



American Enterprise Institute

Web event — If ever there were a time for kindness: ‘THE ANTIDOTE’

Introduction:

Katharine B. Stevens, Visiting Scholar, AEI

Discussion

Panelists:

Kahane Cooperman, Director and Producer, “THE ANTIDOTE”

John Hoffman, Director and Producer, “THE ANTIDOTE”

Moderator:

Katharine B. Stevens, Visiting Scholar, AEI

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Event page: <https://www.aei.org/events/if-ever-there-were-a-time-for-kindness-the-antidote/>

Katharine B. Stevens: Welcome, everyone. I'm Katharine Stevens. I'm a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, specializing in early childhood development and learning. And I'm delighted to welcome you to today's discussion of "THE ANTIDOTE," which is a truly beautiful new documentary, highlighting the essential roles of kindness, compassion, and community in a civil democracy.

I'm really thrilled to be joined by Kahane Cooperman and John Hoffman, who coproduced and codirected the film. I'll begin our event by introducing Kahane and John, and I'll then share a short two-and-a-half-minute clip from the film to give some sense of it for those who haven't yet had a chance to see it, and then we'll hear more from Kahane and John about why and how they made the film.

I'd love to incorporate your questions into the discussion. So please send those along as they come to mind. There are two ways to ask questions. You can email them to martha.baker@aei.org, or send them via Twitter using #TheAntidoteAEI.

First, I'm delighted to welcome Kahane Cooperman. Kahane is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and television producer-director. Her documentary "Joe's Violin" from PBS was nominated for a 2016 Academy Award. As a director, her other documentary films include multiple shorts about autism on HBO, "Making Dazed" from AMC, and "Cool Water," which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.

Kahane also had an integral role in "The Daily Show" with Jon Stewart, where she was coexecutive producer from 2005 to 2015. For her work on "The Daily Show," she received 11 Emmy Awards and 3 Peabody Awards. In recent years, she's also been the showrunner of multiple documentary series, including the acclaimed Amazon series, "The New Yorker Presents," which premiered at Sundance in 2016.

Second, I'm delighted to welcome John Hoffman, who's a six-time Emmy Award-winning filmmaker, whose most recent films include "Rancher Farmer Fisherman," which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2017, and "Out of Many, One," which premiered at the New York Film Festival, followed by Netflix in 2018. Much of John's work as a filmmaker has focused on the key health issues of our time, including "The Weight of the Nation," "Addiction," and "The Alzheimer's Project," all on HBO, and "First in Human" on Discovery, which is a six-hour series set in the world's largest research hospital, the National Institutes of Health Building 10. In addition to making films, John was also the executive vice president of documentaries and specials for Discovery, from 2015 to 2018, after nearly two decades as vice president of documentary programming at HBO.

So, now, we'll turn to the film that we're focusing on today. "The Antidote" is built around nine really fascinating stories of ordinary Americans who are vividly illustrating the fundamental power of kindness, respect, and community in our society and in our own lives. So I want to begin with a short clip, which because of Zoom doesn't have the quality of the actual film but will give you some sense of it, just to start with, and then we will hear more about it from Kahane and John. So, with that, we'll see the clip.

Woman 1: Nobody made it here alone. We have all extended that helping hand because we knew exactly how hard it was. Stand if you have ever gone to a study session and you or someone brought food. Stand if you have ever lent or borrowed a textbook. Stand if you have ever helped tutor a student that needed help with a class. And lastly, stand if you helped a

fellow student out with encouragement, direction, accountability, or even love. You see, I'm standing up here today because of you. We all are here today because we all helped each other.

Man 1: I'm convinced it's a kindness that we all share that brings out the best in all of us. And that's when we feel best about who we are.

Man 2: We are all humans kind of stumbling through life trying to figure out our place. So I think treating people with kindness means understanding that expressed through patience and caring.

Woman 2: If every one of us chip in our own different ways to do something, no matter how small, I think we will have a better community and a better country.

Man 3: What can you share with the rest of the world? We need to value what's present and what's good in people.

Man 4: We must agree there are certain basic human rights that we must all protect no matter what.

Woman 3: We need to be kind, respectful, and responsible within society to live in a civil democracy.

Man 4: We all are immigrants and refugees from other places, creating a country that has a vision.

Man 5: There is love across this country that happens every day. It's not about ignoring those destructive elements of our society. It's deciding my attention is going to go to the good.

Child 1: I think it's the glue that holds us together, I guess you could say. I think it's really important because without kindness, we'd all be maniacs.

Katharine B. Stevens: So, with that, we will turn to our filmmakers. I cried for the entire 101 minutes of the film when I first saw it. Oops, sorry about that. There I am. And it has an effect on me every time. So, please, excuse my tears. I guess I want to begin by when I — Kahane and I went to college together, which is how I learned about this film. A mutual friend sent it to me. So I watched it because I knew Kahane, and I really wasn't sure what to expect. It kind of sounds like a nice idea, these stories of these heroic people showing kindness. Frankly, sounded like it could have been, kind of, flat and hokey, which I wouldn't have expected from Kahane but that was, kind of, my apprehension about it.

I also was apprehensive that it was going to somehow come out with some kind of a particular political message. And what I discovered was that it was just an absolutely beautiful portrayal of the kind of respect and love that we just don't hear much about these days, especially not in Washington, DC, where I'm based. So the first question, Kahane and John, I have for you is, what led you — what gave you the idea for this film in the first place? How did you get it? How did you even start with it? How did you find each other to do it together, and how did you decide to do this film?

John Hoffman: Well, I'll start. And first I want to thank you, Katharine, and AEI for organizing this. This is I think a very important event for us as filmmakers. So, thank you. And I look forward to the conversation and the questions that people are going to have. "THE ANTIDOTE" started in 2016 and 2017. I was feeling very uncomfortable, a growing sense of discomfort with the hate rhetoric that seemed to be increasing in our society. The sense of divisiveness was something that was increasingly upsetting to me. And I was in a meeting with a very large health system nonprofit that had supported some public health work of mine, Dignity Health. And I was meeting with their CEO, Lloyd Dean. And their motto is: "hello, human kindness." And it is something that's very serious to the way that they provide care.

And I was interested in understanding, you know, where does that come from? And what emerged was that their level of commitment is very serious, and they support a lot of research at Stanford and at Berkeley. And I had this instinct that there was a way to look at the world that we're all living in, that we are living in then, through a completely different lens. And I said, "Would you ever be interested in supporting a documentary about kindness?" Not knowing what and where this would lead. And Lloyd Dean immediately said, "Yes." And it wasn't that long before I was beginning the process of looking for a partner. I knew I wanted to make this film with someone.

And I started networking within the world of documentary film and asking people, and two very respected filmmakers that I'd known for a while, both independently said, "Do you know Kahane Cooperman?" [inaudible] Stevens and Dawn Porter. And so, I reached out to Kahane. I had talked to many filmmakers about this project. But I reached out to Kahane, and we had breakfast. And I knew immediately that this was going to be a partnership that would work. And I'll let Kahane tell her side of that experience. That coffee, or that breakfast, in a sense, led to a proposal the next day.

Kahane Cooperman: I said, "I do." So, yeah, I only knew John by reputation. But he reached out, and we did meet for this breakfast. And, you know, he told me that he wanted to make a film about kindness. That was the word at the time, really, that this was hitched to, about kindness, and that he had already raised, not the entire budget but, like, a decent amount of money.

And you don't hear that line very often in documentary. But this was 2018. And, you know, like John, I was concerned about the growing lack of stability. I felt like it was, sort of, the ground was crumbling beneath me. And the world was feeling like a place that I just wasn't recognizing. And it didn't feel like the place I knew. And I was curious, kind of, why. So when this opportunity to explore the idea of kindness in some way, because we really had a blank slate, at this time where it felt like it was getting farther and farther away from us as a country, it seemed like an incredible opportunity.

And so, you know, it's a big commitment when you partner up with someone on such a huge creative endeavor because you really are working together every day and working on, you know, a creative goal that you hope does justice to this opportunity. But I said, "Yes." And so pleased that I did because we had an incredible experience and a really incredible journey along the way making this film, figuring it out, figuring out what kind of stories to tell, how to tell them, and who to tell them about. Who are our characters going to be? What were our stories about? So, it was really interesting. We got a very small team together who joined us

and spent the first bunch of months reading, and talking, and thinking, and reaching out to all kinds of people from all disciplines.

Katharine B. Stevens: So a quick question along those lines. I think part of the reason I wasn't sure what to expect from this film was when one hears the word kindness, you know, it sounds something nice, you know? It's like your grandmother's kind. It doesn't sound like a powerful world-changing concept. And one of the things that I found so remarkable about this film is it brought me to a new appreciation of the power of kindness. So the film itself communicates that. But what is it communicating? How did you guys decide what kindness — what does kindness mean to you, and how did you come to that?

John Hoffman: Well, I'll start. In this research period that Kahane mentions, we were really looking at kindness, and decency, and compassion, and goodness, and empathy from the perspectives of economics, and from political theory, and history, and poetry. You know, and we —

Kahane Cooperman: Biology.

John Hoffman: Biology. And we, in fact, landed upon a whole area of study that many people have looked at, which starts with Charles Darwin. And when he wrote "The Descent of Man," you know, he wrote about kindness in response to the way that the survival of the fittest, when he had written "On the Origin of Species," had been completely co-opted and abused as the rationale for racism and royalism, and he was horrified. And in "The Descent of Man," he talks about the survival of the kindest, and that this is what distinguished humans from other species is our capacity for cooperation and collaboration. And in fact, it is what led to the evolution of the human species was this capacity for kindness because in that cooperation collaboration, you were protected from others, and you were able to advance the species. So, we were, sort of, blown away by that. But to advance this narrative of this film, I think it's important to say that, at a certain point, when we had, sort of felt we were full, sort of, of this learning and taking in so many perspectives —

Katharine B. Stevens: And John, how long — what's the timing of all this? Like, when did you guys —

John Hoffman: About three or four months.

Katharine B. Stevens: So you guys committed and then you both —

John Hoffman: It was this deep research period.

Kahane Cooperman: And this was in 2018.

Katharine B. Stevens: 2018.

Kahane Cooperman: And now we're in 2021.

Katharine B. Stevens: Right.

John Hoffman: So, we were in this home that I'm in now on a little mini retreat with the four-person team, and we said, "OK, let's do, sort of, a visioning exercise. Let's propel

ourselves to the world that, you know, the film is premiering into, and what do we want the film to say? What do we want, you know, the messages of this film to be?” And so, that led to the formation of a series of six questions. We didn’t know we were going to come up with six questions, but we came up with six questions that we want the film to answer, which are: How do we raise our children? How do we teach our children? How do we take care of the sick and the dying? How do we live and work together? How do we welcome a stranger? And, how do we lead?

And we felt that if we could find a collection of stories that answer those quick six questions, it sort of covers the lifespan, and it covers the worlds that we move through in our daily lives. And that became a whole organizing principle for how we would look for stories because we knew that one story could not really cover this breadth of experience that we wanted to.

But it became enormously helpful. And, you know, we started articulating this to others. And people had a, sort of, striking response to just those six questions, the simplicity of them. But then something rather striking happened in the world. And I think Kahane should talk about that.

Kahane Cooperman: Well, yeah, we had these questions, and they were, at the time, our, sort of, North Star. And then the events in Charlottesville unfolded. And, you know, it was a moment of reckoning for so many people in so many ways, but it was also, for us, a moment where we had to look at our film and look at our questions and really see that for a lot of Americans, they live with fundamental unkindnesses every day and that these questions were wonderful, but probably not enough, that we needed to make a film that also acknowledged that there’s problems within communities and, you know, small, large, and nationally.

So, we identified fundamental unkindnesses based on that moment that happened, kind of, right at a pivot and created, kind of, a pivot point for us when Charlottesville happened. And so these fundamental unkindnesses were, you know, lack of a safe place to sleep is fundamentally unkind, lack of access to health care, lack of earning a living wage, and also just the injustices of racism, and homophobia, and sexism are fundamentally unkind. And we took those unkindnesses, and we looked at our six essential questions. And those together became the lens through which we started really our search for stories.

We weren’t looking for one story per question or anything like that, but we wanted our stories to touch on those and to be representative of all the voices, or as many as we could have in this country so that somewhere along the way in this film, we hoped that almost everyone sees themselves somewhere in it in some way. And, really, it was through the questions and then the fundamental unkindnesses that we were able to identify the stories that you now see in the film. And, you know, it’s also a film though, right? It has to be cinematic, and we have to find characters that you care about and stuff. So, that also was a huge and important part of how we arrived at the stories that we finally did to tell this bigger story.

Katharine B. Stevens: So one of the things that — it’s not a word that I’ve heard you guys use, but it’s really, I would say, what I took away more than what are, kind of, known, sort of, social injustices, what one I took even more than that was just the tremendous importance and value of respecting and honoring the dignity of every human being. And yes, it is the case that there are certain groups of human beings whose worth and dignity has been more systematically not valued, right? But of course, that can happen to anyone in any life. And to

me, that was one of the most powerful things about this film was that the way that it was filmed, and they're not characters, the people, the stories that were told, these are people who are embodying, kind of, a radical dedication to celebrating the human value and dignity. I mean, those aren't words you've been using, but does that make sense?

John Hoffman: Oh, what resonated for you could not be a more beautiful response for a viewer to have to the film. So, you know, I think you just made me feel like a very successful filmmaker. If that was your response to the film, that makes me very, very happy. This experience that you have in making documentaries, you gather so much more material than ever ends up in the film. There's 400 hours of material that was filmed for this and, you know, it's 97 minutes long. So, you know, that shooting ratio is awfully high. But the analogy that I use is that, you know, it's akin to making spirits. You know, you have all these raw ingredients, and you distill and distill, distill, distill down, and you end up with this spirit that has different — there's an essence to it and there's different, you know, notes to it when you overwork that analogy of distilling a spirit.

But part of what happens in this editing process is that you start finding these essential truths about the human condition. And some of those essential truths happen because only in documentary, you can put one person's life right next to another person's life. And the quality of that material is utterly changed by its proximity to something else. And so that was one of the, you know, really beautiful experiences of making the film was going through that and finding out the right order, but finding those essential truths. And so, that's what I hear you saying is that there was some kind of a central truth about the human condition that came through for you.

Katharine B. Stevens: Yeah, absolutely. Kahane, do you have any thoughts you want to add?

Kahane Cooperman: No, I agree. I do feel like — to go back to something else you said, but I think it connects — which was when you first hear about kindness, you know, your first — you were a little, I guess, skeptical or kind of, like, "What is this going to be?" And we were highly aware of that. As we proceeded, we're like — we had a fight against that perception of kindness itself being, kind of, soft, you know, and try to look for examples of what we think kindness really is, which is frankly, like, it can be a fierce tool of change. Because when you treat people with kindness and dignity, as you say, their perception of their selves changes, and then the way they treat people changes.

And it's just this, you know, incredible thing, which is why, you know, I think that we were looking to really, really put together stories — you know, and again, as you mentioned, there's nine stories, but any story is powerful. But we were really trying to create something where the sum is greater than the parts so that your takeaway all told is about this dignity. It is actually incredibly meaningful because I do think one of the takeaway messages is just that. And even those stories, you know, some use the word dignity and some don't. But I think it's inherent in every single story and in the way we sort of — it's part of the DNA that they all share, right? So —

Katharine B. Stevens: Yeah, exactly. Because the people in your film, just I think is that what you're saying, by recognizing, embracing actually the worth and dignity of every person, they're seeing the potential, the human potential in that person. And human potential is bizarrely realized to a great degree by others seeing it in us. And as I'm thinking about it,

that's really something that seems to weave through these stories, that the people who you're highlighting, they're, like, human potential amplifiers, it seems.

Kahane Cooperman: Totally.

John Hoffman: But I — sorry.

Kahane Cooperman: No, go ahead.

John Hoffman: I want to come back to our six, sort of, guiding questions. And the last one being: How do we lead? Because the stories are all about institutions and organizations that are providing some sort of service to others. And so, you know, the characters that you come to know very well are either providing and/or receiving some sort of service. And it was very important for us to orient the film that way and to structure the film that way.

And one of the stories, for those who haven't seen the film, that is particularly important and it's recurring is the story about the Center for Discovery, which is in Sullivan County, New York. It is New York state's largest facility for developmentally disabled teenagers and adults. And why I'm pointing this out now is that if there's any story that's about human potential, it is the story of the Center for Discovery. And if there's any story that also talks about leadership, and talks about the role of community, and then the role of government, in terms of, you know, helping people realize their full potential.

And it's not talked about in the film, but I hope and I'm curious, Katharine, if this came through for you, but, you know, the Center for Discovery, you know, it's providing, you know, housing services, health care services, occupational therapy services for developmentally disabled adults. The largest source of money for that are New York state and federal reimbursements for this care. It is an example of, you know, our society valuing every human life and helping every human life achieve its fullest potential. This is, you know, going and, you know, leaning into the good and the goodness in all of us. And so, I think that in terms of one of the messages of the film, it is about how we lead. It is about the choices we make to create the kinds of communities that we all want to live in.

Katharine B. Stevens: Yes. So I guess, you know, if you're in Washington, DC, you, unfortunately, come to see the world in terms of what I describe as funding streams. Just it's not even money. It's actually funding streams. And they become very abstract. And funding streams can be essential. But alone, they do no good, right?

And so, what I found so remarkable about that story is that funding is making possible the extraordinary work of humans, right, loving, kind, respectful work of humans. And I think certainly, from a Washington, DC, point of view, we, I think, forget that money does not serve people. People serve people, right? But the money can be essential, but that the just extraordinary, I want to say, generosity of the people working in the facility, transforming the people they're working with, right? It's just —

Kahane Cooperman: But also themselves. Yeah.

Katharine B. Stevens: What do you mean by that?

Kahane Cooperman: I mean, that, you know, what's interesting in the Sullivan County, New York, example is that most of the people who work there are not people who set out in their lives to be therapists and assistants and stuff. There are local people who saw a job opportunity and found something they love in helping these other people and, you know, learned and moved up the ranks. So it's like, not only is the community of developmentally disabled people being helped, but the entire community has benefited in that kind of depressed area of New York. It's one of the biggest employers now actually.

And so, some of the therapists we met, you know, said they started out — they were a cashier at Target or, you know — and they wanted to do something different. And so they started out there, and they realized they love it. And, you know, they worked hard to either study or just get more work experience, and it changes their lives, and then they're also changing the lives of the people they work with. And it's brought, you know — it's uplifted the entire community of that wonderful town.

Katharine B. Stevens: And I would imagine, to the leadership question, whoever's leading that institution must be setting that tone and that culture that's allowing all that human flourishing to occur under one giant roof. Is that right?

John Hoffman: Absolutely. And that's part of my point, so I'm glad you say that because resources that are there are the same resources that, in the hands of others, might not realize this potential in the ways that we're talking about. So it's all decisions. It's all choices. It's how you use the resources, the human and the fiscal resources that you have, the funding streams that you have, how, you know, these choices are made.

And so, it was very important to us that every story that we present in "THE ANTIDOTE" is extremely well vetted. And one of the things that, you know, was very important to us with a story like this is, you know, the leadership of the Center for Discovery and all the choices that they have made over the years. And it's clear that top to bottom, you know, they really are exploring human potential for, you know, the agency, and for the clients, and the community. And you really feel that in that small community that scene in the firehouse. You know, it spreads, it emanates out in terms of how, you know, everybody in that community, you know, as Kahane says, is better for it.

Katharine B. Stevens: Yes, exactly. And so I guess the question I have is, how did you go about — well, I mean, you found this place. You vetted it. You're sharing with the world, kind of, what it is. How in the world did you dig these people up, these organizations up all over the country and get to know them? And for those of you who've not seen the film, if you do see the film, just the intimacy with which you've entered their lives with what you're filming them, how in the world did that happen?

Kahane Cooperman: Well, I mean, one of the great, you know, challenges and privileges of making documentaries is that, you know, you have to gain people's trust. If they don't trust you, you know, why the heck would they share their story with you, let you into their world? So, you always start out with, you know, the thing that's so essential, I think, and, frankly, essential to this country at this moment, which is conversation. You know, you might reach out with an email, but then that leads to a phone call or a Zoom, and you start talking. And, you know, if the story seemed like it had potential, then we would go there. You know, we went to Amarillo, Texas, before we ever started filming. We went to Boston before we ever started filming there. We went to many of these places and spent actual time to get to know

these people. And I think that, you know, the film and stories, and frankly, all documentaries really benefit from a relationship of trust. With that, you get access.

And I also think, you know — and people become more comfortable showing their vulnerabilities to you. And so, I'm not patting ourselves on the back, but literally, part of our jobs and I think one of the skills you have to have is an ability and an interest in really connecting with people. And I think that human connection is a huge part of this film. It's evident in each story. But I also think that we also as filmmakers had a human connection with all of these people. And I think that's what you're feeling is that it was true and, you know — I mean, it sounds so corny but, like, you get attached to these people. You care about these people, and it's your job to make the people watching care about them, you know, as much as you do. So —

Katharine B. Stevens: So, I wouldn't be able to say which of the nine stories touched me the most. I kept on thinking, "Oh, this one does. No, this one does." The roots of empathy story, kind of, captured me, in particular because early childhood is what I focus on. And one of the things over the last six-and-a-half years that I've been focusing exclusively on early childhood that really struck me is babies are not highlighted enough in our society. I actually had talked to some people — Ohio was working on early childhood policy. And I said, "Couldn't we just get some company to pay for giant billboards of babies to put all along the highway? Because if people just see babies every day when they're driving to go to work, I think it's going to shift how they see things."

And that is what I want you to explain is that story. But in particular, I have two questions about it. One, it's the one that's a little different from the others because, in the others, they're adults who are serving people, right? And this is a project that's serving people, but the person doing the work is a tiny baby, right? And that's thing one. And thing two is why did you lead — it's the first of the nine stories that you highlight. And I'm wondering why you decided to lead with it. And then after you talk about it, we'll show that clip.

John Hoffman: Well, the why we decided to lead with it is a very simple answer. We had two brilliant editors on the film. And one of them one day had the idea of what if we lead with that story? So, it was not filmed with the intention of leading with it, and it was deep into the edit that an editor suggested it. And, you know, in our opinion, it was just really one of the greatest, sort of, creative moments of the making of the film when Andrew suggested that. But why I think it works and getting it to what the story is, is that I think it primes the audience for what to expect. We feel that as —

And for those who don't know and you're about to see, Roots of Empathy is a program that was started by a woman named Mary Gordon in Toronto that is a school-based program for fourth graders, where over the course of a year, one baby, who was introduced in September, comes once a month through the end of the school year to visit the same group of children with a facilitator and the mother of the child, and the children develop a relationship with that baby. And every time they come, the baby is a month older, the baby's developmentally able to do more, and the children understand, and they develop a bond, a love for this child. But the baby is a vehicle for the conversations around emotions. And it is, more than anything, a way to really start instilling empathy in children.

And so, it's Roots of Empathy. And it's a program that's all over the world. There are a few communities in the United States that have Roots of Empathy in their school systems, Seattle

being one of them, which is where we filmed. But you do see in this group of fourth graders, you see just a sense of wonder in their eyes and a sense of love for baby Reuben, who — this is the first time they've seen him. They're so excited to see him and him come back. And the woman who guides the lesson, who is trained in this, is just particularly brilliant at, sort of, articulating what baby Reuben might be feeling and then seeing how the children react. So —

Katharine B. Stevens: Martha, do you want to show that clip?

Woman 4: Hi. Happy New Year.

Woman 5: Happy New Year.

Woman 4: How are you?

Woman 5: Good.

Woman 4: Hi, Reuben.

Woman 5: I woke him up to come see your class.

Woman 4: Oh, did you? Hi, sweetheart. Oh, there's a smile. Do you remember me? It's been a whole month. Hi. It's been a whole month. Thanks for letting him be our little baby. He's so sweet. I guess you like him, huh? This is Reuben.

Woman 6: Oh, what a cutie.

Woman 4: So he comes to fourth grade once a month.

Woman 6: Are you ready to go to class?

Woman 7: Where's the baby?

Woman 4: He's coming. He's downstairs in the office. I just have to put out his blanket and then I'll go get him. Have a good day.

[crosstalk]

Together: Hello, baby Reuben. How are you?

Woman 4: Raise your hand if you can tell me how you think baby Reuben is. We just sang him the question. How are you? How do you think he is?

Child 2: Happy.

Woman 4: You think he's happy? What's he doing to tell you that?

Child 3: He wanted you to touch his feet.

Woman 4: Did he move his feet in front of you? So how does it make you feel when you see Reuben happy? How do you feel?

Child 4: Happy.

Woman 4: Happy? Do you know that feelings are contagious? You can catch a feeling. What do you think he's learning when I play with him and I look at him like this, and I'm looking at him in the eye, and I'm touching his head? What do you think he's learning?

Child 3: Kind of, a new emotion, feeling cool. Like you're in a room with nobody in it, nothing, like, in a blank room and —

Woman 4: And it's just me caring for him.

Child 3: Yeah.

Woman 4: He is learning to be a more caring human being. So he'll be able — you'll be able to show that you care for people because I'm showing you.

Katharine B. Stevens: So, I start crying again. So let me put myself together. So let's see what — I've gotten a couple of questions. One of them is a very difficult question, which actually builds on something I've been thinking as I've been listening to you. So I think maybe — I've been tweeting at our event and, of course, I try to tag you guys and I'm seeing neither of you are on Twitter.

Kahane Cooperman: I am.

Katharine B. Stevens: Oh, you are? I wasn't able to find you. When I do the follow-up, I'll tag you. Twitter has got to be the most unkind place, like, that's ever existed in the human universe.

Kahane Cooperman: Maybe you can leave me off of it.

Katharine B. Stevens: Yeah, yeah, I stay out of unkind exchanges, but it's extremely difficult because perfectly normal, nice people in the early childhood field, just to take one little tiny example, are just extremely unkind on a regular basis. And I think that's maybe an arena in our society where we've let unkindness, kind of, have free rein. One of the questions that our viewer is asking is what you guys see as the root cause of the growing divide that certainly is expressed on — reflected in Twitter? In working on this film, you were in all different parts of the country. I'm wondering if different parts of the country, kind of, seemed different to you in terms of their, sort of, kindness culture. And after having spent all this time in different parts of the country with very different kinds of communities, what your reflections are on what's driving the hate, and the judgment, and the contempt that we see?

John Hoffman: That is big.

Kahane Cooperman: Yeah, that's a big one.

John Hoffman: I don't know that I'm going to completely answer it, but I'm happy to start. I know I want to address your question about us being out in the world. I would say that our

experience making the film and being in nine different parts of the country, very different parts of the country from Alaska, to Decatur, Georgia, is that, I'll speak just for myself, my experience was that my engagement with people was essentially the same. I loved the people that I was with, and the experience of being with them, and I felt a kinship with them that was the same. Now, maybe that gets to what Kahane was talking about, in the way that we paid so much respect to the people that we were with and that became reflected back.

But that was part of why we wanted to make the film because we believe that there is this fundamental goodness that is in all of us and is in our communities and that it was time to really shine a light on that at a time of growing divisiveness and hate. We decided to turn our lens in a different direction.

There are plenty of important efforts looking at the hate and division. Just look at what happened on January 6 and, you know, how we'll understand that event is going to take, you know, probably decades to understand what happened that day. And there'll be plenty of people who will do that. But we felt that at a time when there was, you know, a tremendous amount of hate before January 6, that there was a reason to say what else exists in our communities, and what are the forces for good in our communities, and how are we taking care of those and what is the —

You know, we also wanted to — we have a belief that if we don't pay attention to them, and to Kahane's very first comment about stability crumbling, what happens when just that stability just starts crumbling and crumbling and crumbling so that it isn't beneath our feet, that we don't walk through our worlds with a sense of confidence? So, I just have a — to your larger question, again, this is my personal belief, I think that there are forces in our world that take advantage of these human frailties for, sort of, a tribalistic, sort of, mentality, and they look for these opportunities to pump them up and amp them up because it serves some greater, you know, goal for power. And we do have some human weaknesses and people take advantage of them for their other more nefarious aims.

Kahane Cooperman: I think I would just like to add that, you know, we might have made a different film during a different time. I don't know. But what I do know is that there's nine stories in this film. And frankly, there's four others that we filmed that while they didn't make it into the film for timing purposes, they're all shorts that you can find on our website. So we were actually in, you know, 13 communities around the country. And, you know, obviously, we weren't asked — I have no idea who anyone voted for or, frankly, it just was almost beside the point. And I think in the world in which we all exist, it's become so hard for anything to be beside the point beyond politics.

And I hope that we made a film that takes us beyond that and, kind of, you know, reminds people that, despite all the difficulties, that the thing that, you know, is connecting us and that we do have in common, and that hopefully, we can talk about more and be reminded of is I think that everyone essentially wants the same thing and is capable of the same kindnesses, you know, within their communities, small, large or, you know, greater communities.

But also, you know, one of the ways that we tie our stories together, it's not just through, sort of, what happens in between the stories, which is you start to — you hear this growing chorus of voices that you've met along the way, all speaking to each other and to other stories within the film, even though you might have met them in one story. What they're saying applies to everything. But during those, kind of, you know, interstitials in between

stories, we also use these drone shots, right, where we're flying above. And we really wanted to give the sense of a full portrait of this country and somehow flying above, we felt was very helpful for that.

But it's also meant to say — we also never identify anybody in this film by their name or by their organization, which is a very unusual choice in documentaries. We're only identifying the locations where they take place. And I think one of the many creative choices behind that is to really say that you could be — you know, you might be flying over in the drone, you can drop in anywhere in this country, any town, city, you know, rural place, whatever it is, and you're going to find people like this doing this kind of work, behaving this way toward their fellow human beings. And I don't want to sound, you know, idealistic, or naive, or Pollyannaish. There are a lot of problems, but I think, like, because we're so focused on what divides us and not what connects us that unless we start talking about what connects us, like, I just feel like it's crucial to try to reduce that divisiveness that's really painful to live, experience, and see happening. It's just, you know —

Katharine B. Stevens: It struck me that just as you were talking that it's almost like to say — you know, what is the root of the divide is almost like to say, why is it so dark? And the reason it's so dark is because there's not light, right? Like, you know, your movie is about kindness in this, sort of, deep sense that you've been discussing— describing it as. And it's like, well, kindness is, I guess, and I want to ask you about the name of the film, but it's the antidote to hate. It's the antidote to divisiveness. And so, if you have more — it's just like if it's too dark, you have more light. It's not as dark as it was, right? If there's, like, hate and division, and you have more kindness and connection, you don't have as much hate and division anymore, right? And then that leads me then to the question I wanted to ask you is why you named it “THE ANTIDOTE”?

John Hoffman: I'll go first.

Kahane Cooperman: Good question. Yeah, it's a good question.

John Hoffman: We searched for a title for the longest time. “THE ANTIDOTE” was very late in the process of making the film. And, you know, we tease each other about the process of finding the title. I would come up with lists of names, and Kahane would roll her eyes, and she would come back with a few titles, and I would go silent. And so, it was torturous, but when, you know, push came to shove, we did sit down and neither of us can remember who just said as a turn of phrase, “Well, it's the antidote to” — and then it was like “the antidote, the antidote.” You know, and then, you know, we knew that we had it, although Kahane had to sleep on it. But —

Kahane Cooperman: Had to make sure.

John Hoffman: But I appreciate the way that you talk about the title, that you speculate about what it's the antidote to because we don't live with anything specific because we were so affected by all the challenges that are presented throughout the film, you know, that our characters are dealing with poverty. They're dealing with racism. They're dealing, you know, with coming from war-torn countries where they had to escape their lives and become refugees. So, you know, these unkindnesses that all of our characters are either working to overcome programmatically or that have to overcome in their personal lives, I think that we're talking about the antidote to all of that. And so, you know, it just became a powerful

title for us because of the way that it speaks to everything, and yet it still remains somewhat, you know, open to interpretation, which is a good thing with a title. And then we had a pandemic, you know, come upon us, and it's like, "Oh, my God, would the title be relevant in the time of COVID?" And, you know, we think that we made it through OK.

Katharine B. Stevens: So I'd love to show another clip, we were going to show the bridge

Together: Meadows.

Katharine B. Stevens: Meadows. Thank you. Could you guys say a little bit about, just to set it up for the viewers, what it's about?

Kahane Cooperman: Sure. So, Bridge Meadows, it's a community in Portland, Oregon. And the most remarkable thing is that it is the simplest idea, and it solves all of these issues for people. It's about an intergenerational community where elder people and children of — adopted and foster care children all live together in a big community, and the elder people help the families take care of the younger people. And the foster and adopted kids feel like they have a sense of family, and the elder people feel like they have a sense of purpose. And you take these two communities, you know, and put them together, and you've solved two problems. You know, getting old in this country is not easy. And it can be incredibly lonely and isolated. And these people still have so much to give, but no one really is asking them for it. And this gives them a purpose and connection.

And for these kids, as you'll see from the clip, they benefit greatly from having these relationships and support of these older people. So, it's an incredible community. It's one of only a handful in the country. But it's not the only one. Six. There are six other communities around the country. We focus on this one in Portland, Oregon. And I also, you know, think it's an important story, not that we talked about in the film, but just as an aside, where the City of Portland — so maybe this is leadership. The City of Portland, the mayor I think, saw a story on "60 Minutes" about this. He's like, "I want to have a community like that in our town." And so, through him and by working with some of his colleagues, they decided to lease the space to this community for \$1 a year for 99 years. So, it's an incredible thing where everyone came together, you know, on a civic level, and then on this personal level, and created this really unusual place that seems like a no-brainer once you see it.

John Hoffman: There's one important detail that they were providing — it's low-income housing for the elderly and low-income housing for foster and adopted families that they were providing separately. And someone had the brilliant idea: Put these people together. And what happens when you're still — it's the same resources of low-income housing for these two populations. But look what happens when you put them together?

Katharine B. Stevens: Yeah, my reaction was I don't really fall into either of the groups, and I'm not eligible for low-income housing, but I kind of wanted to move there. That was my feeling about it. Martha, do you want to show the clip?

Man 6: — in the front seat. OK.

Woman 8: Children need to know that they are beloved, and elders need to know that their lives still have meaning and purpose.

Woman 9: How about some water, guys?

Child 5: It's a place for foster and adopted people, not just, like, people that would live in a regular house.

Woman 8: We believe generations coming together makes a powerful safety net.

Woman 10: As long as I feel like I can help any of these children in any way, I really feel privileged. And that's the main reason I moved here.

Woman 11: It means so much to me to have a child in my life who trusts me. And when you see the love for some of the elders, it's very evident. There we go.

Woman 12: The children haven't always been at ease here. They've come from abuse and yet they came here with open arms.

Woman 13: You ended here or did you end here?

Child 6: Right there. Every kid here has an elder that they hang out with. "Probably just a temper tantrum," George says. He —

Woman 13: What's a temper tantrum?

Child 6: When someone gets mad and is really upset.

Child 7: Everybody is family. It's just the thing about living here, you can't live here without everybody being family. It's just how it goes. I told my friends I have like 42 grandmas, like eight grandpas.

Woman 14: Oh, look at that beautiful picture here. All right, here's a good place.

Child 8: [inaudible] Stunning.

Woman 14: Stunning. Very good. I am so proud of you. Okay. Let's go eat.

[crosstalk]

Woman 15: You can read about anything you want to now. You are doing so good.

Woman 16: The teacher actually pulled me aside yesterday and noticed improvements on both of them. I'm a grandmother who adopted four grandsons. It still is today too good to be true. The connection, knowing that, you know, you're not in it alone, you're in it together.

Child 9: 2018.

Child 10: Yeah, you're supposed to make an envelope.

Woman 16: You know, one thing I did learn, you don't have to be blood-related to be related.

Woman 17: Our purpose is to help these children have abundant, beautiful lives. And thereby, we will have abundant beautiful lives.

Katharine B. Stevens: Your film really gets to me.

Kahane Cooperman: You're not alone. You're not alone.

Katharine B. Stevens: Yeah. So, this is just — you know, each one of the — I wish we had time to show the whole thing because it's just every minute of it is so beautiful. There's a question I wanted to ask you, and we're getting questions that are, kind of, connected to this, which is — this seems like a good idea. It could read, like, how can we, kind of, do this, right? Well, seems like a good idea. So, people are asking questions about are we teaching enough in schools? Are churches and houses of worship teaching enough? You obviously don't work in schools or in houses of worship. You made a film and I'm wondering what it is you're hoping to accomplish with this. What does success look like for you and how can people who are viewers help?

Kahane Cooperman: Well, a couple of things. One is, I'm glad everyone's moved. And, you know, for us, our dream would be for this film to be shown in, like, schools all over the country, high schools, middle schools and, you know, many places as possible to get conversations like this going. One of our goals was always to be having conversations with different communities. So, even having this conversation is one of our goals, frankly. Like, we're really happy to be doing it. And it's been one of the most beautiful parts of making this film is to see how it moves people and what resonates with people.

We do have — and for people who are moved by this conversation or by seeing the film itself — social impact was always a huge part of our plan with this film. And through that, we have a website, which is www.theantidotemovie.com. And you can find out every single story, every single organization, a little more about us.

But one of the coolest things is that we partnered with volunteermatch.org. And so volunteermatch.org created a portal just for our film. So you just click on it, put in your zip code, you can also click on any specific areas of interest, and they'll tell you about organizations in your own community where you could possibly help out or contribute. So, on a practical level, we try to make it really easy for people to take that emotional thing that they're feeling, hopefully, and be able to immediately find something to do with it.

But we also hope, you know, that people who see it, that it helps them during these times take a little breath and remember who we are to each other. And, you know, our dreams, pre-COVID or that like, you know, when we dreamed of having this in movie theaters and having discussions at film festivals and that kind of thing is that, you know, our ideal would be, you know, people go into the theater one way, and they come out just with a different lens through which they are seeing their fellow humans and that it plays out some way that works for them.

But, you know, conversation, I think regarding divisiveness in this country, I think conversation is the most powerful thing we have to try to resolve them. And we hope, you know, that conversation to me is what we're looking for at minimum through this film to get

people who think they don't have anything in common to talk. I think that would be — by seeing what they do have in common. That's my how I feel.

Katharine B. Stevens: John, do you have thoughts?

John Hoffman: Well, I think part of — if you think about Kahane's comment about the flyovers and how you could just — you feel like — we wanted to suggest that you could drop in anywhere you can find these forces for good. And I genuinely believe that we could have filmed in any community in this country and found people like you meet in "THE ANTIDOTE."

And so my reason for pointing that out is that these forces for good that are in each of our communities, I hope that people pay more attention to them, that if the film can elevate their awareness, that if someone in their community had the idea to start this organization or someone is in their community had the idea that to pass an ordinance that enabled, you know, this organization to get funded, whatever it is, that is the origin story, that these are important to know what's in your own community, that is lifting others up. I mean, we haven't used that expression in this conversation.

But we use that expression all the time, that this is a film about people who choose to lift others up. And, you know, that shouldn't be noble. It should be, you know, an instinct that we have. And so just to recognize that there are people who probably aren't making a great living in their community, who every day, what they are doing is lifting somebody else up. So if the film just gives you a greater sensitivity to that, you're seeing that through that lens that Kahane's talking about, you're hearing, you know, conversation a different way about one of those forces for good in your community because you have to nurture them. We all have to nurture those forces for good in our communities.

Katharine B. Stevens: So I just got a question, which you'd addressed a minute ago, which is whether the public school system could play a role in teaching kindness. I've worked with the public schools for 10 years. And I can imagine it not being as easy as just adding kindness as a module to the curriculum. But it does seem as though Kahane, what you've mentioned, is using the film as a starting point for conversations in schools would be a wonderful idea. And I'll keep my eye out for however I can help with that. And if anyone's watching who can help with that in their own community or state, that would be fantastic. Because it's just an inspiring film that's just a wonderful — it's a wonderful experience to watch it. And I can imagine it being a wonderful — an excellent starting place for high school students to talk about what kindness means. As we've been talking about, in the abstract, kindness, it's difficult to get your head around it. It seems boring, even, right? And I think —

Kahane Cooperman: Soft.

Katharine B. Stevens: Yeah. To see it I think prompts thinking about it in a different way. So, we just have a couple of minutes left. I wanted to end with a question for each of you. I was wondering how working on this film has changed you guys personally. With the experience of doing this film, if it has changed you, what that's been.

Kahane Cooperman: For me, I have two very specific takeaways that I learned from two of our characters. The first one that, kind of, just have changed the way I navigate and perceive

my role and my possibilities, and the first one was from a story that we show that takes place in Indianapolis, Indiana. And we focus on a gentleman named Diamon Hargess who's a community organizer. He's known as the roving listener. And his job is to bring out the gifts and talents of his neighbors. And in describing to us, sort of, what he does and how he got to the point where he did, he used to knock on people's doors in the community and ask, you know, "How are you?" You know, basically, what do you need? And he would — It was very hard to have conversations like that. He learned that instead of asking people what you need, you ask them, what can you give?

And you know, whether it was he knocked on someone's door who had, you know, these beautiful gardens, and he started talking to this older woman about her gardening. Well, can you teach some of the kids in the community about gardening? That'd be great. So it's what can you give? Suddenly, she felt like a contributor. And so, it was just that pivot of not what you need, but what can you give? It's something that, you know, I just hadn't thought of it like that.

And so that really helped me. And then one other one is in our story that takes place in Amarillo, Texas, around this realization of a community college president who asks himself the question of why so many, such a huge percentage of his first-generation students, which is the majority of his students, aren't graduating ever? Like, the numbers where he asked himself why?

And he finds out by actually talking to them and listening to them. And what he expected to hear was about academic barriers. But what he learned about is that it was life barriers, that it was things like transportation, and childcare, and rent and utilities, and all of these kind of basic things. And he says, "I always thought it was someone else's responsibility to deal with that, but I realized it was Amarillo College's responsibility." And it's win-win if you can help these students to graduate. So he gets buy-in from the school community, and the community at large, in Amarillo College. And everyone is all-in on working together to do what they need to do to help all of these kids graduate in the most incredible way. And that question of whose responsibility is, it also really stuck with me. Yeah.

Katharine B. Stevens: John?

John Hoffman: Well, I see that we're essentially, you know, at the end of our time. So I think that Diamon's lesson about, you know, finding the gifts and talents of everybody that you engage with. And that's about listening. And Diamon also has this great line where he says, "Listening is a philanthropic act," you know. And so, it's just — I think that my career is dependent on my ability to listen. But I think I learned so much more about listening in the making of this film. And so I think — and the whole experience was an affirmation that you give people the ability and, you know, the respect to feel like their life is worthy, and that you want to hear about their life, and people want to share, and that all these lives turned out — every single person that you meet in this film, you know, you never would have known if you hadn't asked how much of a beautiful life there was there. So —

Katharine B. Stevens: Well, I want to thank both of you very, very much for taking the time for, well, this fabulous conversation. And I hope we can stay in touch.

Kahane Cooperman: Absolutely. Thank you so much for having us.

John Hoffman: Thank you, AEI. Thank you. We really —

Kahane Cooperman: Yeah, thanks to AEI and to you, Katherine — old colleague — and your team too. Everyone's been great to work with, and we're so happy to have this conversation.

Katharine B. Stevens: Thanks so much.

John Hoffman: All right. Bye-bye.

Kahane Cooperman: Bye.