

Announcer ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists and thinkers, fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton ([00:25](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton Show. I'm Bill Walton. Well, today I am delighted [00:00:30] to be joined by Amy Chua, who's one of my most... Words fail, actually. She's one of my favorite thinkers on the planet. I've been following Amy's career as a writer for the last, I guess, 15, 16 years. She's written fabulous books on culture, world politics, and political tribes, most importantly, really explaining, I think, perceptively [00:01:00] the various divisions in the world, and also more recently, in Political Tribes, describing the divisions that affect America today.

([01:11](#)):

Let me try holding up the book here. Anyway, Amy's most recent book... Let me complete the intro a little bit. Amy's fairly under-accomplished. She's a professor at Yale Law School. Went to Harvard and Harvard Law School. Her husband's also a professor at Yale Law School. [00:01:30] They're one of the leading charismatic figures on campus, although sometimes their views fall outside the norms at Yale, which I think is very good. Anyway, today we want to talk about her book, which is called The Golden Gate, which is being published as we speak. Has that been released?

Amy Chua ([01:48](#)):

Yeah, just out, just out.

Bill Walton ([01:48](#)):

It just came out.

Amy Chua ([01:49](#)):

Yeah.

Bill Walton ([01:50](#)):

I can't do any plot spoilers here because I've only got two thirds the way through it. Although one of our digital producers, Maureen Sullivan, behind Camera [00:02:00] 3, has finished it, and she's promised that she won't tell us how it comes out. Amy, welcome.

Amy Chua ([02:08](#)):

Thank you so much for having me.

Bill Walton ([02:10](#)):

I've had a lot of fascinating people on the show, but I think you're probably at the top of the charts in my book.

Amy Chua ([02:15](#)):

Thank you. It's really an honor. Likewise.

Bill Walton ([02:21](#)):

I do want to talk about many of your other books, but after writing nonfiction, you decided to write a novel. What [00:02:30] was the impulse?

Amy Chua ([02:32](#)):

Interestingly, I have always wanted to write a novel. I just never quite had a plot. When I was little, as you know, I am the eldest daughter of very strict Chinese immigrant parents. They were the original Tiger Parents. We were held to extremely high standards and weren't allowed to do a lot of wild socializing. So I was a huge bookworm. All I did is read all the time. I would go to the public [00:03:00] library, come back with my arms filled with books, and they were always mystery books, Agatha Christie, every single one. The way this happened... I'm still going to write nonfiction. It's not like I'm moving away for that. But I tried to write a novel when I was in my 20s when I was trying to leave my corporate law firm, it just wasn't working for me, but I just couldn't figure out a good plot. Then three years ago, I was sitting in my parents' house, they live in the San Francisco Bay Area in [00:03:30] the Claremont Hotel neighborhood, and this plot just came to me.

Bill Walton ([03:33](#)):

Where the book is set?

Amy Chua ([03:35](#)):

Where the book is set, yes. I won't give it away either. The idea was a grandmother from one of the wealthiest established families is told on page one that one of her three granddaughters is a murderer, but they don't know which one. And I have a big twist, which you haven't gotten to yet, and I won't say anything. But the whole thing kind of came to me, that structure. I was so excited. It [00:04:00] was Christmas time, so I ran to my daughters. Do you think this is a good idea? My nieces and nephews. Then finally the whole setting came together. Because I don't know if you know this, my parents currently live in Madame Chiang Kai-shek's former house. For reasons nobody knows, Madame Chiang Kai-shek lived in Berkeley, California, from 1943 to 1944, and nobody knows why. The first lady of China was living in Berkeley by herself.

Bill Walton ([04:29](#)):

Well, without giving [00:04:30] away the plot, and I won't, because this is in the first or second chapter, the book opens roughly with the murder of a political figure in the United States who'd run for president in 1940. This book is set... You've got two times, three times, I guess, 1930, 1937, and 1944. You jump between them very effectively. But in 1944, he's murdered-

Amy Chua ([04:58](#)):

Yeah, [inaudible 00:04:58].

Bill Walton ([04:58](#)):

... in the hotel. [00:05:00] His name is Walter Williamson in the book.

Amy Chua ([05:03](#)):

Wilkinson.

Bill Walton (05:04):

Wilkinson. But I grew up in Indiana, and I think you-

Amy Chua (05:06):

Yeah, you know.

Bill Walton (05:06):

... named him after Wendell Willkie.

Amy Chua (05:08):

Yes, he's based... I don't know if you knew this-

Bill Walton (05:11):

Wendell Willkie was supposed to have had a affair-

Amy Chua (05:11):

With Madame Chiang Kai-shek.

Bill Walton (05:11):

... with Madame-

Amy Chua (05:14):

Yes. I read all these biographies. I don't think that that actually happened, but they definitely were friends. They spent a lot of time together. I think she was trying to, I don't know, get him politically to deliver and to support Taiwan [00:05:30] or support her husband. I can't believe you know that. But that's who my fictional murder victim is based on. He actually died in 1944. Wendell Willkie actually died in 1944. I built this whole fictional mystery around a lot of genuine historical facts.

Bill Walton (05:50):

Well, many people think he could have won in 1944.

Amy Chua (05:53):

I know, I know. It's amazing. He came very close to FDR.

Bill Walton (05:56):

So I can't wait to find what you do to this guy in the book. I'm beginning to think... I'm [00:06:00] figuring out who knocked him off and why.

Amy Chua (06:03):

Keep guessing.

Bill Walton (06:08):

It's set in Berkeley and San Francisco, which is a world apart from today's San Francisco-

Amy Chua (06:16):

Oh my gosh.

Bill Walton (06:17):

... unfortunately, in many ways, fortunately in other ways, because you also talk about a class structure in San Francisco in the '30s, which was, if you were white and you were wealthy, the world was your oyster. [00:06:30] But if you were not white and if you're not wealthy, you were part of an underclass that just was not represented at all.

Amy Chua (06:38):

When people say, "Oh, things are just getting worse and worse," America has changed so much. There've been so many-

Bill Walton (06:44):

In good ways.

Amy Chua (06:45):

In good ways. There's so much equality. So, yes, things that would never happen today, like a million Mexican, I think, including citizens, were forcibly deported back to Mexico in 1930 [00:07:00] right after the Depression.

Bill Walton (07:01):

Is that a true...? Did that actually happen?

Amy Chua (07:03):

Yeah.

Bill Walton (07:04):

I didn't know.

Amy Chua (07:05):

The estimates vary, but this is right after the Depression, and there were no jobs, so you could understand. Of course, there was the Japanese internment in 1944. What you were referring to, Berkeley is so just off the charts progressive now, but it was the opposite in the '40s and '50s and even early '60s. They were residential covenants. So in the Berkeley Hills, where my parents [00:07:30] now live, only whites could live, and it would be on the deed. It's funny because when Madame Chiang Kai-shek wanted to buy this house, she wasn't technically allowed to because she wasn't white. The-

Bill Walton (07:41):

The banks, there were restrictions on deeds written into the deed itself that whites only.

Amy Chua (07:47):

Right. I think they still exist. But then the president of Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco was mortified. He's like, "She's the first lady of China. This is very embarrassing." So he stepped in and intervened,

[00:08:00] and she was able to live there. It's completely different now, of course. All of California, it's completely different.

Bill Walton (08:08):

Your protagonist in the book?

Amy Chua (08:11):

His name is Detective Al Sullivan. I had so much fun with him, Bill. I have always loved these kind of classic-

Bill Walton (08:20):

Me too.

Amy Chua (08:20):

... detectives of the Golden Age, like Sam Spade, Dashiell Hammett.

Bill Walton (08:25):

Marlowe?

Amy Chua (08:28):

Yeah, Philip Marlowe and Humphrey [00:08:30] Bogart. It was that kind of character. I wanted to play with that because that's kind of old-fashioned, a little clichéd. So when you meet my Detective Sullivan, at first, he seems just like that. He's a tough guy, kind of noir detective. But then you quickly learn that his mother, you mentioned class, is a poor white. She's from the Dust Bowl, an Okie.

Bill Walton (08:51):

Oklahoma.

Amy Chua (08:51):

Yeah.

Bill Walton (08:51):

She's an Okie.

Amy Chua (08:53):

Okie. Then on his other half, he is half Mexican and half Jewish, but he passes [00:09:00] for white, that he looks white. For reasons that are I think very interesting, his real name is actually Alejo Gutierrez, but he chooses to go by his mom's last name, Al Sullivan. So underneath this exterior, this kind of tough guy, there was a lot more complexity and insecurity and ambivalence. Honestly, he doesn't seem anything like me. I'm a Chinese immigrant kid, a woman, but a lot of me is in him. He's the immigrant wanting to rise. [00:09:30] There's a line in there, I don't know if you've gotten it to it yet. This doesn't give anything away. He's like, it's like the old-fashioned version of woke, "All these privileged people telling me that I can't get rich. I want to succeed. They're all communists." So I-

Bill Walton ([09:50](#)):

I think I actually underlined that.

Amy Chua ([09:51](#)):

Yes, it was one of my... It was a light touch. I didn't want this book to be political, but I-

Bill Walton ([09:58](#)):

It's not.

Amy Chua ([09:59](#)):

No, it's not. [00:10:00] It's not. It's just a big "Who done it?" But he's somebody I can really relate to.

Bill Walton ([10:06](#)):

So I don't read the book... I'm a film buff. I'm a movie guy. I've watched all the old film noir movies. I'm trying to figure out which actor you would've cast in this part from then and which one you'd cast now.

Amy Chua ([10:20](#)):

Oh my gosh. Now-

Bill Walton ([10:22](#)):

I also produced a couple of movies.

Amy Chua ([10:23](#)):

Really?

Bill Walton ([10:24](#)):

I'm trying to think about how we'd structure this. This would be a good movie.

Amy Chua ([10:28](#)):

I think it would. It's so cinematic, [00:10:30] and it's so beautiful. I think I have a line in there. My mom used to love Tyrone Power.

Bill Walton ([10:38](#)):

Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. He was gorgeous.

Amy Chua ([10:40](#)):

Yeah. I don't know. I don't know. [inaudible 00:10:46]-

Bill Walton ([10:46](#)):

I saw him a little... I think Tyrone Power was too good looking.

Amy Chua ([10:51](#)):

Yeah, exactly, a little more [inaudible 00:10:51].

Bill Walton ([10:51](#)):

I think this needs somebody a little craggier.

Amy Chua ([10:51](#)):

Exactly, exactly.

Bill Walton ([10:53](#)):

We'll have fun. Then you've got a young woman-

Amy Chua ([10:55](#)):

Miriam.

Bill Walton ([10:57](#)):

... Miriam, who I'm thinking could have been Tatum [00:11:00] O'Neal.

Amy Chua ([11:01](#)):

That's it. We are so on the same page. I loved Paper Moon. That was-

Bill Walton ([11:03](#)):

Yeah, that's it.

Amy Chua ([11:03](#)):

I-

Bill Walton ([11:03](#)):

She's straight out of that.

Amy Chua ([11:06](#)):

That is literally the person I had in my head. I just always loved that whole dynamic. I can't believe you caught that. That's really funny. I had to watch out to not make her too cutesy, but she's my favorite character in the book. I really liked her.

Bill Walton ([11:23](#)):

No, she comes across as strong and [inaudible 00:11:25]-

Amy Chua ([11:25](#)):

Good.

Bill Walton ([11:25](#)):

... emotional, helpful. She's sort of like all the kids you'd like to [00:11:30] have.

Amy Chua ([11:30](#)):

Yeah, and she's-

Bill Walton ([11:31](#)):

She's 11 years old.

Amy Chua ([11:32](#)):

Right, and she's the wage earner because her mom's a mess.

Bill Walton ([11:38](#)):

But you didn't write a political book. Now, the other part are the three beautiful daughters or the three beautiful young women, the [inaudible 00:11:46] patriarchs. Those I was trying to cast as well. That would be-

Amy Chua ([11:50](#)):

They're blonde and beautiful. There are so many, oh my gosh. But in the younger generation, I don't know [inaudible 00:11:57].

Bill Walton ([11:56](#)):

I don't know. This is almost hard to cast.

Amy Chua ([12:00](#)):

[00:12:00] Well, partly, it is hard to cast because it's a little old-fashioned. You could think of the actors from the 1940s, '50s, I think it would've been easier.

Bill Walton ([12:10](#)):

For those of us who tend to read nonfiction books, and Sarah was joking, "Here's the problem with prepping for your show." Usually, I read... I've got a lot of my favorite authors on, and they write nonfiction. So you get a nonfiction book and you can sort of get at the index and read a key chapter and pull it up on Kindle [00:12:30] and copy and paste some stuff. Look at what's in the footnotes. You can't do that with a novel.

Amy Chua ([12:38](#)):

I know. You can't look at the ending.

Bill Walton ([12:38](#)):

You can't jump ahead. So I can't wait to get back to reading the book.

Amy Chua ([12:44](#)):

Thank you.

Bill Walton ([12:46](#)):

I think it's an interesting read for people who maybe not normally read novels because it's not only a good story, a good detective tale, but it also tells you about the culture a lot in California-

Amy Chua ([12:57](#)):

And the history.



Bill Walton ([12:57](#)):

... and America and the history.

Amy Chua ([12:59](#)):

I did not know, [00:13:00] this is so ignorant, but I did not realize that with Pearl Harbor, the Japanese basically took out the US Navy. They took out all our ships. It would've taken too long to fight in the Pacific Theater to build ships on the Atlantic Coast. So almost overnight, the San Francisco Bay Area became the largest ship building center in the history of the world. That's when the Bay Area took on its appearance now because just people poured in. It's the first time that African Americans actually came [00:13:30] to the Bay Area for jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs. It's something to be really proud of. They were basically churning out a battleship every four days based on Henry Ford's new factory assembly line technique.

Bill Walton ([13:47](#)):

Henry Kaiser used Henry Ford's technique.

Amy Chua ([13:49](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. It's fascinating how they did it. We wouldn't have won the war without this. When I was little, I would see Kaiser Shipyards, Richmond Shipyards, [00:14:00] Naval, but I didn't pay attention and I didn't realize how... It was just a major center. That's when San Francisco exploded in population. It was a sleepier town before. So everything changed after that.

Bill Walton ([14:16](#)):

This is Bill Walton. This is the Bill Walton Show. I'm here with Doctor or Professor Amy Chua. I forgot in the intro that she's also known as the Tiger Mom. Maybe most famously, [00:14:30] she wrote Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother. I went through my library and was pulling out, taking a look at some of the books that you'd written. I was surprised how much of this I have underlined. It's a terrific... It's not only a great story about your struggle with your kids. Struggles is not quite the word, but I guess it was a battle.

Amy Chua ([14:56](#)):

Yes, it was a battle. It was a battle, and it was a struggle, and trying [00:15:00] to do the right thing based on immigrant values. But there's a funny line near the end. I feel like these are American values: don't give up, grit, respect for elders. But my younger daughter was very rebellious and wouldn't have it from day one. That changed my life writing that book. I was just completely unknown before that.

Bill Walton ([15:28](#)):

Well, you got very well known.

Amy Chua ([15:30](#)):

[00:15:30] Not necessarily in the best way.

Bill Walton ([15:34](#)):

Well, I want to stay with the novel. Let's stay with the novel just a bit. But I do want to go to the themes that are in the Tiger Mother book. What else was your purpose in writing this, and what else did you have woven into the plot?

Amy Chua ([15:53](#)):

Well, actually, there are a lot of parallels to today in some ways, and then there are a lot [00:16:00] of differences. I really wanted to bring alive some of these historical characters. August Vollmer is the father of American policing. He invented-

Bill Walton ([16:13](#)):

That was an actual historical character.

Amy Chua ([16:15](#)):

Yes, oh my God. He invented the lie detector and fingerprinting, everything that you see on TV in these detective shows. He just lives up the street, or he lived up the street from my parents. He was, I think, an immigrant from Austria. [00:16:30] These days, where I teach at Yale, you can't even mention police. It's actually insane. There are just very significant numbers of people really just want to defund, I mean, just get rid of the police force.

Bill Walton ([16:46](#)):

They haven't spent much time in downtown New Haven then.

Amy Chua ([16:49](#)):

Well, it's just sort of illogical. It's fun to write a historical novel because you don't have to get into the muck. [00:17:00] I'm just describing the way things were. He was an amazing historical figure. He was also very honorable. It was he who wanted to bring minorities and women into the police force for the first time. So he did that at Berkeley, just out of a sense of decency. So it was fun to kind of... Julia Morgan is maybe the most famous woman architect in America, and she lived there. She designed Hearst Castle. William [00:17:30] Randolph Hearst reached out to her. Why? She built the Campanile, not Berkeley's Campanile, that was the only one that survived the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, just engineering-wise. So Hearst said, "I want you to design my castle." It's a monument out there.

Bill Walton ([17:52](#)):

I guess the thing that's surprising, and I think you're bringing it in, I'm about two thirds of the way through, and [00:18:00] we've discovered that the Chinese laborers turn out to be Japanese laborers. Americans thought the Japanese and the Chinese looked exactly the same, I'm sure. So there was that part. Now, in the third part of the book that I haven't got to do, do some of the military political themes, the World War II themes come into the book?

Amy Chua ([18:24](#)):

A little bit.

Bill Walton ([18:25](#)):

Because you've got Madame Chiang Kai-shek. She was there lobbying on behalf of the nationalists [00:18:30] against Mao. And you've got a lot of the communists in the United States already.

Amy Chua ([18:35](#)):

Absolutely, absolutely. Well, I'm not going to give away [inaudible 00:18:39].

Bill Walton ([18:41](#)):

Okay, we'll let that go. Anyway, let me finish the plug here. Kenny, let's get this one up again. We've got Golden Gate, Amy Chua. It's a novel, and it's a terrific one. It really is evocative of a golden California in [00:19:00] that era.

Amy Chua ([19:01](#)):

Oh, the chapter about the Golden Gate Bridge going up is one of my favorites.

Sarah ([19:05](#)):

[inaudible 00:19:07].

Amy Chua ([19:08](#)):

Yeah, it was so spectacular. Before that, they thought bridges should be very rigid. But this was going to be the longest suspension bridge or whatever it was, so they used-

Bill Walton ([19:19](#)):

It's a mile long.

Amy Chua ([19:20](#)):

Yeah, over rocky shoals. So they used a new technique based on new engineering developments, flexible, a little flexible. I read all these oral histories [00:19:30] of workers hanging as they were building this thing, so there were these people up... I don't even know how many feet, hundreds of feet up. There was a small earthquake, and the bridge was not yet finished. And people swung, they thought, to their deaths, like they were just going to [inaudible 00:19:45]. They fell on the bridge like a hundred feet, and then it went back up. They all lived to... So it was just a huge engineering feat. Then the oral histories are amazing.

Bill Walton ([19:57](#)):

Wow. I guess about nine people died making the bridge.

Amy Chua ([20:00](#)):

[00:20:00] Yeah, a surprise-

Bill Walton ([20:02](#)):

Far fewer than the Empire State Building.

Amy Chua ([20:04](#)):

Yeah. I can't believe you know this. It was a relatively small death toll.

Bill Walton ([20:10](#)):

That was my point. Considering the magnitude of the effort, it was dangerousness.

Amy Chua ([20:15](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Bill Walton ([20:17](#)):

Well, it's... We may have to cut this short. I've got to go finish reading the book. [00:20:30] Control yourself then. One of the themes of your various books is the difference in the cultures, whether it's the Asian culture and their subsets within the Asian cultures and America's culture today and before, and the value systems that people have. It strikes me that one of the things that makes America so problematic right now is that the value system, Asian, white, or whatever, that built America [00:21:00] is being demonized, discredited. In fact, they had an exhibition in the Smithsonian three years ago, two years ago. I somehow got the piece of paper that described it. It was an exhibition of whiteness. Do you remember that?

Amy Chua ([21:24](#)):

I heard about it, but I did not see. Oh my God, I'm sure-

Bill Walton ([21:24](#)):

I'll pull up the description for you. But it had all the things [00:21:30] that describe whiteness that you didn't want to be. It was thrift. It was timeliness. It was family. It was faith. It was staying married. It was all these sort of things that I really see as success virtues.

Amy Chua ([21:46](#)):

Completely, completely.

Bill Walton ([21:48](#)):

The Tiger Mom book, you started with it there. These are success virtues. If you do these things, you will be happy. If you don't do these things, in my view, you're not going to be, and yet that's being demonized.

Amy Chua ([22:00](#)):

[00:22:00] Yeah, yeah. It's a really upside down time.

Bill Walton ([22:03](#)):

I think we can do this with our politics, too, I hope.

Amy Chua ([22:06](#)):

Absolutely. It's an upside down time right now. I have a student who was a Korean American. She went to West Point and served. She flew Apache helicopters in Afghanistan for six years. She came and was a Democrat. She was apolitical. In her first day of class, the 16 people went around, and there was a discussion about the American dream. Somebody said, "Oh, [00:22:30] it's based on racism. It's white supremacist." So when it came to my student, she didn't say anything controversial. She said, "Of course, I know there's a lot of terrible problems in this country. Of course, there's racism. But given that my parents had nothing and I made it to West Point, I got to Yale, and I had African American friends in the military, I do still believe in the American Dream." Bill, she was canceled. Nobody in her small group would talk to her after that, just for saying that she [00:23:00] believed in the American dream.

Bill Walton ([23:02](#)):

This was at Yale Law School?

Amy Chua ([23:03](#)):

Yes, and it's only three years ago. It's at Yale Law School. Again, she was not political. She ended up joining the Federalist Society and becoming very active. I asked her, "That's unexpected. Why? You're so not political." She said, "They're the only people who will talk to me." The same with meritocracy. I [00:23:30] just associated with America. Because if you come from countries... My parents were Chinese but from the Philippines. There's so much corruption. You're not rewarded. Yes, my first book, *World on Fire*, I coined this term "market dominant minorities" about these tiny little minorities, like the 1% Chinese minority in Philippines, or 3% Chinese minority in Indonesia, but also Indians in East Africa or the Lebanese in West [00:24:00] Africa, or whites in South Africa or Zimbabwe. I talk about how it's a very unusual thing because it's different than America. These small ethnic minorities like the Chinese in the Philippines, even though they're only 1% of the population, they control about 60% to 70% of the economy. They're just entrepreneurial.

Bill Walton ([24:18](#)):

Well, that was true in Vietnam-

Amy Chua ([24:22](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([24:22](#)):

... and that was one of the things we did not understand, we America.

Amy Chua ([24:26](#)):

You read my books so closely. It was in my most recent book, [00:24:30] nonfiction book, *Political Tribes*. People did not realize that the Vietnam War... We saw it as this big battle: capitalism versus communism. That's it. What we didn't realize is that almost all the capitalists in Vietnam at the time were all ethnic Chinese. So when America comes in and says, "We are going to support capitalism," the majority of poor, many illiterate of the Vietnamese majority saw this as basically only benefiting this tiny Chinese minority. [00:25:00] That was one of my points that we have really... Basically, our worst foreign policy disasters of the last at least 50 years stems from this kind of ignorance about the unusual or just different ethnic and racial structures that other countries have.

Bill Walton ([25:19](#)):

So we don't know anything about the countries, and yet, we bring our democracy project. I think that's another theme.

Amy Chua ([25:24](#)):

Yeah.

Bill Walton ([25:25](#)):

That our efforts, the neocon democracy project has been a catastrophe.

Amy Chua ([25:30](#)):

[00:25:30] Yeah. I predicted in World on Fire in the afterward-

Bill Walton ([25:35](#)):

20 years ago, over 23 years ago.

Amy Chua ([25:35](#)):

In the afterwards to the paperback, it was right when we invaded Iraq, and I predicted... I remember Noah Feldman said the opposite. He said, "Oh, there's not going to be ethnic conflict. The Shi'as and Sunnis will intermarry." I said, "No. There's a market dominant minority there, the roughly 14% Sunnis that are just despised by the Shi'a majority. If we think that just bringing elections to Iraq is going to lead [00:26:00] to peace and prosperity, it's not." Almost to a tee, exactly what I predicted happened.

([26:07](#)):

Once the Shi'a came to power, they were so hungry for revenge. They had been oppressed and persecuted by this little minority for centuries. So when you brought in elections, people, they didn't vote for moderate policies. They voted for "Let's confiscate, let's persecute our former overlords." Then the Sunni minorities, once they realized, "This democracy [00:26:30] thing is not going well for us," they joined the insurgency, al-Qaeda, and then later ISIS, which was a Sunni movement. So all of that, we just didn't really know about. General Petraeus was actually very nice to me. When they asked for blurbs for Political Tribes, I was so scared. They asked General McChrystal and-

Bill Walton ([26:51](#)):

Did he blurb the book?

Amy Chua ([26:52](#)):

... and Petraeus. Oh, it's for Political Tribes, that book, the one-

Bill Walton ([26:54](#)):

Oh, Political Tribes.

Amy Chua ([26:55](#)):

They were both so generous. They said, "Yes, the US made these mistakes," [00:27:00] and they both gave me a very nice blurb.

Bill Walton ([27:04](#)):

Well, if you want to be the smartest person... This is the Bill Walton Show, and I'm here with Amy Chua. We're talking about her many interesting books and how perceptive she's been and perceptive early a long time ago. So at your next cocktail party, if you're still doing cocktails, although that's not politically correct, read this book. Because what you understand from the World on Fire is how we don't understand [00:27:30] the tribal and the cultural ethnic divisions in the countries that we supposedly want to come and fix and that bringing our ideals to them forcefully through our democracy promotion efforts has been and will be a disaster.

Amy Chua ([27:48](#)):

Thank you, Bill. Yeah, it's true. I called Venezuela right, too.

Bill Walton ([27:52](#)):

I said at the outset, Amy Chua's got a new book out. I said, "My God, this is great."

Amy Chua ([27:57](#)):

[inaudible 00:27:59].

Bill Walton ([28:00](#)):

[00:28:00] I interrupted you.

Amy Chua ([28:02](#)):

Oh, no, you were right. In Venezuela. I also kind of called it right in World on Fire, that was in 2002, almost just predicted what would happen with Hugo Chávez. It's been kind of a sad vindication because a lot of these places are total messes now.

Bill Walton ([28:21](#)):

Well, yeah. I don't know. Should address this much? 45 years ago, I was a banker [00:28:30] at Continental Bank in Chicago. We ended up going on a trip to Greece with a bunch of other bankers. It was a social vacation. We were in Athens, and I said, "We really need to have a foreign policy that makes the world safe for great vacations." By that standard, we have failed utterly.

Amy Chua ([28:52](#)):

Oh my gosh.

Bill Walton ([28:52](#)):

The whole world has gone up in arms against each other, not just against Americans, but against each other.

Amy Chua ([29:00](#)):

[00:29:00] Yeah, yeah. It's a messy moment.

Bill Walton ([29:01](#)):

We need another big idea. Is your next book going to be on the big idea that we need?

Amy Chua ([29:07](#)):

First of all, I'm just hoping that the pendulum is going to swing back. I think things went so off the rails in this country. I'm an optimist despite all these problems.

Bill Walton ([29:19](#)):

Yeah, I can feel that.

Amy Chua ([29:22](#)):

There are a lot of flaws in the American system, but we have an ethnically and racially neutral constitution. [00:29:30] Our founding is based on principles, not on blood, like China or even France. These are blood-based nations. So I actually think we have the best institutions for self-correction. Admittedly, you're not really seeing this right now, but I think over time there are mechanisms. People want to get rid of the Electoral College, but that is so shortsighted. When I study developing countries, one of the things I noticed is, oh, Ecuador has had 32 constitutions [00:30:00] in the last 20 years. Sometimes it feels very frustrating, but we have lasting institutions. Sometimes it feels a little bit like nothing can happen, but it's also a form of stability. So when you hear a lot of people now saying, "Oh, we should get rid of this. Let's get rid of the Supreme Court. Let's get rid of the Electoral College," I'm always like, not politically, but just looking comparatively at the other countries I've seen, I'm like, "Let's [00:30:30] not take for granted a really impressive system that the Founders put together a long time ago."

Bill Walton ([30:39](#)):

So the principles of limited government, rule of law, not by man, they're pretty good. The problem is you can't superimpose those on cultures where people, that's not in their DNA.

Amy Chua ([30:51](#)):

Yeah, or just majority rule. What we were exporting was kind of a weird caricature of democracy. It's like, "Hey, everybody. Let's have elections," [00:31:00] including people who are very susceptible to just crazy.

Bill Walton ([31:04](#)):

Well, the Greeks had the democracy. They didn't have a republic. Evidently, in the Peloponnesian Wars, anytime a Greek general would go out and fight... I can't remember if it was either the Spartans or before that, there was another group. Anyway, anytime the generals would lose a battle, they'd hold an election in Athens, and by majority vote committed [00:31:30] that general to death. So the majority was out of control. So you take everything to a majority vote and you end up with mob rule.

Amy Chua ([31:39](#)):

Exactly. Yeah, that's exactly right. This was very apparent in developing countries. Again, my parents were Chinese but from the Philippines. Most people are very poor and not educated. I think our democracy is at least ideally a lot more than just [00:32:00] majority rule.

Bill Walton ([32:01](#)):

What are your classes that you teach at Yale? I'll start out by saying, one of your classes has a 98% recommendation from the kids that have taken it. It's the only class that comes remotely close to that.

Amy Chua ([32:13](#)):

I teach international business transactions, and I teach contracts.

Bill Walton ([32:17](#)):

Now, that sounds really boring.

Amy Chua ([32:19](#)):



They both sound boring. But I-

Bill Walton ([32:20](#)):

What's the other one? I interrupted you.

Amy Chua ([32:21](#)):

Contracts. It sounds even more boring. I do something kind of unusual. I can't believe [00:32:30] I have to do this now, and I can't believe it's unusual. But on my syllabus, I have a banner that says, "This class will seek to promote lively debate across all political backgrounds." Basically, if you take this class, you have to give people the benefit of the doubt. So if somebody says something that sounds racist or xenophobic or misogynist, if you're going to take this class, you have to civilly raise your hand and express your worries and then have the [00:33:00] other side. It's so much tenser than it used to be. But Bill, it works. I have the most diverse class, but not... I don't mean by diverse, I mean in the deepest sense.

Bill Walton ([33:09](#)):

You mean intellectually diverse.

Amy Chua ([33:10](#)):

Yes. I have very left-wing people, I have lots of minorities, but I have many record numbers of conservatives. Again, it's not as fun as it used to be. I remember when my student, J.D. Vance, was my student. We had these lively, feisty debates. His best friend was a lesbian woman at [00:33:30] the other end of the political spectrum. Then people would go up for beer afterwards. Now, there are no friendships across political lines. You can't. If you're a liberal and you talk to a member of the Federalist Society, not even agree with them, just talk to them, you will be labeled Fed Soc-adjacent and basically socially shunned-

Bill Walton ([33:51](#)):

Fed Soc-adjacent.

Amy Chua ([33:52](#)):

... adjacent and socially shunned. One of the things I used to love most about teaching is seeing cross-pollination [00:34:00] and people moving towards the middle. Like, "Let me explain." It's just so much harder now. But in my classes, yes, it's hard. It's hard. I get scared now. I don't know why I have to be so worried, but I'm like, "I'm going to air these views," and I just hold my breath. I do think my classes are a little self-selected. I think the people who really hate me or are really extreme won't take my class.

Bill Walton ([34:26](#)):

It's like Amazon book reviews in a way. The people who already like you are going to [00:34:30] read it. But the division's profound not only at Yale, but I think in all the major law schools. My background's in finance, not law. What's the principle in law of being a lawyer where both sides deserve representation? What is that called? What is-

Amy Chua ([34:52](#)):

Well, there's the adversarial system. We have the process.

Bill Walton ([34:54](#)):

Okay, the adversarial system. But aren't we reaching a point now where there's this school of thought inside Yale [00:35:00] and other law schools that the adversarial system is out the window because that other side is not worthy defending?

Amy Chua ([35:06](#)):

Yes. It's a really new development. It's a bit generational. If you ask Democrats in their 50s, age 50 and above or 40 and above, whatever their views, they largely believe in free speech, the freedom of speech. But today, the progressives, it's very generational. Many will say, "No. Free speech [00:35:30] leads to racist outcomes. It favors white supremacy. And diversity should be a higher value." My colleague that you should think about having on, Tony Kronman, he survived too. He was always a progressive, but he wrote a book called-

Bill Walton ([35:47](#)):

Tony Kronman?

Amy Chua ([35:48](#)):

Yeah. He was our former dean. He is-

Bill Walton ([35:50](#)):

C-R-O-M-A-N?

Amy Chua ([35:52](#)):

K-R-O-N-M-A-N.

Bill Walton ([35:54](#)):

What's his book called?

Amy Chua ([35:55](#)):

The Assault on American Excellence. He just straight out comes [00:36:00] out and says all these things. He's also a renaissance man. Like you, he has read everything. Unlike me, he's also a philosophy guru.

Bill Walton ([36:11](#)):

But you write a lot more books.

Amy Chua ([36:13](#)):

I don't know about that, but they're-

Bill Walton ([36:15](#)):

Anyway, continue, so The Assault on American Excellence.

Amy Chua ([36:20](#)):

The idea is there is a lot of silencing right now. My students will come to my office hours, and they are afraid. I don't get it. They are afraid to say their [00:36:30] real views. I am not talking about

controversial views. I'm talking about the most basic things that... "What?" I'm like, "What?" So now a trick I... This is the second-best solution. I assign provocative readings from all across the political spectrum, very conservative to very left wing. I ask my students in the class I'm teaching now to do one-page reaction papers. What's your response to this? Then I have these students of all political stripes share their views.

[\(36:58\)](#):

But now many students will [00:37:00] only ask me to read their views anonymously. If they're going to be honest, they want me to read them anonymously, which I do. It's actually great because you see a lot of people nodding, but nobody... Can you imagine? These are brave, the best, and they're such smart students. They are afraid to express these views. I think it was Bari Weiss who said, "Why?" I said, "It's a really good question." I asked a student, and he said, "Dating, it's dating. I [00:37:30] want to have fun, and nobody will [inaudible 00:37:33]. I don't want to have no friends whatsoever. So it's not worth it. It's not worth it."

Bill Walton [\(37:41\)](#):

One of the things I wanted... There's never enough time. We're going to have to have you back and maybe have you back on with Tony Kronman.

Amy Chua [\(37:48\)](#):

Oh, I'd love that.

Bill Walton [\(37:49\)](#):

We'd have a really interesting dialogue. Tribalism is real, I believe, and I think it explains an awful lot about why we're not successful [00:38:00] in promoting abstract principles into places where it's not going to find fertile ground. I also believe as part of tribalism, nationalism is real. You look at the experiment in the EU with Brussels and the European government and all that sort of thing, there seems to be a lot of pushback now in Europe where people want to be French or they want to be Italian or Spanish. They don't want to be European. So that's all giving rise to a populism, [00:38:30] and that brings Trump into play. You've written about, I think, in Political Tribes, you point out in 2011, which is 13 years ago, 12, whatever, close to it, over half of white Americans believe that they've replaced Blacks as the primary victim of discrimination, and it's gotten worse since then.

Amy Chua [\(38:57\)](#):

Oh my gosh. Well, just think about [00:39:00] college applications. It's just basic psychology. If you tell a group of people, "You have to just apologize. You're terrible people," whether it's whites or Asians, what do you think their reaction is going to be? Somebody's going to come along and say, "No, actually you should be proud of being white, or whites have done a lot of good things. What do you want to hear?" So it was such a mistake to make [00:39:30] this move just attacking whites. Even strategically, it was such a bad move. I have a lot of younger friends whose kids are going through the college application process now. I think-

Bill Walton [\(39:45\)](#):

I've heard you're a fabulous mentor-

Amy Chua [\(39:48\)](#):

Thank you.

Bill Walton ([39:48](#)):

... a fabulous mentor.

Amy Chua ([39:51](#)):

I enjoy it. I just enjoy students. They're so interesting, especially the ones that are feeling like [00:40:00] they can't speak or they just don't fit in. I went through a lot of rejections and failures in my life, so I'm good at helping people through those moments. I think that statistic has gotten worse. Certainly on the Yale campus, my Caucasian students, sometimes they just feel like they have a target on their back. I just spoke to one woman who felt like that.

Bill Walton ([40:29](#)):

Well, it's a pendulum [00:40:30] that's got to swing back-

Amy Chua ([40:31](#)):

It has to.

Bill Walton ([40:32](#)):

... or else it's going to lead to terrible trouble.

Amy Chua ([40:33](#)):

Well, I think it has to do with these college applications. Because I'm talking about liberal parents, just people who always wanted to be very, very progressive, but they're watching their kids who studied very hard and they have these amazing numbers who 10 years ago, 20 years ago would've gotten into great schools. So they wanted them to go to Harvard or Yale or Columbia. Yes, you can't always do that. But I am talking about Caucasian students who don't even get into [00:41:00] Vanderbilt or Georgetown. They're only getting into community college because of this. I've seen so many of my friends, they're very upset. I think, for better or for worse, that's where the pendulum's going to come back because it's not political at this point. I'm talking about people living in Connecticut. They're all Democrats, but they're outraged, and they're like, "This is not fair."

Bill Walton ([41:27](#)):

So the pendulum has to swing. I hope it swings [00:41:30] in a positive way. Maybe-

Amy Chua ([41:31](#)):

It can't go any further.

Bill Walton ([41:34](#)):

I'm looking at this pile, not pile, but this excellent lineup of books here. I'm thinking your next book needs to be on the solution.

Amy Chua ([41:43](#)):

It's tricky right now. It's tricky.

Sarah ([41:46](#)):

[inaudible 00:41:45] this book is not political [inaudible 00:41:48].

Bill Walton ([41:48](#)):

I don't know whether we can pick it up in the mic, but my wife, Sarah, is here. She has just said, "Forget the next book. [00:42:00] Read this book." I agree. I agree.

Amy Chua ([42:05](#)):

I love your wife.

Bill Walton ([42:09](#)):

Well, she reads these books. We go back and forth between a place in town and place out in Virginia, so she reads books out loud. We tried to read this, but you can't speed read out loud. We're only two thirds the way through. We need to wrap up here. I'm [00:42:30] just trying to think how to best summarize your... There are not many people like you in the Yale faculty.

Amy Chua ([42:41](#)):

No. No, I definitely feel totally like an outsider.

Bill Walton ([42:49](#)):

Well, hang in there.

Amy Chua ([42:50](#)):

Thank you.

Bill Walton ([42:50](#)):

We need you. We need you.

Amy Chua ([42:52](#)):

Thank you. On the good news front, I think there's a silent majority. Do you know when I told you, what I put on my syllabus, "We [00:43:00] are going to have lively debate. No silencing in this class"? One of my colleagues said, "You're going to get like eight people." I have the longest wait list. On top of the 60 people I admitted, I had a 100-person wait list. And this is at Yale, supposedly crazy... So I think there is a silent majority of people who actually want to be more moderate, want to be more generous, and somehow it's been hijacked by the most extreme voices. [00:43:30] I told you, I told I'm an optimist.

Bill Walton ([43:34](#)):

We need to close out here. China today, China Communist Party, it's looming. It's a problem. It's a problem for Chinese. It's a problem for us. It's a problem for the countries surrounding. What's your take on what's happening in China?

Amy Chua ([43:51](#)):

Well, I'm very sad about it. When I was little, I grew up in Indiana, like you-

Bill Walton ([43:59](#)):

West Lafayette?

Amy Chua ([43:59](#)):

West [00:44:00] Lafayette. People always say, "Was it terrible?" I was the only Asian kid in my school, the neighborhood. It wasn't terrible. Obviously, we stuck out. We had funny haircuts. I had an accent back then. But the system really worked for me. I was a hard worker. I was a great student, and people liked us. So today, ironically, because China is powerful... Back then, China was weak, so nobody was threatened [00:44:30] by China, and nobody was threatened by Asian Americans. But today, we've got this terrible situation where China is the enemy of the country. Then Asian Americans within the university system are viewed as taking all the college spots. It's not just me. My students, my Asian American students, my Chinese American students, it's a tough time for them. Also on our campus, if you try to complain about anything like, "Oh, Asian Americans are being... Elderly [00:45:00] Asians in San Francisco are being punched and kicked," if you say that, people will be, "Oh, stop complaining."

Bill Walton ([45:10](#)):

Now still that's happening?

Amy Chua ([45:12](#)):

It's less so now. During the pandemic, it was really terrible.

Bill Walton ([45:15](#)):

What's your take...? You're obviously a student of Chinese culture. Is it the Communist Party, or is it something...? It can't be the Chinese people. It's got to be what the-

Amy Chua ([45:28](#)):

You mean the country itself? Oh my gosh.

Bill Walton ([45:29](#)):

Yeah, what the Party's done, [00:45:30] what the Party's done.

Amy Chua ([45:31](#)):

It's an extreme... My students who are from China are all dismayed. Many of them are not going back, and many of people have left China just to come here. It's a cracking down. It's very different than it was even six years ago. The pandemic, the way they handled that, people were kind of locked in for a long time.

Bill Walton ([45:51](#)):

Yeah, zero COVID.

Amy Chua ([45:51](#)):

But the real answer to your question is I've kind of lost access. I went to China for the first time in 1979 with my father [00:46:00] when the country first opened up. It was a poor country. It was all communists. We were welcome back, and we wanted the country to do well. Then over the next 20

years, China just opened up. Yale had all these programs, and all my Caucasian students were learning Chinese. We have really reverted back to a time of great hostility on both sides. I've interacted with people from China. A group came to talk at Yale, and they just said, "Your media is so biased." Because remember, they don't have free press. [00:46:30] That's why it's so important that we have a free press. But what they hear is the opposite of what we hear.

Bill Walton ([46:35](#)):

Totally.

Amy Chua ([46:35](#)):

Oh my gosh.

Bill Walton ([46:36](#)):

It's totally silent. Unfortunately, we have to wrap up. Next time, I want to talk about China. I want to dig deeper. We have cultural issues here we need to resolve. We also need to resolve how we think about China, what to do about it. I think you have those answers.

Amy Chua ([46:53](#)):

I don't know about the answers.

Bill Walton ([46:56](#)):

This has been the Bill Walton Show. I've been here delightfully with [00:47:00] the famous and terrific Amy Chua. Though I'm not being instructed to hold up the book... The only reason I'm happy to be ending this show, the only reason is I get to finish reading the book right away, which I'll do this afternoon. Anyway, Amy, thanks so much.

Amy Chua ([47:20](#)):

This was so much fun.

Bill Walton ([47:21](#)):

We'll hope to have you back on. Thanks for all your work. You've made a tremendous contribution to how we understand the world, so keep it up.

Amy Chua ([47:28](#)):

Thank you so much. This was so fun.

Bill Walton ([47:30](#)):

[00:47:30] Okay, great. It's been the Bill Walton Show. I hope you've enjoyed it. I think we've had another wide-ranging and hopefully penetrating, insightful conversation about culture and political tribes and Yale Law School and what's going on there. Anyway, I hope you'll join us again next time. As you know, we're on all the major podcast platforms, and YouTube and Rumble. We're on Substack. We'll see you back now on Monday nights. Send us your comments to the billwaltonshow.com [00:48:00] and also on Substack. We'll take them into our process and hopefully respond in something you'll like in the future. Anyway, thanks for joining, and we'll be back with you soon.

[\(48:16\)](#):

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