

IMAP N America: US Authors Pinpoint Respect as Essential in Peacebuilding

Ray Lipowcan

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Executive Director, UPF-Pennsylvania

The poster has a dark blue header with the title 'Respectful Conversations as a Start to Building a Road to Peace' in white serif font. Below the title is a light blue bar with the date and time 'Tuesday, August 25, 2026: 2-3 PM EDT' in dark blue serif font. The background of the poster is a scenic image of a lake at dusk with mountains in the distance. Three speakers are featured in circular frames: Doug Teschner on the left, Beth Malow in the center, and Ray Lipowcan on the right. Below each frame is a light blue box with their names and titles in dark blue serif font.

Respectful Conversations as a Start to Building a Road to Peace

Tuesday, August 25, 2026: 2-3 PM EDT

Doug Teschner
Author, Braver Angels - New England Regional Leader

Beth Malow
Neurologist and Science Communicator

Ray Lipowcan
Moderator:
UPF - USA and IMAP Coordinator

IMAP-North America – Reducing political polarization, rebuilding trust, and promoting respectful dialogue as a pathway to peace – these goals were the focus of a webinar hosted by UPF-North America on August 25, 2026. The program, titled "Respectful Conversations as a Start to Building a Road to Peace," was sponsored by the International Media Association for Peace (IMAP). It featured authors and Braver Angels leaders **Mr. Doug Teschner** and **Ms. Beth Malow**, who discussed their book "Beyond the Politics of Contempt: Practical Steps to Build Positive Relationships in Divided Times." The webinar was moderated by **Mr. Ray Lipowcan**.

The speakers began by acknowledging widespread frustration with the current political climate in the United States. Participants described the environment as "toxic," "chaotic," "polarized," and "confusing." Mr. Teschner explained that while disagreement itself is normal in a democracy, the greater problem is "affective polarization," a condition in which people increasingly view those who hold opposing political views with distrust, contempt, hostility or even hatred. This shift transforms political differences into personal and moral conflicts, making constructive dialogue difficult.

The presenters identified several causes of polarization, including social media algorithms, partisan media, identity politics, political dysfunction, economic and educational disparities, and growing social isolation. They highlighted the role of what they call "conflict entrepreneurs" – individuals or organizations that benefit from division, often by generating outrage for power, influence or profit. The speakers noted that digital platforms reward provocative and emotionally charged content, contributing to a culture where anger spreads more easily than understanding.

Drawing from their book and their work with Braver Angels, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to bridging political divides, Ms. Malow and Mr. Teschner offered practical solutions. They emphasized the importance of awareness, critical thinking, and recognizing misinformation and "perception gaps," which occur when people incorrectly assume the worst about those on the other side of the political spectrum. Research and experience, they argued, show that most Americans share many of the same core values and concerns despite political differences.

A major theme of the webinar was the importance of building relationships across political lines. Ms. Malow shared how living in Tennessee enabled her, as a liberal Jewish woman, to form meaningful friendships with conservative Christians. Through these relationships she discovered significant areas of common ground, including concern for family, community and the future. The speakers stressed that

personal interactions often reveal far less division than media portrayals suggest.



The presenters also introduced communication techniques used by Braver Angels, including active listening, asking clarifying questions, acknowledging others' concerns, and respectfully sharing one's own perspective. Rather than trying to win arguments, these methods aim to foster understanding and mutual respect. They argued that bridge-building is not incompatible with political activism and can actually make advocacy more persuasive and effective.

During the discussion, participants raised concerns about media bias, political identity, family tensions and social conflict. The speakers repeatedly emphasized personal responsibility, noting that meaningful change begins with self-reflection and character development. They encouraged people to identify their values, cultivate humility and curiosity, and challenge disrespectful behavior within their own political groups.

In conclusion, the webinar presented a hopeful vision for addressing division in America. Through respectful conversations, relationship-building, critical thinking, and a commitment to seeing the humanity in others, individuals can help transform the "politics of contempt" into a culture of understanding, cooperation and peace. The speakers argued that while the challenges facing society are significant, constructive dialogue remains one of the most powerful tools for preserving democracy and strengthening communities.



Click [here](#) to view the webinar.