

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

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Guest: James W. Ceaser, Professor of Politics, University of Virginia

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I: (0:15 – 33:36) Trump and Our Parties

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. I'm very pleased to be joined again today by my friend Jim Ceaser, political science professor at the University of Virginia, student of American politics and the presidency. *Presidential Selection*, your great first book, [on] presidential elections. We're speaking three weeks after our most recent presidential election. So was it a big deal? You edit books, don't you co-edit books every four years on the elections, even?

CEASER: I have, since 1992. Not sure about this year, but this one was exciting. In fact, more surprising than even 2000, which kept me up all night. There were two or three different victors that night.

This time, I fell asleep thinking that it was all over. My wife didn't wake me up, and at about midnight I awoke, and they were talking about the narrow path that Hillary still had. It was like Rip Van Winkle – in two hours, awakening to a different world.

KRISTOL: So how big a deal? I guess that's the question, right? And in a certain way – let me be the contrarian, everyone says, "Oh, Trump, it's unbelievable." In a certain way, if you just came down from Mars and looked at the electoral map, it's a little different. He did better than Romney among working-class whites, he did less well among college educated. But, basically, the states he picked up were the states you would have predicted a Republican would have to pick up, mostly, to win: Ohio and Florida – the two, classic swing states. Iowa. Then he outperformed a little in the upper Midwest. But if I'm not mistaken, six states total changed; it's not like the map was reversed, you know. He lost the popular vote – as we speak here, three weeks after – looks like, by about two and a half million votes.

CEASER: Not according to him. [Laughing].

KRISTOL: He lost by two percent, and Romney lost by four percent. The Senate was minus two for Republicans, the House minus six. It kind of looks like the normal election you might have after eight years of one party in power. Why is everyone so excited about it?

CEASER: Well, on the electoral front there were incremental changes, but incremental changes in just the right place at the right time. That was important. On the election, as a whole, the changes weren't very great, but the fact that the Republican Party is so dominant in every sphere now, that completes this circle, that certainly makes things look different. So without saying that there was a massive change in that way, there is a kind of massive change in the atmosphere.

The most important change is not the electoral support but the fact of this human being, Donald Trump, becoming president. That is completely unexpected. Someone who has never been in office before; someone who came from the outside; someone who was given no chance at the beginning; someone who, somehow or another, made his way through to the end, despite all odds.

That has to be a change. Not just a surprise, but that someone could become President of the United States with that background, that's surprising given the history of America. Going back to the Founding, the effort to secure the office for only those who are qualified. The effort, early on, of parties to get safe party leaders, consensus builders, people of moderate character. In this respect, this really is a change.

KRISTOL: So Trump is the story? Not the distribution of votes, so much, and not –

CEASER: That's the surprise story. Obviously, politically, the control of Republicans over all these levers of power, that is a story. Because, the history of the 20th century has been a history in which the Democratic Party has controlled the country at all the key points where it was possible to make big changes: New Deal, Great Society, Obama's first victory, sixty votes in the senate, the full majority that they could work with. The Republicans haven't had that, and now – though they haven't achieved, in any way, a filibuster-proof Senate – they *are* in control of the levers.

And it's the Democratic Party today that's asking, "Where are we?" This is another surprise. Everyone had thought, the day before, that Republicans would be dealing with a civil war and asking, "What's our future? Why can't we ever become the party that can win the presidency? What are we going to do in the future?" Whereas, in fact, the exact opposite is happening; it's the Democrats who are wrestling with those problems today.

KRISTOL: I want to come back to Trump because he, obviously, is a huge story. We should talk about its meaning, its implications, its relationship to President Obama before him, and to whatever comes after, or whatever comes next.

Let's talk about the Democrats for a minute, since you raised it. I hadn't really thought about that, as much, but it's a good point. So what about the Democrats? Do you expect the Democratic Party – you're a student of the parties – the Democratic Party, in a way, the weakest it's been since, I don't know, before the New Deal? Though, having won the popular vote in six of the last seven presidential elections. So a little ambiguous, there, about its weaknesses. Where do they go? What are the debates within them? What's the balance of power? What would you predict?

CEASER: What's interesting now is that they are posing this question. You know, these are the different stages of grief. At first there was denial, but now some of them are confronting this issue directly. We see this in the challenge of yet another Ryan in the House, for the leadership of the House. It's not just a personal struggle, he is, in a way, saying the party has completely lost its way. How can you have a party, despite the fact that it had the national majority in the presidency, that is located physically in two or three places on the East Coast, in two or three places on the West Coast, and the rest is Republican?

How can you have a party – and here, I think, is a more profound question that they're raising – how can you have a party that has always presented itself as the party of 'the people' that no longer really represents the people? It represents and cuts the electorate in a different way. It wasn't the people, it was the Democratic Party: a coalition of environmentalists, let's say, wealthy and educated, and cosmopolitan educated and wealthy, and then, the minorities. Throw in the teachers' unions, as well. It's a system of that coalition. And people are asking, "Can you have a party based on that, or have we lost precisely the people that used to be the backbone of the party? Namely, 'the people'." That question is being raised, and I don't know how that is going to turn out.

So deeply is multiculturalism in the DNA of the Democrats, can they really question that, and how? And of course, this does raise the question of relationship to the universities, because the universities are a

kind of microcosm of the Democratic Party. All the points – the experts on top, the multicultural base, the organization of the university and the thinking of who the clients are, in terms of minority and diversity. Some are saying, “Have we gone astray?”

KRISTOL: So, there could be a genuine discussion in the Democratic Party – or among liberals, at least?

CEASER: I think so. I don't know how they're going to manage this. It would be difficult. At least some of them raised this question, and that, in a way, is the most interesting thing in the party, that people are openly questioning this. Defeat can have that therapeutic effect.

KRISTOL: I suppose if Trump hadn't run, and you'd had a normal election, and I'm just going to make it Rubio/Walker ticket, had beaten Hillary Clinton, probably, or maybe not beaten her – the big story of the election would have been Bernie Sanders. Who has kind of been forgotten here in the understandable interest in the Trump phenomenon. But a socialist, pretty far outside, I would say, of the mainstream of liberal politics and the Democratic Party, even; himself refusing to be a Democrat, right, until a year ago or a year and a half ago – gets 44 or 45 percent of the vote in those Democratic primaries. Do you take that as a big deal or as kind of a just young people were sick of Clintons, and she was out of touch, and it was a protest vote, and it doesn't really say that we're going to have a, you know, socialist element in a big way in the Democratic Party.

CEASER: Well, I think two things on this; this would be interesting, going back to the last point. Does Bernie Sanders, in some ways, show a way to get away from identity politics? In that it was class-based. I think he was pushed more into the identity business than he wanted. Therefore, in that sense, he could represent the solution to this.

Of course, the more important thing is the fact the Democrats were a party like, you could say, of a kind of democratic approach to it, a leftist Democratic Party like the leftist democratic parties we find in social democracy. Now you have someone who is an avowed socialist, favorite of all of this. The energy in the party, a large part of the energy of the party is behind him. Notice that he was given, by Hillary Clinton, and took, most of the platform and made that kind of the norm, routinized this.

The Democratic Party, a large part as a result of Obama, lost most of its moderate-wing; so it really is a party of the left, and Bernie Sanders is not out of step with the mainstream of the party anymore. You just can't say that he's outside the mainstream – he's pretty close to being the mainstream. And therefore, that is another element that the Democrats are going to have to deal with, in addition to how they conceive of themselves. How far of a party of the left are they? And where are they going to go in that respect?

KRISTOL: What's the answer to that?

CEASER: Who knows, at this point? The fact that so much of the intellectual firepower in the Democratic Party is associated with the Sanders movement is interesting. Of course, I think Sanders thinks that they'll still have him around in four years. Who knows? Maybe he'll be in the form of a wax museum, still there. But he's combative, and he showed he is fully on top of his game, both physically and mentally, during that campaign.

Others, though, will tend towards him, I think Elizabeth Warren and others. It's going to be a different party, and that's one of the things we learned from this election. A kind of populism of the left, but quite different, in many ways, from Trump.

KRISTOL: Though, Trump always seemed to have an instinct that the two were not entirely dissimilar. I don't know that he got many actual Sanders voters to vote for him in the fall, but he certainly wanted to say – much to the ridicule, in a way, of political professionals, who say, “Oh, well, they're not going to vote for you; it's just too different.” But he kept saying, “If you voted for Sanders, you should –

CEASER: I think he probably got a lot of those voters. Remember, Sanders had a large part of the college voter, but he had some section of the working-class voter. Maybe those would have voted for Trump anyhow, but they did, I imagine, go to Trump.

And Trump wasn't just this demographic fact and voting fact, it was their appeals. Remember, Trump presented himself as the party of the – support of the working man. That's Bernie Sanders. Bernie Sanders was originally very much opposed to immigration. His rhetoric a year ago was pretty much the same: "I don't want that many immigrants coming in; they affect the status of American workers."

Both attacked Wall Street. Both attacked bankers. Trump covered every bit of the populism that Bernie did, but Trump was populist in other respects. You can say populism is always, one element of it, among others, is this opposition to an 'elite', the privileged elite. For Bernie Sanders, it was bankers – bankers' class. Whereas Trump, he had that, but he played the flute with many other notes on it. He was against every elite. So, in a way, he out-populisted Bernie.

KRISTOL: Let's talk about the two parties, slightly deviating from the order I had thought we might go in, but I think this is a very interesting point. You have both parties – it seems to me, and it seems to me you're saying – in turmoil, really, right? To an unusual degree.

I guess, what would be the comparison? Maybe the late '60s, early '70s, when you had a McGovern-rebellion with Gene McCarthy, a McGovern-rebellion of the Democratic Party. Somewhat at the time, or shortly after, you had the Goldwater-rebellion, which then ended up as the Reagan-rebellion. So you could say you had the overthrow of the establishment in both parties, I guess. Which would be '64 and '72, '76? Somewhat similar, today? How much flux could there be? Could the parties be almost unrecognizable? How strong are the parties? I mean, there are just a ton of issues about that.

CEASER: I'd say there are. I'd say the Bernie one is more in a standard mold: that there was an element in the party that strengthened. After all – he was maybe at the outer fringe of that, but – that element is in the Democratic Party and was growing stronger.

Trump is different. He overthrows the hierarchy, but *who*, a year and half ago, could have found *any* possibility that this would be the way that the elite was overthrown? And on what basis? On what grounds? You could not have imagined either the personality or the package of ideas, or sentiments, or instincts.

So, in a way, that's a much more remarkable achievement. Both are looked at as hostile takeovers – good piece of property gotten at a cheap price. But I think Trump got the better deal on that, or the more amazing deal.

KRISTOL: So what about the Republican Party? Is it Trump's party? Is he just a fluke presidential candidate of what is a recognizable Paul Ryan, Mitch McConnell, you know, Scott Walker, John Kasich party?

At the end of the day, there are all these Republican out there, the same ones that were out there a year ago, basically. They did pretty well; they held their seats. You know, it's not like Rob Portman *lost* in Ohio, he ran ahead of Trump. So, if there's such a big change, how come Rob Portman's back in the Senate, Pat Toomey's back in the Senate, and Ron Johnson's back in the Senate?

CEASER: The party is the same except for Trump, in one way.

KRISTOL: But that's a big *except*. Right? It gets to the question of the presidency.

CEASER: The presidency. Also, though, he shook the Republican Party in another respect. Every element that thought it was in control of the party and, partly, in control of American life, was simply swept aside as if it were nothing.

Beginning with Washington intellectuals – sorry, Bill. But all of the intellectual class, which is a huge force of power inside the Republican Party. Your basic intellectual cadres were treated as if they were nothing; they weren't important to him in the election and the campaign, they had a peripheral role. The donor class, considered important – pushed aside. Even parts of the Republican media – that's a little bit more ambiguous, but some of those were pushed aside, as well. After all, he took on part of Fox News, as well. So, every element of power was pushed aside in this truly populist takeover.

But also, the reasons not the party, he brings different parts into the party that were either nascent or not there at all. You could say that his two major themes, or let's take three major themes. One of the themes was immigration control. That was central. The wall and all of that. Obviously, this has been a concern inside the Republican Party before this. Trump didn't invent this. It was a conflict within the party between different elements. In a way, that was one part – the part that was, perhaps, minority now becoming clearly the majority, at least of the presidential side.

And then trade, free trade. Again, ambiguity within the Republican Party, but the free trade was the stronger part. That's overthrown.

And then foreign policy. You can look all the other candidates, with the exception of Senator Paul – the Republican Party was more or less of an internationalist, exceptionalist kind of party, seeing itself having a destiny, a place in the destiny of the world. Less so, but with Trump, you have another part, a very small part of the paleo-conservative. "America first," what all that can mean, it's going to be filled out. But these were differences that have shaken the Republican Party completely, and will, depending on his success, make it a different party.

KRISTOL: I suppose he ran as much against the preceding Republican nominees, Romney and McCain, and the preceding Republican president, George W. Bush, as against the Democrats, right? I mean, "Bush led us into war." He just denigrated Romney, of course – especially after Romney attacked him. Opposite side on immigration from McCain, opposite side on trade from all of them.

Has that happened, really, in modern American politics? That degree of reversal in one election? I think it's more often an exaggeration of previous trends – you know, they become more dovish. Maybe Goldwater, I guess, would be maybe the closest.

CEASER: Goldwater, yeah; but though, in Goldwater's case, there was a huge conservative movement at the edges of the Republican Party that had been growing up.

KRISTOL: Not only the edges. I mean, Robert Taft was *barely* denied the nomination by Dwight Eisenhower in '52. So, you could say that was just a different – 45 percent of the party became 55 percent of the party, right?

CEASER: Right. And this is the candidate from nowhere. It's "the man from nowhere," the candidate from nowhere. Picking up the pieces, I mean, not all the pieces are from nowhere – and they had some roots in the Republican Party – but the mix and combination of them, that's the astonishing part of it. And the different part of it.

Now, how much is it going to change the party? We'd have to go through by sector by sector. There's lots of things, and I think this is true as the campaign went on, where there is a real correspondence between Donald Trump and conservatism in the Republican Party. Not only lots of things where there is correspondence, but there's a good deal of low hanging fruit which they can enact right now and will serve initially, at least, to bring, should bring the two together.

Beginning with the Supreme Court nominee. Especially, I would say, with this opportunity which Obama left with all these executive orders which can be undone. And undoing them is nothing unconstitutional but undoing an executive order. So he's not going to run into that objection. There's so many of those that will take place which will, I think, bring the party together, and probably, also, lowering especially business and corporate taxes. All those things I think have brought them together.

Leaving aside some of the tonality issues – like political correctness, on which there's a thousand percent agreement. So, those elements look to bring the conservative movement, looks like a hole-in-one. But then, as you got deeper in, you can see possibilities of real conflict and differences that would be coming up. There's no doubt about that.

KRISTOL: Three weeks in, as we speak, not even into the transition, obviously – still two months away from his presidency, one has more of the feeling of continuation, I guess you'd say, than radical break. The cabinet doesn't look *that* different from a Mitt Romney or Scott Walker cabinet. As we speak, Mitt Romney might even be in it. Fairly 'establishment' picks. A few Trump-like picks. Jeff Sessions probably isn't attorney general in a Rubio or Walker administration, but he was a major Republican Senator – *is*, I guess, still.

One somehow has the sense that it's a little bit of a calm before the storm, or a bit like saying the FDR cabinet looks kind of like – which, I don't know much about it, probably did, in 1933 – like any Democratic cabinet. You know, that's sort of how things work. Doesn't mean you don't have pretty radical changes one, or two, or three years later.

CEASER: Right. But the difficulty is saying what those changes would be and what they are. We know a few positions of Trump, that's for sure. But we don't if there's anything beyond this. He doesn't process the world through the mechanism of, let's say, a set of ideas and ideologies. That's a real break. Not that Bob Dole was a great ideologist, but you kind of knew where he stood just by habit.

KRISTOL: Think about Dole. Dole, who had to say, "I'm going to be like Reagan." He didn't have to, but he said it, as a way of reassuring the party. And Trump, really, didn't.

CEASER: He didn't. But, as you pointed out, not only did he run inside the Republican Party but he *truly* out-Cruzed [Ted] Cruz. He ran against *everything* the Republican Party – touching on Reagan, never directly, that was the one he didn't frontally – but everything else. The honor of others, the presidency of others. I mean, he validated [the call for] the impeachment of the last Republican president. Not a very normal way to go.

But what this is going to add up to, whether we're going to see some sort of break in that respect, that's unknown given the way he operates. I don't know. I hope *he* knows. Maybe he does, maybe he doesn't. These are the great questions that three weeks in we can't answer, in the euphoria that some are feeling at the moment. It's always easy to govern when you're only appointing people and not making any real decisions.

KRISTOL: And the terror others are feeling is probably not, maybe not the best guide, either, though, to actually thinking about what is going to happen.

I guess, I just keep thinking about Goldwater, McGovern. I mentioned those two, I'm probably being too unimaginative to keep looking for examples like that, and they're both so ideological; as you say, it's a little different than someone like Trump.

But also, it is the case, these guys *lose*, have lost. If you look at the winners in presidential elections – I guess this is correct, isn't it? – since forever, almost, or certainly in our lifetimes and beyond, we've never had the test case of a Trump as president. Someone who's that much of a rebel within his own

party becoming the president of the country leading that party. It would be as if George Wallace had won as a Democrat in 1972. And everyone forgets, he won a couple of primaries. You know? He got shot. But who knows what would have happened?

But it's sort of that magnitude of reversal. Goldwater and McGovern lost. And to some degree, therefore, it went back to normal with Nixon and Carter, in a certain way. Then Reagan was Goldwater, but different, and made his peace with party in some ways. But Trump winning is astonishing.

CEASER: Inside of a party. That raises the question to what extent the party is a formality and whether he just came in as an Independent and took over the party on his own.

As I said, over the course of the campaign, as much as he fought the party, he did come closer on a lot of key points.

But the closest, in some ways, would be – just at the presidency, leaving out parties – would be Andrew Jackson. Who came from nowhere, was so different from the others. Had ideas that no one was quite sure of when he came in. The cult of the personality, the differences that he represented. That, in a way, was a kind of shock to the elite of the time. Because they had had these people who were, in a way, from the same background and class of the Founders or the children of the Founders; who had a certain degree of what the office meant, of what they were, of what they represented in the hierarchy of American society. They could have been members of the same country club.

But Jackson was from another place, from nowhere. Took time to develop what was going to be, after all, his ideology. No one was quite clear where he stood on many of these issues. He wasn't, I don't think, clear either, until events helped shaped this. So Trump, in that respect, would be the 'man from nowhere' of the 21st century.

KRISTOL: I suppose the analogy is good in the sense that, too, he beats John Quincy Adams, obviously, in the 'rerun', you might say, of [the election of 1824]. Jackson *had* been in politics – that's one pretty big difference – and had been a general, and had run for president before and had barely lost, obviously, in 1824.

But he beats John Quincy Adams, which is somewhat analogous, I suppose, to Trump beating first a Bush and then a Clinton. That is a pretty astounding – I mean, symbolically somehow, right? He beats the son- and brother-of first, and then, the wife-of previous sitting presidents. It's sort of, somehow very symbolically apt. Shows how much he, I think, takes on the establishment of both parties.

CEASER: That's true. You could say that Trump did that within a party, and ultimately, is closer to the Republican Party. The separation isn't complete. But there is that fact that he comes in as his own person *apart* from the party, as well as being partly *of* the party.

KRISTOL: Let's talk about the parties for a moment. Was this hostile takeover of a party supposed to happen in the modern party system? Supposed to be *able* to happen, I guess.

CEASER: Well, if we take the modern party system as beginning with the reforms of '68 and '72, which were forged in the circumstances of the Vietnam War – maybe not completely deliberate in what they wanted to do – but they effectively, by the end, instituted the system that the progressives wanted. Which was eliminating, in the rules, the party power-brokers as the gateway, and the convention as the gateway to the nominee. That became possible.

At the same time, of course, the parties continued to exist as entities and were very powerful and were able to influence the outcome. The rules opened it up to pretty much anything. The actual fact that a party is a party, and thinks together, and has the same centers of power, constrains the choice.

Trump is the first one who takes advantage of this *fully*, others had tried and gotten pretty far. But the first one to take advantage of this fully – the rules – and simply take over the party in a way that no one in any part of the establishment of the party could have expected or believed. That is the new thing.

Others, as I said, had tried, Wallace and others, but they had been stopped. In part, because the power of the party. That's the difference.

It does raise the question, "Is this just going to be a one off?"

It's not usual for a party to nominate someone not from the party; but it has happened in primaries in a lot of the states in offices, running for Senate and for the House, that some pretty strange characters end up on the ticket. This, in a way, opens this possibility up to the national level and, in this case, an extraordinary individual, in terms of being able to appeal to the constituency inside the party, was able to take advantage of it.

KRISTOL: I suppose that's the best way to think about. There were many *wannabe*-Trumps. There were businessmen who had never held office who had ran, Steve Forbes and others. They did pretty well, for a while. Herman Cain, even, in 2012. There were challengers to the establishment who ran, Pat Buchanan, George Wallace, we mentioned, Howard Dean in '04 – who did pretty well, for a while.

Trump was the one who did well, more than pretty well, and for more than a while, and actually won the nomination. And then, the presidency. So, I suppose we really don't have much experience, in a sense, of how much difference it makes.

But I don't see, in principle, why it couldn't happen again. Now that we've seen how weak the party establishment is in terms of actually speaking to their own voters. Now that could change, I suppose – I don't know why it would. And the media, the ability to end-around the media – including some of the media on your side, sort of. The ability to spend your own money, to some degree. Though he didn't spend that much, but the fact that he could self-finance was important; he couldn't have gotten going, maybe. Being a celebrity. All these things, he's not the only one, right?

CEASER: No, not at all. You could look at it two ways. You could say that this only happened by the accident of this year. Not merely him, not that he was so great – but, of course, he would assert that he was, and there is something to that in terms of his being able to communicate.

But what happened with the rest of the people? They split and diced themselves up, and he was able to take advantage of that. He had a lot of pretty good people who couldn't get together, wouldn't get together. It's understandable – each thought that "why should I sacrifice my ambition?" – but he could have been stopped. And if you look at some of the other races where you mentioned, some of these outsiders, they were stopped by a coming together of the rest of the party. So there's that.

On the other hand, once something is done, it proves something. It's like in any game or sport, you can see something is done – yes, you can actually catch a football with one hand; look at how many college kids catch it all the time with one hand now. He's shown something that's really important. That you can come into the party, take advantage of the possibility and the structure of the rules, and simply take over the party.

You also mentioned, which is important, the remarkable change that we face, really a revolution in communication. Communication used to be something that was expensive. If you wanted to communicate, it was hard to do. Think of the first time, I suppose, they had to chisel something on Hammurabi's Wall. They had to get all the chisels there, it took a long time. Communication has always been expensive. You have to either build an organization and communicate through that, or through mail. It's now possible – the cost of information, of communication is zero. This is a revolution in human affairs.

He can sit in a room and send out a message to millions of people. The trick is getting people to listen. But now it's physically possible to communicate at the cost of zero. Big change!

KRISTOL: All this happening at once, I think, is important. The communication revolution, plus the party weakness, plus a fair amount of discontent because of economic trends, globalization, and somehow.

I think it's a very important point you make and it's a point that goes to – others in political science should think about. Once you show something can be done – that in principle, something could have been done for 5 years, 15 years, 30 years, it's hard to know – But once someone has done it, everything changes because then others start to do it. Then, people figure out how to counteract. Football is a good example. New offensive formations that work for a year or two, and then, of course, the defense adjusts. But then you're in a different game at the end of it all, somewhat different game, than you had before this cycle began. Showing that it works is really an important moment –

CEASER: The system of war gaming – what we chose to do in Garmisch when we play the war games, and how the generals fought the war games. You can see every change in theory of how a war is fought changes dramatically, and that change then sets in motion a new defense. So the world is never the same.

That's been true of campaigns, I think, on a minor scale, all the time – that's why they're called 'campaigns' (military campaigns). But this is, I think, qualitatively different. Wherein a quantitative change, as Marx said, becomes qualitative, this was it. It will re-game the whole system, and that's the new world in which we live.

KRISTOL: So 2016 probably *is* an inflection point, in that respect.

CEASER: In that respect. At least, it opens up new possibilities.

KRISTOL: The other way in which this is true – We were talking about this in the office, and I was trying to make the contrarian argument that it was pretty fluky, he was unusually talented, the other candidates attacked each other. Walker blew up even before getting to the launch pad, so to speak. Just a lot of weird things happened. Bush was a perfect foil. You can't draw so many lessons from Trump's victory. How many other people are going to have his degree of celebrity, *and* the money, *and* happening to be right on a couple of issues that people were unhappy about, where everyone else was wrong? Incidentally, he got so lucky that Bush was liberal on immigration, Rubio was liberal on immigration, they were both free traders. He sort of had a niche to himself, but it turned out to be a very big niche, you know – 38 to 45 percent. Enough for winner-take-all primaries.

So I was making this point and we were arguing about it, but then someone, one of my younger colleagues, made a very obvious but shrewd – /thought shrewd, since I hadn't thought of it at the moment – observation that: But that doesn't really prove anything because WWI needn't have happened, one assumes. There were like a million contingencies, bizarre miscalculations, and flukes. What if the shot had missed in Sarajevo, and so forth, that led to it happening when it happened? But once it's happened, it's *happened*. And the effects can be huge and can lead to a second war, they can lead to the whole change of politics, they can lead to mass movements that no one thought possible – the Bolsheviks taking over the Soviet Union. I mean, that truly isn't quite WWI – But it is a very good point, too, proving that something was somewhat contingent and didn't have to happen –

CEASER: That's why we have the expression 'crossing the Rubicon,' in a way. Did he have to? No. But one simple act changed the history of the world.

II: (33:36 – 56:48) A Changing Conservatism?

KRISTOL: Let's talk about different aspects of that. Let's stay for a minute on the Republican Party and the conservative movement, which has been lodged in that party for quite a while now. Let's talk about conservatism. You've written on that some, quite a bit, actually. Trump seems at odds with what we would have thought to be the different elements of the conservative movement to a pretty considerable degree, no?

CEASER: Yes. Prior to the formation of the modern conservatives, let's say the ideas that began with Buckley and the others in the '50s and '60s, what was a conservative? It was basically a party that eschewed very many ideological principles. It was sort of "let the good person govern, give him flexibility." The party of doctrine was always the party of the left. They were doctrinaire. You think of conservative leaders like Disraeli or something like that, that's what a conservative did. You understood that governing was a complex process, a decent person should be put in and given the chance to make decisions on his own.

The Republican Party, to respond to the Democratic Party, became, in a sense, an 'ideological' party – maybe that's too strong a word – of its own, with several doctrines. It's great leader, Reagan, was the most committed to this. He tethered himself to an ideology. It was a kind of populist movement in its own right, but it was a populist movement that was defined by, in his view, principles of conservatism. And he did read and think about these people, Milton Friedman and others, they became the teachers of the movement.

In this respect, you could say Trump is, by throwing away doctrine or simply surpassing it, in some ways, is a return to an older form – except that the older form was meant to protect prudent rule, rule of state. Whether Trump will be able to do that, whether that's the opening, or whether this is something that's inchoate, we don't know. There's that question about conservatism that comes up. So, that's one way where you could say there's a kind of return to an older conservatism.

But as you go through the different branches of conservatism, people have cut them up in different ways, historians have. I've spoken of "four heads of conservatism," at one point – they've already changed – but one of them was neo-conservatism, another one was libertarianism, or let's say, economic-conservatism, a third one is social conservatism, and a fourth one is a kind of grab bag of traditionalism. Those were just the 'heads' I looked at.

On each one you can see elements of continuity but elements of real conflict.

I mentioned the neo-conservatives first, and you're right here. That could be the point of, at least at this point, where there looks like the possibility of greatness difference, on paper. The neo-conservatives, in their foreign policy, have looked the United States' role in the world as crucial, not only for our own interests but for the interests of the world. In fact, that you can't separate in this age the interests in the world from American interests because there is no spontaneous order in the world, and it's fallen to us by destiny to be the ordering part. That, I think, is the key understanding of neo-conservatism.

The other one is the thing that acts as the American nation. So, in a way, it's a *nationalist* internationalism, as distinct from an internationalist internationalism. Muscular, and I think, on top of all that, neo-conservatives see this as our destiny and, also, part of our nobility. There's something noble in that. That's kind of "American exceptionalism" in the international sphere.

So Trumpism or Trump's discussions really do call that into question. "America first," in a way, begins to think that maybe there is no world order that's important, that that takes care of itself. That we're like every other nation, only we want to be first for ourselves.

Well, of course, the neo-conservative view is that can't happen in this age when someone has to take charge of the world order. "America first," therefore, could be a kind of rejection of that, or we only need think of ourselves like any other nation. I think neo-conservatives say, "That won't work for us and that

won't work for the world. You can't judge America's interests only in its own interest, given the character of the world." Trump has said things as well.

In addition, part of the neo-conservative view is that this new order would have, as part of it, some of America's commitments. Not as the core of foreign policy – it's still realistic – but where possible, at the margins and even more, to put the kind of world we want into effect. So, the spread of liberalism, to the extent possible, with all the difficulties. Maybe – it's said that neo-conservatives didn't see the difficulties. There's all that criticism that has gone on *ad nauseam*. But I think that was the commitment.

Trump has seemed not to value that very much in some of his statements. Just whoever keeps *order* is good. This connection with Russia and Putin, this challenges that.

I will say, now, we're sitting here November 29, that the first act he's made – "act," as a president-elect – occurred with the death of Castro, where he was on the side, really, of what the neo-conservatives would consult. Namely, that it's not just the question that the dictator is dead, but that the dictator was a *dictator*. So there you have the importance of that. That it was above and beyond our interests – and the deals, and the money changing hands between the United States and Cuba – that's kind of important. So maybe there could be some rapprochement.

There also could be some rapprochement of who's going to actually run the foreign policy. We'll have to see, but that's a real difference, on paper, in the domain of neo-conservatism. You could go through the rest of them. I don't want to keep talking as a monologue.

KRISTOL: But I think that's a very interesting point. That "America First" and "American exceptionalism" have overlaps in rhetoric and certainly in policy, too, in some degree. But they're actually at odds with one another, theoretically, and practically, in many ways.

It will be interesting how much you can go back from "American exceptionalism" to "America First," in a sense, in the modern world. Maybe you can – you just ignore, not ignore but minimize, this whole alliance structure. Free trade was so much a part of that. Sort of underrated, I suspect, as a part of that American world order. "The world America made," as, I think, Bob Kagan called it.

CEASER: They do share nationalism, not exactly the same; I think it's fair to say, neo-conservatism nationalism is scrupulous about not being closed. But still, they do carry the nationalism, they do carry strong military.

But the whole thing of how we view the world order and America's place in it, I would say its place in the destiny of the world – after all, this country was formed with a kind of destiny, either God-given destiny or just historic destiny. I think that's been a part, and I think neo-conservatives have picked that up in a realistic way. They've tried to make sense of this notion of 'destiny' without, let's say, its theocratic implications, to give a direction to our policy and a nobility to it. "America First" does raise that into question, especially with its resonances of "America First" in the past. So lots to see there.

We did say, I think you mentioned, that the people who are actually going to be involved in making the policies in foreign affairs: so far, looks like it's not that different. People are being mentioned, we don't know, as we're sitting, who the Secretary of State will be. But many of the people mentioned would fit in, I think pretty closely, in the presidency of a Scott Walker or a Marco Rubio. It wouldn't have been that different. But how much are the advisors going to count rather than what's coming from the top? We don't know that.

KRISTOL: I would say, on the other strands of conservatism, the one thing that I think kind of held them together – the traditionalists, to some degree the social conservatives, certainly the free market conservatives – was a belief in small government or limited government. I would push back a little on the notion that the older American conservatism isn't quite Disraeli-esque. It is in some ways, just competent management of affairs, statesmen-like, even, informed by history.

But it was also really – certainly since Wilson, I guess, and the reaction to Wilson – it was always about the government is too big. We need to restrain the government. Always about some version or other of constitutionalism and defending the ‘old’ Constitution against that kind of activism. Either judicial activism or congressional activism, which the courts weren’t curbing. That’s what the great fight under Roosevelt was, of course.

That would seem to be about a century old, that tradition. Reagan certainly, he probably paid more lip service to it than actually rolling back government. But the core of his first inaugural address was saying “government is part of the problem more often than being part of the solution,” or however he put it exactly.

That does seem pretty strikingly *not* to be much part of Trump. Either from a debt point of view – he doesn’t seem to care much for entitlement reform. But even in a kind of fundamental way. What’s always, I think, tied together the different conservative elements has been useful because it allowed other differences to be bridged, in a way, was the – Now, he’ll make a conservative constitutional Supreme Court appointment, I suppose, so that might, again, paper things over for a while.

His idea of being president is you go tell some company not to move to Mexico. There’s not a whole lot of rule of law, constitutionalism, limited government. That is a strain that I think you could find all the way back, couldn’t you? To the ’20s, and through Taft, and through –

CEASER: But not before then. You could say from the 1860s to the, the Republican was the party of a bigger government. A party that did a lot of things, that saw itself as the mover. Going back, even, to Teddy Roosevelt.

They began switching sides when they saw what progressivism could mean. Also, if you want to stretch this, they were also the party of protectionism and the tariff, in a strange way. That was the core of this. We’re not the party of strict laissez-faire, that was only one part of it. I’m sure Trump is thinking about that.

KRISTOL: No, but that is a good point. Trump, in some ways, is more of an 1870s, ’80s, early ’90s’ Republican.

CEASER: Yeah, you had a kind of welfare system introduced, indirectly, through the support for the Grand Old Army. People have studied this, that Republican Party did a lot of those things: Land-grant colleges, the Hamiltonian plan of development, infrastructure.

KRISTOL: You’re right. Restrictionism in immigration, that was a little later. And protectionism, certainly.

CEASER: But the constitutional thing – I was going now to the group of the traditionalists. One element of the traditionalism on which Trump is problematic has been the emphasis on constitutionalism. Which I think, even when you had the Republican Party as the party that was activist, they rooted that activism in an interpretation of the Constitution and stressed that point. This was the old debate between Jefferson and Hamilton. Hamilton gave justification by his reading of the Constitution. So this isn’t something Trump has emphasized, to say the least. That doesn’t mean that he doesn’t care about it, we don’t know. But if someone cares about it, they would put it up front. He hasn’t. That has been a concern.

On the other part of traditionalism, modern Republican traditionalism, I think that traditionalists, they’ve been more concerned about, say, a common culture, which swings over into immigration. That’s been a debate that took place many times between, say, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *National Review*. A large part of conservatism of the *National Review* was always, say, “Well, we want to make sure we don’t let in too many people.”

I think there's a way of treating that in terms of ideology, but there is also a way of treating it practically. The ideologies, in this case, can sometimes trump the practical. The practical being, probably America, at this point, was in line for a pause – even if you believe in a large amount of immigration – I think it was time for a pause. I think it was time for, a lot of people wanted a pause to assess. I think you saw a lot of communities were disrupted and people felt that, they felt that they had been the ones who were short changed by all this. This may turn out to be wrong, this may turn out to be right. People may see that they prefer the labor to the community elements. But it was certainly time, I think, for a pause.

Added to the fact that there are dangers about which group should be coming in, which shouldn't be a matter of ideology. It's a matter of *real politick*. You don't want to bring into the American population, groups that are going to pose, not as individuals but in groups, it's hard to say, but groups could pose danger. That's just pure common sense. Forget the ideology, I think that's where we were, and I think, therefore, we will see a wall. I know someone has spoken just as a fence or a chalk line, but I see a wall being built as a great symbol.

I'm sure that the Trumps will monetize it. It's going to be the southern part of Texas and there're going to be hotels on the wall, there'll be Marriott's on the wall. They'll be Holiday Inns on the wall, with Mexicans and Americans both coming to these, built right into the wall with swimming pools.

KRISTOL: I'm glad you have thought through this so much. Trump should call you up –

CEASER: And it only cost 10 billion dollars. Think of what Jerry Brown has been spending in California on a project which won't even be completed, if it ever is, until 2030 or '40. And the estimated prices now are well over 100 billion.

KRISTOL: That's a light rail, or something like that?

CEASER: The rapid rail that's going through and I think, by 2020, will end in an almond farm outside of Bakersfield, so that you can move *seamlessly*, as so many want to do, between Palo Alto and Bakersfield.

KRISTOL: This is why Trump wins, right? Liberalism becomes this kind of insane, big government –

CEASER: The big government part – that's another, going to the libertarians. In some ways, the libertarians are losers. *And* the economists. This is the Milton Friedman part. Of course, they've taken a real step down, because they were really a gateway inside of the Republican Party on certain orthodoxies. What you can and can't do – which isn't to say that they are wrong but, politically, it took a step down.

This wasn't checked out with the standard economists. I think the economists that you'll see in the administration will look a lot different from the economists you've seen in any other Republican administration. That's still to be seen. They'll be more businessmen and less of the orthodox economists. That's a new issue, to what extent, someone would say, that conservatism has given too much sway politically to ideas of economics and not been political enough, that's going to turn out. We'll see what will happen.

There's a case to be made – maybe it's true, maybe it's not – by Trump people I speak with, which is something like this: "Of course, some of these things may not be the best from the point of view of growth and economics, when you go through it. But they are a small price to pay if you take care of the *big* things that account for growth, which is: less government regulation, lower taxes for business. And therefore, in a way, you pay off the people who vote for you – that's partly why they vote for you. So what? You sacrifice some degree of economic growth for something that is going to bring you a lot *more* economic growth. Look what we have now, which is almost zero. So there's a case that's being made here. Whether it's going to work out we'll see.

A lot of people have a lot of worry about trade, and the implications for trade, and how far that would go in trade wars, and the degree to which we're part of globalized economy. That could be worrisome.

KRISTOL: I suppose, what I take away from this on the Republican Party and the conservatism front – and we'll get to the bigger question, of what Trump means for the country or the nation. But on the conservatism front, it is the breaking of orthodoxies. Which, of course, can be a good thing and is necessary to happen every now and then.

But it's a pretty *broad* breaking of orthodoxies for a movement that, as you say, had become quite ideological and had all kinds of gateways and checklists – too many, probably, that got a little ridiculous. You had to say that you were for this and against that, and this latest Supreme Court decision. Then everyone signed up dutifully on the conservative constitutional agenda, the conservative economic agenda. As you say, the different aspects of it became too checklist-y. But the degree to which Trump has kicked it over is pretty astounding, I suppose. And it means, of course, how do you predict what he's going to do as president?

CEASER: That's the issue, in a way. And since a lot of those ideas kicked over, I think are pretty good ones and, in a way, they're good fences on governing. Sometimes they did go a little far but they were good fences on governing.

So what do you do when you break that fence? Do you enter into a world of prudence or do you enter into a world of inchoate and erratic behavior? What's going to happen?

There are changes there. I'm concerned about the overthrow of these forms of conservatism – recognizing that some of them, to me, were becoming a little cloying.

Some of the economic stuff, you know, I don't think took account of the lives people were living and what they expected from their government. I think Jeff Sessions was at the front end of this where he says, "You know, this isn't a business, it's a country." One little line had a lot of resonance.

Of course, it had resonance within the Republican Party. The Republican Party was the one that broke the back on the idea of immigration. The "Gang of Eight" and what not, split the party. But pretty much, the Republican Party said enough. That battle had already been waged within the Republican Party, just maybe not at the *Wall Street Journal*.

KRISTOL: I suppose the defeat of the "Gang of Eight" bill in 2013 after it passed the Senate was, in retrospect, a very big moment. Paul Ryan wanted it and John Boehner wanted it, really, and the Democrats wanted it, and President Obama wanted it, and the *Wall Street Journal* wanted it.

CEASER: A lot of parts of the elite wanted it.

KRISTOL: A lot of, let's call them 'normal' conservatives, *The Weekly Standard*, *National Review* didn't want it, on sort of different grounds. You didn't have to be a nativist to be against that particular piece of legislation. In retrospect, that was a moment, I suppose, where that was a bit of a harbinger of Trump.

CEASER: Another part is, on the big government side, that is kind of surprising. The precursor, the John the Baptists as it were of Trump, has been taken to be the Tea Party. They were both populist, they both emerged to the surprise of many, and yet, the key elements of the Tea Party are not literally in Trumpism. Which is the Constitution. It's there but maybe not first, and also, of course, cutting the cost of government.

And I don't merely say 'debt'. I think that is intergenerational justice. I think that always should have been sold on that basis. That's not a concern right now. Trump mentioned the debt more and more towards the

end of the campaign, but that differentiated Ryan from Trump, responsibility on that point. Either it's a cost that he feels that you have to bear to draw voters in, or that the growth that we will achieve, rather than going how the Democrats were, is better than the alternative. But he overthrew those elements, which I thought –

I thought that the element of the debt was going to be *the* issue of conservatism of the next generation. *Wrong*. It's amazing that that was so quickly overthrown. It just seemed so compelling, so important, and so logical when you looked at this thing, when you read the accounts of where the nation is going into debt. It still may prove to be, in terms of the health of our system, I haven't given up on that, but politically, it lost its force.

KRISTOL: Just to conclude this part of the discussion, it [the national debt] was the heart of a, let's call it a "conservative narrative," as you guys say in the academy, that tied together: the economists, who were worried about it from an economic point of view, and moral concerns about burdening the next generation, constitutional concerns about "this is what happens when government is untrammled from the notion that it should balance its budgets or limit its goals," or have even a gold standard, all these obvious, kind of old fashioned constraints gone, and this is what happens – you get 20 trillion dollars of debt. It was so core, I think – whatever the violations of practice by different Republican administrations – to the "conservative narrative" of what the problem was and the general kinds of solutions to it.

And for Trump, he talks about the debt some, but he seems to have pretty much trampled over that orthodoxy. Which, again, comes back to what is party government about? Whatever one thinks of Clinton and Obama, let's say, on the Democratic side, and Bush and Bush, to take the most recent four presidents on the Republican side, or Reagan, Bush, Bush – there is kind of a party *coherence* to what the Republicans did and didn't do, and to what the Democrats did and didn't do. With, obviously, shading to the middle, and some bipartisanship, and some deviations. One does have the feeling that Trump could just really scramble that in a way that we haven't seen in quite a long time.

CEASER: On key issues, let's say – we mentioned foreign policy, we mentioned size of government debt, trade. These are issues. But how is he actually going to do this once governing? That remains an open question. Since it's not driven by any ideological checklist he seems to have.

These are discrete policies, spoken in terms, instead of ideologies you have "deals." And each deal is a separate and distinct package; each deal is separate from one another. The connections between the deals don't seem to be as important as the deal itself. It's another way of viewing the world. It could be said to be a kind of prudence. It could be said that you don't want to connect things that aren't connected, that's doctrinaire. We'll see.

III: (56:48– 1:33:49) From Obama to Trump

KRISTOL: We've barely mentioned the current President of the United States, Barack Obama. Let's step back and talk more about: Is 2016 a big moment for the political system, as a whole? Not so much [about] the Republican Party, conservatism, not so much [about] the election results.

I do think one could look and say, "Gee, the first two post-Cold War presidents we had were Bill Clinton and George Bush. Kind of conventional, normal, center-left and center-right, 16 years of normalcy, I guess." Then you get Barack Obama beats Hillary Clinton. Then Donald Trump beats first a Bush then Hillary Clinton, brother- and son-of the preceding Bush president. Somehow it does seem symbolically apt. How much of our politics changed in a bigger sense? Are we living in an Obama-Trump America, not a Bush-Clinton America?

CEASER: Well, the two are extraordinary personalities, in one sense or another, that loom over almost all presidents in that respect: being outsized in one way.

Obama, the 2008 campaign, he's a traditional Democrat in many ways, to the left side of the party, but still. The secret of Obama [was that he] exceeded his ideas. It was him the person, him at the moment, the African American at this moment. The speaker. Everything that was invested in him, the worship of him. The fact that this was really an outside personality who became virtually president of the entire world, and saw himself as the president of the entire world, of where the world was going. He had his adorers, I like to call them the "adorables," just as Trump had his "deplorables." That great group.

The key to this was some way in which he was able to relate to mass audiences. I remember going to his rallies in 2008, the energy and the electrically was like none of the other candidates. It was just something there that others didn't have. Obviously, that carried over from the rallies, outside beyond, in ways that no one quite understood.

Similarly, Trump, in a very different way, is a person who was able to deliver a message and tremendous energy at his rallies in the same way, to reach an audience. Now, his was never an international audience, it was "America first"; it was really based on this country. In a way, it was more limited. He was looked askance by other nations. Although, the implications of Trump's victory on the rest of the Western world may be just as great or greater than Obama's. That is left to be seen. But it was much more intensely tribal, which is his way of looking at things.

And a way of being able to go over the heads of the party, as Obama did, but in a way, against them when he wanted, as well. So we have two types of popular leaders that emerge: one charismatic, one more a popular-leadership, as some have said, demagogic in character. But both have this character.

Is this a new element, a requirement of our political system or just the accidents of two one-offs after another? Well, two one-offs after another is maybe already more than a coincidence. It's just extraordinary.

I think, in light of this, there is something the two share, consciously or unconsciously. I would say consciously. Both have elegant wives, too. Consciously, the fact that they must admire something in each other. They see that they both pulled off the same, or part of, the same trick of being able to communicate to a mass in a way that could elevate you above the need of party, in some sense. That's pretty different.

I could see us slipping back to normalcy. You just don't have that many human beings like that, but they sure both stand out, at this point, like that.

KRISTOL: They've opened the door, it would seem, to a kind of new politics. I remember at the time, and I was in grade school, I suppose, but Kennedy, I think, people had the sense of the charisma for the first time. Max Weber's term, social science word, suddenly became an everyday word in American journalism. I guess we have had since then, to some degree, a politics of charisma, muted by the American party system and by the constitutional system. But probably, you know, no Kennedy, no Reagan, right? I think there is some truth to that probably. Now you do sort of think no Obama, no Trump as sort of [going from] the next stage of charisma to a certain personality and celebrity, and outsized hopes, in the case of Obama. And with Trump outsized hope, I would say, but also fears.

CEASER: That's the similarity. Then there is the question of relation of both of those to constitutionalism, which is interesting because, in a way, one might look at this and say this is pure Caesarism of a certain sort. Two Caesars after another, three Caesars would be more than enough.

Obama is interesting because, at least on the rational level, in 2008, he and his party ran, strangely, as a kind of constitutionalist party; in that if you go back, they were warning against the imperial presidency of George Bush. Someone who had violated the Constitution. Obama was part of this, as were all the others; it's in their platform. They were worried not only about what happen during the Iraq War, supposedly these violations of the Constitution, but these things called signing statements, where Bush

was depicted as a kind of dictator who cared little about the Constitution. The American Bar Association was behind this. Half or more of the professors of law were writing screeds against this unconstitutional president of George Bush. And Obama, as a teacher of constitutional law, put himself on the line on this. I call them, institutionally, they were Whigs. Against the president and for the Congress. The old-style Whigs of the anti-Jacksonians.

No sooner did they get in office, then this talk of constitutionality died out rapidly. Obama, himself, became the one who seemed to most disregard the Constitution, or so his critics said. I think there is something to say that he threw a lot of constitutional restraints overboard. The law professors, almost all of them, a couple of exceptions, noted, who had complained so vociferously, were suddenly quiet. The American Bar Association, not a peep from them.

Yet, the ways in which the constitutional restraints were violated were enormous. They invented a new doctrine. 'Dysfunctionality of Congress' as a way of saying if Congress is dysfunctional by the judgement of the president, then the president achieves this new power to do whatever he wants. And that becomes somehow acceptable. That's interesting.

Now we come to the constitutionality of Trump, who seems, from the campaign, less constitutional. He's not talking about the Constitution. He's criticized executive orders but he hasn't gone into a big thing about the imperial presidency. He seems to have some fascination for strongmen acting individually. Yet, the paradox would be, I could see – I'm not going to bet, but I could see – coming out of this, a much more constitutional resolution than occurred under Obama.

I don't see that the Republicans in Congress are going to change as quickly, if they change at all, as the Democrats did. Which was kind of a disgrace, really, seen in retrospect. I hope they feel ashamed about this. I think the Republicans do take, many of them take, constitutional issues more seriously. I hope that at least three years more seriously. That would be nice.

But also, the politics of the thing. The fact that he's not exactly their first or foremost Republican candidate, if a Republican at all. The fact, therefore, that he's further away from his party than maybe any president in the era of parties has ever been, going back to Andrew Johnson, who you know, was in there as a kind of Republican, but neither party really supported him.

Who, really, has fully invested in Trump? They are invested as long as he does well, but if things really begin to fall flat, they will say, "Well, he was never fully ours. We said when we ran, 'we're running to check him.'" That was the early core of the campaign of Marco Rubio and many of the senators. They do have cool relations.

So we can imagine a more active constitutional kind of Congress, and so you have a "checked Caesar." You know, when Augustus came to power in Rome, he praised the Senate while taking away all its powers. That was his great change. He made everything look, on the surface, as if it was lawful, and it became unlawful. One could say that was Obamaism. This could be the opposite: one who comes in who looks like everything is unlawful, but there could be a large degree of law that could develop. That would be a happy scenario. That one I imagined in May, when I thought the unthinkable: an article I wrote for your [magazine] about his becoming president, that this could be a silver lining. This return to constitutionalism.

KRISTOL: I think the Obama thing was always a bit of myth, the Whigism. I remember just thinking this at the time – and being of course, liking McCain and having many friends in the Bush years. You know, columns in Denver, 70,000 people. It was a sort of left-wing Caesarism, which means it doesn't seem very muscular, perhaps. It's more 'hope and change' and 'we're the ones you've been waiting for'. It really had that feel of a kind of Caesarism.

And, the other thing I'd say is, they won a big victory, the Democrats in '06 against Bush, and then Obama increased the margins in '08. First Democrat to win a majority of the vote in the presidential election since LBJ in '64. He had a mandate, you might say, or the party felt it had a mandate, or liberalism felt it had a mandate, and he took advantage. And liberalism has never been terribly constitutional, so they were happy to go in that direction.

I do think this is different – on the one hand Trump is the president, so that's huge, as he would say. It was amazing the inside straight he pulled off in Wisconsin, and Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

On the other hand, as a true, empirical fact, he ran *behind* the House Republicans, by quite a lot. If you look at their whole national vote, I think they beat the Democrats by about three million, and Trump's going to end up *losing* to Hillary Clinton by a couple of million. A lot of the Republican Senators ran ahead of Trump, slightly ahead in some cases, but not that many of them think they're in the Senate because of Trump, or in the House. I really think that's very limited. That's not like Reagan, or Roosevelt, or any of those big, realigning elections. So there is a big possibility that Trump, inadvertently, could lead to congressional reassertion of power, to some degree, against Trump. Or maybe, not necessarily *against* Trump, but just on its own, you might say, as Trump's own policy predilections are also murky and conflicting in some ways.

CEASER: Numerically, if you look at, and we've done charts and everything on where he stands, and say all the presidents since McKinley, modern presidents, he's way down: of 31, he's like 26th in percentage of Electoral Vote for the winner. [And] if you look at all the presidents who have won after two terms, the "change presidents," he's down at the bottom of all those. So his *personal* mandate is not large.

But given the expectation [that he would lose], that still keeps him going: it was against *all odds*.

KRISTOL: That is a big deal, I think.

CEASER: In a way, it's magnified. If you looked at it in the calm light, of "how does he do it, if you put it on paper," you don't capture that element of "against all odds," and that continues to linger.

KRISTOL: And against the elites. That's very important. I mean, just talking to people after the election who were for Trump. A camera man over at ABC came over to me, "We did it." He was so excited. It was a feeling like he, who has been, I think felt somewhat neglected, his concerns are not at the top of anyone's list in the fancy network building in which he works. And people like him are not featured on the evening news, you know. He's not one of the favorite groups, hardworking, middle-American guy. They finally, they won one, you know?

CEASER: That was the breadth of his populism. Because conservatives have an ambiguous relationship to populism, obviously. Populism is like the majority ruling *directly*, as Mencken said, you know, "hard" and all that.

But, conservatives are constitutionalists, that's one element. It was '63, the people ultimately prevailed, but you want forms and constraints, they've always supported those. So that's one element in which there's tension. The other element is that, in a well-ordered society, the elites are supposed to be, in some sense, on the side of order. That's the part that has changed for a long time. Conservatives have a right to be populist because the elites really aren't conservative and haven't been for a long time. The only ones that Sanders attacked, the elites, were business, the banks. Look at what Trump went after. He went after places in our society where the levers are held by elites. Big media, elite. Universities, elite. Experts, elite. These were the ones, where these people were saying, "We got them," that was more important.

I know, I traveled the rural parts of Virginia. You get outside of Charlottesville and talk to people, it was something like that. They wanted *these* people brought down. And he was their champion in that respect.

The economic part was important, but I think the economic part has been exaggerated and the overthrowing of the cultural elements is really just as important. That's the basis of the anger factor. It was in that.

KRISTOL: How much are you worried – maybe that's too judgmental a word – how much do you think there is a danger – there's another judgmental word – of the baby being thrown out with the bath water?

That is, I'm happy to prefer the common sense of middle-America to liberal elites. I really do agree with middle-America more often than not, certainly have in my adult life, I would say. That's part of what it's meant to be a conservative, even an intellectual conservative, who disagrees with most intellectuals and tries to defend a common sense and an experiential kind of wisdom of, you know, the school of hard knocks as opposed to the school of Mr. Jefferson [the University of Virginia], there, where you teach.

But, having said all of that – People are saying this is not just a revolt against the elites. It's a revolt against, not just against quote "experts" but against *actual* experts who do *actually* know some things. And against actual *reason* and against *truth*. How much do you think that's not a totally, just a made-up, lefty kind of anti-Trump talking point?

CEASER: Well, watch the campaign. Who couldn't, really, honestly, we can nuance this and everything but there were things said, even the nationalism was xenophobic. Lots of things that didn't comport with, let's say, I'll use the word "tapping into," but also restraining. You have to "tap into" but you restrain. Have we seen the restraint? That's the concern that people have.

As for the "reason", yes. It was the reasonable people in 2008, the experts and the reasonable people, who thought this was a campaign of reason. But look back at the campaign of 2008, the attachment of Obama was based not on reason but on a worship. This "adorable" thing is absolutely true. You look at the number of people with intelligence and a degree and all of that, and ask the basis upon which they made their commitment, and it looks like a leap of faith and emotion that's extraordinary.

So how much different from that is what happened in 2016? Different people, different sentiments, but it's not as if 2008 was this paragon of reason and 2016 is this paragon of unreason. That's a false way of looking at that, and I don't think that most of the people who are in the "reason camp" today, have ever really done justice to what happen in 2008. They should've. Some of them woke up, a little bit, when Obama got the Noble Peace Prize. I think people said, "Woah, wait."

KRISTOL: That was sort of the epitome of the –

CEASER: Coming a little bit to terms with what had happened.

KRISTOL: Let's reward hope, not reality. Yes, that's interesting.

On the other hand, we now have two, I think it's fair to say, two "leaps of faith" presidents. There has always been an element of leap of faith, you elect a young senator, you elect Kennedy, you elect Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, a former actor who had been for Goldwater. All of these things, of course, have elements of leaps of faith.

CEASER: FDR, too. Yes, a lot of presidents who are just, as you say, human beings who are made by their party. This was Van Buren's idea. He said we can't all be Jacksons and stars. That's dangerous. Can't we just have a politician? Well, how do you give the stature to an ordinary politician? That's the problem. Very few people have stature enough to be president. The party was supposed to supply the stature.

KRISTOL: But, in those cases, you did have, actually, Roosevelt had been the VP nominee and was from a famous family. Reagan had been almost the nominee in '76 and the governor, two terms, of the largest state. Clinton, twelve-year governor.

Whatever leaps of faith were involved in all these cases – Kennedy, even, spent actually a long time in the House and the Senate, 14 years. It does seem – Obama and Trump seem to me to be somewhat different category. Obama less so, because he was a Democrat, he had been a state legislator, he had run for the House and he won the Senate seat. Still pretty fast, four years in the Senate.

But then, certainly with Trump, of course, the first person not to held government office. Is that the future? Is that a kind of—?

CEASER: That could be a little bit more one-off. It's hard to imagine, though possible, that the normal pathway to the presidency would not come through politics. But, more you think about it, he's blazed this trail, others have proposed it. I forget how many times *Time Magazine* has had a businessman on its cover.

KRISTOL: Right, Peter Ueberroth. Every four years. Sometimes generals.

CEASER: Head of a car company. Iacocca. There were all those, and Ross Perot, of course.

KRISTOL: That's always been the kind of rebellion against party government, right? And that's what party government is designed to put down, way back with Edmund Burke and then Van Buren. I suppose, is this a moment where the opponents of party government have maybe gotten a little bit of the upper hand?

CEASER: Well, celebrity being a new factor and communication being new factor, it looks like it's more possible. We're in a much more celebrity world. I have trouble getting my head around what culture is, but it sure is different, in ways I can't fully describe. Just the rapidity of communication, the character of communication, obviously, the vulgarity of communication. These are all new things. How they'll evolve, we really don't know. But there's been a change, in that realm, in the last 15 years, which is pretty remarkable.

CEASER: And it's implications for governance? I guess, one aspect of the old party government, I don't know if it was really party loyalty to the president, but there was more of a certain sense of the party, watching out for the party. Is Donald Trump going to spend a lot of time worrying about whether the things he's doing are helping the Republican Party in 2018? Maybe he will, I don't know. It's an interesting question. Obama did not, wouldn't you say? Compared to preceding presidents.

CEASER: He destroyed his party pretty easily, but they sacrificed to him willingly. Suicide. But the party stood together. That was the remarkable thing. The "Obama Party," they banded around him and they walked the plank for him in a way that you can't imagine in 2010, such that few of them are there now. They stuck together, and this was a period in which the party was very much together.

That, I think, could be different inside the Republican Party. Could be different, as these views on issues emerge. I can see a lot of Republicans switching on different issues. A much more fluid situation in Congress, which would probably be healthy. That's another possibility.

KRISTOL: You said earlier that one of Trump's first kind of "acts" as not president, president-elect was the statement, on Castro's death. I suppose, at the end of the day, one talks about the election both demographically in terms of the voting, one talks about the campaigns which are very, very interesting, the party, the nominating process.

But, I suppose, governing, really, is fundamentally important. The Reagan revolution – I was arguing, someone was arguing, “Trump’s the new Reagan. The Trump revolution is as important as the Reagan revolution.” And I said, and I think I’m right about this, “The Reagan revolution wasn’t that he beat Jimmy Carter in 1980.” That was impressive, that he had come back from losing in ’76. Come all the way from Goldwater – his speech for a presidential candidate who got slaughtered in ’64 – all the way to the presidency in ’80. But that wasn’t the Reagan revolution.

The Reagan revolution was that he governed for eight years and followed conservative policies in, at least two very big areas: taxes and foreign policy. And succeeded. That’s why there was a Reagan revolution. And elected his vice president, who continued, basically, those policies, certainly in foreign policy, and won the Cold War. So, I suppose, how Trump governs and the success of his governance is just overwhelmingly important for all the theorizing one can do about it.

CEASER: It is good to keep in mind that the purpose of elections is to choose someone who governs, not the other way around. We’re so obsessed with elections that we attribute the impact and effects to elections; whereas, it is governing. As you point out with Reagan, even his great speech becomes ridiculous – even good speeches – if they’re not backed up by deeds. There is no rhetorician in the world that sounds good when everything in the world is failing around them. You look absurd. And the words look absurd. And the dissonance between them.

It is going to depend on governing. As it should be, one would hope. We’re not living in a virtual world. I think there’s still an element of reality in this world. A small amount, but –

KRISTOL: As a political scientist who studies governing as well as elections, what would you say, and this is, of course, very hypothetical, but what would be the things to watch for?

I mean, of course, you could have massive recessions that no one predicts, and you could have foreign wars, and so forth. I don’t know, if you had to predict where the big successes or failures would be, or the key things on which he will be judged. Foreign policy? Domestic policy? Economic policy?

For example, I had a conversation with Bill Galston, just recently, the Clinton Democrat, who said look, not as a Democrat but really speaking from what’s good for the country, one of the things he worries about the most is Trump really has – a lot of hopes have been invested in Trump in Wisconsin, and Ohio, and Pennsylvania. They think that he’s going to turn their economic situation around in Scranton, or Youngstown, or whatever. And, he’s probably not. I mean this is Bill’s line. Maybe he could do temporary stuff, but basically, globalization is globalization, and technology is technology, and those jobs aren’t coming back. They’re not going to have the lives they thought they might have 20 years before. And maybe we’ll get better at retraining and maybe, of course, we’ll do all kinds of things.

But very unlikely that there will be the kind of turnaround that they might have thought in the excitement of the day after election day. And that’s worrisome. If you have tens of millions of people who invested a lot and *didn’t* get what they hoped, you could have a really nasty, nastier, populous backlash. Is that possible? How much should one worry about that? Or can he? Does he have a fair amount of low-hanging fruit? I guess that’s, again, an empirical policy question.

CEASER: That’s difficult to say. In effect, you’ve put on politics something that’s really happening outside of politics – automation and globalization. Even with some trade barriers, this isn’t going to change these facts, entirely. You can build a car with a lot fewer people today. So, how are the lives of these people going to change, and what do they really expect, and how disappointed will they really be? That’s going to be key. But I also think that the economic part is only one part of it.

KRISTOL: That’s a very important point. If they feel respected, maybe, they don’t need to have a doubling of their income.

CEASER: That would be it. If they can see the direction moving as – maybe, American labor markets would tighten a little bit, in a lot of areas.

Regulations could matter some. I mean, take what happened with, and people thinking it was happening, in western part of Virginia and West Virginia. West Virginia, now the second most Republican state in the Union, I think. Would you see a president just as easily take away the livelihood via regulation of all the faculties of Harvard and Yale without people even blinking? It's effectively what these people felt. That someone and something wrote a rule, that never went through Congress, and here's our lives, or lives of many in our community, simply wiped out.

What kind of government is this? So maybe you're not going to change everything, but you can change a few things. There's lots going on in these communities, though, that look beyond the scope of government. This is the problem today, that so much is connected to what government promises and what it delivers. It can always deliver dependency and welfare, but that's not what the ultimate aim of this is. The ultimate aim is this idea of a respectable job, for a respectable person, in an economy that is growing.

Tough, in some places, to imagine. The mobility of our society is such that talent can easily move to one place from another. So, areas become poorer because they're poorer, and it's hard to change that. So we'll see.

On the other hand, there has been some uptick in the tightening of the labor market. This could make a difference, as people see others around them doing some things. It's going to be uneven. Hard to say, that's beyond my competence. And I'll say this, beyond the competence of all the economists, as well.

KRISTOL: That's for sure. We could be totally surprised one way or the other. Maybe the 20 trillion dollars of debt doesn't come collapsing on our head. Trump gets some economic growth going, and the deficit goes down and he doesn't have to worry, in a way that Paul Ryan thought you had to worry, about conventional, conservative budget cutting.

I do suppose in this respect, though, that Trump and Obama are similar, and in contrast to "the conservatism of 150 years ago" [you mentioned]. Which is the expectations from politics are very high in the Obama and Trump cases. Which strikes one as not very – not healthy or sustainable. Safer for the political system if expectations are modest, because people can feel this is doing okay.

If you had said to me when Barack Obama was elected, one of the biggest movements, popular movements, discontent in 2015, 2016 is going to be "Black Lives Matter." Without even making a judgement about the merits of what their complaints are or their issues are. You elect the first African American president ever, he's got a cabinet that has other African Americans, the Justice Department, both attorneys general are African Americans, you're going to have a big kind of revolt – not big, but somewhat of a revolt, a real thing – in the African American community against the criminal justice system. But who has been running it? I don't say that in a dismissive way, I just think that it's maybe because expectations were unreasonable.

I suppose one could have an analogous thing with Trump, a more radical party. And criticism of Obama for not doing enough with criminal justice reform, and so forth.

CEASER: The politicization of so many realms and the expectations are a problem. On the other hand, it also is an opportunity, because if you can't succeed in one realm, there are so many other realms that have been politicized that, by changing and doing something in those, you can show that you've actually changed something that was formally beyond the scope of the federal government, altogether. Which is an altogether more sane system.

Education is an example. There could be some really important changes in that, which would register in the lives of people. Not exactly the people we're thinking of – in rural places, people usually go to public schools, and that's it. But in a lot of the urban areas you could see some changes.

You could see some changes in cultures of universities. You could see a lot of regulation changes that people would see right away, which would be kind of low-hanging fruit.

KRISTOL: I suppose indirect changes in terms of the culture, even if the federal government doesn't impose things, you know. Just that people have a sense that different things are possible. The retreat of political correctness. It is a very wide open playing field here for Donald Trump, and I guess, the Republican Party, and to some degree, the Democratic Party, because these parties are never down and out forever. Again, it's not as if the [Democratic] party doesn't win a lot of votes at the presidential level, so you wouldn't necessarily bet against them in 2020, I shouldn't think –

CEASER: The winds of history will probably turn. Although, they've taken a little hit on history, because part of their history was not only the "arc of history" that Obama predicted, where they are having a little bit of a problem, but also the demographic part.

There are some ways in which the demographic thesis remains true, but there are some ways in which it has been disproven in this election, in important ways. The true demographic thesis for the Democrats is waiting for the older whites to die out.

The false part is that, as some of these groups come in, there's no reason why they will remain within ethnic encampments if an administration plays itself well. Didn't happen with the Irish, didn't happen with the Germans, who were thought to be closed ethnic groups, and were, for many years. Why should it happen with the Hispanics? Time will tell. Also, what about African Americans? Could we see some changes there? That may depend a lot on the results of policies.

You could do with some minor improvements in what's happening in cities. That could make a real impact. Will it happen? Who knows.

KRISTOL: It would be incredible if Trump becomes the Republican who, finally, after decades of Republican attempts and laments about how difficult it is, sort of breaks through with the African American voter and, for that matter, the Hispanic voter, as well. Someone who you wouldn't say personally has shown great sensitivity, perhaps, for the concerns of those communities. But you know what, if he puts in certain policy changes, I agree – what if people see the schools in inner cities improving. And the job prospects for manual labor, let's say, as opposed to college-educated labor, improving in a few places. It wouldn't take that much, perhaps, to –

CEASER: To show a sign of hope, right?

KRISTOL: That would be something.

CEASER: These are the areas of policy.

KRISTOL: And luck.

CEASER: Yes, and luck, and all sorts of other things. Of course, in most of these cases, the things that actually, sometimes govern a presidency are things that come from nowhere.

A foreign policy crisis, and suddenly a president is not doing what George Bush thought he was going to do – which was read books to 3rd graders – and he's dealing with something new and different.

That's just the way the world works, and that's why they get their "fame and their pay," which isn't very much, of course, to Trump – but, still.

KRISTOL: That's where, I guess, conservatives like me, who've worried about Trump's character, temperament, judgement, get more worried. But, people rise to the occasion sometimes.

I have a Republican friend who has made the case that Harry Truman was thought to be, and was, in some ways, not prepared for the presidency. He knew nothing when he took over, really. Somewhat impetuous, irritable guy. He made a lot of bad appointments, in fact. Sort of a chaotic administration. Had to bring George Marshall back, remember, in 1950, after his going through two Secretaries of Defense in a couple of years. That was already after he was elected, in his own right, let alone at the beginning. Missed all kinds of things that were happening. And yet, history has been kind to him.

CEASER: He was sure better than Henry Wallace.

KRISTOL: Maybe you could write a Harry Truman scenario, perhaps, for Trump.

One last point, and I'm very struck on your point about the left and the arc of history. I think that is very important. I think one effect of the Trump election, however narrow it was – and the minority of, not just minority of the popular vote but losing the popular vote, and the inside straight on the Electoral College – I do think it's so important for the left to have that sense that it's going in their direction. It's sort of inevitable. The demography makes its sort of inevitable, and the Obama victories made it seem kind of inevitable there would be a third one after Obama.

I wonder how much of a blow – it's sort of like with the Soviet Union, right? Once they lost a rather small war in Afghanistan, that wasn't central to their existence, in any fundamental way, when you think about it. It just, one thing led to another and suddenly the whole – I don't think we're going to have a collapse of liberalism like we had a collapse of the Soviet Union in the '80s. But somehow it feels to me like the whole thing is sort of rickety. The universities, political correctness, the failure of Obama's actual policies as opposed to the hopes. One wonders if Trump could, in a weird way, in that respect, herald a much bigger change.

CEASER: The idea of history going in a certain direction, the implication is what happens when it doesn't? Because it's not just the policy that fails, but the whole worldview that fails.

I remember a letter of Jefferson, where he's talking about the French Revolution, where he says, "It's an event like any other event. But no, it has this metaphysical status. If it doesn't succeed in the way that we thought, everything that we thought about the movement of history doesn't succeed." It's disproven in *one* case. That's a little bit of a problem with the view.

As for the demography, that's an important issue, as well. Although, going back to that, I've raised a point: it isn't the case – this is a little off the point – it isn't the case that this was just a question of white voters. I'd like to think that, in many of these cases, they were voting as *voters* and not *white* voters.

The reason it becomes a matter of race is because the minority voters have voted so much as blocs, and seen themselves as blocs and it's been addressed by the Democratic Party as a bloc. Is the white voter a bloc in the same way?

Traditionally, the white voter has just been the voter, and a lot of these transformations away were the fact that these voters, not for reasons of race, had simply said, "Now it's time for a change." They weren't voting on the basis of race; they were voting on the basis of what they thought should happen.

This ties into this case. Many of them were Obama voters who turned away. I don't think race was the issue; it was where they thought this thing was going, and they weren't happy.

KRISTOL: The left wants to say it was race. One clever lefty formulation, which isn't, probably, entirely false, is the white working class noticed that everyone else was voting as a bloc and voting as an identity interest-group, so to speak, and they just said, "Ok, fine. If they're going to vote that way, we'll vote that way." And turns out there's a lot of them.

Trump saw that and won. But I think it is unfair, in a couple of ways, as you said. And I don't really think that was the main motivation of the vote.

And Trump did as well or slightly better than Romney among African Americans and Hispanics, which does suggest to me if he just did a couple of things, if he toned down some of the offensive stuff, did a couple of symbolic outreaches and then actually had some policies that did some good, it would be an unbelievable irony if Trump reverts.

All the demography talk goes away if the Republican share of African American and Hispanic vote starts to increase, at *any* pace. You don't even need to get to 50 percent, certainly, but becomes reasonable. That would be an amazing irony that Trump would be the person that makes that possible.

CEASER: It fulfill that 2012 autopsy of the Republican Party, but in a completely different way.

KRISTOL: That's a good note, ah, yes. The irony of history, the coming of history, always a good note to end on. Jim, thanks for being with me today, and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]