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**Jonathan Groubert:** From Amsterdam, This is Bright Minds, the podcast from the John Adams Institute. A treasure trove of the best and the brightest of American thinking. I'm Jonathan Groubert, and this week's guest is former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and she is a woman with a warning.

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**Madeleine Albright:** Truth, without respect for truth. There would be no civilization. It is also fascism as most potent enemy. So we should be worried today that in many parts of the globe, we are witnessing a concerted and intentional assault on the truth.

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**Jonathan Groubert:** As Bill Clinton's chief diplomat, Madeleine Albright, knows a lot about who is and who is not telling the truth on the world stage today, and she names names in her book: *Fascism: A warning* (2018). This is a recording of her 2018 appearance, and it is her fifth time at the John Adams Institute. Now, later on in the show, she is joined by former Dutch foreign minister and current EU VP Frans Timmermans. Probably one of the most articulate and outspoken politicians around these days. And when the two of them get together, what emerges is the kind of spirited conversation you don't normally hear from politicians. So here is Madeleine Albright.

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**Madeleine Albright:** Thank you very much. It's wonderful to be back here a fifth time and to have a chance to talk to you, and not long ago I was coming back from China and Chicago is the first port of entry. And I was there getting undressed for the security people, and I put my stuff down on the conveyor belt and the lady behind me said: "So where did you get all those screw top bottles?" My bottles all leak, and I said; "Well, I got them at the store, the Container Store." And then I started going towards the magnetometer, and the TSA guard looked at me and said; "Oh my God, it's you," He said, "I'm from Bosnia and we all love you in Bosnia. And if it weren't for you, there wouldn't be a Bosnia. And you're welcome in Bosnia. And can I have my picture taken with you?" So we have our picture taken that screws up the whole line. I go back. And the lady of the screw top bottle says; "So what exactly happened here?" And I said, "Well, I used to be secretary of state," and she said; "of Bosnia?" So.

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**Madeleine Albright:** thank you.

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**Madeleine Albright:** I am delighted to be here, and people ask me why I continue to write books. And my answer is that I love Dutch hospitality and it really being here the fifth time, I think has proven it, and I have enjoyed every minute. I want to thank the institute's director, Tracy Metz, for having me and congratulate everyone connected with this event. And I also want to give a shout out to your acting mayor Jozias van Aartsen. Jozias and I became friends back in the Stone Age when I was U.S. secretary of state, and he was the country's foreign minister. And at the time we saw eye to eye on most issues and we still do. In fact, we are both charter members of a group that I formed of former foreign ministers, and we meet a couple of times a year and talk about pressing issues. The official name of the group is the

Aspen Foreign Ministers Group. The unofficial name is; Madeline and her exes. We just had a meeting, actually in Versailles, and we concluded this time that the world is a mess. That's a diplomatic term of art. So, I look forward to tonight both having that discussion with all of you and with the very distinguished first vice president of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans. Because I can think of no better place to talk about the dangers of fascism than an institute dedicated to the power of ideas, named for a man, John Adams, who stood against tyranny.

I'll begin with a simple word that we sometimes take for granted: Truth. Without respect for truth, there would be no civilization. And that's why even the very first law codes in the ancient Babylonia included penalties for perjury and bearing false witness. Truth-telling is the basis of social compacts and business agreements. It's the key to honorable relations between people and nations. It's essential to prove a point, educate a child or provide the foundation for a government of, by and for the people. It is also fascism's most potent enemy. So we should be worried today that in many parts of the globe, we are witnessing a concerted and intentional assault on the truth. For example, we need look no further than Russia's unwillingness to accept responsibility for the shoot down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17. Last month, the investigators into that tragedy, for the first time, drew a direct link between the missile that destroyed the civilian plane, and the specific active-duty Russian military unit. We had already learned that the rocket was fired by a Russian launcher from territory in Ukraine, that was controlled by Russian backed forces, and that it killed 298 innocent people. More than half of whom were Dutch. Since that terrible day, the Earth has circled the Sun four times, and yet the Kremlin still denies what the whole world knows. Instead, it has made up stories and tried to blame others.

Moscow's failure to apologize or admit what happened is outrageous, and what is worse is part of a larger pattern. Russia, under Vladimir Putin has lied about Crimea, lied about Ukraine and lied about Syria, where it is helping the Assad regime to cover up horrific crimes. It has also lied about its blatant attempts to disrupt the democratic political process in multiple countries in Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the United States. But Russia is far from the sole culprit. Today, in too many countries, respect for truth and for democratic institutions and values is under relentless attack. It seems as if almost every month there's a new sham election extending the tenure of an autocrat as president or prime minister. Just this year, it has happened in Hungary, Egypt and Venezuela, as well as Russia. And this past week, Turkish voters gave a victory to its increasingly heavy-handed ruling party and its leader, Erdogan. In Europe, as this audience well knows, extreme nationalist movements are storming the barricades. Shifting the terms of debate, moving its legislatures and grabbing for themselves a larger slice of power. In Germany, nativists are now the principal opposition party and are in a more prominent position than at any time since World War Two. The entire continent is wrestling with questions of identity, ethnic and religious pluralism, hate speech, the consequences of modern technology and competition between larger and smaller powers.

To most of these questions, there are no easy answers. But democracy demands that they be addressed through free and open debate, in accordance with the rule of law. And common sense suggests the democratic governments in all sectors of Europe, and on

both sides of the Atlantic, have a huge stake in working together on behalf of shared interests and ideals. But as I write in my new book 'Fascism a warning' the United States is playing a different role now than it has in the past. Instead of seeking to unify the democratic community, the message being broadcast from the White House is; every country for itself. We have a tradition in America that when traveling abroad, citizens should not engage in blunt criticism of our president, especially if the person was a former high-level official and as a former secretary of state, I will try to abide by that tradition. But today is, as in my book, I will emphasize what I am for and then you can draw your own conclusions.

To begin with, I believe that the world needs leaders who will bring people together instead of driving them apart. I believe in a free press dedicated to the pursuit of truth in all its aspects, because the truth can never be an enemy to an honest man. I believe that public discourse should be civil. That doesn't mean dull, but it does mean treating other people with respect, listening carefully instead of just talking incessantly and making decisions based on reason. Bearing in mind John Adams statement that facts are stubborn things. I also believe the Democratic leaders should help and support one another instead of reserving their warmest words for dictators and the world's leading abusers of personal dignity and human rights. I believe in multilateral cooperation to address global problems, including climate change, nuclear non-proliferation, terrorism, Middle East peace, and free, fair and open system of trade. Finally, I believe in the ongoing value of a transatlantic partnership. As a little girl, I saw what happens when good and decent people fail to unite in the face of demagogues. In that era, the Netherlands was among the countries that paid a terrible price. Hitler was unique, but his tactics and the circumstances that allowed him to gain power have parallels in our day.

Then, as now, there are politicians who propagate conspiracy theories designed to nurture, hate and fear among average citizens who encourage followers to lash out at people who differ from themselves and who promise simple solutions to hard problems, through their oppression and degradation of others. Then, as now, there are leaders who seek to monopolize authority by rewriting constitutions, co-opting the courts, weakening legislatures and equating dissent with treason. Then, as now, there are leaders who want us to believe that greatness is defined by spectacle, not character. That honor is irrelevant, and that winning means not having to answer any questions. The Italian Holocaust Survivor Primo Levi wrote that, and I quote: "Every age has its own fascism." And I'm not comparing anyone to Hitler, and I'm not saying that Third Reich is coming back, but we are in the presence of echoes and shadows. We can't afford to be complacent. We must draw a line between legitimate debate and efforts to augment power, by chipping away at the foundations of democracy. We must understand that the danger that we're in and we need to act.

In the United States, we have a slogan that has been drilled into us in relation to the fight against terror. If we see some things, such as an unintended suitcase or backpack, we should say something. When I look around the world today, I am disturbed by much of what I see. So, I've added a third element to the slogan See something, say something. And what I've added is; do something. And that is why I wrote this book as a warning, because tonight

there is an urgent need for people on both sides of the Atlantic to stand together and vow that we will not allow the peddlers of hate to shape our future. We will not allow them to turn us against one another or to treat our neighbors with contempt. We will not allow them to hijack the institutions that ensure our freedom and define our democracies. We will not abandon all that we have gained through decades of shared sacrifice. We will not remain silent as they strive to drain the meaning from words and to convince us that up is down, wrong is right, and truth is whatever they claim it to be. Instead, in every country, from all parts of the political spectrum, we have to insist on the integrity of our own minds, the importance of democratic values, the rights of the majority and minorities and the dignity of every human being. Because of with those beliefs that support us, I'm convinced that there is no threat before us against which we cannot prevail if we heed the warning and if we act in time. So, thank you and I now look forward to our discussion very much and to answering your questions. And since I'm no longer in the government, I'll be able to answer your questions.

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**Jonathan Groubert:** And with that, Secretary Albright left the podium and seated herself next to Dutch journalist Juurd Eijvoogel of the newspaper NRC Handelsblad for a conversation about the things she used to not be allowed to talk about.

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**Juurd Eijvoogel:** Well, that's already a very strong opening statement that we, we have something to chew on. When did you first start thinking about writing a book on fascism and making it a warning?

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**Madeleine Albright:** Well, I think, I did begin thinking about this three or four years ago, and I was planning to write it no matter who won the election in the United States because, I was seeing certain things that really upset me and I was seeing a lot of things in Europe also in terms of divisions in society. Some of the aspects of a leader identifying with one group, a tribal group of some kind, in order to limit the expression that was possible by those that they were disagreed with.

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**Juurd Eijvoogel:** And so, it's about something that's happening, a movement that's happening in many countries. It's not just about the United States. It's not maybe not even just about the United States and Europe. It's more about more.

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**Madeleine Albright:** It's all over the place, frankly, and I think that, I have to say that I was very disturbed by what was happening in Europe, as you described. I am kind of the epitome, I've decided, of the European-American relationship. And having been born in Czechoslovakia and having been somebody that celebrated, and perhaps was too euphoric, about what was happening at the end of the Cold War, all of a sudden I thought, what is happening? And I watched Hungary, for instance. But then also this is happening in the Philippines and in Venezuela and other places. Those are the countries that I've been writing about.

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**Juurd Eijssvoegel:** When you yourself were a student in America, did you ever think that the phenomenon of fascism might come back? or did you think it had disappeared?

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**Madeleine Albright:** I thought it had disappeared, and I really, there had been a war. It had been defeated. I think people saw what was going on. And so, yes, I thought it had been defeated.

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**Juurd Eijssvoegel:** And then after the fall of the wall, maybe the end of the Cold War, you were confirmed in that idea?

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**Madeleine Albright:** Very much so. And it was interesting because there was a sense of euphoria. By the way, I did a survey of all of Europe at the time in 1991 and really very strong attitudes survey. And what was interesting was especially in central and Eastern Europe. There were people who said they wanted to be Europeans. They felt that they had been kept from doing that. What was interesting, though, when I go back and I look at those statistics, there were certain hints of what we're going, what was going on, and there's certain things I really do remember. One of the questions that we asked was: 'Is there a piece of your country in the neighboring country?' And I will never forget Hungarian's, 80 percent Hungarians thought that there was a piece of their country in the neighboring country. And then something else that kind of stood out. We did focus groups, in addition to questionnaires. And I'll never forget a focus group outside of Moscow where this man stood up and said: I'm so embarrassed. We used to be a superpower, and now we're Bangladesh with missiles.

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**Juurd Eijssvoegel:** Worrying yeah. You were very forceful a minute ago about the danger, as you call it, that we see from this authoritarian the threats of fascism looming. Do you expect there to be a sort of a movement that turns into a revolution? Or is it more step by step sliding down a slope?

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**Madeleine Albright:** I think more than sliding down a slope. The best quote in my book comes from Mussolini, and he said that if you pluck a chicken one feather at a time, the chicken doesn't notice and the people don't notice. And I am calling out the feather plucking, not easy words to say together. And so, I think that it is important to point out that it's a slide, and some of it has to do with trying to figure out what the economic situation is, what to do about groups that want a certain amount of different things that are out there. Because to go back to your first question, there are problems in our society. There's no question. Some of it does have to do with technology and employment. Obviously, the immigration, I don't call it a crisis or an emergency, it is what the world is at this point. So there are things that need to be dealt with, but the way that they're dealt with are the feathers. And so I think that's and that's why this book at the end of the book, I say some people will say it's alarmist. I mean it to be alarmist because it's that slide that worries me.

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**Juurd Eijvoogel:** And it's that assault on democratic values on our system that we have lived in that the United States has created. For a large part, is it not too late?

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**Madeleine Albright:** Well, you know, I'm often asked if I'm an optimist or a Pessimist, I say I'm an optimist who worries a lot. And I do think one of the reasons that I wanted to write all these things down and say what I'm for is because I do worry about it and I and the other thing that worries me is that a term we're using in the United States is that we're normalizing this. That this may be the way people need to behave in the 21st century and technology, or that we should just wait it out. And I think that's what makes me, that's what makes me worry. I do think and I have a paradoxical statement in my book, and I admit that, I say democracies very resilient. But I'm also worried that people take democracy for granted. And when we came to the United States, by the way, my father was, as I said, a Czechoslovak diplomat. We spent the war in England with the government in exile. And then he came back to Czechoslovakia, was made ambassador to Yugoslavia, and then his last assignment was to be the Czechoslovak representative on a new commission of the U.N. to do with India and Pakistan over Kashmir. The communists took over. He didn't want to work for them, came to the United States. He defected and asked for political asylum. And so, what he said when we came, when he came to the United States, and I know this is not a nice statement about the British, but what happened was, he'd say, when we were in England, people were very kind. They would say things like, "We're so sorry, your country's been taken over by a terrible dictator. You're welcome here. What can we do to help you and when are you going home?" When we came to the United States, people said, "We're so sorry your country has been taken over by a terrible system. You're welcome here. What can we do to help you and when will you become a citizen?" And my father said, "That is what made America a really unique country." But the other thing he said. And we, he was a professor at the University of Denver, and he said; "There's nothing better than being a professor in a free country." But he said, "I am very concerned that Americans take their democracy for granted." And that's what we can't do. And that's what other democracies can't do, which is why normalization, or sitting it out, is not the best idea.

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**Juurd Eijsvogel:** Good, Well, the right questions. I love to bring Frans Timmermans now on the stage. You all know Frans Timmermans, of course, long time diplomat, member of Parliament for many years for, courageous reader, as we all know who follow him in tweets and interviews. Undersecretary for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And now in the thick of things in Europe, hammering out decisions of the European Union. Frans Timmermans, Welcome.

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**Frans Timmermans:** Thank you very much, thank you. thank you very much for this, for this kind introduction, I just want to say hello to a number of friends here, especially the mayor of this great city, Jozias van Aartsen, who I have to tell you, is arguably the last male mayor of the City of Amsterdam. And one of my predecessors as European commissioner, Frits Bolkestein, former leader of the Liberal Party in this country and someone who has shaped

this country, in more ways than people sometimes think, and I'm really very honored by his presence here tonight.

You were saying something about your travels to the United States, I have one experience many years ago when I worked at the OSCE on human rights and I had an appointment at the State Department to talk about, actually Macedonia, where we now have finally an agreement on the name of the country. And when I left the office to go back to Europe, the official said, who was very knowledgeable about Macedonia, said to me; "Safe travels back to Brussels." And I said to him, "Well, I'm going back to the Netherlands, and that's Amsterdam." And he looked at me and he paused for a second and he said, "Well, don't worry about it. I always get my Scandinavian countries mixed up." So, you know, it's, that's the State Department like the Foreign Ministry, you specialize in certain countries and you don't always see the broader picture. But that's why you have secretaries of state.

I wanted to say a few things very briefly about this wonderful book, and I would I would encourage all of you to read it. People like myself have been struggling for so many years. How can we alert our constituents to the risks of what is happening in society? When we see parallels with, let's say, the 1910s before the First World War, when we sleepwalked into this World War. Or the 1920s 1930s, because in the Netherlands and in other European countries, as soon as you mentioned a parallel with those times, you were sort of excluded from the debate, because you were scare mongering. It's completely different. You should allude to that. And I think we in politics, we have never overcome that problem. So, we're always afraid to mention parallels, even if the parallels are blatantly clear. So, what is the value of your book? The value of your book is that you don't sort of rub people's noses in the parallels. You just describe the situation as it was, and is, in autocratic or totalitarian countries and you leave it up to your audience, the readers, to draw their own conclusions and to see the parallels. So, so it's, I think it's a, it's a non-paternalistic way of being pedagogical, I would say. And that is what I love most about this book, and I would really encourage you to read it. You know, fascism is not something that came from Mars and sort of infected humanity. It is part of the evil that resides in all of us so that we need to keep under control. Culture is the process of collectively controlling our most powerful negative urges and to create a society where we mobilize positive dynamics. And I want to end and on this today again. I don't want to sound like Yoda, but I almost do, you know, fear is the greatest commodity in politics. Fear leads to hate, and hate leads to the dark side. Here's Yoda. But it actually does, because it is the fear of people that allows them to dehumanize other people who are suffering and just don't allow them to have the same human treatment as they expect for themselves. And it's the fear that's driving nationalist politics. Francois Mitterrand said: "A patriot is someone who loves this country, A nationalist is someone who hates other countries." And this hatred is always necessary in nationalism. You need to have an enemy, otherwise it doesn't work. You know, once you create an enemy as the driving force of fear, the enemy needs to be worse and worse and worse for it to keep working. It's like, you know, salt on chips. If you don't, every time you like salt on chips, you need to put more salt on chips for the sake to get the same effect. And that's how nationalism works as well. So that is why I believe the message given to tonight by Madeleine Albright is a message we should all heed, we should all listen to, and we should all act upon. Thank you very much.

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**Juurd Eijvoogel:** Thank you very much. Frans Timmermans. Generations of politicians maybe underestimated the weakness of the relation?

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**Madeleine Albright:** Well, I think they have. I mean, there's been a question I have always said we wanted a strong European Union. I do think that when you're sitting in Washington or someplace and you read about Brussels, I know where it is. Is there questions, like what are they doing? I know people also think that when they look at our Congress. But there is this kind of sense that there are a bunch of people in Brussels, and are they really talking on behalf of the people in the countries? What kind of an operation really is it? But I know that Europeans can certainly say that about what's going on in our Congress also.

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**Juurd Eijvoogel:** Frans Timmermans you were very much involved with rule of law matters and democracy in parts of Europe and certain countries. The values that we're sort of the core values of what we call the West, do you feel supported there by our American ally, when you're in Poland and Hungary?

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**Frans Timmermans:** Until recently, yes. The issue now is that, if you redefined foreign relations as purely based on power and interests detached from values. Then, of course, you don't care what sort of regime there is in another country. As long as that country takes your interests into account, you make a deal with that country. I'm trying to, and it's quite difficult, but I'm trying to enter into the head of the president of the United States when he's when he's arguably developing that, that doctrine. But if we, as Americans and Europeans, do not start from our values when we project our international influence, what the hell is it for? Is it just for power? Others will be better at that, autocrats will be better at that. And what Secretary Albright was saying earlier, we have a huge difficulty in cornering the phenomenon with words. We haven't really found the right words. They don't really match what is happening. But what I see is a redefinition of democracy. If you look at Europe, democracy since the Second World War was always based on a tripod: democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights. And you could not instrumentalized one against the other because that was our historic experience. Hitler came to power through democratic means. There was not one law in Germany, not even the racial laws that were written, that were not legally sound. They were in blatant violation of fundamental rights. But legally, they were sound. When I used to advocate human rights, when Europe was still divided, the arguments I got when I made the argument that there should be free elections. The argument I got back was; our constitution says we shouldn't do this, so it's the law. So, they instrumentalized a law against democracy. Now what we see in Hungary and Poland is the instrumentalized democracy against the rule of law and human rights, saying we... it's in the universe of populists. It's to say we won the election. We're the only ones who know what the people want. So anybody who disagrees with us is an enemy of the people and should be excluded from political process. And so judges should do what we say. The press should be writing what we say. Anybody who doesn't do that is an enemy of the people. Now the problem in a democracy, if you go down that path, and sadly, some member states are going down that path, that then the idea of losing an election becomes an existential issue because you know



that if you lose the election, you will be treated by the new majority the way you have been treating the minority now. And therefore, you then say: the end justifies every means I can use to stay in power. And that's the end of democracy, frankly, as we know it.

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**Juurd Eijvoogel:** And America used to stand for these principles, and doesn't anymore?

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**Madeleine Albright:** Well, I think that there has really been a sense that we have stood for this principles. And I think what's very interesting is when President Carter decided that human rights and defending human rights was in the national interest. There were some people who thought it was kind of wishy washy. But if one saw it, it really did make sense. In so many ways, I think the problem, and I am a professor and I think the hard part is sometimes explaining inconsistencies in foreign policy. So, during the Cold War, there's no question that the US made alliances with some pretty nasty people. And the question is always why would we have done that? And some of it was because we needed, in our national interest, there was a division there. I think, however, our stronger role in the US is to have friends with similar ideas on the value system because ultimately the rule of law and freedom of the press and human rights is what makes the country functional. But it's harder than it looks, and I think that part of the problem is, you know, you ask, is the US doing the right? When the president of the United States goes and puts his arm around a leader of Poland that is in fact deciding things in terms of making sure that the judiciary no longer has the role it's supposed to do. That is not exactly the way I see things. Now, is this, Let's say that one of the reasons might be is that we have to defend Poland against the Russians. That isn't what's going on. So, it's hard to figure out what the rationalization is for the behavior. But the main thing I do think a point that has to be made; democracy is majority rule and minority rights. And the term that Orban has come up with over illiberal democracy sounds like an oxymoron to me, but it is basically only about a majority rule. And the point you made, point out why that is definitely not the kind of value system that we all need to cherish.

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**Madeleine Albright:** I can't tell you how much I appreciate the fact that you are all here, that you're interested enough in this to listen. Thank you very, very much for your presence.

00:33:07

**Jonathan Groubert:** The mighty team of former American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, along with former Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans at the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ in 2018. Also thank you to this event's co-producer. The European Commission.

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called Love Prince Out by the Parlano's. Our editor is Tracy Metz. From Amsterdam. This was Bright Minds, the podcast from the John Adams Institute. I'm Jonathan Groubert. Thank you for listening.