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**Geoff Norcross:** *Welcome to Think Out Loud on OPB. I'm Geoff Norcross in for Dave Miller. So I was digging into the New York Times on Sunday, flipping through the front page and right there on page A-7 was a whole page ad about my city. It begins with 'This is Portland' and then it goes on to say that yeah, things are a little crazy in the city right now, but this is who we are. It's good and you should come visit. Travel Portland spent over \$100,000 on that ad in the New York Times and three other major newspapers. It's the first part of a months-long campaign to encourage folks to come visit and today we're going to dig into the campaign, what it says and what it doesn't say and the larger effort to rehabilitate Portland's reputation. We're talking with Lisa Bates, Associate Professor of Urban Studies and Planning at Portland State, Alex Zielinski, news editor with the Portland Mercury and Amy Lewin, Vice President of Strategic Communications for the Portland Business Alliance. Welcome all of you. It's good to have you.*

**Lisa Bates:** Thank you. It's great to be here.

**Geoff Norcross:** *I think I should read this whole thing. It's not too long, but I should get it out there just so we can know what we're talking about and then I'll ask questions of all of you. So here's the text. "This is Portland. You've heard a lot about us lately. It's been a while since you've heard from us. Some of what you've heard about Portland is true. Some is not. What matters most is that we're true to ourselves. There's a river that cuts through the middle of our town. It divides the east and west, but it's bridged over and over again, 12 times to be specific. And that's kind of a great metaphor for this city. We're a place of dualities that are never polarities, two sides to the same coin that keeps landing right on its edge. Anything can happen.*

*We like it this way. This is the kind of place where new ideas are welcome, whether they're creative, cutting edge or curious, at first glance. You can speak up here, you can be yourself here. We have some of the loudest voices on the West Coast. And yes, passion pushes the volume all the way up. We've always been like this. We wouldn't have it any other way. We have faith in the future. We're building it every day. The only way we know how, by being Portland. Come see for yourself. Love, Portland. Okay, there's a lot there. But I would like to ask everybody around the table what your first thoughts were when you first read that. Lisa Bates, let's start with you.*

**Lisa Bates:** Well, like yourself, I saw this in the physical paper on Sunday. Read it out loud several times to the household and honestly, I felt a little bit confused. Who is the we? Who was the you? I don't have a lot of clarity about the intentions, but it felt like a pivot in some ways away from some of the, not just 2020, but over the past several years reckonings that we've been doing in Portland with understanding that there are actually multiple 'we's' who have experienced the history and experience current Portland very differently, into a little bit more of that glossed over Portlandia vision, which, I guess it's a tourism ad. So perhaps I shouldn't be surprised by that.

**Geoff Norcross:** *Perhaps, and there's a video that is very Portlandia and we'll get into that as well. Amy Lewin, what were your first thoughts when you read the ad?*

**Amy Lewin:** Well, you know, I actually had a link to the video before I saw the ad in the paper. I saw on Twitter folks were posting and noticed in my inbox a link to the video and part of my work this year has been to try to contextualize what's happened as we have been a community reckoning with a lot of different challenges and it's been a hard year. And I think if you are the tourism agency for Portland, which Travel

Portland is, they're not Portland's PR agency, they're not in charge of the Portland brand. They are in charge of encouraging people to be here and to come and visit. And it's what I saw in this is something that was articulating all the different moments we've had in how we talk about Portland, what it means to be in Portland, why we all chose to be in this place, live here, call this place home. And I think at the end of the day it started a conversation, which I actually really appreciate, because I think we have the luxury of this moment in June 2021 to be having a real conversation about what is Portland, what does Portland wannabe? How does Portland want to be better? How do we become a city that recovers where there's no spin, but we're really authentically talking about all those pieces and I think this ad, though it's not a campaign, is a moment to start the conversation. I think it connected me to some of the work that I've been trying to articulate with teams across the city this past year

**Geoff Norcross:** *Alex Zielinski, first impressions from you.*

**Alex Zielinski:** Like you and Lisa, I saw this for the first time in print, taking up an entire full page in the New York Times and I think I was struck mostly by the term around polarities and dualities and the way it was talking about the city that is divided by a river, but not really divided. And it just seemed for me, as someone who follows city politics pretty closely and the news it seemed to vary in contrast with what we as a city, had just seen in the previous week, which was: 50 members of the Portland Police Bureau's Rapid Response Team, which responds to protests, stepping down, kind of in protest, to one of their officers being indicted for assaulting a member of the public during a protest. And that paired with the alarming kind of homeless crisis in Portland, the affordable housing crisis, these issues that are really divisive and have divided neighborhoods and I know that's not what a tourism agency hopes to bring into the conversation, but it felt, in contrast with the city that I live in, in some ways, not that we should embrace being divided, but there are real polarities here that I feel like are worth making space for.

**Geoff Norcross:** *And you Alex, have been covering the protest for racial justice from the start and you have seen those polarities manifest themselves sometimes violently at times. I'm wondering how you feel about that line and whether it even really tells the truth about life in the city right now.*

**Alex Zielinski:** I do think that there's nuance to all these conversations that are going on right now and the conversations that were sparked by this ad campaign around the city's recovery and kind of where we're at. But it does seem to try to be kind of hastily repairing the clear division that was on the front page of the New York Times from Portland this year and on national TV. And people- the nation- is was very aware of what Portland has looked like this past 18 months or so. And I think, watering that down to us being passionate and that we can get really loud- I don't know if that's enough to categorize where things are right now as a city and where things have been.

**Geoff Norcross:** *Amy Lewin, you said, you don't look at this as a campaign, you look at it as a moment. But Travel Portland is using this effort, whatever you want to call it, to try to get people to come back and to stay in our hotels and in our short term rentals. Do you think it will be successful?*

**Amy Lewin:** Let's be honest, tourism keeps us as a city going in so many ways, right? It's critical to economic recovery and June, July, and August are beautiful times to come visit Portland. We've got to start the conversation and to be boldly trying to do that in earnest at this moment is the right moment to do that. And

if you think about the impact to the hospitality industry this year, it's massive. 10,000 people lost their jobs this year in the hospitality industry. The visitor's spend in our economy is massive. And if you think about that in the sense of when someone comes to Portland, they're shopping at a small local boutique, they're getting cute clothes, fun food, eating out, wines and accessories. Like there's this coming to Portland moment that we still need as we navigate recovery. And I was thinking about this in the sense of whatever challenges our city is facing- and there are a multitude of challenges, we've got to start somewhere. And part of that is just stitching together what it is to be here in Portland and how do we start the conversation learning why we love Portland again.