

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BE THE PEOPLE: A CALL TO RECLAIM AMERICA'S FAITH AND PROMISE

THESE CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER DOWNLOADABLE QUESTIONS FOR *Be The People* are suitable for classroom use, book clubs, and other discussion forums. Group leaders can select one or more questions from each chapter for weekly discussion, or they can modify the questions to make them more suitable for your particular group's age and educational level.

CHAPTER ONE:

RESHAPING OUR NATIONAL IDENTITY

1. Why have Americans been largely complicit in the reshaping of their nation by a small group of elites? What events have spurred the recent grassroots uprisings by everyday Americans? Do you believe the intensity behind these movements will last?
2. Swain asserts the power of "cultural enforcers" to define what is seen as acceptable and what constitutes legitimate arguments in policy debates today. For instance, the much-criticized firing of Juan Williams by NPR in October 2010 stands as an example of the enforcers' desire to limit debate. How have cultural enforcers influenced or stifled your freedom of speech and debate in your local communities?

3. Swain states that the efforts made by “cultural enforcers” to promote moral relativism and tolerance are “tragically well-intentioned, motivated by a desire to create a better world—a utopian society that replaces old values and norms with a better way of life.” Eden, the original utopia, was doomed by the failures of man. Since man is not perfect, is such a utopia ever possible? What does the Bible say regarding a utopia on earth?
4. Do you believe that America is a Christian nation? Why or why not? If not, do you believe America was, at one point in our history, a Christian nation? What does it mean to consider America a Christian nation? How should our laws, our morality, and our leaders represent such a distinction, if we, in fact, seek to be represented as a Christian nation?
5. Swain sees sobering parallels between the totalitarian dystopia presented in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the direction our society is heading today. Furthermore, since the presidency of Barack Obama, sales of Ayn Rand’s dystopian novel *Atlas Shrugged* have skyrocketed as the Tea Party has embraced the book’s antisocialist message, recognizing ominous parallels in Rand’s novel as well. Are these fears justified? Do other works of fiction provide parallels for the path America is currently taking?
6. In what ways is America exceptional? How has this exceptionalism been manifested through our history? What is it about our heritage and our value system that makes our country unique among the nations of the world?
7. How can we restore our national identity? Through what forums, political and otherwise, can we voice our discontent with the loss of our identity?

CHAPTER TWO:

AMERICA’S RELIGIOUS ROOTS

1. Swain argues that “Scripture indicates that God relates to humanity today as he has done in the past,” noting that, “In Hebrews

13:8 the apostle Paul says that Jesus Christ is ‘the same yesterday and today and forever.’” Do you agree? Does God judge nations today the same way as he has in the past?

2. Natural law, the “law written on the heart” that distinguishes right from wrong, is a belief system that Christians and deists held in common. Is this still true today for Christians and other nonbelievers of various faiths? How can natural law provide a common moral ground today upon which we can set policy and restore our original vows?
3. The First Amendment (particularly the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses) was originally intended to prevent a national church, like that of England, and prevent the potentially harmful effects of religion. Today, however, the First Amendment has been reinterpreted to support banning prayer in schools and public displays of the Ten Commandments. Can this modern interpretation be reversed to reflect the framers’ original intentions? Is this feasible, given the current political climate?
4. Swain lists Manifest Destiny, the Louisiana Purchase, the territories gained through the Spanish-American War, and the mass displacement of Native Americans as potential abuses of America’s covenant relationship with God. One may also consider the purchases of Alaska and Hawaii, and the subsequent imposition of American governance on the natives in those territories. Would you consider these to be abuses of the covenant? In your opinion, were at least some of these matters ordained by God?
5. Swain contends that the capture and transport of Africans as slaves, something that is taught as momentous mistake in American history, “carries all the hallmarks of divine providence.” Discuss why she believes this to be the case, including the parallels she sees “between the experiences of black descendants of slaves and the 400-year bondage and redemption of the Israelites in Egypt.” Are there any other such moments in history that, looking back, may be seen as providential?

6. Swain notes Deuteronomy 28:15–22, explaining that it states: “A nation that rebels against God will absolutely not thrive.” She further asks the provocative question, “Has our behavior brought God’s judgment upon America in the form of the curses spelled out in Deuteronomy 28:15–53?” Do you believe that America’s immoral behavior in recent decades has brought these disasters and worsening economic conditions as consequences of breaking our original vows? America has suffered horrible disasters stretching back to our independence, including numerous natural disasters, the burning of Washington, the Civil War, the Great Depression, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Can these also be considered to be ramifications of our rebellion against God, even during those times? If not, how can we explain them?
7. How can we rebut those who dismiss religious reasoning? Through what methods can we create spaces, in our local communities, where faith-based reasoning is considered an acceptable counter to secular arguments?

CHAPTER 3:

ABORTION’S FRAGILE FACADE

1. Swain mentions the decline of America’s religious leaders, specifically citing Rev. Ragsdale, who questions core tenets of the gospel and claims abortion to be a “blessing.” How has this decline harmed our morality in our cities and in our nation as a whole? How can we reverse this harmful decline of America’s religious and moral leadership?
2. Although the abortion debate is normally framed as women’s reproductive rights versus the unborn child’s right to life, Swain reveals how abortion harms women and men, both physiologically and psychologically. How does the current debate, framed in its present stance, help those who argue a pro-abortion stance? Can this framework be overhauled? How?

3. Even though the Bible does not address abortion explicitly, we can be sure that God values human life and prohibits murder—the deliberate taking of innocent life. God distinguishes between murder and other forms of killing, including “capital punishment, God-ordained war, and accidents.” How would you respond to a person who accuses pro-life Christians of being hypocrites for holding positions supportive of military service and the death penalty for capital offenses?
4. Many Christians and politicians today profess to be pro-life. However, they make exceptions in the rare cases of rape or incest. Is this a true pro-life position when we consider the innocence of the unborn child? What advice does the Bible give on these deplorable circumstances?
5. As Robert P. George asks, “Is the developing embryo or fetus a human being or a mere unwanted growth?” Using his reasoning, if one is personally against abortion because it is the taking of life of a developing human being, surely one cannot allow such homicide to take place. Therefore, is it possible to be personally pro-life but politically pro-choice, as many claim to be?
6. What is the ultimate goal of the radical environmentalist movement highlighted by Swain? What are the racial implications of soliciting money from wealthy Europeans, as Pop*Offsets* is doing, in order to prevent the birth of children in African nations?
7. How is abortion treated in our community? How can we increase awareness of Planned Parenthood’s racist history and evasion of rape laws?

CHAPTER 4:

FAMILY MATTERS

1. In Thornton Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth*, the wife declares to her husband that what sustained their marriage—and protected their kids—was their promise to each other. Moreover, Swain credits the promise between her friend Quigley and his wife as “their

anchor in difficult moments” that held them together. Swain believes this promise to be “their commitment to their vows based on their faith in God.” Do you agree with this assessment? How else is marriage like a promise?

2. Newt Gingrich, who has divorced and remarried multiple times, is often cited as a nationally prominent politician with a tumultuous marital history. Should we consider a politician’s marital history when evaluating him or her as a potential candidate? If a stable marriage reflects a candidate’s judgment and morality, does a history of divorce reflect the opposite? Is more political leeway given to male candidates who may have remarried more than once, as opposed to women?
3. As Swain notes, the Bible maintains that “Christian marriage is a permanent institution.” In the modern world, should marriage still be considered to be a permanent bond? Do circumstances like physical or mental abuse or financial troubles constitute legitimate grounds to seek a divorce? What else could be?
4. How can we reduce the rate of divorce today? Swain mentions divorce law, such as no-fault and unilateral divorce, that facilitates divorce in today’s society. In order to convince Americans of the sanctity of marriage, should we focus on fixing these flawed policies and instituting “covenant” marriages, or on appealing to Christian morality?
5. In Matthew 5:32 (ESV), Jesus says, “But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” We also know that God has warned against committing adultery in the Ten Commandments. What does this mean for those who have been divorced and remarried? How can we interpret Jesus’s statement today?
6. Some gay-marriage advocates promote a conservative case for same-sex unions, arguing that marriage is a fundamentally conservative institution. Ted Olson, the U.S. solicitor general under

the Bush administration, has argued in favor of same sex unions because it shows that gays and lesbians want to participate in a tradition important to many conservatives. Assess this argument.

7. Swain notes “the importance of the church in helping stabilize lower class urban neighborhoods . . . it seems to be the African American poor who most fervently practice their religious faith who do best at breaking the generational cycle of poverty, hopelessness, and self-destruction.” However, in too black many churches, allegiance to a liberal ideology causes many to distort the Biblical teachings and ignore pressing concerns, like STDs and the homosexual subculture. How can we make sure that these churches begin to address these issues and also do so in a fair manner that is not clouded by loyalty to a political party?

**CHAPTER 5:
IMMIGRATION, THE RULE OF LAW,
AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY**

1. One of Swain’s main concerns is the plight of “America’s blacks, legal Hispanics, and poor whites,” groups that she sees as powerless because they lack representation by lobbyists and media personalities. Why does the media focus singularly on the difficulties faced by illegal immigrants and migrant workers? Although many, including Colbert, believe such immigrants to be the most powerless group in society, is this actually true, given their powerful backing?
2. Swain, instead of relying solely on the main unemployment rate, chooses to use the broader U-6 measure, which she argues is “an important indicator because it calculates the unemployment rate by including unemployed people who would like to work but have not looked recently, as well as those working at part-time positions but who would prefer full-time jobs,” thereby including both the unemployed and the underemployed. Why does this measure not receive as much attention in the mainstream media? What are the drawbacks of its use?

3. Swain shares her stories of her personal experiences with immigrants in order to “clarify that my involvement in the immigration debate is not borne out of hostility toward immigrants.” Many of those who oppose illegal immigration are smeared as being anti-immigrant or, worse yet, racist, tarnishing their reputation. Why are these charges so easy to level in the current media environment? What can we do to make sure that these voices are not unjustly silenced by fear of being besmirched?
4. Swain quotes Hirschfield, who says that the “stranger of the Hebrew Bible is better understood as a resident alien, a non-citizen who agrees to abide by the laws of the community into which he or she has come. To that extent then, many if not most, illegal aliens in this country, would not qualify.” Why does he consider the “stranger” to be this? Do you agree? If not, is “open embrace” the only Biblically acceptable response to immigration?
5. As we see in the story of Esther, laws may be changed but not ignored. When we examine the willful breaking of law through inaction to enforce existing policy, such as marijuana laws in California or the sanctuary city policies throughout the United States, are we operating under the strict rule of law or the fickle rule of men?
6. Swain states that “[i]mmigrants who make demands on Americans to make accommodations to meet their needs fail to respect our culture as other cultures and by doing so, they take advantage of our laws and customs.” However, America is often seen as melting pot, where foreigners can live out their own dreams and make their own homes amongst others, preserving their own culture while adopting a new one as well. How can we reconcile these two visions of America?
7. All too often, speech is constrained by the need for political correctness, which is set by the “culture enforcer” media. How can we fight back and reclaim truly free speech in our communities, especially as it relates to the notion of multiculturalism reigning supreme over our own American way of life? How will our push-back on this notion of multiculturalism restore *E pluribus Unum*?

CHAPTER 6:

MOVING BEYOND RACE AND RACISM

1. Many of those who oppose President Obama's agenda, especially in the Tea Party movement, have been labeled as racists. Why is this charge so damaging? Why has it been so easy to level against conservatives?
2. Swain states that "[w]hen the Body of Christ operates as it was intended, fellowship transcends race." What are some examples, either personal or historical, of this? Can we observe this same fellowship among those of differing religious beliefs?
3. Examine Swain's discussion of segregated churches. Do you consider racially segregated churches or other such segregated institutions to be a problem that may contribute to the lack of comfort some may feel around those that are not of their own ethnic groups? Why or why not? Should these churches attempt to bridge the divide?
4. While racial and ethnic harmony in America is a goal to strive toward, Swain tells us that, "until the return of Christ, we will never see the eradication of racial barriers and tensions." How, then, should we measure any success in bringing about racial harmony?
5. Swain believes that the root of racism lies in the denial of the sanctity of life, and explains how racism fueled the actions of Margaret Sanger in founding Planned Parenthood. What insights can we take from this? Is it possible, then, to believe that all people are created equal, yet still be pro-choice? Would this be an ideologically consistent position?
6. How have our historical efforts to combat racism, especially through race-based affirmative action, actually served to exacerbate the problem in modern day America? Examine Swain's call for a "need-based approach." Would this approach lead to resentment based on class, instead of race?
7. Swain asserts the three things our nation needs to overcome our struggle with race relations are a strong work ethic, a clear vision,

and a sense of identity. How can we foster these ideals within our communities?

CHAPTER 7:

RACIAL POLITICS: PRESIDENT OBAMA AND ME

1. How does Peggy Joseph's now-infamous proclamation of what Obama could do for her reflect the unrealistic expectations many had of what his presidency would entail? Did his campaign encourage this "cult of celebrity," especially among black Americans? Has this come back to haunt him in the accusations by black leaders that he has not done enough for African Americans?
2. Despite some statements by black leaders, Swain notes the widespread "black reluctance" among the populace to criticize Obama or his policies. Why do you think this is? Did this same reluctance manifest itself in the public opinion of previous black leaders considered to be on the other side of the ideological spectrum, including Clarence Thomas and Condoleezza Rice?
3. While Swain argues that questions about Obama's birth "have made it difficult for the president to govern," do you think that the refusal to fully release his records is also an intentional political calculation, designed to immediately dismiss anyone who raises these questions as a fringe "Birther?" In other words, do the pros outweigh the cons?
4. The Bible reminds us to always respect our leaders, and Swain reminds us that "1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NKJV) admonishes us to pray for our leaders, even those we don't support politically." What is the difference between supporting a leader politically and praying for that leader? How does this Biblical order apply in nations where the leader seizes power without the consent of the governed, such as in communist or totalitarian nations?
5. The imperfect nature of man, according to Swain, is the foremost reason that racism persists today, as we are tempted to blame others when our own plans fail. Given that the imperfect condition of man is unchanging, can we ever fully solve the problem of racism?

6. Swain discusses at length the obstacles she faced as a young black girl growing up in rural Bedford, Virginia, including the hidden prejudices of those who were not outwardly racist or did not consider themselves to be racists. What can we do to make our neighborhoods, churches, and communities more welcoming to those of different cultures, different religions, and, above all, different ethnic backgrounds?

CHAPTER 8:

RECLAIMING AMERICA'S FAITH AND PROMISE

1. Swain quotes Cal Thomas as stating that “trying to use government to . . . transform culture into the conservative Evangelical image has failed.” How can private institutions take over where government has failed?
2. Examine Pastor Joe Wright’s 1996 prayer. Although it is now over a decade old, how does it apply to modern America? Do you agree with all his statements?
3. Ultimately, Swain calls on us, “We, the People,” to assume our responsibility to “Be the People.” She lays out several steps we can take to reclaim America. What are some other ways we can become more knowledgeable and influence those in our communities?