

Community Dialogue: Coming Together In A Time of Increasing Complexity and Distractions

April 5th, 2025

Western Massachusetts

<https://cityuntangled.com/> (*Contact info at the bottom*)

Version 1.0

**Slide dimensions are 11"x8.5" for easier printing.*

Community Dialogue: Coming Together In A Time of Increasing Complexity and Distractions

Description text that was sent out:

“At the national and local levels, we are experiencing much frustration and confusion over increasing complexity and distractions. The technological, social, and governmental complexity of our society is increasing, along with an ever-increasing amount of distractions such as social media and entertainment. This event will have a brief presentation on these topics and then move onto an open dialogue on how we can come together. Please bring your questions, frustrations, and ideas. Please also come with an open mind and the respect for the dignity and humanity of others.

Host Nathan Chung is a nine-year Valley resident who has worked in information technology and customer support in both private and public sectors.”

Hope for This Meeting

1. Increasing complexity in our society, combined with more isolating distractions like Internet and social media, is affecting our ability to engage with each other.
2. **I don't have brilliant answers but felt compelled to have this dialogue after seeing what is happening at the local and national levels. I hope we can start discussing issues openly and come up with solutions.**
3. The focus is on two-way dialogues where we see the dignity and humanity of others.
 - a. Please avoid speculating on the intents of others or labelling them.
 - b. Please focus on ideas rather than people.
 - c. Go back and forth between push (speak more) and pull (speak less).
4. **This is meant to be a dialogue as we go along.**

Format

1. Presentation with interactive questions at key slides.
2. Breakout groups *if* there are many people.
3. Coming together again.
4. Wrap-up.

Complexity and Distractions Intertwined

Definitions of Complexity and Distraction

From Merriam-Webster.com

Complexity

1: something complex [a whole made up of complicated or interrelated parts]

Distraction

1: something that distracts : an object that directs one's attention away from something else

Complexity and Distractions are interrelated, in my opinion.

When Complexity is also a Distraction

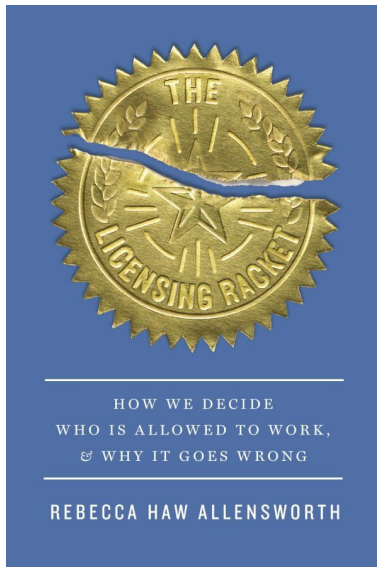
My examples

- Tax return forms
- Application notifications
- Streaming TV subscriptions (Both financial and mental distractions)

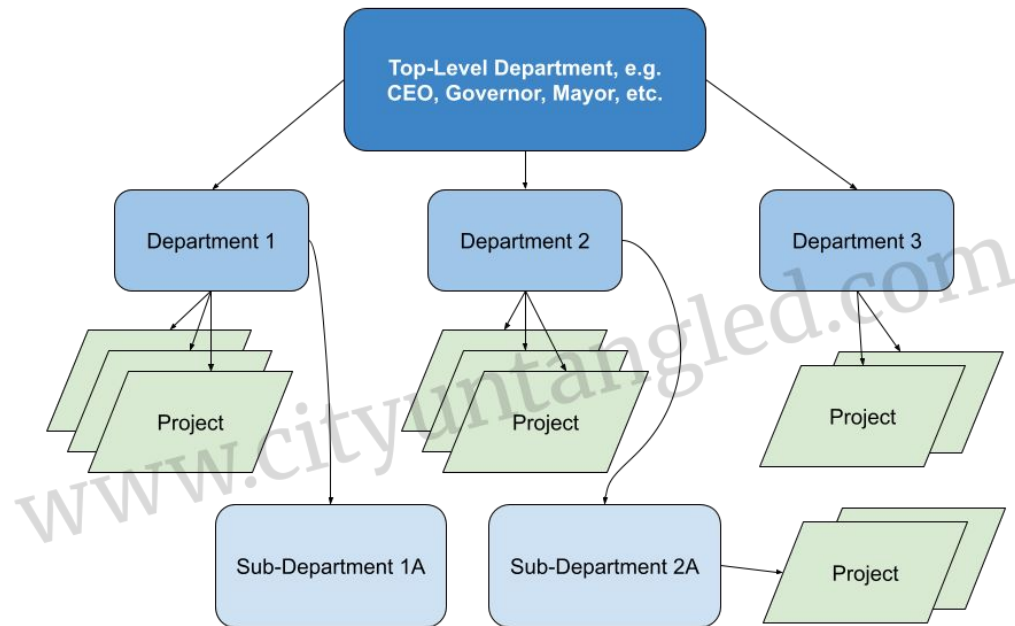
What are some examples you can think of?

Increasing Government Complexity

- More services and more departments.
- Increased power of licensing boards and more licensing requirements. (*The Licensing Racket*, 2025)



An Example of a Common Hierarchical Organization



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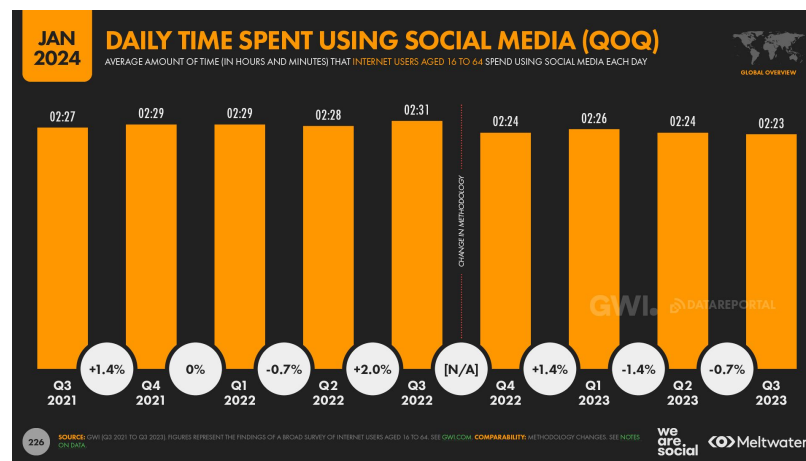
Social Media

Does social media serve a valuable purpose or is it a distraction?

“*The Anti-Social Century*” in the Atlantic from January, 2025

“Home-based, phone-based culture has arguably solidified our closest and most distant connections, the inner ring of family and best friends and the outer ring of tribe. But it’s wreaking havoc on the middle ring of “familiar but not intimate” relationships with the people who live around us...”

According to datareportal.com, Internet users spent about 2.25 hours per day on social media in 2023.



Peak Complexity

Page 194 of *The Collapse of Complex Societies* by Joseph Tainter, 1988:

“Four concepts lead to understanding collapse, the first three of which are the underpinnings of the fourth. These are:

human societies are problem-solving organizations;

sociopolitical systems require energy for their maintenance;

increased complexity carries with it increased costs per capita; and

investment in sociopolitical complexity as a problem-solving response often reaches a point of declining marginal returns.”

Modern example: More technologies and organizations being developed to address problems. They produce more information and side effects that are difficult for people to keep track of. **What do you think?**

Some Tips

Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Some tips from *Garbology* (2012), in priority order.

- Refuse
 - Unsubscribe from marketing emails.
 - Do not take home marketing goods.
- Reduce
 - When receiving gifts, ask for consumable gifts or money.
- Reuse
 - Give to others who need it.
 - Repurpose
- Recycle
 - This is the last resort.
 - Only 9% of the plastic ever produced has been recycled, and 19% has been incinerated. (MIT Review - [“Think that your plastic is being recycled? Think again.”](#))

Controlling Tech Consumption

Deliberate “Dumb” Phones

- Reviews: <https://www.freethink.com/consumer-tech/dumphone>
- Sunbeam Wireless
- Safecell: Kosher phone approved by TAG International (<https://tag.org/>), a Jewish religious advocacy group.

[Seven Commandments of Social Media](#) on the Atlantic

Reader letters from the April Issue of the Atlantic

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2025/04/the-commons/681760/>

“How should municipalities counter the anti-social century? I think offering free spaces and activities for the public would be a good place to start. And maybe I’ll start talking with strangers on the train.” - Alexandra Lubbe, St. Louis, Mo.

Channel Aggression Into Sports

- Many of us are living in environments that are more mentally and emotionally stressful than physically stressful.
- Physical risk is tightly controlled while mental-emotional risk less so in some cases, e.g. Facebook.

What would be the impact of engaging in more physical activities with controlled risk, e.g. sports, while reducing mental-emotional stressors?

Via Negativa, or Subtractive Solutions

Our brain has a bias toward additive solutions rather than subtractive solutions (“via negativa”). From the Scientific American, “[Our Brain Typically Overlooks This Brilliant Problem-Solving Strategy.](#)”

Example: When faced with a problem where removing a toy block is easier to solve the problem rather than adding a toy block, more people still prefer the additive solution.

Another factor for additive bias is financial.

“It Is Difficult to Get a Man to Understand Something When His Salary Depends Upon His Not Understanding It” -Upton Sinclair

Common Stories

Sapiens by Yuval Noah Harari

Page 24-25:

“It’s relatively easy to agree that only *Homo sapiens* can speak about things that don’t really exist, and believe six impossible things before breakfast... After all, fiction can be dangerously misleading or distracting...However, fiction has enabled us not merely to imagine things, but to do so *collectively*....Such myths give Sapiens the unprecedented ability to cooperate flexibly in large numbers.”

Belonging, Purpose, and Service

Clip: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=7-80EQRGMgg>

Full video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zdp6uDQ0rhg> (Above quote starts at 16m33s)

U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy on belonging, purpose, and service:

"When we have relationships with one another—deeply fulfilling relationships—that is profound. It has a transformative effect on us. When we have a sense of purpose in our life, especially purpose connected to something bigger than us, that can drive us in profound ways. And when we serve other people—the profound thing about service is that you might think, 'If I'm struggling with my mental health, I need people to help me. Why should I be helping others?' Well, it turns out that one of the challenges with depression is excessive rumination—when you're constantly in your head, mulling over everything happening in your life. Sometimes, one of the most powerful things you can do to break that cycle is to focus on others. This is one of the reasons why service is such a powerful antidote to isolation and loneliness. It's a very powerful salve, if you will, for mental health and well-being.

So, these three elements—belonging, purpose, and service—to me, this is the triad that constitutes success."

Native American Mythology and Contributions

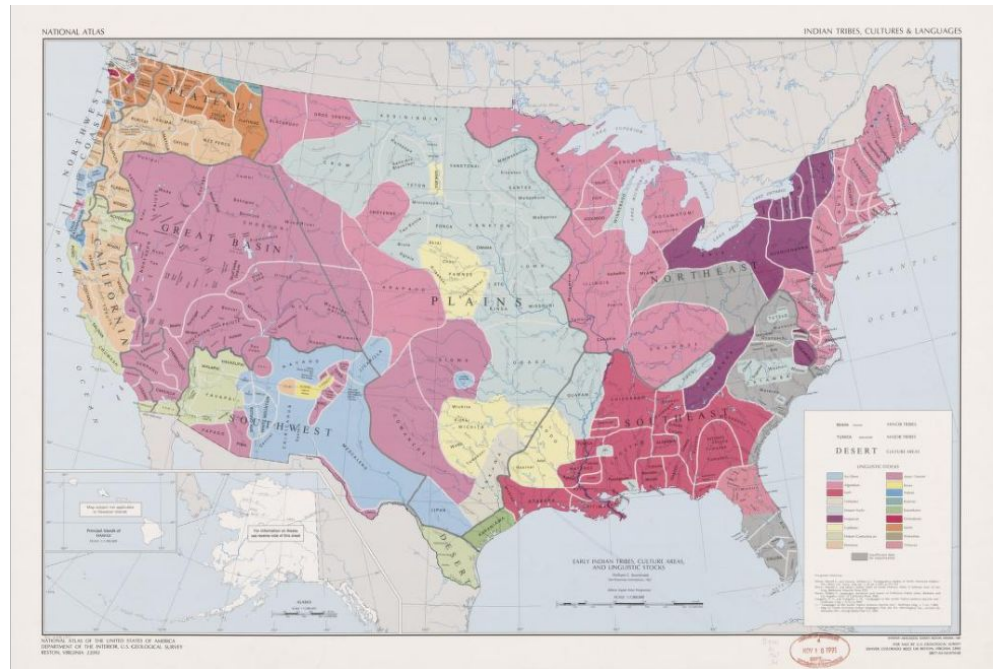
Private collection of Native American myths:

<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/native-americans/>

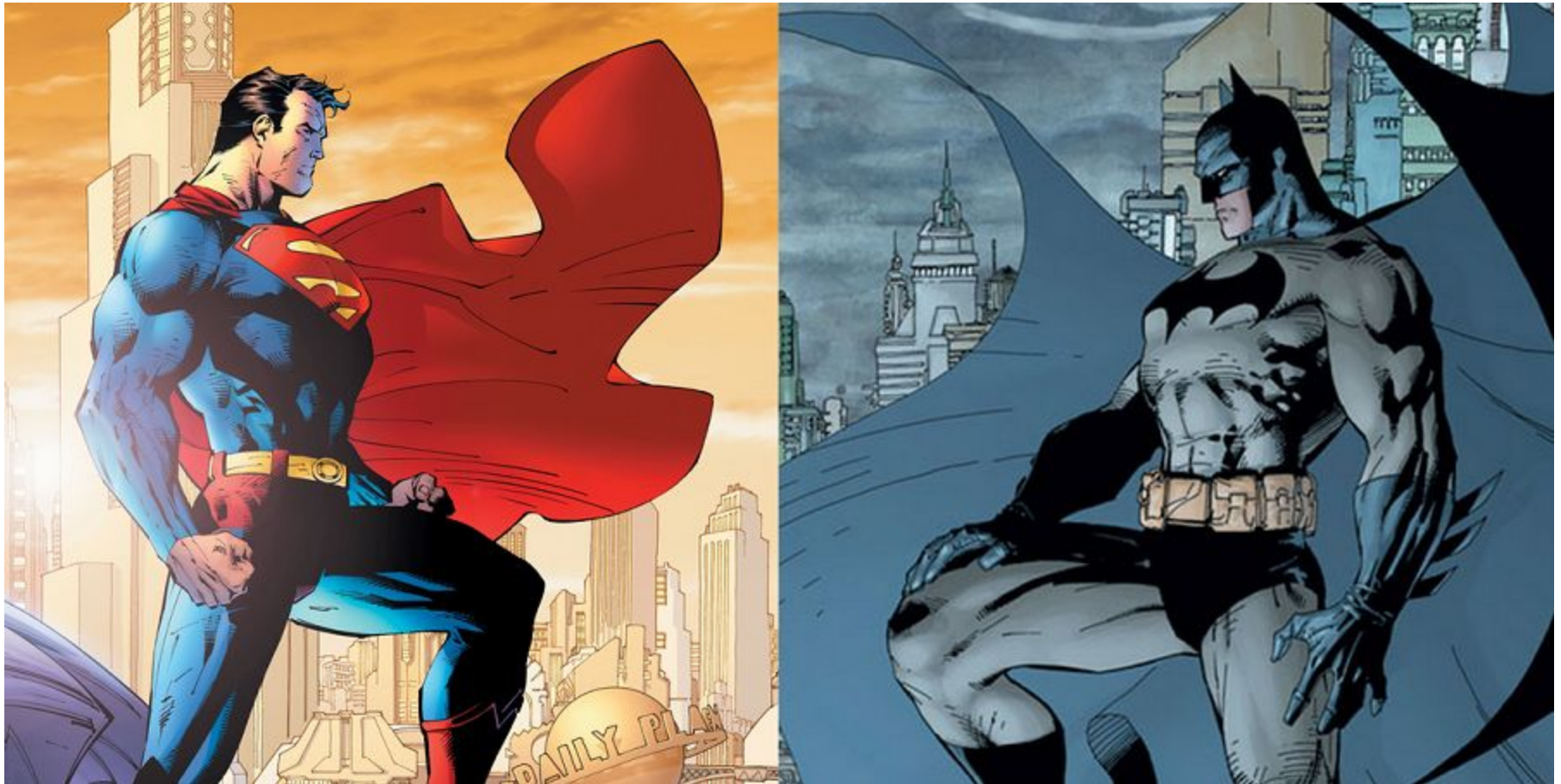
Iroquois Impact on the Constitution:

<https://www.pbs.org/native-america/blog/how-the-iroquois-great-law-of-peace-shaped-us-democracy>

Due to many different Native American nations, they had no singular unifying mythology based on my limited understanding.



Does the USA have national myths?



Superman and Batman art by Jim Lee, long-time DC artist.

Impeachment of the South Korean President



Date and Time: 11:22am KST, April 4th, 2025

Left: Associated Press on YouTube. “South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol removed from office.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvL85qbfjtA>

Right: JTBC News on YouTube (In Korean). Real-time reaction to the verdict. <https://youtu.be/PSy81TzfGig?feature=shared>

ChatGPT Translation of the Impeachment Verdict

| Original and Official Korean Verdict [(https://www.ccourt.go.kr/html/board/boardRecentView.html)] | ChatGPT Translation |
|--|--|
| <p>피청구인의 법 위반행위가 헌법질서에 미친 부정적 영향과 파급효과가 중대하므로, 피청구인을 파면함으로써 얻는 헌법 수호의 이익이 대통령 파면에 따르는 국가적 손실을 압도할 정도로 크다고 인정됩니다.</p> <p>이에 재판관 전원의 일치된 의견으로 주문을 선고합니다.</p> <p>탄핵 사건이므로 선고시각을 확인하겠습니다. 지금 시각은 오전 11시 22분입니다.</p> <p>주문 피청구인 대통령 윤석열을 파면한다</p> | <p>The respondent's violation of the law has had a serious negative impact and far-reaching consequences on the constitutional order. Therefore, it is recognized that the benefit of protecting the Constitution by removing the respondent from office significantly outweighs the national loss that may result from the dismissal of the President.</p> <p>[Human note: The following was played in the previous video clip.] Accordingly, the following verdict is delivered with the unanimous opinion of all the justices.</p> <p>As this is an impeachment case, the time of the verdict will be recorded. The current time is 11:22 a.m. [Human note: "Checked" might be more appropriate than "recorded."]</p> <p>Verdict: The respondent, President Yoon Suk-yeol, is hereby removed from office.</p> |

Is the South Korean impeachment a story of hope or of despair for the USA?

Wrap-up Questions

1. Do you find you have enough time and energy to be engaged with others? If not, what are some ideas to have more time and energy? Or does it need to come from the other end?
2. What are your ideas for reducing or managing complexity and distractions?
3. What are some positive stories, or even mythology, for the region and for the nation?

Thank you.

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