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**Denver Dialogue X ASF: The End of Soft Power?**

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Session recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGleKELPOvM>

Dafna Linzer:

Good morning. Thank you, Niamh. Good morning everyone. I'm Daphna Linzer. Excited that this panel is part of an incredible final day here at the Forum. As Joe said earlier, working to find solutions. Our panelists are no strangers to this room and have come this morning with innovative ideas on a topic that may sound pessimistic, but I think once we get to the end of this, you'll see great opportunity. And I want to start this morning with Farrah era who has had the distinction of serving as a political appointee for both presidents of Bush and President Obama. And Farrah, you have been thinking about these issues for so long. I'd like you to set the table for us here. There's been a lot of talk even just now on hard power and just a little bit of talk on soft power and this is going to be our moment, I think. So help us understand what soft power is today and who should be the focus, what should the focus be? Help set. Set the table here.

Farah Pandith:

So good morning to everybody. I do agree. We've spent a lot of time talking about hard power. Yet in almost every panel you've heard people refer to the importance of soft power. And I think at this particular strategic moment, we have an opportunity to think about soft power differently. The traditional way we have thought about soft power from government has been exchanges and diplomacy of all kinds, whether it's sports diplomacy or panda diplomacy. You hear soft power referred to in that way. This moment is very different. We have three generations, millennials, gen Z and Gen Alpha that are being influenced by culture and are changing the way in which they think about not only our nation, but other nations around the world. So when I think about soft power today, I think we ought to be doing what Secretary Gates and Secretary Rice said yesterday. Think about the different kinds of tools in our toolbox to be able to build a strategic soft power. This is the moment to do that so that we are not letting generations go by that we will then have to try to engage

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with this is the time to actually build their affinity for us to engage with us and to use our innovation in the United States to think differently about what that could mean.

Dafna Linzer:

That's great. And Marie Slaughter, we cannot have the discussion without you. Can you unspool? I think Farrah just touched on it a little bit, but just unspool the demographic advantages for us both at home and closer to home.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Great. So first of all, Joe, I'm very glad you're up here because otherwise people might think that soft power is only feminine power and we certainly would not want that because it is not it power and it is a huge source of our strength. So I want to start with that. To me, the future of soft power is our diversity as a country. Our diversity is not just soft power, it's our superpower. So remember by 2027 Americans under 30, there will be no one racial or ethnic majority. That's what you are seeing on college campuses right now. That is that generation. So by 2027, that's all Americans under 30 by 20 40, 20 45, that's all Americans. That is extraordinary, right? There is no country in the world that has ever moved from an 80% roughly for our first 250 years, European American majority to no one majority. That means we are a country that reflects the entire world. So we will be 30 to 35% Hispanic American, 15 to 20%, both African-Americans descended from enslaved Americans, but also the new African diasporas. And we've seen quite a lot of that over this week. Just people looking to where their ancestors came from. Just as I'm half Belgian, to me, yes, I think about World War I, well not World War I, world War ii, and my grandfather, my Belgian grandfather was at Dunkirk, he got to Britain. That is my history. But increasingly the history of central and Latin America, the history of India, of China, of all of Asia, south and East Asia, that will be American history and that country, when you think about soft power, again, we will be connected to every culture in the world. We will be connected to the people who are still our families in ways that no other nation can touch. So for me, when I look at this century and I think about all the things that Joe wrote about as soft power, whether it's our entertainment, it's our sports, it's our culture. Just more broadly it's our economic ties. We now have that with the entire world.

Dafna Linzer:

Thanks Kori Shockey, you've seen this from inside the Pentagon and out. Emory paints a pretty positive picture here, but how is the US actually doing on projecting soft power? And I guess I would ask too, not just how is the US doing? How's the US government doing?

Kori Schake:

So the US government's not great at it and it's not an incompetence issue, although it's partly an incompetence issue, but it's mostly because governments have to make hard choices. And the American government as the dominant rural giving and enforcing power in the international order has to make more hard choices than most others. But the great

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secret of American vitality isn't necessarily the choices of the American government, it's the vibrancy of American civil society. It's the Walt Disney Company, it's American diversity, it's American. The complex way everybody's worried about American elections is actually an enormous tribute to the fact to American soft power because people hold us to a higher standard than others and they should. It's part of what makes us so good. I think American soft power is vital and vibrant and bubbly. If you think about the ways the international order is changing, if you look at the way technology innovation is sweeping, I mean my favorite description of the United States is we're a country innovative enough that in a global pandemic we could produce not just one but three lifesaving vaccines.

We're a country so prosperous that we could provide it for free, not just to all Americans, but to lots of other people. But we are also a country where a third of Americans will not take a free and lifesaving vaccine and that's who we are. So I think a lot of the difficulty with soft power is we try and pretend there was a mythical time where the United States wasn't complicated, where we didn't have to make hard choices, where we weren't messy and divisive and a group of people who don't trust their government, but that is who we are. And that's plenty good enough to be the place where more immigrants want to come, where more people believe they can chase their dreams and achieve them. And that too is American soft power.

Dafna Linzer:

That's great. Joe, you literally invented the term, we're in a very different moment than we were then. But what were you addressing then and when you were sort of first thinking through soft power and what's your take on how sort of soft power 2.0 might work for the next generation?

Joseph Nye:

Well, the term came to me as I was writing at my kitchen table in 1989. I was trying to refute Paul Kennedy's book, the Rise and Fall of Great Powers, which said that the United States was going the way of Philip II Spain or Eduarda and England and so forth. And I totaled up our military power and then our economic power. And I said, but there's still something else. And that's the ability to attract. And if power is the ability to get others to do what you want, you can do it by coercion or by payment, but you can also do it by attraction. And if you have this capacity to attract to get others to want what you want, you can save a lot on carrots and sticks. But it doesn't mean, well, I should follow that up. I described this in my memoir, which is that was developed at the kitchen table as an academic concept. The great surprise in my life was a decade later when HU and Tao told the Chinese Communist Party their annual conference in 2007, that they had to do more to increase their soft power thought. Wow. But any case, the breakthrough moment, the main problem we have is if we forget that soft power and hard power are two sides of the same coin, which is power, the difference is hard. Power tends to work a lot more quickly and be a lot more visible. Soft power often takes more time. Lemme give you examples from Ukraine to go to your point about 2.0. Sometimes people have said to me, well, given the war in

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Ukraine and Gaza and so forth, is now basically this is the end of soft power, which is our title. And I said, on the contrary, it has both short and long-term effects. Think of it, president Zelensky, who training as an actor knew enough to put on a Green T-shirt and do appeal not only on screens all over the world, but in front of parliaments, and he was able to develop sympathy for Ukraine.

Attraction to Ukraine then was able to translate that attraction into hard weapons. So there's a clear and short run relation of hard and soft power, but the long term is even more important because in a sense, the ability to affect other's people's minds may not change things immediately, but it's got to be part of a long-term strategy. Condi Rice and Bob Gates I thought were terrific yesterday in pointing this out that military power alone is absolutely necessary, but it's not sufficient in that sense. If you look back at the Cold War, sometimes people say, well, what role did soft power play in the Cold War? It's worth remembering that the Berlin Wall did not come down under a barrage of artillery came done under hammers and bulldozers, wielded by people's whose minds had been affected by radio free Europe and by Hollywood and by American fiction. So we make a great mistake if we say end of soft power, we also make a great mistake. If you think soft power can substitute for hard power, a good strategy has to be what Kdi and Bob were saying yesterday. How do you combine the two?

Dafna Linzer:

I really love that. Farah, take us a little bit around the horn on sort of cultural impact because we're not the only ones who are kind of flexing soft power in a pretty successful way. I think South Korea, Latin America, the Middle East, there's a lot of examples out there. Let's start there.

Farah Pandith:

I'd like to pick up on a thread that came across Anne Marie and Corey and Professor N, all of whom said how important it for us to understand the moment we're in. I mean, you talked about Ukraine and how Zelinsky did this so easily, it just came very naturally to him. I think one of the things the US is missing is how naturally other countries are able to woo in generation Z and millennials in ways that maybe sometimes they're crafty, but in other times it just sort of happened. So I'm looking in the first couple of rows and these are the new rising leaders, and you're all shaking your head yes. So I teach at Georgetown, one of my students, RIE Dixon, when I asked him, give me some examples of soft power for you. He said, Farah, my generation doesn't think about Japan the way you do.

You put it in the context of World War ii. You understand the horrors that happened after that and everything that's happened since. He said, I grew up with Pokemon, with Hello Kitty with anime. And when we think about Japan, it's really different. I don't need to tell you about South Korea and the monopoly of this wave around the world. \$143 billion will be spent by the year 2030 on Korean products. Why? Because of Korean beauty, because of k-pop, because of KDRs. You're all shaking your head. Yes. For those of you who are not Gen Z and millennials, I'm one of those, it was shocking to me to learn how impactful just

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normal things in day-to-day life that are on your phones began to change the way you think about the world and that's what we should be doing. No, yes, I completely agree. Disney, we have done that.

We've done that with the Marvel series with our military people think about our military in a very particular way because of the Marvel series, but I don't think we've been as smart about a strategy to develop what's happening and to take the threads of different parts of the world. So I gave you two examples from East Asia, but let me tell, I mean for those of you who have watched Bridgerton, the idea that this generation who rejects colonialism, who is very forcefully anti, all of that has celebrated Bridgerton. Why? Because they're what those worlds could be. And I think that's really important because these generations are seeing themselves and in their worlds in very different ways. So they want to recreate. I know that there are tons of examples, including gaming series that we put out. There are US companies that are doing these games, but the generations that are younger are building worlds in those games that make them feel like they have agency.

And so what does all this mean? It means that the cultural components of things that we think, oh, how interesting that K-pop is taking over the world or how interesting that Bridgerton is really no, there's something bigger there. There's something where the United States government ought to be thinking very, very strategically about that next phase of how we bring people on board so that we are building likability that the only thing that we are not presenting is the very difficult polarization in the United States or the idea. One of the things that I was honored to do in my public service roles in the Obama administration, I was special representative to Muslim communities, but before that in the Bush administration, I was engaging with Muslims right after nine 11 in Europe. I cannot today go to Europe and tell Muslim kids what I told them 20 years ago.

It is shocking. I was able to say as a Muslim, you are not going to be discriminated against. I was able to say mosques will not be targeted. I was able to say as a Jew, as a Muslim, as a Hindu, as a Sikh, you can walk down the street and nobody's going to call you a name.

Well, I can't say that anymore. And so I think about how they are perceiving who we are. So what does all this mean? While we have examples culturally of all these things that are taking place, there's a moment, here's our moment, okay, we understand how important these generations are and the fact that these are the generations that are going to be future leaders talking to us. I don't want to get to know them and have them like America or have to build that when we are in a crisis. I want them to already have a deep understanding of our values, who we are, what democracy is, and how we value pluralism.

Dafna Linzer:

And also our panel has a Bridgerton reference. So Anne Marie, I want you to run with that. I mean we're two years away from celebrating America's 250th anniversary and can you frame soft power in that context and a little bit off of a far side, how can American society, not just the government to Corey's point, can seize this opportunity in this way

Anne-Marie Slaughter:



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Great

Dafna Linzer:  
People here do?

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

So before I do that, I just have to say, because I was looking out, not all of you seem to be completely aware of the Bridger reference, so I'll just say Bridger is pride and prejudice are a little earlier than pride and prejudice in a completely diverse world. And it's Shonda Rhimes Shondaland. It's on Netflix. And the first season when you see Queen Charlotte, the Queen Charlotte for whom my hometown Charlottesville was named wife of George ii as a black woman, you are a little surprised because that is not what you expect with the pageantry and carriages and silks of the kind of historical fiction a lot of us love. The really cool thing is by the third season, you don't bat an eye because it is a re-imagined world. Again, we know this, we've all read lots and lots of historical fiction about Britain in the 19th century or the 18th century really, but it somehow works.

And so it is a re-imagining where race and ethnicity simply don't matter and a vision of a world. That is the world that the United States has to get to. That is the world we're in. It's the world we're becoming. So what do we do with the 250th? Well, I'll start just by saying in 1976, I was 18 years old. I was manning a bicentennial booth at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. And basically Charlottesville expected Mr. Jefferson to walk down the street at any moment. And nobody knew about Sally Hemmings. Nobody knew about Jefferson's African-American family or if people knew it was certainly wasn't public. That was a celebration. Even though we'd had Vietnam and Watergate, it was a pure celebration. We had Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth come that always struck me as a little odd, frankly, but they came to the White House.

We had the tall ships from all over the world this time around it isn't just going to be a celebration, it's going to be a moment of, as my colleague Theodore Roosevelt Johnson III named for the First American president to invite a black man to the White House. As he says, it's going to be a moment of pride, absolutely. Of reckoning, absolutely, and of aspiration. And we have a chance to bring Americans together, the America that we've always been, the America that we're becoming around those three things about here's what we can be proud of, here's what we have to reckon with. And we heard Tony Blinken say it, and I believe it so deeply. Our greatest strength as a democracy is being willing to put our ideals up here, put the reality right there, face the gap between them and say, here's what we've got to do differently and better.

And then what is our aspiration for this extraordinary country that, as I said, will reflect the entire world and can connect the entire world? I'll say also politically, regardless of what happens in November, we have got to rebuild that democracy from the ground up. So in 2026 starting now, it's got to be an opportunity to bring people together at the local level, regardless of red or blue, to talk about where we've been, where we are now and where we are going. Last thing I'll say that I also love about 2026, the World Cup's coming and the

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World Cup is not just coming to the United States, it's coming to North America, it's coming to Mexico and the United States and Canada. That is an opportunity to reimagine culture. Our football is not this football, but we do both in the United States, but to bring together people around the continent and again around the world focused on the America that we're becoming the America will be for the next 250 years.

Dafna Linzer:

Such a feel good panel. Joe, just kind of jumping off that, is soft power something that everyone can engage in at its best? What could that accomplish?

Joseph Nye:

Well, let's face it, soft powers, because it's power something we all have and use every day. We don't spend most of our day hitting each other over the head or paying them. We're always trying to attract each other. And the interesting question is how do you do that At the international level, a leader in a democratic society has to practice soft power to understand it or they fail. So I think the interesting question since we're at a security forum is how does that relate to security? And we've talked about cultural exports, Hollywood basically various ways that we've already been discussed and Farah was correctly right on that.

But there's also how we behave at home, which is an enormous source of attraction or unattraction. And I think that's what Annemarie and Corey were referring to. Let me give you an example from the 1960s during the Vietnam War, by the late 1960s, American government policy was wildly unpopular around the world and you had people marching in the streets all over opposing the American government. But you know what they sang? They didn't sing the communist internationale, they sang Martin Luther King, we Shall Overcome. That's a message or an anthem from American Civil Society, which shows that a large part of our attraction is this question of who we are and how we behave at home, which is why I would echo what my colleagues have said about this. It's critically important. That then brings you to my comment to concluded is how do you combine government and culture effectively?

And I called that smart power means sometimes the two are in canceling each other out as the Vietnam example illustrates. But it's also true that if you're able to have the two reinforce each other, it makes a huge difference. There's a Norwegian who once said that during the Cold War, Europe was divided into two empires, a Soviet empire and American empire. But the difference was the American empire was an empire by invitation, and that's absolutely crucial. So the question is how do we design policies and strategies for dealing with China, Russia, others that are what I call smart power that combine these two. And just to conclude, we're not doing all that badly. The Pew poll, which was taken I think of 37 countries last year asked around the world, which country is more attractive? The US or China and the US won overwhelmingly in all continents except Africa.

Dafna Linzer:

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Yeah, we've talked a lot about Chinese influence around the globe, so that's important to note. It was interesting to hear that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs talk about just as a reminder, that militaries around the world, they want to be like ours. That kind of affinity and desire to emulate is something he feels all the time and sees all the time. Joe noted sometimes there's negative soft power out there as Emory did too on sort of our image abroad. Corey, what will it take for other parts of society to kind of have that experience that the chairman talked about and that can counter those effects of the negative?

Kori Schake:

Well, first and foremost, making good choices helps counter the negative. So that would be a good place to start. I do think the American military, the way they conduct themselves, the fact that as George Washington said at the end of the Revolutionary War that the American military yearns to be the first military in a thousand years, it's not a threat to democracy. That's an enormous amount of soft power. The way we worry about how our military is conducting itself, the way we worry about whether it is attractive to young Americans, the way that we engage with foreign countries through our military, the way we train other militaries not to be a threat to civilian governance in their society. Those are all enormous American assets, but the military is a hierarchical coercive institution and you can't replicate that involuntary circumstances elsewhere in American society. I love the description of Americans given by the British historian Bertha Ann Rer in 1923.

She wrote, Americans are people so extreme in politics or religion or both that they couldn't live in peace where they came from. And I love that not only because I think it's descriptive then and now, but also the problems that America struggles with are not for the most part unique to America. Other societies are struggling with the very things we are. We just do it big, loud and in everybody's range of vision. And I think the point that Joe made about protest movements mimicking the nonviolent integrity, the language, the music, the behavior of the American Civil Rights movement is just perfect because we are both by bad example, the need for a civil rights movement and good example, the fact that we loudly adjudicated it and came to a different social consensus about what we wanted for our society, that's actually American soft power. It's not the having it right, it's not just the having it right. It's the struggle to get it right and we're not the only people struggling to get it right.

Dafna Linzer:

So what kind of role can influencers play?

Farah Pandith:

So I would answer that in one second. I do want to be realistic about one thing. We have never not done soft power. Obviously there are arms of every part of government that does soft power, including the Department of State where we put it firmly in the public diplomacy shop. Yet we do not give money to soft power. So we can talk as much as we want about how important it's to the United States government to use soft power, but we don't value it. And I want to be really clear about that. You talk to embassies around the world, they have



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all kinds of great ideas and they don't have the infrastructure to be able to do that. I just have to say that. But the other piece of this is sort of the creativity part, which is the influencers. So we talked about a government wielding soft power, and we also talked about an individual that is able to get on YouTube or Instagram or whatever platform they want to use and really change very quickly the perception of something in a moment. And there's some negative examples I can use for that. You recently saw, I don't know, seven months ago maybe the American woman who went on TikTok to say that she had been duped and that Bin Laden was actually great and you should go out and read his manifesto. Years of work, I mean two decades worth of hell that we have gone through to try in the aftermath of nine 11, not to speak of the lives that were lost. And yet this one person was able to send something virally. Now we can't control every human that is on a social media platform, but I'm simply making the point that the power of soft power is not just with mechanisms like the Public Diplomacy Bureau at the State Department. It is with everybody to the points that were made civil society. So I went on chat GPT, because I feel I was thinking about the future and I asked it, what haven't we done in soft power around the world? Use all countries, what could we do? And chat GPT told me that we should ought to go Gen Z influencers and we should start doing exchanges with them. That could turn out really badly by the way. But I want to say, I think that there's a moment here where we can be really fun about the things that might be able to happen because an individual wants to show their story, their American story, who they are, how they navigate it and own it in a very particular way.

Dafna Linzer:

This is when all panels collide. When far goes on GBT to ask about soft power. I should open this up for questions. You're all going to have incredible ones better than mine, so I'll just let folks bring the microphone.

Question 1:

Micro, thank you so much. I'm Kelsey Frierson, one of the rising leaders in this year's cohort and work at Beacon Global Strategies. I have so appreciated this panel, which I think it getting at something that I think we all feel and we all can sense that there's this kind of, we're losing our grip on soft power. And I also think it's really helpful to paint this as both a whole of society approach, but then also looking specifically within government where there are institutions or where there is effort here. So my question, and throw it to all of you is the United States government set up right now to do soft power. I think back to the Cold War with the US Information Agency and in the dissolution of that agency, I know we have the Global Engagement Center as a department, we have public diplomacy, but is there an institution in place to coordinate soft power efforts?

Kori Schake:

No. And Americans wouldn't trust it if there was.

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Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Well, no. And I listened to Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates yesterday thinking exactly about how wonderful it would be if we had a source of news that told the truth, but I don't think that would be necessary to be beamed into Russia. I would like it in the United States where all Americans actually agreed. So in the fragmentation of the media environment, no radio station, no television station could possibly play that role. And then when you're beyond that, then again, we don't know how to even wrap our arms around the fragmentation of the media environment so that we as Americans have a trusted source. I would think that that is a place we ought to be trying to invest civil society as well. It's a large part. We know of what plagues the United States, the death of local news, and then you have national news that is deeply politicized and manipulated if we're on social media. So I think that is a problem for the US government, but I think it's a bigger problem for the US and for our pure allies.

Joseph Nye:

I could just add, I agree. I think the answer of no, I agree with, but the important thing to realize is that it's not just whether USIA was abolished or the under Secretary of State for that position has been vacant about half the time. That's a dereliction on the part of government. It's that we should be putting more money into efforts, into promoting ideas. But here I'll quote my colleague, Condi Rice. Again, it's important that what we do is stick on the truth. In other words, if we shouldn't get into the business of broadcasting propaganda, we should be broadcasting the truth. That's our strong suit. And all these people on VPNs in China and Russia are not there because they want to hear an attack on Russia or China. They want to know what the hell's going on in their own country. So government has to be very careful to put more resources into this, but don't distort it and don't get in the way of what's our great strength.

Dafna Linzer:

Quick shout out for us News and World Report. We're amazing.

Question 2:

Good afternoon and thank you all so much for this panel. It's been really impactful for me personally. My name is Tyra Beman. I'm currently a member of the US Foreign Service and I'm also a proud member in graduate of Spelman College, which is a historically black women's college. And one of the things that we learned our first year is about the Sankofa bird. The Sankofa bird, if you all may be aware, is a West African bird that represents as you move forward, you always should be looking back. The bird has its head turned. And this image is oftentimes used in a lot of both literature, but also thinking about why history matters. And so you all noted the importance of history, but one of the things I'm most worried about is the erosion and the erasure of histories that refer to my ancestors personally as well as all of us really. Where's that truth, as you noted? And so what can we do as education systems are being attacked throughout the United States, what can we do

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as spaces of higher education are also under attack? Where can we seek to ensure the next generation does learn their history accurately to ensure that we as a society and as a world move forward without forgetting our impactful, our dark, our complex history of the past

Farah Pandith:

Well, I would turn it to the scholars on the panel, but one quick thing is don't limit your own narrative and your voice. You are so powerful. Each one of you who has that little device in your hand has an opportunity to change your peers and change a narrative in your own community. So don't wait for somebody else to do this for you. You have to take your own agency seriously, and you need to be really excited about doing that because it's a very rich, sometimes very difficult and painful, but really rich history and the way in which you describe what it's been like for you here in the United States.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

And I'd just add that the politics are really nasty at the moment and likely to be for some time. But you can imagine again, in the sense of 2026, and I'll just note it's not just 2026. 2027 to 2037 is the decade before the 250th anniversary of the Constitution. So this is a period from now probably through to 2050 of anniversaries, of reflections and again of where are we going for the next 250. But if you put the philanthropic interest and just the civic interest in reviving local news, which many, many people understand again has been an engine of democracy. I mean, imagine to Tuck Villa, had there been no sort of local news and the revival of civics, which is one of the few bipartisan areas you can see, you bring those together. And I can imagine an organization like Report for America is just as one where in all towns you bring together young people and older people to tell the history of their town and to tell a complete history of their town with all the members of their town. Now, that may not be taught in the local public school system depending on what state you're in, but you don't need to do it through the public school system. If we can bring the right entities together. And again, these big anniversaries are galvanizing markers in and it's up to us to use it, right

Dafna Linzer:

Corey?

Kori Schake:

So what I think you're seeing with book restrictions and things like that is a backlash to what's actually happening in the field of history, which is an enormous diversification and amplification of voices that have traditionally not been considered to matter. So the bad news is we are seeing America as a society struggle with how comfortable we are with the pace of change and with a changing perspective on how we think about our own history. But that's so normal in American society. This is us finding the new social compact and what's

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driven that is actually this explosion of diverse and inclusive voices in the writing and studying of history. And that's the good news piece of it.

Dafna Linzer:  
Joe, last word.

Joseph Nye:  
Well, just an anecdote because I agree totally with what my colleagues have said. In November of 19, what was it, 2008, right after the American election, I was at a conference with a member of the British cabinet and he turned to me and he said, you Americans are amazing. Yesterday because of the Iraq War, you are the most unpopular country in the world. Now you've elected an African-American for the first time in your history and you've restored your soft power. So I think that's the moral of the story.

Dafna Linzer:  
This panel is one of the many things that makes Aspen just phenomenal in my mind. Please help me thank four brilliant thinkers who inspire us.