



BOOKS

In Trump's tumultuous age, what does patriotism mean? Everything, says Dan Rather

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Donald Trump's name does not appear in Dan Rather's new book. But the political and cultural tensions that have exploded in the first year of his administration are an important backdrop to it.

"It's a divisive time," says the veteran journalist, who kicks off Miami Book Fair at Miami Dade College's Wolfson Campus on Nov. 12. "It's perilous for the country."

But in "What Unites Us: Reflections on Patriotism," Rather, 86, doesn't waste time bemoaning our differences so much as reflecting on what we have in common. He considers the lessons of the past — his and the country's — and urges us to stop yelling at each other and listen.

The most important takeaway? We need to cultivate empathy, he says.

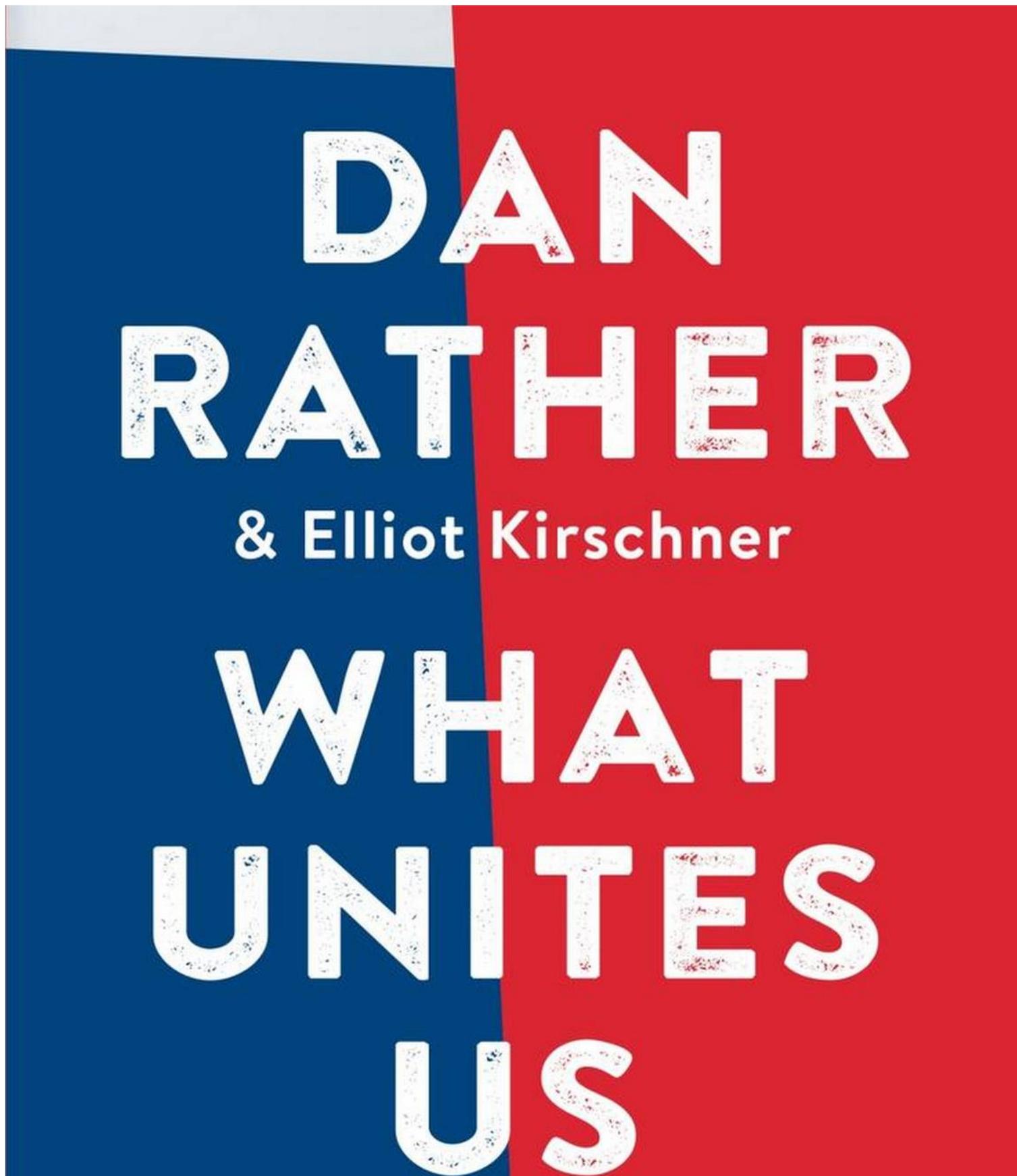
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“Empathy is something we’ve been good at as a country and a people. Look at what happened after Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma. There was an outpouring of empathy, neighbors helping neighbors. We need to remind ourselves that’s America at its best.”



REFLECTIONS ON PATRIOTISM

What Unites Us: Reflections on Patriotism. Dan Rather & Elliot Kirschner. Algonquin. 274 pages. \$22.95.

Perhaps such a gentle sentiment sounds strange coming from a hardcore newsman who joined CBS in 1962, became the anchor and managing editor of the "CBS Evening News" in 1981 (a job he held for 24 years) and was instrumental in the rise of "60 Minutes." Rather has interviewed every president since Dwight D. Eisenhower and has covered Vietnam, Watergate and impeachment hearings. And he hasn't been particularly shy about criticizing the current administration on social media.

But his topic — what we need to be as Americans — fits seamlessly into the political wing of this year's fair, which runs through Nov. 19 at Miami Dade College's Wolfson Campus. Speakers include former Vice President Joe Biden, Sen. Al Franken, MSNBC's Lawrence O'Donnell, former DNC chair Donna Brazile in conversation with Republican strategist Ana Navarro — even George W. Bush's twin daughters, Barbara Pierce Bush and Jenna Bush Hagar.

In his book — part memoir, part reflection — Rather admits we've become a divided nation.

"Too many decent law-abiding men and especially women are being told that this nation is not for them, that their values make us weaker, that their voice is better left unspoken," he writes. "We see elected officials pounding their chests, saying their vision of America represents the only real patriotism. To them I say that patriotism is not a cudgel."

Rather is quick to remind us that just because Americans are politically and culturally divided doesn't mean the present is the worst of times.

"We've got a lot of problems," he says. "But we've always had problems. The Civil War is the worst example, but the 1960s were a divisive time, too, with Vietnam, assassinations, race riots. ... We need to think about these things. I feel strongly that as a people we need to listen to one another, and the current climate is to shout at people through tweets or at a rally. That's what divides us."

Listening, of course, doesn't necessarily mean compromise.

"There are some things we can't compromise on, like racial injustice," he says. "You make it clear: 'I don't agree with that.' Racial prejudice and racial injustice, they're not the goals of our country. White nationalists want to dominate the country, but demographically America won't support that. Look at Miami. It's one of the great success stories; it's diverse. When you look at Miami, you see the future of the country."

In Rather's view, one of the book's most important discussions involves the difference between patriotism and nationalism.

"Patriotism makes it clear you love your country but are aware we're not perfect and never have been," he says. "The goal is always to be striving for a more perfect union. Nationalism is not inclusive, and the danger is it can lead to tribalism. What we know from our history is economic nationalism led to the Great Depression. White nationalism led to Nazis. We need to take those lessons from history to heart. If we ever descend to tribalism, where it's 'I only want to be with my own kind,' we're through."

"Some signs would indicate we're in danger of going that way. But I don't think we're at that point. ... We need to talk about what matters most. ... I'm an optimist by nature. We're going to get through this period."



Miami Book Fair runs Nov. 12-19 at Miami Dade College Wolfson Campus.

IF YOU GO

Who: Dan Rather and 'What Unites Us: Reflections on Patriotism'

When: 6 p.m. Nov. 12; the fair runs through Nov. 19

Where: Miami Dade College Wolfson Campus, 300 NE Second Ave., Miami

Tickets: \$35, includes copy of the book; www.miamibookfair.com

"Evenings With..." events

Nov. 13: 6 p.m. Lawrence O'Donnell (\$15); 8 p.m. Patti Smith (\$35, includes copy of her book "Why I Write")

Nov. 14: 6 p.m. Kwame Alexander and Edwidge Danticat (free tickets required); 8 p.m. Wallace Shawn

Nov. 15: 6 p.m. Isabelle Allende (\$40, includes copy of her book "In the Midst of Winter"); 8 p.m. Donna Brazile in conversation with Ana Navarro (\$15).

Nov. 16: 6 p.m. Barbara Pierce Bush and Jenna Bush Hagar (\$15); 8 p.m. James McBride (\$15)

Nov. 17: 6 p.m. "An Evening With the National Book Awards Winners and Finalists" (\$15)

Street fair

When: 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Nov. 17-19

Tickets: \$8 for adults; 13-18 and over 62 \$5, 12 and under free; www.miamibookfair.com



There are many activities for kids at the Miami Book Fair street fair, which runs Nov. 17-19.

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