

Hello everyone. I am Amie, your local librarian, back with another episode of *This is Berthoud*, the podcast where I get to talk about all the things you are talking about, so that together we have something new to think about. As is always the case here, please remember that we share information in these podcasts, but not legal advice or medical advice or tax advice or really any kind of advice except giving you something new to consider, so if you need that kind of advice go find one of those experts. And now with that out of the way, let's share some information.

Today we're working through a topic, or really a couple of topics, that are definitely on people's minds in this community right now. We're going to talk through this community's response to the Black Lives Matter and Back the Blue movements. I know for some people these topics might be triggers, and that's okay. There's nothing wrong with stopping this podcast and coming back later, or letting other people listen to it for you. And we have no interest here at the library in telling you that your thoughts or your feelings about these issues are invalid. You think what you think, and you feel what you feel. We do hope to give you something new to think about, but can't force you to think anything, so you can relax and keep an open mind and just listen.

Let me start by saying that the library does not endorse particular political candidates and usually doesn't take a stance on most political issues, and some people assume that's because the library is neutral. Well, yes and no. Unless we're advocating for the library in some way, we typically don't take stances on the issues, but we are always open to having discussions about political issues in the library. We even have "convening the community for public discourse" as one of our strategic focuses right now. We don't use neutrality as an excuse to shy away from difficult community conversations; we actually actively encourage those conversations. We want people to explore new and different ideas and treat the library as a forum for conversations, even when the topics are difficult and complex or unsettling. It's impossible to find common ground on divisive issues if no one will talk about the issues, so that's where we come in.

So let's do it, let's find the common ground. Usually you get the library's take on an issue, or information from the research that we've done, right off the bat, but today I'm actually going to start by telling you what other people in the community are saying to us about these issues. Don't worry, I'm not violating anyone's privacy; I'm not giving you any names. But I am going to give you five statements that people have made here in the library—our job is to listen for what they have in common. Ready?

Number one: I fully support the movement for racial equality, but I don't support rioting.

Number two: Not all police officers want to kill people. Most just want to help keep their communities safe.

Number three: Some of these politicians are manipulating the situation to get people to vote a certain way, but hey, at least more people are likely to vote this year than normal.

Number four: Don't they know that not all protestors damage property or hurt people?

Number five: Isn't it possible to support law enforcement but still call for reforms where they're needed?

So there we go, there's five examples of what people in this community are saying about Black Lives Matter and Back the Blue. You heard all the things we have in common as a community, right? We can

be done, hit the stop button, move on with our day because we have it all figured out. No? You didn't hear the commonalities? That's fair, because they're more difficult to pick out than in our everyday, non-divisive conversations. But there is common ground, so stick with me.

We've been listening here at the library for a while, and here's what we've learned from you that we all have in common. First, everyone we've spoken with acknowledges that these are relevant, critical issues that require deep thought. Some of you are struggling because your take on these issues can't be summed up in a hashtag. The two major political parties are completely at odds with each other, the media sensationalizes everything, and memes on social media tell you that you need to be wholeheartedly in with your opinion or you need to be wholeheartedly out. With so much of the regular media and so many of the interactions on social media portraying only the extremes on these issues, it's possible for you to be feeling isolated if you don't fit neatly into one of those camps. Please know that you're not alone in this community—there are other people discussing the nuances and the angles and working toward solutions that take more than one sentence to explain. You recognize that it's not absurd to both support law enforcement officers in their work and to call for police reforms at the same time. You recognize that we're a lot closer to racial equality in this country than we have been in the past, but there's still a lot more work to be done. Even the people who have spoken with us that have summed up their thoughts sort of with a hashtag have told us the backstory and the thought process that had them arrive at Back the Blue or Black Lives Matter as their positions, and the reasoning is personal and heartfelt and often practical. These are complex issues, and this is not a community that comes to conclusions hastily or lightly. So take comfort in that. Despite what most of mainstream media and social media wants us to believe these days, Back the Blue and Black Lives Matter are not the opposite ends of the same spectrum. I'll pause here for a second because I know for some of you that's the most shocking thing that you've heard me say. But so many of you have told us that you refuse to choose between supporting black people or supporting police officers, so you won't choose. In fact, I'll remind all of you that the first rally that happened here in Berthoud took place right after George Floyd was killed. The rally was small, the rally was peaceful, and the rally was organized to show support for the Black Lives Matter movement and law enforcement, at the same time. As a nation and as the Berthoud community, we're asking ourselves difficult questions. What does excellent policing look like, and how we can help our officers receive the training and the support they need to achieve that excellence? What does true racial equality look like and what do we need to change to make that equality an actual reality for everyone? Those goals are not mutually exclusive, and so many of you have told us that you're working on achieving both.

The second thing we have in common here is the ability to see the importance of individuals and individual actions. So psychologists and sociologists have figured out that there really isn't any such thing as group behavior, except when the behavior itself defines the group. Say what, Amie? Okay. I can say, for example, that all swimmers swim. In fact, if I tell you that I'm a swimmer but I never swim, you'd call me a liar, because I don't fit into the category of swimmer unless I perform the behavior of swimming. But if I say, "All swimmers eat bananas for breakfast" or "All swimmers sleep less than 6 hours a night" you might start to question me, because we know that individual swimmers make their own choices about what to eat for breakfast on any given day or what time they go to bed at night. Therefore there's no such thing as group behavior among swimmers except that they all swim. So in our context today, we hear you acknowledge this fact most when you use the phrase "not all," as in "not all police officers abuse their authority" or "not all Black Lives Matter supporters cause riots."

And I think it's the ability to see individuals as individuals that will help us move forward. It can be a huge challenge to acknowledge a "not all" statement, but seeing people for who they are as individuals changes that. "Not all cops abuse their authority" can be a hard thought for you to think, but if you can envision the cop who lives on your street, does it get easier? Or maybe for you the tough thought to work through is "not everyone at a Black Lives Matter rally supports rioting and looting." If so, can you picture your neighbor who took her teenage son to a rally? Again, does it get easier? This isn't to say that policies and laws are unimportant—in fact, I think it's pretty clear that developing policies and procedures, and changing laws are necessary actions to create a better society. But until we see individuals as individuals instead of faceless bodies in a group, I'm not sure we're ready to talk about changing laws and policies. It is difficult to know what policies and laws need to change if we can't understand and empathize with the individuals that are affected by a policy or a law.

We have a tendency to group people, right? If you been listening to other episodes here you know we've talked about implicit bias and confirmation bias and our tendency to group people into "us" and "them" categories. Unfortunately we also tend to apply different standards to a group that we agree with than to groups that we disagree with. My challenge to you is to see if you can come up with a "not all" statement that you're uncomfortable with and learn to sit with it. In case you think I'm asking you to do something that I refuse to do myself, let me tell you my "not all" statement that I'm learning to sit with. "Not all politicians seek office for their own gain." My brain doesn't like to hear that, and it wants to flat-out reject it. I make myself sit with that statement—it's written on a piece of paper tacked to my computer monitor—and if I'm having trouble sitting with the thought, I picture one of the women who helped raise me. She was a neighbor, the mom of my best friend when I was young, and she was one of the people who showed me that good and kind are active attributes of a person. She also ran for and held political office because she believed it was the right thing to do and she could make a difference. So whenever I'm having trouble sitting with the thought that not all politicians seek office for their own gain, I think of Mrs. Olson. See if you can do the same type of thing.

And then, when you're ready for the next step, try to find someone here in this community that you disagree with and listen to that person's opinion. And just listen, okay? We're not listening to respond, and not listening to accept, but listening purely to understand. Rallies and hashtags are great for drawing attention to areas of our community that may need changes, but if we never move beyond rallying and posting hashtags we won't get any closer to making changes. Listening, understanding what people need, and learning what excellence looks like make really great next steps. They're not easy steps, and they don't give the same instant gratification as expressing an opinion on social media or attending a rally. But if we're willing to put in the hard work of listening, understanding, compromising and making changes, just think about what kind of a community we could create. What would it feel like to live in a community where neighbors all cared about the health and wellbeing and life of all of their neighbors, where every life mattered regardless of skin color or political affiliation or professional uniform? Wouldn't you want to live in that community? We can, I think, if we're willing to create it. And so many have told us that you are willing to create it. And here at the library, we're ready to work on that with you.

As always, if you have questions about what you've heard on this podcast, or you just want to talk to us, you can get in touch by calling the library at 970-532-2757, or you can send an email to me, to Amie, at [podcast.bclld@gmail.com](mailto:podcast.bclld@gmail.com). And also as always, I'm proud to say *This is Berthoud*.