperate for something better. There's huge unmet demand. You and I see it all across the country. People are yearning for some different kind of journalism, different kind of politics, different options, something else. What happens is we start thinking there is no other way.

That these are the only-- We either have to have this or give up our deeply held values, which is part of the myth-making of conflict entrepreneurs. One way to turn down the volume of conflict entrepreneurs is meet that demand. In this country, if Didn't Vote was a party, it would've won the last two elections. There's huge unmet demand in this country.

You're not going to get everyone to vote, I know that, but there are a lot of people who are tuning out the news, 4 in 10 Americans say they sometimes or always avoid contact with the news, but who still want to know what's going on and still want to have a sense of agency and curiosity and understand the world better. How is it that in a country of this much talent, creativity, and let's be honest, greed, we have not met that demand? I feel like there's got to be ways to meet that demand that are financially viable and good for the conflict. Tell me, do you think I'm smoking my own supply here?

[00:31:14] Eboo: First of all, eras just don't last forever. They never do. The Woodstock era didn't last forever. The Obama

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second thing is that I just don't think human beings are made for long-term high conflict. We just can't sustain it. In your great example in the book about the Hatfields and McCoys, at some point after however many generations of blood feuds and killing cousins, somebody just writes to the newspaper, "I'm done. It's gone on too long. I'm done."

Here's the thing. There was enough of an appetite for that, that that held. I'm sure that there were individuals in those families who might have said before, "I'm done," but it just didn't take. I think one day you wake up and High Conflict is a bestseller, and you're like, "Wait a second, the product was right, the demand needed to shift. The clothes were right. The climate needed to change."

I think we're on the cusp of an era of cooperation. I'm proud to call you a friend, Amanda, and say, we're bridge builders or conflict interrupters or peacemakers, or whatever term you want to use together. Actually, there's a lot of us. Over the last 10 years, there's been a proper movement of bridge builders. It's a proper field. It's got organizations like Solutions Journalism. It's got luminaries like you and John Powell and John Wood Jr. and others, organizations like Braver Angels, funders like the Einhorn Collaborative and New Pluralists.

I think when we're doing our part to shift the paradigm to change the climate, and then I think one day it just changes and you wake up and you're like, "Oh, people are ready for what I have been trying to say and providing for a long time." If I'm smoking my own supply, it's better than what other people are providing. That's how I feel about that.

[laughter]

[00:33:06] Amanda: At least I know where it came from.

[00:33:07] Eboo: Right.

[00:33:08] Amanda: I think that timing is everything, but you don't know when it's going to hit, so you have to keep issuing the invitation, keep doing the work, keep trying to find ways to

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It's funny that you mentioned the Hatfields because I'm thinking about Cap Hatfield who's the one who wrote that letter to the editor of his local paper and who said, "This is over. I'm done. I'm sick of it. I can't take it anymore."

There were probably, you're right, many others who tried to do that. I'm sure even after he wrote that letter, there was conflict that we don't know about, and there were plenty of people in his orbit who resented him and tried to shame him and tried to call him out 19th-century style for doing that. Something about him, his voice, the moment, and everybody else's fatigue clicked. The more fatigue I see, and I see a lot, the more hopeful I get.

[music]

[00:34:08] Eboo: Yes. Amanda Ripley, author of *High Conflict*, personal friend, American luminary, thank you so much. It is the time. Cooperation is better than division. There are resources in our traditions to be a bridge rather than a barrier or a bunker or a bludgeon. Let's change the climate. Let's shift the paradigm. It's time.

[music]

[00:34:35] Eboo: Friends, times like this call for introspection. As Amanda Ripley just told us about high conflict and guided us into how we might de-escalate it, there are some things that each of us can do. Number one, we can take a break. Sometimes you just need a break. You go to separate sides of the island. Number two, you can slow down the conflict. Number three, you can recognize in yourself if you are being a conflict entrepreneur or a fire starter or you're helping conflict entrepreneurs and fire starters and you can ask yourself the question, who do I want to be in this moment?

Remember, high conflicts are characterized by contempt and disgust. You take pleasure in other people's pain. You destroy what is precious to yourself and to others. Nobody wants to be that person, so how do you shift from conflict entrepreneur to peacemaker? Well, one thing is you recognize

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own identity salient. In the case of Curtis Toler, it was no longer a gang leader that was the most salient identity. It was father and it was Muslim.

Amanda and I also talked about the powerful role of religion in each of these matters. The powerful role of religion in teaching us rituals where we can take a break and slow down the conflict. The fact that so many great peacemakers have been people of deep faith across faiths, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Dorothy Day, the list goes on and on.

Finally, there is a role for America to play here. Part of that role is to demonstrate that people who are at each other's throats elsewhere in the world do not have to fight here. That conflict is in fact not core to particular identities. It is contextual. If you change the context, people can have different relationships. Let's play our role positively here in the United States as bridge builders and peacemakers. Let's marginalize the fire starters and conflict entrepreneurs. Let's be the potluck nation that I have talked about before.

Let us know in the comments or wherever you live on social media how you deal with high conflict. You can find us on Twitter @interfaithusa and Instagram @interfaithamerica. If you need more guidance on navigating high conflict, pick up Amanda Ripley's book *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out*. To read more about this conversation and to find resources and stories about bridge building in our religiously diverse nation, visit our website interfaithamerica.org. I'm Eboo Patel.

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