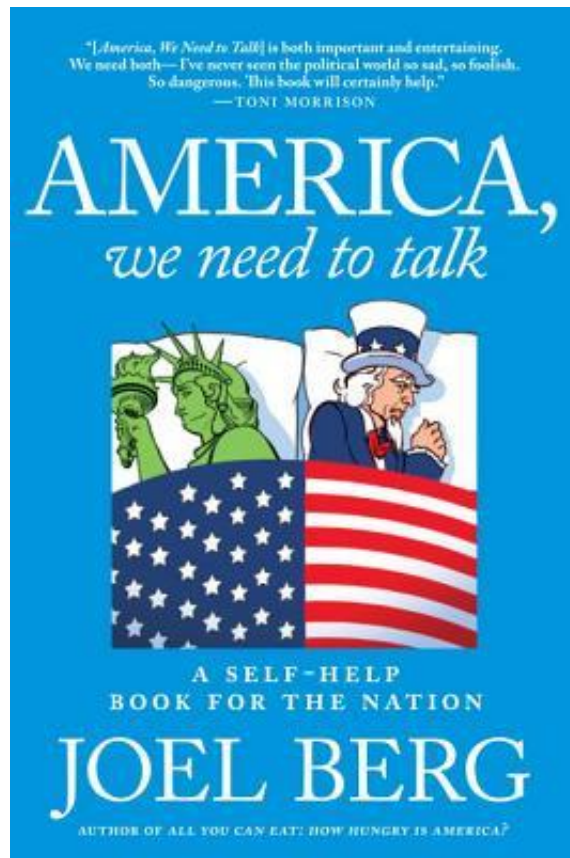


## America, We Need to Talk



America, you need to read this book. In fact, America, this is a textbook for how to get yourself out of the regressed state in which you find yourself. It's more: It's an encyclopedia of the reasons why we've come to this parlous state in our history, why our democracy is at greater risk than it's ever been, how we have been lied to and cheated on – including to and by ourselves, the missed chances for righting our wrongs, and the abundant opportunities that are ours for the taking. This book is a paean to good sense and civic engagement; a laurel wreath for our forebears who fought for freedom – political, economic, cultural, and spiritual; and it's a recipe book for how to make nourishing, delectable meals to build our moral strength and satisfy our souls.

Joel Berg is that rarest of *rarae aves*: He's a policy wonk of the first order, but he's also an activist leader, a non-profit executive, a political operative blooded in battle, an eloquent and passionate voice for progress, and, to boot, he's damned funny. In short, he's the whole enchilada. His vast experience, his humanity and his intelligence spring forth from every page – all 600+ of them. You will learn things from Joel you didn't know, you will remember things you'd forgotten, you will be inspired to pick up that doggone ball and run with it.

We are at a crossroads in America today. What we have been seeing since the national catastrophe of Donald Trump's inauguration as president and the onslaught of his racist, know-nothing administration is a tearing down not only of decades of social and political progress, bought with blood in so many cases, but relentless attacks on the very foundational principles of

modern civilization: science, decency and civility, free expression, and tolerance.

We have seen, at the same time, a resurgence in the power of our most important institutions with the courts addressing some of the worst abuses head on; with public-interest lawyers and state AGs vigorously pursuing environmental, corruption and civil liberties cases; and with the most important federal investigation in American history into the manifest abuses of power and blatant criminal activity of the present administration and the campaign that brought it into office. We have seen the American media rise to the occasion. And, most importantly, we have seen our brothers and sisters in the streets, at the airports, at town meetings, and organizing, organizing, organizing to get out the message and to get out the vote. Jelani Cobb, writing in *The New Yorker* recently, had this to say: “These are perilous times. But it’s possible, when looking from just the right angle and at exactly the right moment, to discern something that looks strikingly similar to inspiration.”

*America, We Need to Talk* can stoke that inspiration. Joel practices what he calls “radical centrism.” What’s that? It’s “...a new wave of large-scale, society-changing, progressive advances which aid both the middle class and low-income Americans, but does so based on smart, realistic reforms anchored in mainstream values.”

His diagnoses are based on sound social science. His prescriptions are practical, eminently doable, and are not expensive. He calls on us to be “activist patriots.” And he is clear that the movement needs to be inclusive, and that means inviting even our disaffected, cognitively confused brothers and sisters on the American right into the party. Mark Lilla wrote in the immediate aftermath of the 2016 election that we now have “...a generation of liberals and progressives narcissistically unaware of conditions outside their self-defined groups, and indifferent to the task of reaching out to Americans in every walk of life.” Joel Berg echoes and expands on that perception: “If progressives want to win, we absolutely need to move beyond mere identity group politics, which pit one group’s grievances against those of other groups. Of course, we should specifically combat racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia, but we also need to build a broad-based movement that unites *all* causes. Over and over again, we need to remind ourselves that what unites us – being shafted by forces of greed and hatred – is far, far greater than what divides us.” His entire book reminds us, over and over, of our history, our common humanity, and our duty to respond in these dark times as “activist patriots.”