

# READING GROUP GUIDE

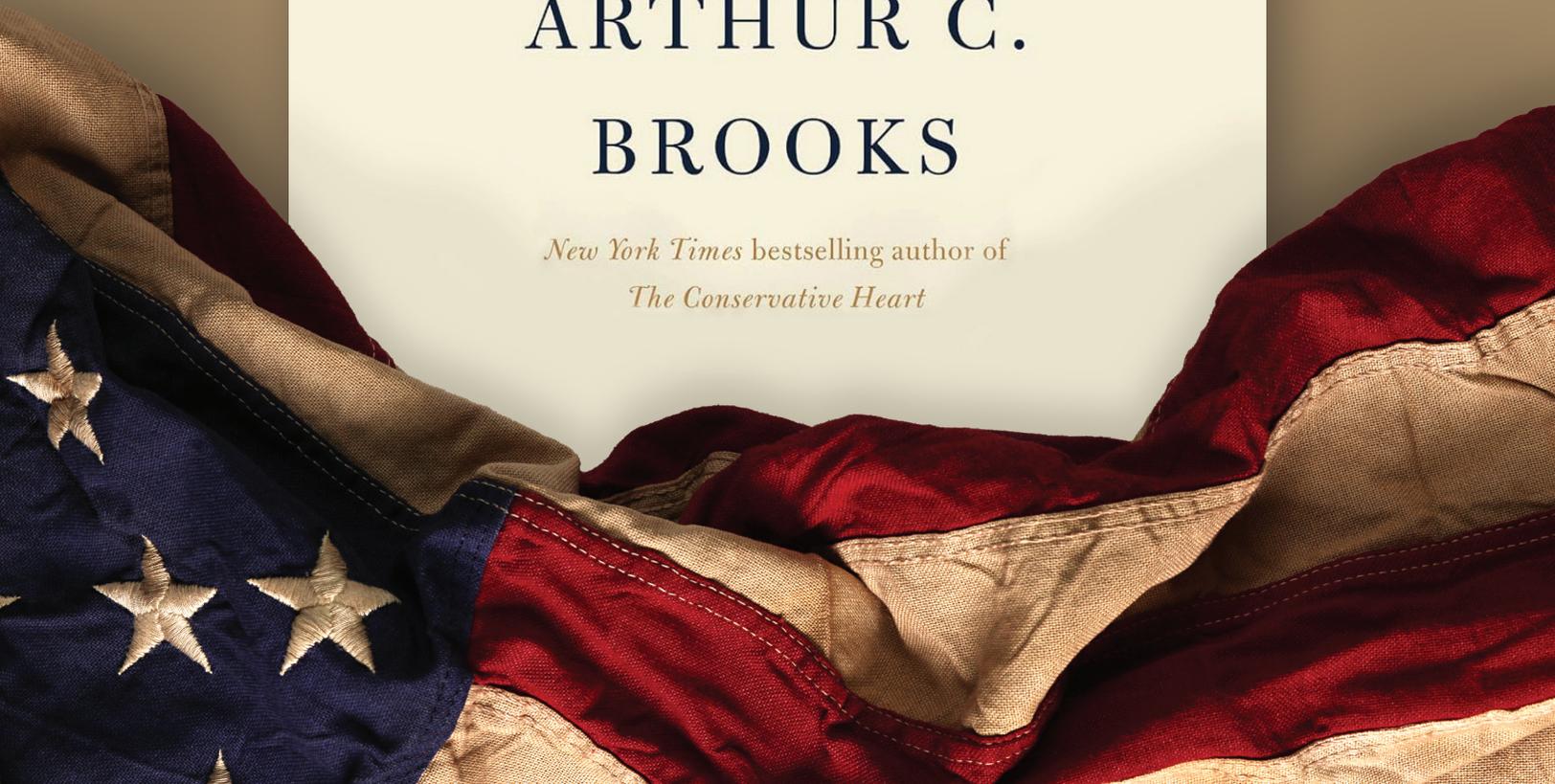
HOW DECENT PEOPLE  
CAN SAVE AMERICA FROM THE  
CULTURE OF CONTEMPT

# LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

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*The Conservative Heart*



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## Reading Guide

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### SUMMARY

In *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America From the Culture of Contempt*, Arthur Brooks explores the growing polarization in society and offers a path toward civility and understanding through compassion and dialogue. He argues that while we may deeply disagree with others, particularly those with opposing political views, fostering empathy and respect can help bridge divides. Drawing on research in psychology, sociology, and philosophy, Brooks emphasizes the importance of love and human connection as tools for overcoming hostility. Ultimately, he advocates for a shift in perspective, encouraging individuals to engage with opponents not as enemies but as fellow humans deserving of understanding.

### KEY POINTS

- Each lesson in *Love Your Enemies* is a point on the map toward a happier, courageous life and offers the possibility of healing the culture of contempt.
  - Refuse to be played by powerful, manipulative leaders in the media and in office.
  - Form friendships outside your comfort zone.
  - Disagree better. Silence isn't what's needed; rather we can strive to "be part of a healthy competition of ideas."
  - When someone on your side belittles an opponent, defend the opponent. Most likely you have family members on the other side. So treat all opponents as you would want your loved ones to be treated and defend their dignity.
  - Listen more and talk less. (Painful for wordy folks, but a goal Arthur says he's pursuing.)
  - Search for common ground. (You can't find it unless you listen.)
  - Write your own story in 12 words or less. Use it to understand yourself, and share it so others understand you.
  - Say no to contempt. Treat others with love and respect even when it's difficult.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Here are some questions you might contemplate:

1. What do you think inspired Arthur to write *Love Your Enemies*, and how do your own personal experiences connect with topics in the book?
2. In the book, Arthur discusses the concept of “contempt.” Why do you think contempt is particularly damaging in public discourse and personal relationships?
3. Arthur offers strategies for overcoming contempt and fostering constructive conversations. Which of his strategies do you believe is the most challenging to implement, and why?
4. How should we address the role of social media in amplifying contempt and division, and what can individuals do to counteract this influence?
5. *Love Your Enemies* emphasizes the importance of empathy and understanding. Can you recollect a specific example from your own life where practicing empathy led to a positive outcome?
6. In *Love Your Enemies*, Arthur argues that political polarization is a significant issue in America. What role do you think political leaders and institutions should play in addressing and reducing polarization?
7. Arthur discusses the concept of “civility” in his book. How do you define civility, and how can people incorporate it into their everyday interactions?
8. How would you reconcile the need for strong convictions and passionate beliefs with the practice of loving one’s enemies? Can a person hold firm beliefs without falling into contempt?
9. Looking ahead, what do you see as the most pressing challenges to fostering a culture of respect and understanding, and how can individuals and communities work together to overcome these challenges?

## STUDY GROUP DISCUSSIONS

These discussion starters provide questions for those in your reading group to reflect, discuss, and even debate. Healthy debate offers us the opportunity to practice Arthur's challenge to love and appreciate those who think differently than you do.

1. It is widely accepted that economic competition leads to innovation, higher quality products and lower prices for consumers. Brooks argues that healthy competition in the “marketplace of ideas” is similarly beneficial, yielding better solutions to the problems facing America today. Do you agree? Have you had an experience of “ideological competition” that led to a positive outcome? Or a negative one? What do you think made that experience possible?
2. Brooks identifies contempt as the primary driver of destructive political polarization. (Webster's defines contempt as “the act of despising” or “lack of respect or reverence for something”). Have you struggled with feelings of contempt for others based on their ideology or political beliefs? Is there a specific piece of advice or insight in this book that you found helpful in managing feelings of contempt? Do you believe we are capable of “loving our enemies”?
3. Brooks uses the language and tenets of religion and spirituality throughout this book, referring to his own Catholic faith, the teachings of the Dalai Lama, and the metaphor of “missionary work” for bridging ideological divides. Did any elements of his faith-based arguments resonate with you? Why? How do you think atheists or people of different faiths than you would react to those ideas?

