CARNEGIE COUNCIL

The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics

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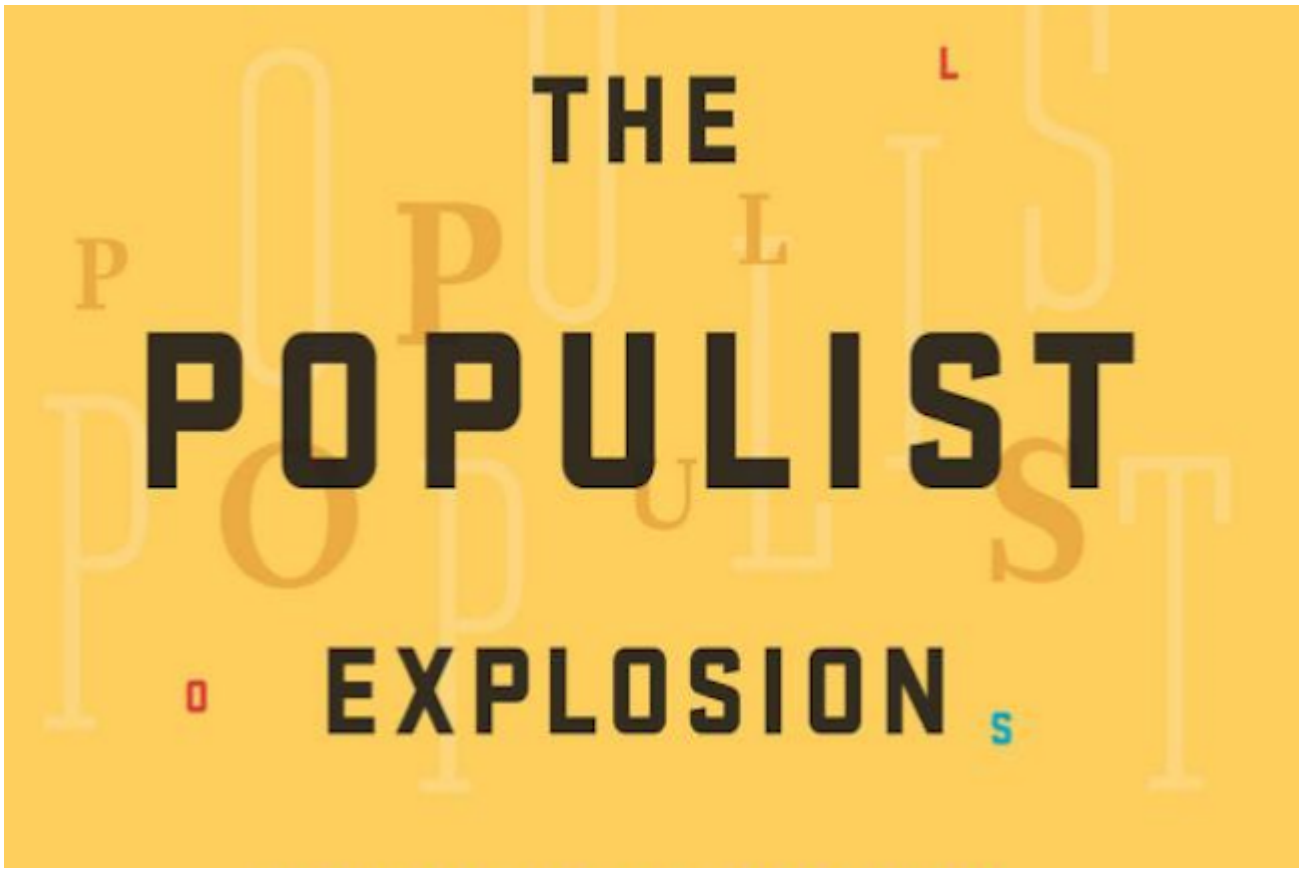

Detail from book cover

John B. Judis, Joanne J. Myers

Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good evening, everyone. I'm Joanne Myers, director of Public Affairs programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to thank you all for joining us.

Our guest this evening is John Judis, and he is often described as "one of America's best political journalists." We would be pleased to welcome him here at any time, but his presence tonight is especially fitting, given how many of us are still trying to process the results of the November election.

Mr. Judis is the author of The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics. This book is the basis for our discussion and should provide the historical and political clarity needed for us to understand what is happening here and in Europe. The New York Times has cited this book as one of the six books to help understand Trump's win, and Bloomberg News has cited it as one of the best books of 2016.

In the next half-hour or so, John and I will have a discussion about the "populist explosion" that is sweeping the globe. Then I will open the floor to questions that you may have.

Discussion

JOANNE MYERS: John, in trying to comprehend the appeal of the Trump presidency, more often than not you hear the word "populist" being used. So it seems to me the mega-question is, what is populism?

JOHN JUDIS: I'll give you a somewhat long answer that will twist around a little, but just bear with me.

First of all, people get confused because they think of political terms like scientific terms, as if you're talking about gravity or some chemical compound. But political terms like "liberal," "conservative," and "populist" don't have specific definitions. There is no exclusive set of characteristics that will tell you what is or isn't a populist. Putin has been described as a populist; Reagan; Jack Kemp was described as a populist. A lot of times it is used as a synonym for "popular," in Europe for "demagoguery."

What I'm talking about in the book, and I think a useful way of understanding it because it helps explain our politics today, is a political tradition that starts in the United States in the 1880s and 1890s—and that is where the word itself comes from—migrates to Europe sometime in the 1970s and 1980s, and becomes a major factor in European politics in the 1990s or so.

The distinguishing characteristic of this tradition is a conflict between the people and an elite, people and the "Establishment." There is not any specific group at any specific time that has to be defined as "the people" or as "the elite." Sometimes the people are the poor; sometimes they're the struggling middle class. Sometimes the elite are Wall Street, the money power; sometimes

they are the treacherous Democrats in Washington; sometimes they are just Washington itself. It is a two-pronged relationship between the people and the elite. Let's get that.

Now I want to introduce something to confuse matters a little, which is that there are left-wing and right-wing varieties of populism.

The left wing unites the middle and the bottom of society against the top. The classic example currently would be Occupy Wall Street, 99 percent versus the 1 percent; Bernie Sanders against the billionaire class. In American history, the People's Party of the 1890s. Huey Long would be another example of left-wing populism. In Europe, Podemos, the Spanish group, is an example of populism in this sense.

Then there is what you might call a right-wing or conservative variety. That also sees a conflict between the people and the elite. For instance, Donald Trump attacks corporation heads who want to move their firms to Mexico and leave workers in the lurch.

But there is also, in addition to seeing a conflict between the people and the elite, a third term that enters the equation, and that is the idea that the elite, or Establishment, is coddling another group—Muslims, African-Americans, illegal immigrants, asylum-seekers—you name it. It is an "other" group. With right-wing populism you have this third element entering the picture. Left-wing populism is just middle and bottom versus the top.

I want to say just one more thing—and I hope this doesn't confuse you—which is that, though I call them "left-wing" and "right-wing," there is something misleading about that, too. The right-wing populists are not in many respects right-wing. Donald Trump, for instance, campaigned on a promise to protect Medicare and Social Security; his trade policies are pretty much the same as Bernie Sanders', attacking "runaway shops," corporations that leave the United States in order to find cheaper wages elsewhere.

In Europe, the National Front—Marine Le Pen—its platform is somewhat to the left of the Democratic Party. It is way to the left of Hillary Clinton and slightly to the left of Bernie Sanders on domestic issues. Capping credit card charges, separating investment banking from commercial banking—Glass-Steagall—is a part of their platform; making sure that their version of national health insurance applies to all people regardless of income or locale.

In other words, though I describe these as "right" and "left," they are peculiar in other respects. They are kind of hybrids, these right-wing populist parties.

The final thing I have to say is that their peculiarity is what distinguishes them. People said about Trump, "Well, he's not a normal Republican." He's not a normal Republican, and he's certainly not a Democrat either. In Europe, they call Marine Le Pen and they call the Danish People's Party the "extreme right." We can talk about the way the terms are used in Europe, but they're not really the

extreme right in the way that we in America would think about it.

They erupt, they arise, at certain times when the common political vocabulary, the assumptions by which people understand politics, are starting to break down, when it is possible to build a movement on the basis of the fact that the leadership of the major parties is clueless—they don't understand what's really happening, they don't understand the problem of illegal immigration, they don't understand the corporations moving overseas, et cetera. Again, populist parties—left, right, but mainly peculiar—erupting at certain times are an early warning sign that the consensus that has held together politics in the United States or in Western Europe is starting to break down.

That's my two bits.

JOANNE MYERS: How is it different from other politics then, with people raising their concerns?

JOHN JUDIS: The difference between populist politics—take again Sanders and Trump as examples—and let's say standard-issue liberalism in America. Liberalism goes back in a lot of ways to Teddy Roosevelt and then to Franklin Roosevelt, the basic idea being pluralism, to reconcile interests, but with a view toward acknowledging and taking account of the working class, the middle class, and the poor, not leaving them in the lurch.

But it is not a politics that, for instance, differentiates the people from the business class or Wall Street. It doesn't make that same kind of difference. That is really the difference between, let's say, a Hillary Clinton and a Bernie Sanders. Many Republican conservatives see—you could take the Chamber of Commerce—the interests of society from the standpoint of business. In that respect, what is good for business is what is good for the country. They more or less look down from a standpoint of business.

Again, that is different. They don't make the same dichotomy, they don't see the same kind of conflict, as populists do. That is basically what distinguishes populism from the other kinds of politics.

JOANNE MYERS: Do you think we're too quick to define them and label them like they're the "other"? How would they define themselves, or does it even matter?

JOHN JUDIS: In the United States, the term is sometimes debated about. But since the 1880s or 1890s people have not been embarrassed about describing themselves as populists, either on the left or the right, and a lot of groups—Bernie Sanders wouldn't object to the definition. There is a group called National People's Action—I think you have the Working People's Party in New York—they're happy with the term "populist." Similarly, Trump, Steven Bannon, "populist economic nationalist."

Europe is different. In Europe it's a bad word.

JOANNE MYERS: So what is the difference besides being a bad word?

JOHN JUDIS: The difference is that they have not, until very recently, had a left-wing populist tradition.

JOANNE MYERS: That is more in the South—Spain, Greece.

JOHN JUDIS: Yes, it is almost entirely in the South. They had social democrats, Christian democrats, Labour Party, conservatives, Tories, but they didn't have left-wing populism; they just had right-wing populism. Right-wing populism becomes itself an out-group in politics. It is seen as the extreme right.

There is a think tank in Europe—I think a Christian democratic think tank—that published a report. Think tanks in the United States are very respectable institutions and are very cautious in their judgments. They don't do things that would upset the cautious mind. This think tank published a study of the different populist parties in Europe, and they titled it "Exposing the Demagogues." In other words, they put a tabloid-type headline on it. I don't think in the United States we would do that.

But in Europe, like in Podemos, the Spanish party, there has been a long debate about even whether they should use that word. Syriza in Greece is, again, reluctant to describe itself that way. But it is becoming more common in Europe. It is still a no-no.

JOANNE MYERS: There is often a commingling of the terms "fascist" and "right-wing populists." How would you distinguish them, and is it dangerous—I would assume so—to label them or commingle those terms together?

JOHN JUDIS: There are similarities between the fascism of the 1920s and 1930s.

JOANNE MYERS: But what is the difference now? They are really not the same. Could you help us to understand the differences, because I think people are often confused?

JOHN JUDIS: First, the fascist movements arise—particularly we will talk about Italy and Germany—in the wake of the Russian Revolution. Their primary purpose is to knock out the socialists and the communists. That is the context in which they begin. That is also how they end up getting business support, not within a democratic tradition, not parties that aimed to—their complaint was that society wasn't democratic enough—always within the basic authoritarian political context. That is different, again, from the parties in the United States and in Europe.

Like the Danish People's Party has had different leaders for now. Parties are in and out of government. They don't go into government with the idea of ending government itself. Again, it is a different political context.

The second thing that I would emphasize is that the fascist parties of the 1920s and 1930s were still within this struggle for empire that began in the West in the 19th century, and particularly after the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. What they sought to do was to become imperial powers to challenge Britain and the United States. Mussolini wanted to create the Roman Empire, Hitler the Third Reich.

Right-wing populist parties today—and this is also true I would say of the left—are almost, you could say, contractionary. Trump doesn't want to take over Mexico; he wants to keep Mexicans out of the United States. The National Front in France wants to leave the European Union. In other words, what they are is, in some sense, a reaction to the internationalization of politics, diplomacy, and economics that occurs after World War II—the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and in Europe in particular the European Union and the euro. So historically it is a completely different rhythm.

I am not saying that makes them good. We may face some real dangers in the United States. But it is not the same as the 1920s and 1930s, and screaming about Hitler and stuff is not going to help us understand better. It is especially not going to help us understand the people who are attracted—let's say the Trump voters.

JOANNE MYERS: Do you think it is just a movement, or is it something more, bigger than that, that will have legs and continue?

JOHN JUDIS: A movement is something big. I guess the question is: Did Trump just get elected here, and does he, in addition to that, represent an electorate that will stick with him regardless? We do not know that yet.

What I'd say, I guess, is there is a core group that is not that large—maybe 20 percent of the voting electorate—that goes through American politics, let's say starting with George Wallace in 1968 and 1972: more male than female; at that time graduated from high school but didn't go any farther; at that time too blue collar; but now have gone to college but maybe didn't get a degree, or went to Salisbury University rather than the University of Maryland; primarily white; and primarily older rather than younger, not that there are no young people.

This body of the electorate—there is a sociologist named Donald Warren who did these studies in 1971 and 1976, and he wrote a book called The Radical Center, and he found that this group was central to Wallace's candidacy. They see themselves as besieged on the top and on the bottom by an elite or a ruling class that is oblivious to their needs and an elite that is making them, in effect, pay for the welfare given to the people below. In 1968 and 1972 it is primarily blacks, and then it changes as the decades go on.

This group moves through the society and the electorate like a big rodent, you could say, would move through a python. If you imagine it swallowing, you can see it going through. At one time, it

is concerned about taxes—the tax revolt in the late 1970s; at another time religion—the Christian Coalition—it helps Buchanan and Perot, a lot of them vote for them in the 1990s; war on terror, anti-Islam in the early 2000s; and, lo and behold, now Tea Party and Trump.

I think that is the group that is the most fervent in its support of Trump. It is not, again, strictly a right-wing group. These are people who objected to Obamacare because they felt that it was forcing up their premiums in order to pay for the uninsured, but they want Medicare and Social Security. If Trump is stupid enough to go along with Paul Ryan and the Republican leadership, then he'll be in a lot of trouble because this group actually is liberal on those kinds of issues. Just as Wallace's voters were New Deal liberals, they were just also racists and segregationists.

JOANNE MYERS: You emphasize a lot of the economics of it. But aren't there cultural factors that play into it, or where these voters are located?

JOHN JUDIS: Yes. That is what I was saying. As this group moves through, it takes different forms. Sometimes the issue is primarily cultural; sometimes it's economic. But the different aspects of it coexist.

I used to do a lot of writing about the conservative movement. My first book was a biography of Bill Buckley. I used to go to the Christian Coalition meetings in the 1990s and interview people. In 1992 the leadership of the Christian Coalition was Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed. Reed had gotten his start at the Young Republicans. He was basically an operative and remains that. He is not a deeply religious guy in that sense. Robertson, again, was the son of a senator, big businessman.

So they were more or less identified with the standard Republican leadership. When it came to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1992, they were all for it: "It's going to help business." They got the organization to endorse it. But I would interview people—the rank and file, and even the people who went to the convention—and they said: "No. We're totally against that stuff. We like Pat Buchanan."

I guess what I am saying is that that kind of sensibility continues, and it coexists. Obviously, there is a lot of intolerance toward Mexican-Americans that you find in the Trump voters. But again, it coexists with a feeling that we have to rein in these corporations that keep moving overseas, we have to do something about them avoiding taxes; and all these other issues, to do something about jobs. Jobs was the key issue: "Make America great again. Make it so that we make things and we don't have to buy stuff from China or Japan if we want to get a TV or what have you."

I guess what I'm saying is that in the wake of the Great Recession the economic aspects have come to the surface and the cultural ones remain. They always remain like that, but it has pushed economics to the forefront.

JOANNE MYERS: That is what ties actually Europe and the United States together in some ways because they both suffered from financial crises in some way.

Let me ask you: If Donald Trump was not the celebrity that he was because of The Apprentice, do you still think there would have been someone like—there was Bernie Sanders for the Democrats, but in the Republican Party—a Donald Trump who would have been spawned? Was there somebody waiting in the wings?

JOHN JUDIS: It was odd. I saw Trump in August of 2015 in New Hampshire. I dragged my wife—we go there for a vacation every summer. It was like going to the premiere of The Godfather Part II. I don't know if they do this now with movies. I'm showing my age. There were hundreds of yards of people lined up to see this guy. I had no idea that this was happening.

There is no comparable Republican. It is a kind of odd thing. What I'd say is if you compare, let's say, Ross Perot in 1992 with Donald Trump, Ross Perot was actually ahead in the polls in May of 1992. He was ahead of both George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton by a significant margin, beyond the margin of error, and it looked like he might actually be president. But it turned out that he was very prickly, and not prickly in the way that Donald Trump was either. The whole Meet the Press kind of thing just threw him for a loop.

JOANNE MYERS: He wasn't as nasty.

JOHN JUDIS: Yes. He ended up dropping out, if you remember, in July of 1992, and then he came back, but it was too late.

But his candidacy and the issues that he was raising were viable then. Bill Clinton took over a lot of them. "People before profits" became Clinton's slogan in July, and that was directly in response to Ross Perot.

Trump, I think, again because of his experience in television—

JOANNE MYERS: And social media and the tweeting—

JOHN JUDIS: —has been able to surmount all these things. You think that video would have just doomed any usual politician. There is no doubt that he has exceptional political skills, and that is the reason he got beyond his adversaries in the Republican Party. I thought he was finished when he had the—

JOANNE MYERS: We thought he was finished from the day he went down the escalator, the beginning of the end almost, right?

JOHN JUDIS: His battle with Fox, I thought that would be the end. How can a politician get into a contest with Fox?

Anyway, yes. He has exceptional political skills. When I listened to him, he had that ability of television people to appear as if he was improvising what he said. But in fact, his speeches were all like those old French novels where you could shuffle them. He always said the same thing, but it seemed like he was saying it anew to that audience.

JOANNE MYERS: He involved the audience, too, which I think—he made it a part of it.

So now Donald Trump is president and you have this populist in office. But he still has to work with the Establishment. So what happens next?

JOHN JUDIS: In a sense, he is the Establishment.

JOANNE MYERS: But he's espousing anti-establishment views. So what happens next?

JOHN JUDIS: Of course I don't know.

JOANNE MYERS: We all need a crystal ball.

JOHN JUDIS: Let me put it in a broader context. What sometimes does happen to populists when they finally get into office is that they do become the Establishment and they lose their own political focus.

The Greeks, Syriza, they run their campaign against the troika in Europe—the bankers, the European Union, and the IMF—and they say, "If we get into office, we're going to defy these guys. We won't let them push us around anymore." That is the basic conflict that they run on. They say, "The old Panhellenic Socialists gave into these guys. We're not going to." So they get into office, and they give in to these guys. They have now become, in effect, a kind of other version of the Panhellenic Socialist Party, and they are going to get voted out in a year.

So sometimes what happens is that the populists get into office, they become the Establishment, and they find, lo and behold, that they can do no better than their predecessors.

Now we cannot tell what's going to happen with Trump. One of the things that interests and alarms me is that if you listen to his inaugural address, it was the attempt of a guy who has won the presidency, who has all this power, again to recreate the populist conflict between himself and Washington. That was the basic theme of the inaugural address.

JOANNE MYERS: "Draining the swamp."

JOHN JUDIS: He is there trying to continue that kind of politics and that logic. When he gets to the point where he has to deal with the messy kind of details of Congress to get his bills passed and all that stuff, that is when he could get into trouble and find himself in the same stew as Syriza did in Greece.

On the other hand, there is a scary possibility. I said that there were certain similarities you could find between the 1920s and 1930s and now, and you can see the possibilities of this happening now, which is Trump doing this stuff about travelers and immigrants from these seven countries. There is a big uproar, people protest; he modifies it a little; but they continue it.

One, two, three months from now there is a big terrorist attack, and the people say, "We're doing this on behalf of the Islamic State of Iran and Syria (ISIS)," and ISIS says "Great" or they put them up to it. How does Trump respond then? Does he say, "Well, you know, I did X, Y, and Z because I knew things like this might happen. Now we have to go farther. We have to do A, B, and C in addition to that." Big protests start again.

Anyway, you can see a kind of snowballing effect, similar to what happened in the 1920s and 1930s and got us into a right-wing mess in Europe, especially in Central Europe. I think that is the bad scenario. But we don't know what's going to happen at this point.

JOANNE MYERS: On that upbeat note, I'd like to thank you for just providing a little bit of the past, a little bit of the present, and the future.

Questions

QUESTION: Thank you for that presentation.

In the next eight months there will be important elections in Netherlands, France, and Germany, maybe the three most important countries in the European Union, excluding Great Britain. In each case, there is a right-wing party which is poised apparently to do better than it has ever done. How would American politics and President Trump be affected if the right wing did much better than expected in those elections or much worse than expected? What would be the impact in the United States?

JOHN JUDIS: I have a feeling that if Trump continues along the path he has in the United States, it is going to hurt those parties in Europe. I think there will be again a centrist backlash against them.

Again, the numbers are kind of funny. In France there are two rounds. There is a first round, and then there is a runoff between the top two. The leading contenders are probably Fillon, who is the more conservative Thatcherite and Ted Cruz kind of conservative; there is Macron, who is the Blair-centrist-independent; Marine Le Pen; and the socialist—the Financial Times said they could come in fifth. But mainly those three.

I suspect Le Pen is going to come in first or second. They came in first in the European elections, but then they got completely knocked out in the runoff. I doubt that the National Front could win in the second round. But she is going to get better than 18 percent for sure this time. She will get

30-35 percent. And who knows if there is another thing like what happened in Nice, another terrorist attack? All bets are off in France.

Germany, it'll be a question of getting into the legislature at all, the national parliament. They are already in state legislatures, the Alternative für Deutschland. But it is a question of whether they are going to have anybody—I think it is a 5-percent limit in Germany—get into the national legislature. I bet they will. But they are not going to be the leading party; they are not going to govern.

Holland is more of a question. Wilders might come in first, and it is a question of whether the other parties will join hands to try to create a coalition to keep him out of the government.

In Denmark the Danish People's Party is actually the biggest party in parliament, but they are not the governing party.

Again, my guess is that Trump will in some ways scare people in Europe into voting for the adversaries of these parties. His own politics—it somewhat amazes me—seem to be intent on trying to undermine the European Union. They want to do bilateral trade deals instead of doing a multilateral deal with the European Union. Some of it seems to be pique on Trump's part, but some of it—he said he had trouble getting some kind of licenses for his hotels with the European Union, but some of it may be Bannon's strategy. It might be, again, a strategy for trying to create a populist-right alliance between these parties and the United States.

QUESTION: My name is Jonathan Krivine. I live on the Upper East Side here, and I am becoming a big fan of Carnegie.

Is polling dead? The economic data have never been as benign. The unemployment rate is down to 5.5 percent. [Editor's note: 4.8 percent according to the the Labor Department's January jobs report.] The Dow is up to 20,000. Obama had unprecedented approval ratings. All of these numbers suggested that this thing was in the bag for Clinton. All of the pundits were blithely unaware of what was going on in the middle of the country. I'm thinking to myself, The pollsters are useless. The polling numbers were very encouraging for her. Do you think as an industry it is shot, given their track record with the election?

JOHN JUDIS: This is definitely not my area of expertise, judging these polls. There are people now who make a whole living of saying which polls are better than the others.

I want to answer your question in a different way, which is that one of the reigning assumptions of people who thought that Hillary Clinton was a shoo-in was that the country was in good shape. Usually, you find if unemployment is 4.5 percent and if things are getting better—you think of 1984 with Ronald Reagan, where it was about 7-8 percent, but it had been 12 percent—the party that has been in power is going to do well.

But the economics in the United States are kind of tricky now. They are not the same as they were in 1980. Katz and Krueger—Krueger was the head of the Council of Economic Advisers for Obama—published this study that just came out of what kind of jobs were created during the recovery from the recession. Lo and behold, a large number—I cannot remember the percentage, but it would surprise you; I think it was a majority—were of this temporary Schedule C contractual and part-time jobs. Again, the employment figures can be misleading.

The other thing that struck me about the election was that if you looked at a map of where manufacturing jobs have disappeared since 2000, you would see an almost exact match between the Trump success in swing states—and in the South too, incidentally. The two leading states in terms of losing manufacturing jobs—one was Michigan, but what was the other one? Does anybody have a good guess? North Carolina. Furniture industry. Trump wins.

I am not answering your question because I'm not a polling expert, but I think a lot of people's brains were addled by the overt employment figures that they were getting.

QUESTION: James Starkman.

Having read The Art of the Deal, would one properly postulate that what has happened in the first 10 days of the Trump presidency is putting forward the most aggressive case—particularly, let's say, on the immigration ban—start out with your hardest case, and then work back from there to a compromise that would be much more acceptable to the mainstream? You could also extrapolate that to many of the economic programs that are going to come out. How do you feel about that?

JOHN JUDIS: That is very possible, and that is an optimistic view of what Trump is doing.

The pessimistic view is two things. The first thing is that he has seen in the primaries and in the election that when he followed this strategy, this "take no prisoners" politics, everybody thought he was going to lose, but he won. Why not do it again? Why not just continue that same kind of strategy? It's a strategy of polarization. Pat Buchanan under Nixon—"you rip the scab off"—that was what he described as what Nixon should be doing. Put that together with the fact that his strategic advisor Bannon seems to have this view of polarizing politics. Internationally, he has a view of Christendom as being in a conflict with Islam, which also will lead to very bad results, I think.

Yes, you may be right. The Art of the Deal, he might end up doing that, and we will be better off if he does. But he might also be in the grip of both his past success and ideology, in which case we're in for a really rough ride.

QUESTIONER [Mr. Starkman]: He has already walked back quite a few things, as you know.

JOHN JUDIS: Yes.

QUESTION: I'm Deborah Rogers from Fordham University. I am in a terrorism class. I am also in a democratic theory class.

Thinking about the military and thinking about what it is that you're talking about, looking at the words "ethics matter," thinking about Donald Trump, and seeing the complete contrast, in the sense that he does not have any military frame of reference whatsoever in his own life and his grandparents—

JOHN JUDIS: Military school.

QUESTIONER [Ms. Rogers]: We're all New Yorkers, so we know what that means, military school. I also have kids who have been through the school systems in New York, so I know what the military schools are for, for some kids like Donald Trump.

That is, in a way, a little offensive even to our military, when you think of Jim Webb and you think of people like that. But even George W., who I was clearly no fan of, his father had—people that have been in battle know you don't want to go and put people in battle. Trump is a million miles away from that.

You said something that I really want to ask you what your point of view is. You said, "God forbid, because if that happens, all bets are off," and that is if a terrorist attack happens, then it is going to re-jigger everything. It is most likely going to happen, and so what is going to happen in Europe or what is going to happen in the United States is what do we do after that? It is not "if." Even if it is a small event, it is going to be an event that needs a military response, and our generals are already saying, "Oh my god, this guy is an idiot," without saying that. So now what do we do? That is my question. What do you think?

JOHN JUDIS: Who is "we"?

QUESTIONER [Ms. Rogers]: The populist we.

JOHN JUDIS: You mean, what do Trump and the country do, or what do you and I do in response?

QUESTIONER [Ms. Rogers]: What are we as a divided nation—to your point just now to that gentleman about how the corrosive divisiveness—we are not going to be going to battle. Our police are going to come in and try to help, and our military is going to go out and try help, but guided by whom in the case of this guy? He is basically in charge. We're talking about politics, but politics in relationship to the military as well.

JOHN JUDIS: I'll try my best to answer what I think is your question. Don't keep going because I'll just get more confused.

QUESTIONER [Ms. Rogers]: Am I confusing? I'm sorry. I have all these terror stories in my head.

JOHN JUDIS: Incidentally, my father, who was from New York—long dead—went to Staunton in Virginia at the same time as Barry Goldwater, and he was a naughty kid, too. They sent him there.

QUESTIONER [Ms. Rogers]: But he grew up and he turned out okay.

JOHN JUDIS: Trump and the military, and I know this because I collected some of the statements—I don't have them here. I'm of the same generation as Trump, and we grew up in the atmosphere of Memorial Day after World War II. There were these big parades, and you went out, and the feeling was that the military was invincible.

I lost it during the Vietnam War, of course, and I lost that same kind of veneration. Trump still has it, and you can see it in the people he has chosen to run the government. It's on a par with his "make America great again" in terms of manufacturing. Those are the two things that are clear.

Again, the question I guess is: When we have this terrorist attack, is he going to listen to Mattis, for instance? Is he going to listen to Kelly? Flynn is kind of a nut, but from what I understand he is on the way out.

QUESTIONER [Ms. Rogers]: And if Sessions gets in?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Flynn is on the way out?

JOHN JUDIS: I don't know if Flynn is on the way out—believe me, nobody knows this—but the gossip in Washington is that Trump finds him difficult, which I can understand. He was the guy who was "locking her up" during the Republican convention. He had this hatchet-like expression on his face, too, and "lock her up." It's unbelievable to have somebody like that as the national security advisor.

JOANNE MYERS: This afternoon he came in at the press conference and announced that Iran was on notice now because they launched some missile. He interrupted Sean Spicer.

JOHN JUDIS: Iran is a big problem.

JOANNE MYERS: But Mike Flynn came.

JOHN JUDIS: He wrote a book with Michael Ledeen, who is—I won't go into it. He was so nutty that the neo-conservatives get embarrassed. Jessica Mathews wrote an article in The New York Review of Books. She described his book that he wrote with Ledeen, but a lot of it's focused on the threat of Iran. Bannon is also focused on the threat of Iran. So is Mattis, but Mattis doesn't want to undo the Iran deal.

Again, that's one of the real danger signs in this administration. My wife's a dentist, and one of her hygienists is an Iranian-American. We went to some parties with them and stuff like that.

They used to go back and forth to Iran and—I'm sure you know this—the Iranian people are among the most pro-American in the Middle East. Banning travel, stuff like that, this is an area where you could see real conflict.

If I was in charge of Iran, I'd be thinking about starting that nuclear program again and seeing if I could do it underground. Because you have both the Israelis—he is going to let them have free rein—and these people like Flynn. So, yes, Iran is another danger spot.

QUESTION: Sondra Stein.

As an example of what I'm going to say, I heard an interview on TV with this woman from coal country, obviously poor, and she said she was sickly. She was being interviewed, and she voted for Trump. She said that she has Obamacare and really needs it. So the interviewer said, "But he said he was going to get rid of it." And she said, "But I know he would never hurt me."

My theory is that, besides the exact words, it's whose alpha has a powerful effect. Many times if you can't understand human nature and you look at animals, you see that alpha male. Trump is certainly alpha. I just wonder what your idea was.

Also, I don't think we can look at the election without including the FBI and Russia in their effect.

JOHN JUDIS: I guess I'll go from the end to the beginning.

I'd be the last one to say that Comey's intervention at the end didn't have an effect on the election. We're talking about the FBI guy and the letter he wrote saying he was beginning the investigation. Polling aside, the election was close enough that I think maybe Hillary Clinton would have won if it hadn't been for that. I'm not sure. We can't be sure. Russia I think might have had some marginal effect on some down-ballot races, but I don't think that mattered.

I didn't approve of John Lewis's argument for not going to the inaugural because the Russians hacked into the thing. You could have used that argument in 1936 because the Communist Party supported Franklin Roosevelt. I don't think it was a decisive factor.

The alpha male thing? Trump was able to convince people, like that person you heard, that he was on their side. The one question that polling people ask that I think is always worth looking at is, "Does this person care about you? Is he on your side?" They did different variations of that, and Trump did pretty well on that. I think he resonated with a lot of people.

In 2000 Al Gore had a lot of problems, the same problems that Hillary Clinton had. The Democrats have had these kind of nominees from a certain Protestant tradition in America, somewhat cold. Bill Clinton was not like that at all, but Kerry was.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: "Aloof" is the word.

JOHN JUDIS: Aloof, yes, absolutely. Gore. Dukakis had other problems.

Anyway, she was not able to project that, and in some cases didn't try, like not visiting parts of the Midwest, whereas Trump was able to do it. Again, that is his skill.

QUESTIONER [Ms. Stein]: I was saying alpha in the sense of dominance, not just caring.

JOHN JUDIS: You're getting into deep waters there, and I'm not going to journey in there because I haven't thought the psychological stuff through.

QUESTION: Ron Berenbeim. I'd like to preface my question with a modest proposal.

JOHN JUDIS: Everybody should leave the room and go out and demonstrate, right?

QUESTIONER [Mr. Berenbeim]: Statisticians have shown that you are about three times more likely to be killed by lightning than a terrorist, so I think that Trump's next executive order should be to prohibit lightning from entering the United States. I think it might even be more effective than his executive order.

I am just very skeptical, I have to say, and I'd just like to throw this open for discussion: How much of any sort of Trump's win can be put into any sort of rational procrustean bed, as it were? It seems to me that it is just one of those random events. When you see now that he is in there, it is like the New York Mets of the 1960s. Can't anyone play this game?

Okay, so he wants to do these things, but the execution is so muddled. I just don't know that there is any sort of explanation as to how he got there or what's going to happen next that we can derive from what is generally called "evidence."

JOHN JUDIS: You said a lot of things, and I think the last thing you said is going to get me back into the alpha-male stuff, too, which is good.

Terrorist attacks and lightning first. I don't think it is the same because terrorist attacks are something we should be able to prevent. When they happen, people feel that they don't have control of their circumstances in a way they don't feel when they look at statistics about lightning. It is much scarier, and I don't think you can discount that—San Bernardino, the Orlando attack.

When the anthrax stuff started after 9/11, every time I went to the damned mailbox—and, being a journalist, you had a special reason you were worried about it—but, of course, there was a one-in-four-million chance that anthrax was going to end up in my mail.

Those are real fears, and Trump is right to address them. I felt at times that Obama's public response afterward was pretty lame. Again, whether he can knock off ISIS, that is another

question entirely, and we can discuss that.

Obviously I don't think that the Trump thing was a random event, although I agree that there were no other candidates who were similar. But something like that was going to come up. The fact that it has been brewing in Europe is an indication that we were going to get some kind of right-wing populist response in the United States that was similar.

Whether he is going to get anything done—I think you have to give him some credit, oddly. He was just the president-elect and he was in control of the government. It was amazing.

Think about the stories about when Franklin Roosevelt gets elected, and I think the inaugural then was in March, and Hoover was desperately trying to rope him into doing anything, and he absolutely did nothing. It was the correct strategy for him at the time.

I cannot remember in my lifetime a president-elect being as forceful as Trump was. I am not endorsing what he was forceful about necessarily, but he has been surprising so far. And I wouldn't write off the fact that he will be able to get some things done, though friends of mine who study Congress and know more than I do think he is going to get completely bottled up.

QUESTION: Bob Lenzner.

Can you talk to us about how the great recession in 2008, the collapse of the banks, and the collapse of the real estate market, transformed American politics? I know it ended up with the election of Donald Trump, but how did 2008 transform American politics?

JOHN JUDIS: What I'd say is that if you look at the last 40 or 50 years, after the 1970s and early 1980s you get a change in American politics. Those are the Reagan years. You get the promise of a new kind of economy. Remember Clinton talked about the "new economy." Globalization used to be something good.

When the promise of a new politics, of a new political economy, seems to fail, you get a reaction. The first big burst of populism is in 1992, and it comes exactly in the wake of that first post-Reagan recession. In 1996 we get the Internet boom, and everything just goes away; Perot and Buchanan basically become irrelevant. In 2001 we get the Internet problems, but at the same time we get 9/11, so everybody's focused on the war on terror, the threat of terrorist attacks, and then on the war in Iraq.

When the recession hits, again this idea surfaces that somehow the promise of globalization, all these things, is not delivered. So economics comes to the surface, and you get a group that has already been discontented about various things becoming focused more on economics, though still again aggrieved in terms of culture and other issues.

That would be my simple explanation.

QUESTION: My name is Alexander. I have a two-part question.

I was wondering about your thoughts specifically in regard to how misogyny has played out in this election, particularly in the relationship between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton and their respective supporters. I feel like, especially in my generation, I noticed a complete dismissal of Hillary Clinton and a lack of acknowledgement of anything that she could have ever done that would have possibly been good, and she was automatically written off as a two-faced lying B-word, and there was this rush of people my age to not even look at her at all as an option. So I was wondering regarding that.

The second one is your thoughts in general on the "alternative fact" phenomenon. and how do we get out of that quagmire?

JOHN JUDIS: Oh, the alternative facts. I could be giving you alternative facts. You don't know. Who knows anymore, right?

The misogyny, I think that's overrated as an explanation for Hillary Clinton's electoral problems. I remember when the West Virginia primary happened and Bernie Sanders won in West Virginia —"Well, it's because the people there hate the women," or they don't want to have a woman candidate.

But you forget the senator. You know who the senator is? Shelley Moore Capito is the senator there. And again, she is a really good politician. She knows how to talk to people, and she is the daughter of a governor.

I really don't think that was a central factor in the primary—it might have been in the general election. But she should have won. That wasn't the reason.

QUESTIONER [ALEXANDER]: Do you think it was a reason?

JOHN JUDIS: Of course. Everything's a reason, yes. But I don't think that is the reason that she lost, and I don't think it was that big a deal with the Bernie Sanders thing.

If you look at the actual polls, Bernie did very well among the young women. The split was old/young. She got the African-American vote to such a great extent that she won all those Southern states. I don't think, again, that misogyny was a key factor.

What was the last thing?

JOANNE MYERS: Alternative facts.

JOHN JUDIS: That's a good thing to end it on.

I'm of two minds about all this stuff, and I used to say this when people would complain about

Rush Limbaugh. With talk radio, and now with the Internet, you get a lot of bullshit spread around and a lot of false stories and rumors. But at the same time, it's a democratization of the political discussion. It's like when the printing press was introduced by Gutenberg. There were a lot of lying books and stuff like that.

QUESTIONER [ALEXANDER]: It's not a new phenomenon.

JOHN JUDIS: But again, you couldn't have democracy without a printing press, basically. The same thing with the Internet. It gives us a possibility of a greater democracy, a greater spread of information on the basis of which people can make informed decisions. But it also, obviously, can have deleterious effects.

JOANNE MYERS: I think we all wanted some concrete answer, and there is no one answer that explains this phenomenon. But I thank you for taking us down the path and raising so many questions.

I invite you all to continue the conversation. Thank you very much.

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