

Pittsburgh is subject to the same racial, socio-economic stresses that are seen across the country. I don't know if we are more or less polarized than other areas. But clearly there is polarity, and it is being exacerbated and freed up by rhetoric, and that is never a good thing.

The core challenge is to recognize that other people have an equal claim to life. What this polarization and rhetoric says is that we have unequal claims to life. That's dangerous. It's unacceptable to denigrate the claims of others, say they have no status, or not recognize that they cohabitate this world.

Learning to live is learning to live with others. Giving equal claim to others in your community is a leveler—it allows “I” to change to “we.”

I think Pittsburgh is trying to honestly deal with these issues, which is not to say they're resolved. We're trying to figure out how to hear other voices to make this a better city.

City of Asylum tries to bring people together in imagining the future through creative expression and opening themselves up to others and the unexpected.

Our programs are free. Our artists are diverse, global voices, but also those we consider underrepresented voices. We're building a diverse audience. The stories told are often by artists who've dealt with threats, censorship and injustice. They're engaging moments that in a very personal way reinforce the value of a society that allows creative expression and freedom.

One key thing is getting people into the same space to share such experiences with others unlike themselves. I think that may be one of the most enlightening experiences you can have: a vivid recognition that we all share a stake in the future; that we exist in a world where people differ and we can do so without animosity; and that we may be on the right-hand side or the left-hand side of the boat, but we're rowing together.

— Interviewed by Jeffery Fraser

ROW TOGETHER

> **R. Henry Reese**

CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF CITY OF ASYLUM PITTSBURGH

