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StoryCorps Selects Birmingham for National Initiative to Reconnect a Divided America

Renowned Public Service Organization Calls on Alabamians of Differing Perspectives to Record Conversations for Inclusion in the Library of Congress Amid America's Crisis of Polarization

StoryCorps, the groundbreaking national nonprofit dedicated to recording, preserving, and sharing the stories of Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs, launches **One Small Step**, a multi-year national effort to begin to mend the fabric of a country at the breaking point, in Birmingham, on October 21. The organization, in collaboration with local media, political, religious, and community organizations, is calling for Birmingham residents to participate in 40-minute, one-on-one conversations with strangers, to share about their lives, and, in turn, to help people get past the labels of "Republican" and "Democrat," "liberal" and "conservative."

"Our research shows there is something special about Birmingham. Even amid a contentious election year, we believe Birmingham residents can show the rest of America that we can once again be neighbors and communities if we have the courage to listen to one another," said **StoryCorps Founder and President Dave Isay**. "Every day brings new evidence of how frustrated, angry and disconnected from each other Americans feel. One Small Step aims to remind people of the humanity in all of us, and that it's hard to hate up close. We believe the city can model this change."

By bringing together strangers of divergent perspectives to have courageous and meaningful conversations about their lives, One Small Step helps to decrease feelings of contempt across political divides, allowing Americans to see one another as human beings.

StoryCorps has developed the initiative over the past three years with the input of scientists, researchers and psychologists. Conversations recorded for One Small Step are not about politics, but rather about who we are as people, what we care about, and our dreams for the future. Every interview becomes part of American history at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress (with participant permission).

Birmingham is one of four cities in which StoryCorps is anchoring One Small Step. The organization conducted polling and other research, including a pilot in Birmingham in partnership with **WBHM**, and determined these cities were particularly likely to carry out the initiative successfully, as residents expressed exhaustion with political divisions and also a willingness to listen across them.

StoryCorps first piloted One Small Step in 2018-19. In the time since, data have shown a widening chasm between Americans. A **2019 study** showed that about 40 percent of people view the other party as “downright evil”; one in five Republicans and Democrats agree with the statement that their political adversaries “lack the traits to be considered fully human”; and about 20 percent of Democrats and Republicans think the country would be better off if large numbers of the opposition were dead.

One Small Step is made possible by the generous support of the Fetzer Institute, Kate Capshaw and Steven Spielberg’s The Wunderkinder Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Charles Koch Institute. StoryCorps thanks these donors for their commitment to this project and to bridging divides in America.

About StoryCorps

Founded in 2003 by Dave Isay, StoryCorps has given people of all backgrounds and beliefs, in thousands of towns and cities in all 50 states, the chance to record interviews about their lives. The organization preserves the recordings in its archive at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the largest single collection of human voices ever gathered, and shares select stories with the public through StoryCorps’ podcast, NPR broadcasts, animated shorts, digital platforms, and best-selling books. These powerful human stories reflect the vast range of American experiences, wisdom and values; engender empathy and connection; and remind us how much more we have in common than what divides us.

StoryCorps is especially committed to capturing and amplifying voices least heard in the media. The StoryCorps MobileBooth, an Airstream trailer the organization has transformed into a traveling recording booth, crisscrosses the country year-round to gather the stories of people nationwide. With the 2015 TED Prize awarded to Dave Isay, StoryCorps launched a free mobile app that puts the StoryCorps experience entirely in the hands of users and enables anyone, anywhere to record meaningful

conversations with another person and upload the audio to the Library of Congress. StoryCorps also records interviews in StoryBooths located in Chicago and Atlanta.

Recording a traditional StoryCorps interview couldn't be easier. At one of our locations, you and a loved one, or anyone else you choose, are met by a trained facilitator who explains the interview process. You are then brought into a quiet recording room and seated across from your interview partner, each of you in front of a microphone. The facilitator hits "record," and you share a 40-minute conversation. After the session, you're emailed a link to your interview, and a digital file goes to the Library of Congress, where it will be preserved for generations to come. If you are not able to get to a recording booth or would prefer to do the interview at home, the StoryCorps app serves as the facilitator, guiding users through the interview experience, from recording to archiving to sharing their stories with the world. It provides easy-to-use tools to help people prepare interview questions; record high-quality conversations on their mobile devices; and upload the audio to archive.storycorps.org, which serves as a home for these recordings and also provides interview and editing resources. StoryCorps also recently launched StoryCorps Connect, a new video-based platform that makes it possible for two people in different locations to conduct a StoryCorps interview remotely.

StoryCorps is a national institution that fosters a culture of listening in the United States; celebrates the dignity, power and grace that can be heard in the stories we find all around us; and helps us recognize that every life and every story matters equally. In the coming years StoryCorps hopes to touch the lives of every American family.

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