

## **POL S 334 A - Amy Chua, Political Tribes**

[00:00:00.00] [RADIO STATIC]

[00:00:04.35] - From KUER News in Salt Lake City, this is RadioWest.

[00:00:07.41] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:09.18] I'm Doug Fabrizio. Think about the big conflicts of the last 50 years or so. The scholar and writer Amy Chua says, "In all of those, the US has acted as though these are struggles over ideas, like capitalism versus communism." But Chua says, that's wrong. That time and time again the US has missed the real key to these fights. That it's not about borders and geopolitics, it's about tribe. "The group identities that matter," she says, "are not national, they're ethnic or regional or religious." And here's the thing-- people will do almost anything for their tribe.

[00:00:44.49] Today in the program, Amy Chua is joining us to talk about her latest book. She says, if we want to save our nation, we need to come to grips with tribes. Join us after the news.

[00:00:55.50] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:01:03.23] - Hey RadioWest listener, we thought you'd want to know that the book we're talking about on today's podcast just happens to be available on Audible. Go to RadioWest.org, and you'll find a link included with the show, along with links to IndieBound and Amazon. And any purchases you make through these affiliate partners help support RadioWest. Thanks so much.

[00:01:23.52] - This is RadioWest. I'm Doug Fabrizio. In her latest book, the scholar Amy Chua says that we are at an unprecedented moment in American history. For the first time, white Americans are faced with the prospect of becoming a minority. And this is important because when groups feel threatened, she says, they retreat into tribalism. They close ranks.

[00:01:44.72] So you have one group-- in this case, conservatives-- who feel threatened. Which has led to a rise in nationalism, to anti-immigrant rhetoric, and identity politics. But what has happened, Chua says, is that the reaction from the left hasn't been any more helpful or any more useful. Liberals, she says, have been dismissive of the people who feel threatened. And these days, they're often Donald Trump supporters.

[00:02:10.62] So you have elites, who think they celebrate universal values. But basically, they're just looking down at the tacky flag wavers and NASCAR fans. This, she says, is political tribalism.

[00:02:23.39] And in her book, she says, if we want to fix the divisive atmosphere in this country and abroad, we're going to have to come to grips with it. Chua is a legal scholar, a professor at Yale University. She's the author of a number of books, among them *Battle Hymn of the Tiger*

Mother. And she joined us recently to talk about her latest book. It's called, Political Tribes. We began with the reasons humans are tribal. It's complicated.

[00:02:51.64] - Well, it's definitely partly biological. And I spent some time in the book going through some really fascinating studies that basically shows that we, like our fellow primates, we absolutely need to belong to groups. If you think about it, very few people are hermits. And once we connect to a group, our tendency-- we can overcome it, but our tendency is to want to cling to that group and to defend it and to think it's better than other groups.

[00:03:22.63] And this is actually fine in lots of contexts. I mean, family is a form of tribalism. Different religions can be and sports. Just think about sports. But when things get dangerous is when tribalism takes over a political system. And that's really what the book is focused on. Because when that happens, then you tend to see everything through the lens of your own group or your own tribe. And sometimes, facts and arguments and even policy start not to matter. It's just like, OK, this is my side and I'm sticking with it.

[00:04:00.16] - Much of the book is the way in which American policymakers and most of us, frankly, have sort of gotten the idea of tribalism wrong. You say-- and this is an important idea in the book, that the group identities that matter most are not the national ones, it's ethnicity. It's regional. It's sectarian. Say something about that, if you would.

[00:04:24.89] - Yeah. So, America-- in our foreign policy, it's so interesting. We, for at least the last 50 years, have tended to view the world in terms of these grand ideological battles. Capitalism versus communism, and we're always on the good guys side. And then after that, it was democracy against authoritarianism. And most recently, of course, after 9/11, it was freedom-loving peoples, led by us, against the terrorists, an axis of evil.

[00:04:55.87] So what we do is be kind of blinded by these ideological blinkers. We have been spectacularly blind to-- been really ignorant about-- the group identities that matter most to people on the ground, in these countries that we're supposedly trying to help, that we're invading it and trying to make better. And yes, oftentimes, these most important group identities, the ones that people will really sacrifice and sometimes kill and die for, are not always national.

[00:05:28.20] In many non-Western countries, they are sectarian or religious or ethnic or tribal or clan-based. And we've missed it everywhere, from Vietnam to Afghanistan to Iraq to Venezuela.

[00:05:41.79] - And we'll get to some of those examples. We'll dig through some of those. I think they're really important. But we should also point out, as you do in the book, that this isn't just about foreign policy. You say, in our domestic relations in politics that we've also been oblivious to group identity. Explain that because this is an important theme in the book as well.

[00:06:04.80] - Well, it's so interesting. Many of us-- I include myself in this category-- who like to think of us, ourselves as maybe non-tribal. Because if you think about it, the great Enlightenment ideals were about overcoming these group identities, religious wars, ethnic identities that seem to cause so much trouble. So many people in the cities, on college campuses,

on the coasts tend to think of themselves as multicultural, as kind of cosmopolitan. We're citizens of the world. We're very tolerant. We're not bigoted people.

[00:06:43.00] But one thing that we missed is that identity, that kind of cosmopolitan identity, is itself very tribal. And we often forget that there are all kinds of people across the United States, which is extremely heterogeneous. And I'm not just talking about race or ethnicity. And we miss a lot, again, of the most important group identities that matter most specifically to ordinary Americans and often to struggling Americans.

[00:07:15.33] And I think elites-- using that term very loosely. I don't mean necessarily financial elites. But again, people on college campuses, a lot of progressives who want to make the world a better place, we sometimes don't realize that we're also, again, a little bit ignorant about the group identities that matter most to people in the rest of the country. And I think that partly explains why people were so surprised by the 2016 election. I mean, this is pretty much everybody got that wrong.

[00:07:45.69] - Well, here's a point you make in the book related to that. You say that the elites who were confounded by Trump's victory are missing that in terms of taste, you say, in terms of sensibilities, even values, that Donald Trump is quite similar to the white working class. Even though a lot of people said-- and you heard this a lot-- what do they have in common? What do the evangelicals have in common with Donald Trump? What do blue collar, working class white people who are coal miners in West Virginia have in common with this billionaire real estate developer in New York City? But you say that they do have similarities.

[00:08:24.30] - Yeah. So after the election, a lot of people asked just those questions. And there were two most common answers. One was, it's all a con, and these people are so ignorant, they can't even tell that he's actually a billionaire and nothing like them. And the second explanation is, they're just-- he's satisfying their kind of racial and racist tendency. So they're kind of letting everything else go.

[00:08:52.42] And look, those two negative statements might explain some people who voted for him. But I think that they also reflect some of the condescension which helped get President Trump elected in the first place. And if you think about things in terms of, again, group identities, the tribal instinct or the group instinct is all about identity and identification. And many people in Trump's base really do identify with him.

[00:09:24.18] In terms of taste and sensibility, Donald Trump really is a lot more like a lot of working class Americans. He does a better job projecting himself or portraying himself as a member of the same cultural tribe in terms of the way he dresses, the way he talks, the way he's always getting called out for not being politically correct enough. And we on the Coast, he'll say something and people will be horrified. Oh my god, that's so racist and sexist. But for a lot of people in the middle of the country who didn't get trained on these Ivy League campuses, they actually relate to that because they're always getting called out for those exact same mistakes.

[00:10:10.57] And even the sports that he watches-- World Wide Wrestling and NASCAR and the way he says all-- he stuffs himself on McDonald's. So in terms of cultural identification, he

really has kind of portrayed himself as not even just a member of their group, but almost as their champion. So one of the interesting things about belonging to a group is, one you decide that you've connected-- and studies are very clear about this-- then you just-- it's like you can excuse mistakes. And when you see people trying to take out your person, you'll defend them no matter what.

[00:10:47.92] So that kind of explains-- there's scandal after scandal and mess after mess. But certainly everybody I know on the East Coast is, OK, this is finally going to bring this man down. And yet, his approval ratings always stay about the same. And I think this is what explains it. It's the more members of his own base see people attacking him and trying to tear him down, the more they kind of dig in and champion him.

[00:11:17.32] - You say that this tribal instinct, it works on a gut level. And a lot of this is aesthetics. And I just wanted to sort of accentuate that because I think this is so interesting.

[00:11:29.34] There's this website, for example, that features surreptitiously taken photographs of particularly disheveled people at Walmart. And you see a lot of-- I'll put it this way-- elites just chuckling at these kind of rubes. And here's something that you write in the book. You say that American elites disdain tacky things. And not coincidentally, those tacky things, like fake tans and big hair and pro wrestling, are usually associated with lower income Americans. So it's no wonder, I guess, that working class Americans feel resentful.

[00:12:11.30] - Oh, yeah.

[00:12:11.95] - Right?

[00:12:12.80] - Yes. And it's very ironic. And it goes both ways, by the way.

[00:12:16.82] - Sure.

[00:12:17.05] - One thing that I say is that there's just mutual disdain and distrust between what you might call these cosmopolitan coastal elites and then, again, loosely speaking, kind of Heartland America, rural America, Southern America. But you're absolutely right. Especially for elites who like to view themselves as so tolerant, it's amazing how judgmental and really just how insensitive in their own way. Because they're very, very much about being careful about racial and ethnic and religious sensitivities. They're always calling out people for being offensive in that direction.

[00:12:57.92] And yet, when it comes to, as you say, just making fun of people who really just have lower income and maybe don't quite speak in the same polished way, it's amazing how quickly people will go-- and when they attack, it's quite vicious, actually. I think it's something that we all need to reflect on. I suppose it's sort of human nature.

[00:13:18.09] - Yeah. What do you mean when you say, America is a supergroup?

[00:13:24.88] - So this is actually something incredibly positive. And I think it's really important. I say that alone among the major powers of the world, the United States is what I call a supergroup.

[00:13:38.23] And to be a supergroup, it's very simple. You have to satisfy two very understandable requirements. The first is you need a very strong, overarching, collective identity-- American. But at the same time, you have to satisfy a second condition, and that is that supergroups have to allow individual subgroup and sub-tribal identities to flourish. So that ideally, at its best-- for example, in America, you can be-- somebody can be-- I'm Libyan-American or a Croatian-American or Irish-American or Japanese-American. And yet intensely patriotic at the same time.

[00:14:20.74] - And you wouldn't see that in Europe, for example.

[00:14:23.15] - No, We take it for granted. If you take a country like France, that at first glance seems very similar to us-- it's another progressive, Western democracy. But it is not a supergroup because it satisfies the first condition. It has a very strong French national identity, but it doesn't allow individual subgroup identities to flourish.

[00:14:46.12] Remember, they had the burkini ban where it was quite a scandal. The Muslim women were not allowed to wear their full body swimsuits. There is a ban on headscarves. And President Sarkozy actually said very explicitly-- he said, in France, you have to speak like a French person, dress like a French person, eat like a French person if you want to be French.

[00:15:09.79] And a lot of people think that that almost forced assimilation has contributed to a lot of the social unrest and radicalization, especially among the Muslim and North African communities. And we don't exact-- we don't have that problem. We're very different that way.

[00:15:27.61] - It's interesting. We weren't always that way though. You talk about how we had to go through this transformation, particularly during the Civil rights struggle in the '60s, for us to be able to get there. Is that right?

[00:15:39.19] - Right. So we've always had this incredibly just wonderful constitution with the most amazing principles. But as we now all know, we have repeatedly failed to live up to those principles. And at the time that we passed it, we said all men are created equal, but we had slavery. Women weren't allowed to vote.

[00:16:01.60] And in fact, even-- we had voting and property restrictions. So many, many poor, struggling Americans couldn't even vote. So we were not a supergroup in the sense that we didn't allow all kinds of subgroup identities to actually-- not only just flourish, but for our citizenship to be open to all groups until first after the 14th Amendment when we established birthright citizenship. That is, in the United States, after the passage of the 14th Amendment, being an American is not a matter of blood or ancestry or ethnicity, it is just a matter of being tied to the land and abiding by the Constitution's principles.

[00:16:48.52] And what's amazing is that very, very few countries have this birthright citizenship. I think most Americans don't realize how rare it is. No Asian country has it. There, it's all like-- it's blood. Are you Chinese by blood? That's how you can be a citizen.

[00:17:05.14] Even Europe doesn't have it. In fact, the only other countries that have birthright citizenship-- I mean the most common one that we might think of is a country like Canada. But then we had to go through the Civil Rights revolution because, again, we had these principles but we didn't always follow through.

[00:17:23.34] - That's Amy Chua. Her latest book is, Political Tribes, Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations. We'll take a break and come back in a moment. You're listening to RadioWest on KUER.

[00:17:33.88] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:17:52.15] This is RadioWest. I'm Doug Fabrizio. Today in the program, we're talking about why it is humans are tribal. The legal scholar, Amy Chua, says we have to come to terms with tribalism if we're going to learn to get along with each other. Her new book is called Political Tribes, Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations.

[00:18:12.18] One of the insights from your book that you point out early on is that a lot of the Enlightenment principles, like liberalism or secularism or even equality, even democracy itself, a lot of those principles don't actually give the kind of tribal group identity that most humans actually need and want. Would you talk a little bit about that, because this seems like a fundamental misunderstanding. What we think is that everyone is in agreement on these liberal principles. But in fact, that doesn't really get at the idea of what humans are actually looking for. Is that right?

[00:18:50.26] - Exactly. So again, these are wonderful enlightenment principles. And the first thing I want to say is that I subscribe to them. In an ideal world, we would all have equality and individualism and rule of law. But yes, a line from my book is that universal brotherhood is incompatible with gross inequality.

[00:19:13.33] A lot of the Enlightenment principles really kind of either conceptualize the world as the whole world-- we're all citizens of the world-- or as individuals. We're just all individuals. Let's get rid of these sectarian identities and religious and all these backward phenomenon. The problem is, easier said than done.

[00:19:37.00] For human beings, we need to connect. And it is very, very difficult to connect to the four billion other people on the planet. It is much more natural for us to say, oh, my family, that's my tribe first. I'm going to be loyal to them.

[00:19:54.46] If you look at the way the military units are organized, it was very deliberate. Often bands of like 12 or 10, because it's very hard to be loyal and feel intensely passionately connected to even like 1,000 people. So what I say is, really, if you take Hollywood movies, the only time that Earth is united is when we're under attack from another species. So our tendency

is that we need an us versus them. It's very hard. This is something we should all work towards, but it's not where we are now.

[00:20:33.92] So what I say is that as America tries to bring all kinds of good things to the rest of the world, we have to realize that while those principles are wonderful, they're very romantic. And we can't just expect to transplant democracy in a country like Syria or Libya and say, you know what, let's just have a bunch of elections. And all of these different sects and groups and tribes are just going to come together as one people. It's really often the opposite. We will try to implement this grand principle, like democracy, and find to our surprise that democracy, under certain conditions, can actually catalyze group tensions rather than smoothing them over.

[00:21:16.69] - This brings us to Vietnam, I think, because you provide in the book some examples for the ways in which the US has been blind to tribal politics, and Vietnam is one of them. Where you say, we got it wrong. And you say that driving and shaping the misunderstanding there was this Vietnamese nationalism, this ethnic conflict actually, that's at least 1,000 years old. And it's something we just didn't really understand or see.

[00:21:44.40] - It's really amazing. We saw that whole conflict in terms of the Cold War. Again, a lot of people-- our troops, certainly, trying to do the right thing. Oh my gosh, we're going to liberate these people and help them have capitalism, as opposed to this terrible communism. But what we completely missed was, first of all, that what the Vietnamese people were fighting for-- I mean most of these were very poor, uneducated peasants. What did they know about Leninist Marxist theory?

[00:22:14.19] What they were fighting for was-- just as you say-- for their independence. Vietnam is a country that had been colonized by 1,000 years by the Chinese. The Chinese are their first enemy. So one of the biggest mistakes that the United States made is we went in there and we kind of thought that the Vietnamese and the Chinese were the same thing.

[00:22:37.80] It's amazing. We said, oh, the Chinese they're going communist and the Vietnamese are their pawns. So we're going to come in.

[00:22:47.33] And there's another piece of that conflict that we also missed. This is a group dynamic internal to Vietnam, and this is something that I think most Americans, even people pretty literate about the Vietnam War still don't know. And that is that Vietnam had within its borders a tiny, what I call a market dominant minority. And this is a term I coined in 2003 to refer to a small outsider ethnic minority that controls a vastly disproportionate amount of the country's wealth.

[00:23:24.31] Now that always sends off alarms. Oh my gosh, is she started stereotyping? But that's part of the problem. This is not just a taboo stereotyping thing. It actually was the case that in Vietnam, a tiny 1% Chinese-- not Vietnamese-- but Chinese minority controlled, historically, about 70% to 80% of Vietnam's commerce, retail, banking, really the private economy.

[00:23:52.38] So why is that important? The bottom line is that most of Vietnam's capitalists were actually not members of the Vietnamese people. They were this outsider hated group-- the

Chinese. So when we the United States come in with our military and say, we're championing capitalism, what we missed is that all the Vietnamese people are like, wait, why would we send our own sons and husbands and children to fight for this principle that is really benefiting this hated group that has colonized us for so long and that is controlling everything?

[00:24:26.94] So we basically shot ourselves in the foot from the moment we went in there. In the battle for the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people, we just missed this dynamic. And we have just repeatedly been blind to the group identities that matter most to people on the ground. To these countries that we think we're trying to help, but we just didn't study enough what is actually going on before we invaded with our troops.

[00:24:57.27] - So let's talk about the ethnicity and tribal instinct that you work through in the book. I wanted to have you talk a little bit about this study you cite where young children are asked to put on t-shirts that are related to groups. Because this seems to tell us something about the way we organize ourselves into groups.

[00:25:15.48] - It's so fascinating. Researchers recently took a large group of children, between the ages of 4 and 8, and yes, divided them into the most innocuous groups you would think-- the red group and the blue group. And gave half of them red t-shirts and the other half blue t-shirts. They then sat these children in front of these computer docks and showed them computer edited images of other children about their age, half of whom were wearing red t-shirts, and the other half of whom were wearing blue t-shirts.

[00:25:50.79] They then asked these children for their reactions to the children in the pictures. Their reactions were astounding. Even though these children knew absolutely nothing about the children in the pictures, they consistently said that they liked the children wearing their color better. They consistently wanted to allocate more resources to the children on their side. And they consistently said that the children wearing their colors were smarter, more moral, just better people in every way.

[00:26:28.26] And what's almost most scary is they displayed very strong unconscious bias. They were told these stories about the children wearing the red and the blue and then asked questions. And amazingly, these subjects-- again, they're just between the ages of 4 and 8-- consistently remembered all of the good things, all the-- many were of the positive things about the children wearing their color. And then when it came to describing things about the children wearing the other color, they would systematically remember all of the much more negative things.

[00:27:06.54] So that just shows how deep and sort of innate this goes. There was nothing-- they've never met these children. And yet, just on the basis of an instantaneous assignment, you're on the red team or the blue team, these children displayed enormous and intense group bias.

[00:27:25.16] - So what's going on? It's neurological? Is there something happening in the brain?



[00:27:30.23] - It now appears to be neurological. They conducted some of these studies while putting MRI scans on children and adults. It's just the beginning. I don't want to overstate it.

[00:27:40.80] But what they are pretty clearly finding is that your parts-- the parts of the brain associated with differentiating stimuli and kind of humanizing, they light up when we see members of own groups. Meaning that we humanize people. We can be more sympathetic to them. The studies show that when you see members of your outgroup member, your brain doesn't light up there. What scientists have concluded is that it is much easier physiologically to just to stereotype and to sort of dehumanize people that don't belong to your group. So there does seem to be a hardwired basis for a lot of this phenomenon.

[00:28:25.43] - So when we see the outgroup blow it, fail, have something bad happen to them, the reward center in our brain lights up.

[00:28:36.71] - Lights up. These are new studies by Mina Cikara from the Harvard neuroscience lab and a bunch of other people. And she said, yes, this is disturbing. It doesn't always happen, but under certain conditions, especially when one group feels threatened by another group or there's a long history of competition, then yes, sadly, there seems to be a neurological basis for schadenfreude. It appears that we actually take physical pleasure in seeing outgroup members fail or even suffer something painful. And that really says something disturbing about human nature.

[00:29:15.65] I will say that we can overcome this. I want to-- I can't wait to later get to talk about the studies that are very positive about human nature.

[00:29:24.11] - We will. I promise. Yeah. It could be you could very easily get very pessimistic and depressed about all of this if you look at some parts--

[00:29:32.33] - They're fascinating.

[00:29:32.81] - Yeah. It's amazing. Let's talk about Afghanistan. I thought this was another interesting example of where we kind of missed the tribal identity stuff. American policy makers focused, of course, again, on the battle against communism, at least early on, later on terrorism. But they knew very little, for example, you say about the Pashtuns. Talk a little bit about that.

[00:29:56.78] - It's actually, I think-- I think your listeners will find this very illuminating because I only started to learn about this when I read more and more. So after 9/11, we invaded Afghanistan on a wave of collective grief and anger. And again, we had these ideological blinkers on. At this point, it was the war on terror. All we could think about is that Afghanistan was harboring Osama bin Laden.

[00:30:24.32] And geez, I remember feeling that way. But here's what's interesting, we completely missed the fact that the Taliban, the group that was harboring Osama bin Laden, was not just an Islamic fundamentalist group. It was also an arguably primarily an ethnic group. So Afghanistan is a country with incredibly complicated ethnic and tribal relationships.

[00:30:53.30] The national anthem mentions 14 different ethnic groups, and the largest three are the Pashtuns, the Uzbeks, and the Tajiks. And the Pashtuns are the biggest ethnic group in Afghanistan, and they are-- the Pashtuns were the ones that founded Afghanistan. They ruled Afghanistan for centuries. And a lot of people used to think of Afghan and Pashtun as almost synonyms.

[00:31:22.37] But what happened is after the Cold War, right before we invaded, this Pashtun group, the largest, began for various reasons, to start to be threatened. They feared that their historical dominance was being undermined. And what did we the United States do? Oh my goodness, when we intervened militarily to battle the Taliban-- and we actually had an enormous military victory-- we allied ourselves with something called the Northern Alliance that was principally dominated by the Uzbeks and the Tajiks-- namely, the rival ethnic groups to the Pashtuns. Without even realizing it, right there, we shot ourselves in the foot.

[00:32:04.99] At first, the Afghans were so excited. They were wanting to help us. But then they thought, oh my gosh, these Americans want to take us down. This largest group, the Pashtuns, they saw us as propping up and supporting their two biggest rival ethnic groups. And then when we set up the government after we toppled the Taliban, once again, we were viewed as putting in these most prominent positions members of the Uzbeks and the Tajiks.

[00:32:33.55] So fast forward to 2018 today, the Taliban is back. We have lost trillions of dollars, thousands of lives, and we have accomplished nothing. The Taliban is still there. And so now if you look at all these books and reports coming out of DC, they are all called "The Pashtun Dilemma," "The Pashtun Problem."

[00:32:55.09] My point is, that's 10 years too late. And we're always doing this. We go in blind to the group identities and dynamics that matter most. We learned the hard way by losing. Then after we're already in this terrible position, where we really have only third and fourth and fifth best options, then we discover what the groups are and they we're always coming from behind.

[00:33:21.57] - You write about how tribalism plays into terrorism, for example. And you say, terrorism is, above all, a group phenomenon. And I want to ask you about this. Because at this point in the book, you explore some of the dynamics of group psychology. Talk a little bit about that. What have you learned about group psychology and how it helps us understand how terrorism might work?

[00:33:42.36] - Well it's pretty illuminating, actually. So serial killers tend to be like these murderers. When they do studies on them, they tend to be psychopaths. What's really strange is, over and over, when you get somebody who was a terrorist, who tried to be a suicide bomber, for example, it's shocking. They are not psychopaths.

[00:34:06.57] And so what is going on? And you think, what kind of people can blow themselves up and children? And disturbingly, study after study shows that you cannot understand terrorism until you see it as really a group phenomenon. How to people who are often described as, oh, friendly, nice guy, end up committing these heinous acts?

[00:34:29.85] It's offered through a long process of slow, group propaganda and indoctrination and a process of dehumanization, where people start to portray the other side, the enemy, as this horrible, faceless enemy trying to wipe them out. So I go through a bunch of interesting studies showing like how people get radicalized to join ISIS. I mean, some of these-- these are like people from the United States or Great Britain.

[00:34:59.07] And it's often from a group that feels-- they feel very marginalized to begin with. And these successful terrorist organizations, it's almost like a street gang. They give these often very depressed and low esteem young men, they give them a mission. They give them a sense of self-worth-- you're part of this great team. They give them weapons-- here's an AK-47.

[00:35:26.94] They give them teammates, and they give them upward mobility. You can rise through the ranks. And these studies also show that it's almost a hormonal-- you often-- that you see these crowds of ISIS members dressed in black shaking their fists.

[00:35:44.88] And there are now neuroscientists that show that what happens that you would never do these things individually. You train in groups, and then you get into this kind of frenzy, and your oxytocin levels go up. So it's absolutely fascinating. There's a conformity factor where you start to not want to be different from your group mates.

[00:36:04.52] - Can I mention that one day while you're on that because the study was fascinating. There's the study where they used two different wines that you're right about to kind of enforce this idea of group consensus. So even though somebody in the group may have felt a particular way about a wine, they wanted to conform to the group. And that was a very powerful impulse.

[00:36:26.75] - Oh, this is my favorite study. Rob Wheeler of Stanford does it. And I'm not going to do it justice, but I'll just wildly oversimplify.

[00:36:35.58] It was so funny. The whole thing was fake. So they got a bunch of subjects who signed their permission. They thought they were doing wine tasting, but really, some of the wines were really destroyed with vinegar. So there were some wines that were clearly worse than others.

[00:36:51.44] But they set up the situation where they had the subjects go last, after like eight other people had-- and these eight other people were supposedly people with great wine taste. So what they found is that even though privately, these subjects when they tasted the wines, they knew which one was worse-- that's like, oh my god, that one has vinegar in it-- when they were asked in the context of the group and all these fake group members said, oh, this wine is best, speaking about the vinegary wine. And like eight group members would consistently say, oh, this is the finest wine.

[00:37:27.99] When they got to the test subject, even though that person knew the wine tasted bad, in public, around those groups, he would say, oh, yes, that wine is best. So this is this powerful study. These are really well-educated people still will conform rather than actually stand out and say something different against the group.

[00:37:52.11] - Amy Chua. Her new book is called Political Tribes. We'll take another break and come back in a moment. You're listening to RadioWest on KUER.

[00:38:00.00] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:38:18.17] This is RadioWest. I'm Doug Fabrizio. Back now to our conversation with the legal scholar, Amy Chua. Her new book is called Political Tribes, Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations.

[00:38:30.80] I want to come back to domestic politics. I want to quote from the book here because I want to dig down on this. You write this. You write, the left in the United States believes that right wing tribalism-- bigotry, racism-- is tearing the country apart.

[00:38:46.10] The right believes left wing tribalism-- identity politics, political correctness-- is tearing the country apart. And then you say they're both right. Explain that.

[00:38:58.46] - Yeah. So it's very interesting. I've gotten in a lot of hot water for this, partly because, well, because America's very politically tribal right now.

[00:39:06.77] - Exactly.

[00:39:07.54] - Yeah. And I also always like to make clear that I'm not equating, of course, Nazism and white supremacy is worse than a bunch of kids being politically correct. I'm not equating them. But if the question is, how did we get to this moment in America, where the country is so bitterly divided, we are at a point, for the first time in many generations, where we view people who voted on the other side not just as people we really disagree with, but we at this point we view people who voted the other way as immoral, as evil, as un-American.

[00:39:47.20] So we're almost like this two Americas, and it's just not a-- it's a very dangerous situation. I think that both the left and the right don't realize that they're playing with fire. Again, the book is interesting because I take the readers through the comparative lens. Because I think it's fun to be angry at the other side and just say, I just want to take them down. I hate whichever side you're on. I hate the other side. They're horrible. I want to see them suffer.

[00:40:16.27] But if you compare this to a country like Libya, another multi-ethnic country, or Venezuela, these are failed states now. So I say, look, let's watch it. And I do think that both sides have contributed.

[00:40:32.14] On the left, I think that-- I will just show my cards. I'm the daughter of immigrants, and I've written a book saying how important immigration has been for the strength of this country. But I think it is ridiculous that we can't just talk about it. There are a lot of people and they're in the middle of the country who maybe have never met a Muslim-American, have never met a Chinese-American, a Mexican-American, who are really worried about the changing demographics. They are really worried that America may not be the same country that they knew. They are worried about whites losing their majority status supposedly by 2044.

[00:41:15.22] And what I see a lot of progressives doing is, they just instantly say, oh my gosh, you're worried about that. You're a racist. You're a xenophobe. You're an Islamophobic. And I just think that is not the way to go. You can tremendously disagree and say, look, here's why you're wrong. Here's why you shouldn't worry.

[00:41:35.23] But we need to have a conversation, and we need to be able to ask the hard questions. Every country has the right to define who can come in and what numbers can come in. It is not a racist thing. It is not a xenophobic thing to ask those questions.

[00:41:52.60] And I'm speaking as somebody who is very, very pro-immigration. And this is what I mean by political correctness and a lot of the excesses of the left. It's almost like you just start calling people names who maybe don't say things the right way, that kind of offends you.

[00:42:12.01] And what is the result of that? You don't just change people's minds. You just drive the conversation underground. And that is where I think the real danger lies.

[00:42:21.73] You should see the hate mail I get. In these dark underground-- there is real, terrible racism and white supremacism and stuff that we really just do not want for this country that are inconsistent with the principles of this Constitution. But I guess my point is that if we don't let these concerns that are perfectly legitimate be debated, be spoken, even if the words don't come out in the way that you like it to sound, we're just going to encourage more extremism and radicalization.

[00:42:56.33] - There's what seems like, I think to me, a really important story that you tell in the book about a student of yours, Giovanni. And it seems to be a good summation of what you're expressing in the book. That we need to be able to find a good balance of being realistic about our expectations, but also giving people a break for the anxiety that they may be feeling for whatever it might be. Would you just tell the story about Giovanni because I think it's really good.

[00:43:20.93] - This is such an interesting part. I mean, first of all, he is very, very progressive, much more progressive than I am. His parents are extremely poor Mexican immigrants who lived in a trailer park. So interesting fact number one is that even though his father-- I mean, they're all Mexican-Americans-- very, very poor, his mother and his sister actually voted for Donald Trump. So right there, that's part of what I mean. That a lot of the coastal elites, they just want to kind of use these big labels like, oh, everybody who voted that way, they're all racists.

[00:43:58.01] That just covers up too much. Many, many different people voted for President Trump for many, many different reasons. Point two is a remarkable story that Giovanni told me.

[00:44:09.79] Again, Giovanni grew up extremely poor. He didn't even get to go to high school or grade school because he was working as a plumber with his father. But he was always-- the next door neighbors in the trailer next to them were some Republican, white Southern couple that always protected Giovanni and a sister. Brought Thanksgiving food for them, helped them in every way and basically even adopted them as their kind of like godchildren. And said, if anybody ever gives you a hard time, we'll take care of them.

[00:44:45.11] So fast forward to the 2016 election. By this time, my student has had this heroic American wonderful rags to riches dream. He was discovered by a doctor who said, you're really smart. You should go-- he took the high school equivalency test. He got himself to Cornell, and then he came to Yale Law School just through sheer hard work and brilliance.

[00:45:06.86] But on the eve of the 2016 election, and Giovanni was very much anti President Trump, he sees on social media that this couple that had always been so kind to him, he said that he posted what most people would consider very what you would call views expressing racist attitudes or certainly using language that you would never use on an Ivy League campus. And they were very strong Trump supporters. And yet, Giovanni had this amazing reaction.

[00:45:38.12] First he said, it is possible for people to have these very, for lack of a better term, generally racist views towards large numbers of people they've never met, and that's bad. And yet on a one on one personal basis, he said, they were nothing but good to my family. In fact, nicer than other people. So he said that this is an opportunity that progressives should look at. That we should be looking to persuade.

[00:46:04.94] Some people may have views that they hold for various reasons, but actually at a human level, they're good people. So that was amazing. And the second thing I said is that Giovanni, his reaction reflected a certain amount of generosity that I don't even know if I can have I. And I said, this is what I think America needs more of. I think we all need to elevate ourselves and maybe not always assume the worst possible about the other side.

[00:46:34.27] And certainly to realize that while there are probably some pretty terrible things that are true about some people, when you're talking about large groups, like 60 million people, that is a lot of people. That's a lot of human beings. A lot of stories. And that was why I told Gio's story. That even if somebody this poor, from this position, could open his heart, then maybe we can-- maybe we can all learn something from his example.

[00:47:04.37] - You say toward the end of the book that when you look at the American creed, the promise that you referred to earlier of equality, that the increasing belief on the left is that that was always a lie. But on the right is the belief that that had always been true. That we'd already achieved that idea of equality. As you say, two sides of the same coin.

[00:47:27.75] So finally, Amy, what are you saying? That all Americans need to be realistic about the ideals of American democracy, but still come to believe them in some ways. Is that right?

[00:47:38.18] - Yes. America has always been aspirational. We have never been the country that our constitution wanted us to be. And that's what's great about our constitution. We had these principles that we just have never really quite lived up to.

[00:47:53.81] So it goes back to the idea of a supergroup, which, again, America is, and we need to get back to that. We're a country that has a very strong national identity. And we also allow subgroup identities-- religious, ethnic, whatever to flourish. But in order to have and to maintain that very strong sense of being an American, both the right and the left need to do better.

[00:48:18.15] So what I criticize the left for is, I say there is a huge amount of difference between saying we have a wonderful constitution with incredible principles that we have repeatedly failed to live up to and we must try harder. There's a huge amount of difference between saying that and saying that all our principles were always hypocrisy. So I see this. People say, America is not a land of freedom. America is a land of oppression.

[00:48:48.08] We're not built on principles of equality. We're built on principles of white supremacy. And I just say, look, that's scorched earth approach. You are playing with fire. Let's not throw the baby out with the bath water.

[00:49:03.95] I think that if we start to tell our children that this country is nothing but a land of genocide, built on white supremacy, then why is this country worth fighting for? So I say, we need to-- it may seem like a very small wording change, but to me, it's very important. We have to do better to live up to those principles. But our principles are truly exceptional ones.

[00:49:28.28] And to the right, I say-- the right always thinks that, oh, we're the patriotic ones. And my message is, look, real patriotism-- if you really want a lot of Americans of all different stripes and ethnicities and races to buy into this country, that the idea of this country is a great, exceptional, moral nation, we need to have legitimacy. We need to make sure that people from marginalized backgrounds, formerly oppressed backgrounds don't feel that they are not being treated with the same dignity and respect that the dominant groups do.

[00:50:06.02] So the right has to realize there is more work to be done. We can't say, hey, you guys on the left, stop whining. We're perfect. We had the Civil Rights revolution. We got there. I think that both sides need to, again, kind of see America as more of an aspirational concept and fight hard to realize it.

[00:50:28.55] - Well, Langston Hughes's poem, "Let America be America Again", you refer to finally-- he gets at both of those ideas. That we haven't lived up to it, but that there's always this aspirational hope that we some day can or will.

[00:50:44.04] - It's so beautiful. It's just such a beautiful poem. And he doesn't sugarcoat anything.

[00:50:50.01] - No.

[00:50:50.31] - The poem is about all the people. There's one voice, the idealistic voice, that says let America be America again. And then he has all these voices saying, America was never America to me.

[00:51:01.65] He talks about not the Native Americans that were extinguished, the slaves, the poor whites. But then at the very end, it's so inspiring. He says, this is not a cynical voice, and this is my point. He's not saying America is a land of genocide built on that principle.

[00:51:20.29] He said, let America be America again. It was the land that never was. And yet, must be and will be. It ends on this resoundingly inspiring note. And that's how I end my book.

[00:51:35.80] - Amy Chua. Her new book is, Political Tribes, Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations. She joined us from the studios of the CBC in Toronto. RadioWest is a production of KUER News. The program was directed by Tim Slover, produced by Benjamin Bombard and Elaine Clark. I'm Doug Fabrizio.

[00:51:53.92] [MUSIC PLAYING]