

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

**Guest:** Jonah Goldberg, Senior Editor, *National Review*

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### **I: (0:15 – 27:08 ) On President Trump**

KRISTOL: Hi I'm Bill Kristol, welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to have joining me today my friend Jonah Goldberg, Senior – what is your title?

GOLDBERG: I'm Senior Editor at *National Review* and a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

KRISTOL: But not a Senior Fellow?

GOLDBERG: That's blue sky.

KRISTOL: At the American Enterprise Institute. A very thoughtful observer of and participant in our national public life, in general.

GOLDBERG: Kind of you to say.

KRISTOL: And conservatism in particular, I would say. I think we had a conversation in the summer and it was about the meaning of candidate Trump – I guess nominee Trump, at that point. Now we're speaking three weeks after Election Day, and we now have President-elect Trump. What's your take on that? What does it mean?

GOLDBERG: Well it's like, you should get a Mrs. Lincoln joke in there somewhere. I have to say, you know – as I'm sure you did – I talked to a lot of reporters doing sort of thumb-suck pieces about what the Trump campaign means and what it will mean once Hillary wins.

I was in this mindset of, "My gosh, *if* you know, Trump wins" – which I didn't think was going to happen, I'm hardly alone in that judgement. I've always thought it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for him to win the popular vote, and I was right. I kind of assumed, given how out-there I was on all this, that I would be in a deep, horrible funk about it if he won. And it turns out, I'm not.

I woke up Wednesday after the election in a shockingly good mood. We get the Court. We're going to do something, I don't know quite yet what, about Obamacare and the executive orders; might get some good tax reform. So, there's a good policy environment going on. We held the House, we held the Senate, or the Republicans did – I should stop referring to myself in the "we" when I'm talking about Republicans.

But, for me personally – I mean, you’ve been around the block longer than I have on this kind of stuff – this is the first time in my professional life where I have zero ownership of a Republican president, and it’s incredibly liberating. And so it dawned on me that, going forward, if Donald Trump does things that I think are good, I will say so. I mean, my whole mantra for 18 months has been: “My job is to tell the truth as I see it.” And I will continue to do that. So, if he does things that I think are good, that’s great. My side wins, my arguments win. ‘My team,’ such as it is, wins. And if he reverts back to the character that I thought was on ample display during much of the campaign, I get to say “I told you so.” So, it’s sort of win/win.

My guess is it’s going to be “C), all of the above.” He’s going to do some really good things. I think all of his appointments, with some exceptions, have been pretty top-notch, the sort of thing you could expect from most Republicans. And the thing I worry about is still – it’s not ideological, although I’ve always had my problems with him ideologically, it’s *characterological*.

It’s what happens – I think he was rightly, and honorably, and to his credit, sobered by the fact that he actually won. I don’t think he planned on winning. So this period that we’re in now, the best analogy I can think of is to the first 30 minutes of the first debate, where he took it really seriously and he held it together. I think the awesomeness of the job – you could see it on his face, how nervous he was when he met with Obama in the White House that first time. He’s taking it seriously. Good for him. A couple tweets notwithstanding.

What I worry about is, six months from now, when he takes it as a given: “*Of course* they play ‘Hail to the Chief’ when I enter the room,” and, “*of course* the Marines salute me,” and, “*of course* I’m the leader of the free world.” And he feels none of the sting of his own insecurity and conscience about how to handle himself as President of the United States, *that* worries me. But I’ve been wrong about other things, maybe I’ll be wrong about that, too.

KRISTOL: Let’s hope, for the country’s sake. Of course, it could be lesser and greater versions of that, obviously.

GOLDBERG: And you have to give him a chance, too. You only have one president at a time. I think the left are making fools out of themselves. You know, people ask about, “Will you support impeachment if he needs to be impeached?” You know, let’s wait for him to do something that’s worthy of that. Until then, you give the guy a chance. Give the system a chance. We have a system of checks and balances. This may be, as you’ve been arguing, sort of invigorating for some of the, up until now, fairly moribund and atrophied elements of our system of checks and balances, as people rise to this occasion on both the right and the left. So, we’ll see. I wish him the best.

KRISTOL: I want to talk about the left, actually, since you mentioned it. I think liberalism is having more of an internal debate and crisis, maybe, than people realize. Then, really pick your brain on the state of conservatism, talk about the culture more broadly.

But just on the feeling of liberation on Wednesday, after the election, I think your colleague Ramesh Ponnuru, I think this was his line (I, at least, gave him credit for it, and quoted him because he told it to me a couple months before the election) – which was, we were all depressed, Clinton versus Trump, and he said, “Look at the bright side. One of them will lose. And you’ll be happy about that.”

I’ve got to say – and I’m not a Hillary-obsessive or hater – but the sense of liberation one had that she will not be in the White House, the Clintons will not be in the White House. The Clinton world, we don’t have to think about it for the next four or eight years. That was a big part, for conservatives, at least – actually for a lot of liberals, too, I think – a sense of, like a big weight going off our back here.

GOLDBERG: I agree with that entirely. This is pristine territory. It's an exciting, brave new world. It doesn't feel like a flashback. Whatever new problems lie ahead, they're new, interesting problems rather than the same plodding problems you have with the Clintons. But I do think that that touches on an important point that has been lost on a lot of the discussion, particularly on the right.

Yes, Donald Trump did something really impressive, and you've got to give him credit for his victory. But the real story of that election is that Hillary Clinton *lost* more than Donald Trump won. It's a binary thing, so if one loses, the other one wins. But Hillary Clinton, it's becoming abundantly clear – as I said for two years beforehand, was a terrible candidate for the Democrats – but ran a really bad campaign. Spent more money in the second district of Nebraska than they did in Wisconsin. They lost as much as Donald Trump won.

The beautiful thing is the Democrats are not learning from that lesson. I shouldn't say beautiful thing. The amazing thing. Barack Obama said this week that the main reason they lost is because every bar and restaurant in the country is playing FOX News, and they couldn't get their message out.

KRISTOL: What bars and restaurants does he go to? Not to take his comment too literally, but, seriously, it's literally false. Bars and restaurants, I'd say male-oriented ones, play sports. Right? I mean, ESPN is on all day. I don't know what a more female-oriented restaurant would be, but they would play "The View" or something. "The Voice." It would be kind of mainstream culture and entertainment, I would say. Airports play CNN. I actually bet very few people – playing FOX is a little bit...you put off, some of your patrons wouldn't like it. It just shows what a ridiculous bubble he's living in.

GOLDBERG: The bubble thing is fascinating – because, first of all, he goes to very few restaurants. And the one thing I guarantee every manager at every restaurant does when Barack Obama shows up is, "Let's turn off Sean Hannity."

KRISTOL: I don't think the DC and Martha's Vineyard, these Hampton places he goes to, A) they don't have TVs on, and B) they're not showing FOX News.

GOLDBERG: Also, they're doubling. Looks like they're going to make Keith Ellison head of the Democratic Party. They're in a deep, deep state of denial. There was some leftwing magazine that came out with the headline saying that, "If Jon Stewart were still hosting The Daily Show that Hillary would have won."

KRISTOL: I think the left, liberals, think there's one true fact that they can hang onto which is the Democrats have won the popular vote in six of the last seven elections. Demography. Still Trump could turn this around, but it's kind of going in their direction you might say. Their group is growing a little and the Trump group is shrinking a little. So this used to be their core fact.

The core conservative, Republican fact, which I think might turn out to be equally misleading, is that Republicans control everything and they haven't been this strong since 1928. So let's talk about maybe each of those. It is interesting that the one thing this election does not seem to be prompting, which I think it should be, is rethinking. Well maybe it is on the right, that's a question I suppose.

So, liberalism. What's your – you're a student of liberalism, you wrote a whole book on liberalism. Where does it go? Analytically, what would you expect over the next two or four years in terms of the party and liberal intellectuals. Is it the end of an era?

GOLDBERG: Again, we're sort of in this transition period, right? Where we don't know what lessons people are going to take from these things. It does seem to me that in our political liberalism, rather than liberal culture, there's this tendency going back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of utter and complete disdain for "flyover America," even before we could fly over it. Right?

Christopher Lasch writes about this beautifully in, I think, *The True and Only Heaven* where he has this wonderful, long discussion just going through all the muckrakers and intellectuals of the Progressive Era and their visceral contempt. *The Nation* magazine wrote, “In These United States” where they just went from sort of one middle-American state to another mocking and ridiculing these rubes and hicks. I think that tradition has lived on for a very long time, and it comes back. It’s very much a city mouse versus country mouse kind of mindset. There’s this horrible line from Bill Maher who says “the job of the Democratic Party is to drag the slack-jawed yokels and make a path for this country into the future.”

I think that, I think our friend Ross Douthat wrote about this well, that “the cultural left has a Samantha Bee problem,” where they think that because they watch a handful of sneering, smug, condescending shows on Showtime and HBO and Comedy Central.

KRISTOL: I myself have never seen Samantha Bee, so I take it she is –

GOLDBERG: But John Oliver.

KRISTOL: She is such a condensing comic?

GOLDBERG: It’s all a sort of – “I don’t know anybody who knows people who drives a pickup truck, so let’s make fun of everybody who owns a pickup truck.”

KRISTOL: Or owns a gun.

GOLDBERG: Or owns a gun, or goes to church regularly or any of that kind of stuff. I think because the donor class of the Democratic Party comes from that, their kids watch that. They think it’s hip, they think it’s ‘now.’ They confuse *their* kids with youth culture generally, that they have a deep and abiding bubble with this coastal elite attitude and it’s translated itself into Democratic politics.

I think one of the things that a lot of us didn’t take into account, particularly a lot of liberals didn’t take into account, was the degree to which Barack Obama was a charismatic personality as a politician. He actually represented a side of a cultural argument that a lot of people really don’t like. But he could pull it off.

But it’s sort of like in the primaries, there were a lot of Trump mini-me’s who tried to run as Donald Trumps. That guy that ran against – that idiot who ran against Paul Ryan. There were a few others. And they all failed fairly abysmally, because it turns out that if you’re not Donald Trump, acting like Donald Trump is asinine.

And acting like Barack Obama without being Barack Obama comes across as smug, effete, and elitist. I don’t think that is a pose that can work for the Democratic Party when you generalize it. Which is why this guy Ryan is running against Nancy Pelosi, who is sort of the matriarch of San Francisco liberalism.

KRISTOL: Even Obama, who is a very talented politician, at the end of the day, it’s 52 percent and 51 percent in general elections. The first after Bush with horrible approval ratings. The second against Romney, not a perfect candidate, with a bit of an economic recovery – just enough to take him over the edge.

But, of course, the Democrats had terrible loses. You might have thought, looking back, they would have realized that 2010 and 2014 were harbingers of a problem they had in middle America. They rationalized it as a different electorate and so forth. It turned out the 2016 electorate was a little more like 2014 in the sense that, just the kind of people who turned out. Trump was able to turn out what people had considered a mid-year electorate, in some respects.

GOLDBERG: In certain states.

KRISTOL: In certain states. But I think it's very interesting about liberalism and Obama's effect. I've been worried – worried as a conservative and friendly to Republicans – about Republican donors: I think they distort Republican elected officials' view of the world to some degree. But, I guess now that you mention it, the Democratic donors are more cloistered. You really are talking L.A., San Francisco, New York, Boston, a tiny bit of Chicago. So, they don't have any connection with non-blue state, non-culturally hip, progressive America.

GOLDBERG: The Tom Steyer types, right? Who think that you can build a major, mass, populist movement over something like climate change, with the voters that we actually have in this electorate. They're delusional. "So we got a huge turnout on campus at Oberlin." Well, that's not a bellwether. And I think there is that cocooning, that cultural cocooning among liberals, and they don't understand.

What I do think is sort of fascinating, though, is the degree to which, and we talk about them not learning the right lessons, right? A week before the election, every liberal analyst, pundit was talking about the Democratic 'blue wall', you know, their firewall, and how they had this inherent advantage in the Electoral College. They then lose. Thanks mostly to the voters who were, for 100 years, the *core* of the FDR Democratic coalition, these working-class whites. And, immediately, the response is, "They're all racists," and, "The Electoral College, itself, is an institution of white supremacy."

So, a week before the election they were *bragging* about how this 'institution of white supremacy' was their inherent advantage in any election. Then, it turns out, when it blew up in their faces, that sort of impulse to automatically go to these buzzwords of "white privilege" and "white supremacy" and all the rest – don't get me wrong, I think Donald Trump helps them in that regard, and so does Steve Bannon and all that. They make it easier for those arguments to be made. But, nonetheless, when you're actually trying to appeal to actual voters, telling them they're all white supremacists and racists for voting for this guy who says he's going to bring jobs back from Mexico, reinforces the message that the Democrats are out of touch, I think.

KRISTOL: One moment I thought, and I said a few times, that I thought Trump could win, was when people just went on and on about the 'blue wall'. Which is an intelligent enough – I mean, Ron Brownstein did a lot of work on this. It was a true fact. I mean the Democrats had won these states since '84 or '88. But I came to Washington in '85 and then, of course, Dukakis, having been ahead, lost in '88. There was a huge amount written in '89, '90, and '91 about the Republican electoral –

GOLDBERG: Bill Schneider had an *Atlantic* cover about the 'Republican lock'.

KRISTOL: 'Lock'. Could they pick the lock? Very hard to pick the lock, the electoral lock. Democrats, of course, beginning in '92, won most of elections and won the popular vote in almost all of them. And all of these places that Republican had had for a long time, California and others, just totally went south. Ohio.

So as soon as everyone agreed on 'blue wall', I figured something would go wrong with it. But it is funny that as you say – not funny but interesting – the historical Democratic voters in those states were the ones who broke it open.

Often, I'd say parties and movements, they start off with one lesson from an election, they think that everyone should take a certain lesson, and then everyone goes the opposite direction. I've been struck by how many times that happens. People are very bad at it – I mean, we are, too. This is not a criticism of people, it's just a fact. Predicting the future, or the initial response is often – this is true in life, too – it's often not the second or third response, or the response three months in. It's like the Republicans, they were going to have – God, the only way you can win in 2016 is the "autopsy," right? Run a Marco Rubio-type. They run the guy that is *most* opposite of what every enlightened, really most intelligent, you might say, Republicans thought, more or less, in 2013. And the guy wins for the first time. Wins the biggest electoral vote number for Republicans since '88.

GOLDBERG: There's a great line I quote often from an essay by [George] Orwell, called "Second Thoughts on James Burnham," where he points out that intellectuals, throughout the war, whenever there was a setback in the war or whenever there was a victory in the war, immediately made straight-line predictions: defeat or victory. It was like, "Oh, we lost to Brook, that means the war is over." Or, "Oh, we got back to Brook, that means we're going to win." Orwell makes the point that if you ask the average Brit on the streets throughout the war, "Of course we're going to win. We're British, we'll win." Turns out they were right. And the problem is that intellectuals tend – he says, it's a form of power worship, that you make straight-line projections because you want to get on board. And I think there is – you saw that a lot this year with a lot of our friends, I think. But we don't need to get too deep into that.

KRISTOL: They always want to be on the – and also, to be early in seeing the wave that is coming. There's a huge – I've seen this in politics many times, and I've been guilty of it a few times – a huge over-interpretation of any one event. "This is decisive, now it's going to go downhill directly." Of course, things change and reverse, and the surge was the most dramatic, finally, in my time in Washington, in terms of an actual, real world thing.

Politically it's also true. You know, there is a bad day for Trump, "He's finished; it's over." James Comey comes out, "Clinton has no chance," and then she still wins the popular vote by two million. People just over-interpret events, in general. The public is much less event-driven. They have a general view. One thing does not freak them out the way all of us who have to comment on it every day does.

GOLDBERG: Although, conservatives are, I think, more hypocritical about this tendency. I think it's a natural human tendency. Liberals are the ones who to believe in "five-year plans," right? That you can rationally plan the future. Conservatives, we're supposed to believe along with Burke that society is infinitely complex, you can't predict the future. And yet, conservative pundits do it all the time.

KRISTOL: That's a good reminder. I should remind myself of that more. Final point on liberalism – I want to talk about conservatism – but liberalism: I'm sort of struck, it doesn't seem much of a Bill Clinton or Bill Galston-type rethinking is going on. I mean, Bill Clinton himself has now been quoted, and I gather this is true from people I've talked to, as him saying he had been warning for the past month of the campaign that, "Hey, we do need some white votes here, some white, working-class votes. They get to vote, too, you know." We can't just do this kind of picking very careful coalition of some college educated, upscale whites, and some minorities.

GOLDBERG: Over-performing with Hmong in Minnesota.

KRISTOL: Bill Galston and some of the old Clinton-Democrats have weighed in. One doesn't feel, either, from reading liberal columnists and journals, or from watching the Democratic Party, that that is the reaction. And I think it could be, don't you know it could go, the other way? Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren seem to be the way the energy of the party is.

GOLDBERG: I think that's right, and I think part of psychologically what's going on is there are a lot of Democrats who suspect that, first of all, Hillary *did* steal the nomination from Bernie Sanders. The WikiLeaks stuff kind of suggests there's merit there. And two, that Bernie Sanders would have beaten Donald Trump. I don't know that that's true. I actually, kind of think it's not, but who knows?

But so, they feel like, you know, if only we had doubled-down on our Obama-ness. Right? That's always been the gripe about Obama, is he didn't own his left wing-ness enough. So, I think that there is this sort of notion that if were just you know – it's sort of Howard Dean-ism – if we were just a purer form of our true selves, we'll win over everybody. And conservatives have been prone to that kind of thinking quite a bit over the last 20 years, and it doesn't go very far.

KRISTOL: I was thinking as you said it, conservatives, I think we are prone to this. Fifty years ago, more, Nixon loses to John Kennedy in 1960, not entirely dissimilar. Nixon, not a very charismatic or attractive candidate, but a very experienced guy. Eisenhower has two terms, like Obama, loses a very close race to Kennedy, and the reaction among conservatives was – I mean, they disagreed with Eisenhower and Nixon, so they had an ideological issue, just like Sanders and Warren do – but they also talked themselves into as an electoral matter and an analytical matter that, “There is a huge hidden conservative vote out there, and if only we finally nominate the Barry Goldwater part of the political party, and gee, let’s just nominate Barry Goldwater, we’ll win in ’64.” Now, maybe, he would of course have had a better chance if there hadn’t been an assassination and such, it’s hard to know. But, it is interesting, the reaction to Nixon losing to Kennedy was Goldwater, not, I don’t know, a Rockefeller, or Bill Scranton, or a new generation of moderates or something like that.

GOLDBERG: Well, that was also Ted Cruz’s theory. The problem is that he was seems to me, I mean I haven’t crunched these numbers or anything, but it seems to me he was half right. But what Trump did was he activated these people not based upon conservative ideology but in terms of an anti-establishment populism thing, which I don’t think Ted Cruz was a good messenger for.

KRISTOL: Well because trade was such an important part of it, I think. There, Cruz just had standard – I think correct, but standard – free-trade views. So, liberalism – so they really could go left. Trump could be an extremely lucky man.

I was thinking about this. I mean, I think he’s a very skillful demagogue. I underrated him and I plead guilty, certainly in terms of analytically missing, in the primaries, especially, that he would win. I always thought he had a chance in the general. What if he does have a Democratic Party that goes so far left that whatever mistakes Trump makes, off-putting things he does, and even policies that may not work out so well, the alternative is – I don’t know what it would be exactly, or who it would be. I guess that’s hard to tell, right?

GOLDBERG: It’s sort of a McGovern problem, right? It’s ’72.

KRISTOL: Trump is Nixon in ’68.

GOLDBERG: He’s very Nixonian. He’s law and order.

KRISTOL: You get an administration that is kind of a mess, conflicting views, does one or two things pretty well, though. Gets us out of Vietnam in a decent way, I would say, in ’72 and sort of restores a kind of civil peace. Goes horribly anti-conservative on a whole bunch of things.

GOLDBERG: Nixon hated the Buckley-ites. He hated the conservatives. That’s the thing that’s really amazing about it.

KRISTOL: But then he won, and I think *National Review* didn’t officially support Nixon in ’72, is that right?

GOLDBERG: I know we didn’t in ’60.

KRISTOL: ’60, that’s right. In ’72 they supported Ashcroft in the primaries –

GOLDBERG: Ashbrook.

KRISTOL: Ashbrook in the primaries, kind of a token challenger. I guess they must have supported Nixon against McGovern. But then there was a massive reelection victory. If you get enough, if the other party goes enough to the other side –

GOLDBERG: This is something that has confused people, I think for generations is, and I think the right – this is a human nature problem, this is not unique to the left – that if you hate somebody, you assume they're ideologically your opposite. When, in reality, Nixon was the last New Deal president, really. He created the EPA, he was the founder of Affirmative Action, he bragged about how they spent more on social services than they did on defense. Wages and price controls. You go down this long list of things. But the left hated him and could never forgive him ever since the – Helen Douglas, anti-communist stuff. They thought he was, you know, a petty tyrant and all the rest. And so, they assumed that ideologically he was a crazy right-winger, but he wasn't. We went through something like that in the '90s where we couldn't stand Bill Clinton, in part because he was stealing Republican, conservative issues, and so people treated him as if he was this crazy communist.

I think that Trump has got this very advantageous position where his voters, first of all, – when 60 percent of the electorate thinks you're not qualified to be president, you actually have remarkable room for improvement in people's minds, right? If you look at what people wanted him to do, among Republicans at least, it's a pretty conventional, Republican thing, and most Republicans don't, in fact, want him to be the crazy demagogue stuff that people fear he's going to be.

So, he's got a remarkable amount of maneuvering room. And if the left keeps taking the bait and burning flags every time he says you shouldn't burn flags, it gives him the Nixonian opportunity to hold the center. Conservatives will hold their nose and people like *National Review* might gripe. But if they go with Elizabeth Warren-style liberalism, or McGovern style liberalism, it gives him the space to be a modestly, center-right president, who if he just doesn't round people up, people will think, "Wow, that's a pleasant surprise."

## **II: (27:08 – 45:33) Liberalism and Conservatism**

KRISTOL: And the real populist touch or pseudo-touch whatever it is, which he does a little like Nixon with hardhats and all, but way beyond in terms of what he's sort of willing to do and say.

So, what about conservatism? Pivoting to that. Again, very hard to say; so much depends on what Trump does. Someone made a point to me that it also depends on if he succeeds. There is a huge difference when the president, for all of the people like us who weren't for him, is sort of on your side of the aisle and has a successful four years or unsuccessful four years, it makes a big difference in the way people think about it. Having said all of that, what do you think? I mean, are we at a moment where people are going to say there was a wave, a conservative movement that lasted from, I don't know what, '55 with Buckley or really Robert Taft in '48. And then goes through Reagan and with the Goldwater nomination and defeat, the Reagan failure in '76, the Reagan success. Then Gingrich and even into this century, obviously. And then it ended. Somehow we're in a new moment, or is this more of a one off, a blip, a midcourse correction?

GOLDBERG: I agree with you entirely that it's too soon to tell, right? I do think, going back to the Nixon thing for a moment, that this is, at least the election, was the fulfillment of a young Pat Buchanan's dream. Pat Buchanan used to write these memos to Nixon in the White House saying how we have to get rid of the guys down at the yacht marina and go with the guys having lunch at the construction site, and we need to create a new white, working-class, populist party that rejects Wall Street and favors Main Street and all that kind of stuff.

And that's the coalition that Trump basically put together – to give him his winning margin. He still had to have rank and file conservatives, and evangelicals, and all that, to do this. Matt Continetti, who we both know, obviously, had that interesting piece ["Crisis of the Conservative Intellectual"] where he's talking about how, basically, this was the fulfillment of bringing in the Wallace voters into the Republican coalition. When the left-winger hears that they think, "Oh, that means you brought in all the racists." Yeah, racism was part of it, but there was a lot of other stuff going on in the Wallace vote. And so I think



KRISTOL: Very important to remember that George Wallace ran as an Independent and won five states as a Southern protest candidate in '68. In '72, before he got shot, which took him off the stage, he was running as a Democrat and won Democratic primaries. I believe the day after he was shot in Maryland, he won Maryland and Michigan primaries, and had won Florida before that. These are not trivial states, Florida and Michigan. And as a Democrat. It shows how much working-class vote there was there to be poached.

GOLDBERG: Maryland's a weird case, but Michigan is not exactly a Jim Crow state. Again, it's this amnesia, among liberals, that these voters aren't part of their coalition when these voters were the essence of the Democratic coalition. Republicans have been winning college-educated whites *forever*. Barry Goldwater won among college-educated whites. It's non-college whites that have been the core of the Democratic Party forever. Now, the response from the liberal elites is to hold them in contempt. There is a possibility that Trump brings them into the Republican Party, and if he's successful, they hold them there.

KRISTOL: How different is the Republican Party and the conservative movement in which they're a much more central part, I guess?

GOLDBERG: Again, I'm in a wait and see moment.

KRISTOL: Is it a Nixon party or Reagan party, to put it in a very simple way? I mean –

GOLDBERG: Our friend Steve Moore said last week, or recently, that, "it's no longer the party of Reagan." They asked me about this on NPR, and I was bleary-eyed and the only thing I could come up with, I said, "You need to understand that the best analogy I can come up with for this is that this is like the Pope saying 'Jesus-shemeezus'." Steve Moore, who has been whipping anybody who deviates, any deviationists from Reaganism, from pure Reaganism, for my entire adult lifetime, to all of the sudden, to say 'This is no longer Reagan's party' is really kind of an amazing thing. I don't know the answer to that.

I do think that this is something that – I do think that people like us need to emphasize a lot is, that the way the Republican Party responds to rising populism, protectionism, changing demographics of the coalition, has to be, by definition, very different from the way conservative intellectuals or the conservative movement respond to these things. It has never been our job to get people to turn out to vote. Sometimes we get confused about that, but, and I think, I'm sure I brought this up the last time we did this, but my favorite line from William Jennings Bryan is, "The people of Nebraska are for free silver, therefore I'm for free silver. I will look up the arguments later." A politician can say that kind of thing, right? Who is the French intellectual that said "The people have chosen and I must go with them, because I am their leader." That is what politicians can do.

If you actually claimed to have anything like principled, conservative intellectual convictions, you can't say that two plus two is now five because the voters say it's five. If that puts us a little bit on the outs of where the voters are and the movement is, that's ok. I think that tension is probably healthy for everybody. The conservative movement was built on that tension.

People, and this sort of gets to where we opened, I love not feeling beholden to defend Trump when I think he's wrong. I defended Bush, I know you defended Bush – we had our disagreements with him about some second order of Medicare part D and the Department of Homeland Security and that sort of thing. But he was a wartime president and under attack – the most cynical, craven attacks from the left trying to undermine a wartime president – and you felt like it was a patriotic duty above partisan duty to defend the guy.

Maybe something will happen where out of patriotic duty I have to defend Trump; but I have no sense of partisan loyalty to defend the guy. But I'm happy to say he's right when he's right. I think that is a healthy

thing for the conservative movement, where for too long, we've blurred the distinctions between being a conservative and Republican.

KRISTOL: I would just underline the point, because it's not just that we have certain principles and of course we should defend them, but also I think we should defend a true account of the last 70 years of history. I think it's very important that people *not* think that American global leadership, which has included all kinds of things, and many foolish things, and unnecessary things, and screwed up things, but still has included willingness to use the military, it's included free trade and pretty free movement of capital. It's included being forwardly deployed. That's been good for the world and good for us. This was not automatically going to be the case: That nuclear proliferation would be surprisingly slow since '45; that we'd have rather few wars since the mid '70s and late '70s; that you would have hundreds of millions, maybe billions of people liberated from poverty in East Asia, and so forth. The post-Soviet Union fall, that the post-Soviet Union would, mostly, with some hiccups, obviously, would end up as reasonably free and democratic states.

Very important, I think, to defend on substance, and these were mostly conservative policies, sort of conservative/center policies in the case of the anti-communism. Same with free markets. I mean, it's one thing for Hayek and Keynes to have arguments in the '30s and '40s, but are we really not going to say that after the experience of the reversals – whether it's China or India, here in fact, Israel even; I mean, Netanyahu liberates the economy – that, generally speaking, freer markets are good for a lot of people.

I think it's important to not – people are so wrapped up in “This last year's election shows that people are upset about trade.” Well, fine. Maybe they have the right to be upset and maybe there are things that have to be tinkered with, but I don't know. There really is a throwing out the baby with the bathwater danger, I think, in some of these areas.

GOLDBERG: I agree with that entirely. I think that's exactly right, and I think it is an important point that we've had so many controlled experiments over the last century: North Korea versus South Korea, just look at the condition Cuba is in. The idea that, somehow – not necessarily, and Donald Trump isn't a socialist or anything like that, but there is a sense of, what's the right word, *dirigiste*, right? Or “command” – like the stuff he's doing with Carrier.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's just today. Let's say a word about that.

GOLDBERG: He jaw-jawed the CEO of Carrier to keep a bunch of jobs in Indiana. On the merits of this one case.

KRISTOL: “And it's a great victory. Just as mere president-elect he's already saving jobs, let alone what he'll do as president,” you know.

GOLDBERG: There's a problem, first of all, of the president only has so much time in his day and he can't be sort of jaw-boning every CEO out there. But also, there is a real moral hazard problem, in the sense that now we know, or now a lot of CEOs know, that if they just announce that they're going to send some jobs to Mexico, they can expect a call from Donald Trump with some promises of some concessions to keep them in the country.

There's also just a long-standing tradition in American politics and economics that we don't single-out individual companies; we're not even supposed to single-out sectors. That happens too much. But individual companies, that can lead to all sorts of problems.

This idea, that an individual politician is smart enough to out-guess the market, and out-guess the – that he can reject what Fredrick Hayek called “the knowledge problem” and he knows best what's best for Carrier and what's best for Indiana. That argument cannot be allowed to be sustained. This is a political

one-off. You know, Reagan was protectionist for Harley Davidson. There are things that you do as a matter of politics, but as a matter of principle, we need to stay clear about this.

KRISTOL: Really, this is how you create Europe: a sclerotic, European economy, incidentally, by not letting any firm lay anyone off; which is why a lot of people would say why you have very slow growth in Europe. There is something about the dynamism and vitality of the labor market here that really helps us. Now, you know, we should do better at helping retrain workers and so forth –

GOLDBERG: It accelerates the crony capitalism problem. The problem with crony capitalism has been for a very long time that rather than looking to satisfying the consumer or meeting the demands of the market to make their bottom line and make a profit, they look to the regulatory environment in Washington. The message that comes from this is that Washington will fix your problems rather than smart economic decisions, smart business decisions.

Again, one can make way too much of this. This is maybe a one-off thing and fine; and it was part of a campaign promise he made in Indiana, and Mike Pence is the vice president and he cares about this. But, in principle, I think there is some troubling aspects to it.

KRISTOL: And I do think that, again, here we have experience as well as principles on our side. The arguments for constitutionalism, in a Hayekian-sense, maybe, not just a kind of theoretical question about wealth... We've now have 50 or 60 years of experience of moving away from limited government, constitutional forms, towards a kind of very intrusive welfare state/crony capitalist state. And it's not good for anything, whether it's economic growth, free liberty, equal treatment under the rule of law. I do think that is where conservatives will have a big challenge. It's not Trump's instinct to care a lot about those things.

GOLDBERG: Also it – people used to make this point about Obamacare, that it was going to reorient our understanding about our relationship to the state. When you assume that the state can compel you to buy something, that the state is there to guarantee that you have healthcare, that changes your orientation towards your idea of government.

The whole idea, which is a very traditional populist notion of “I alone can fix it” – that was Trump's big thing. That, too, changes your understanding about the role of the state. Somehow the state is there to solve all of your problems. It's very Obama-esque. Yeah, it's got a more right-ish, populist patina to it, but it is still the same sort of message that it's the individual, and it's the guy running the White House. It's sort of a monarchical understanding of the role of the state, which is not in accord with American tradition.

KRISTOL: And certainly not with conservative thought. I have this slightly contrarian view, maybe it's a hope, that the experience of Trump could lead to revitalization in a certain way of, let's call it's the Hayekian and the constitutionalist and all the different strands we have of pro-limited government, pro-constitutional forums, pro-rule of law, type thought. Which has been somewhat – well, in the case of Obama, was a conservative argument against liberals – so it had a slight partisan feel to it. If made by conservatives against *both* Obama and Trump, has maybe more credibility, you might say.

But it really would require actual political leaders, I suppose, to make this argument in Congress. Maybe they'll have some self-interest in doing so. It would be nice if Congress stepped up instead of yielding to the Executive Branch.

GOLDBERG: I have this burning desire to make this case. I mean, I'm not an activist I don't organize things. I don't put together groups. But it happens like clockwork whenever Republicans get into office – it happened under Bush, happened a bit under Reagan, and it's happening at blistering speed under Trump, and we're not even under Trump yet. All of the sudden, liberals and progressives rediscover the benefits of federalism. You know, when Republicans are in power, or when Republicans are out of power

and they want federalism it's because, the assumption is automatically because, "Ted Cruz wants slavery again." Right? It's all this idiotic, paranoid nonsense. States' rights is *purely* a doctrine of preserving or restoring Jim Crow and slavery.

But when a Republican is in office, all of the sudden – and you see this on college campuses – you get liberal kids who all the sudden are much more receptive to the idea that, you know, maybe if Oregon wants to be able to import raw cheese or have microbreweries that don't fit the EPA's or FDA's definition, that they should have the freedom to decide these things at a local level.

And what I would love to see, it would be a great thing for, I don't know, the Koch people, or Freedom Partners, one of those kinds of groups, to really try to organize and lock-in as much of the left into these arguments now. Conferences, you know, plebiscites or referenda or whatever. So that they can see it.

Eventually the window is going to close again, and they're going to think it's all about racism. If we could get Republicans and Libertarians to make this pitch the right way, you could actually see – I hate sanctuary cities, I think sanctuary cities are probably unconstitutional and I don't like them at all. But you can see in the logic in liberals all of the sudden clicking in, "Wait a second, why is the federal government telling me how I can organize my city?" The problem is that immigration is actually a federal issue under the Constitution, but the logic is there. And if we could get more liberals and progressives to lock-in and acknowledge that local control, community control, is better, creates happier people – get them all to read Yuval Levin's book [*The Fractured Republic*] – I think that would be a great, grassroots project for a sort of left/right synergy that gets us back somewhere closer to the correct constitutional order.

KRISTOL: You mentioned Libertarians. I'm struck that two, three years ago, the conventional view was probably if there's something *new* in the Republican Party this year that's not Bush, that's not Scott Walker, that's not mainstream Republicanism, it's going to be Rand Paul and libertarianism. That's sort of an irony, right? We got something like the opposite of it, I would say, with Trump. Maybe that libertarian – I still think there is a lot of empirical evidence that it's a good idea, and a lot of theoretical arguments for much more decentralized politics. Maybe, and maybe we need the left to embrace it against Trump. I don't know.

GOLDBERG: I know this is a little outside of our writ here, but I think it's a really important point. That we have this populist moment where lots of people feel like global elites or national elites are running their lives and all the rest, and I think there's a lot of merit to that problem. That's the argument for pushing these things down to the most local level possible, because when you do that, first of all, cultural war issues become much easier to deal with because the winners have to look the losers in the eye. You see, you know, if you're against gay marriage, you see the people that are for gay marriage at your kid's soccer game and at the supermarket and all that kinds of stuff.

Moreover, it lets people at the local level know who to *fire*. If you look at something like the VA scandal, you have 435 congressmen who were all outraged about it, and there was no one to fire. If you send all those functions back to the states, give the VA hospital in Arizona to the state of Arizona, then there is a local official that people know, that people can reach out to, that they can fire. Instead of this faceless and amorphous administrative state bureaucracy. I think that that would give a lot more people a sense that they have control over their politics, over their lives, and it would syphon off a lot of the more bilious populism that's in the country right now.

### **III: (00:45:33 – 1:06:33) Politics and the New Media**

KRISTOL: I think we think 2016 could well be a big deal politically. It could be a one-off, oddball thing, and we'll have a 2020 race or 2024 race that looks like an old-fashioned race. But one also has the sense that it's kind of a big cultural moment, a moment in the media, a moment in celebrity culture. You've written lot about this, all of these related issues over the years, what strikes you the most? The celebrity side of it? Trump's use of social media? A lot of these have seemed to come together this year.

GOLDBERG: I think that's right. I think there's a tendency among conservatives to think that somehow we're outside the fishbowl looking in on "the culture." Right? "Oh can you believe what happened with culture?" And all that kind of stuff. Turns out that we live in America and we're in the culture, too, and we watch a lot of the same TV shows.

KRISTOL: Conservative voters are in the culture.

GOLDBERG: Yeah, and we know from the data that all these supposedly cultural problems that affect "others" are in fact affecting the white working-class and white people. Divorce rates among the top quintile haven't been a problem in a long time, but family breakdown among whites is as big a problem as it was among blacks when the Moynihan report came out. Young conservatives speak pretty much in the same cultural vernacular as young liberals do, and they all hang out on Twitter, and they all hang out on Facebook, and Instagram and all the rest. So this idea that somehow conservatives are outside of it I think is overblown. To be sure, there are Orthodox Jews and Evangelical Christians who *are* at a critical distance from some of the stuff in their culture, but it's very hard to be.

I think that, the reason I bring this up is, I think that to a certain extent, one of the reasons why a lot of conservatives, me included, didn't appreciate Trump's potential for success was how much he is in fact fully a creature of the popular culture. And that the logic, the appeal of the undercurrents of the popular culture are actually much stronger than a lot of the rules of thumb that we apply to politics. So when he would say things in the primaries, "Oh that's gonna kill him," and it wouldn't because people were watching him as a creature from a slightly different dimension. They were watching him as the guy from "The Apprentice" and all the rest. I remember people saying throughout the early primaries that the laws of political gravity are eventually going to apply. Problem is that he was not under the jurisdiction of the laws of political gravity, he was under the laws of jurisdiction of entertainment gravity. He actually understood, he was a pretty good student of those laws.

I do think – I think if I were a Bill Galston-type liberal, I would be very worried about Trump, the president Trump, not just because of all the usual handwringing stuff, but because I think what Trump proved is something that Obama gave us a hint of: That celebrity and cult-of-personality politics work better in this new media environment than they have worked since at least Kennedy, if not, you know, going back much further.

And that's a much bigger problem for liberals, or for Democrats, than it is for Republicans. We don't have a lot of celebrities. What, is Ted Nugent going to run next time? Meanwhile, I think if you had, if George Clooney or Tom Hanks had thrown their hat in three weeks before the election, they could have won the election. You have, you know, the Kanye West types. There's all of these really popular personalities on the cultural left, the Hollywood left that – You know, [if] Jon Stewart ran for office? My God, the crowds that he could get. That is a long-term – if these trends continue, if Donald Trump is more a harbinger of cultural trends – then those cultural trends are going to affect the Democratic Party a lot more than they're going to affect the Republican Party.

KRISTOL: I suppose from – on the other hand, from a conservative point of view, don't we dislike or worry about the effects of these cultural trends even more than liberals or progressives? We believe in institutions that are being kind of just shoved to the side and mediating institutions, some of them we don't like, like the media, an important mediating institution. Still, at the end of the day, we probably don't think it's great that you can just sort of tweet things that are made up.

GOLDBERG: I do think sort of – talking about the cultural or the media landscape, and I can't remember if we talked about this the last time I was here – but I've long believed that from, I don't know, early 1930s through, call it like, 1989 was basically not just a Cold War – I mean the Cold War, and it predates the Cold War – it was a great parenthesis in American media landscape where, for reasons that come out of the rise of the telegraph and the radio and then really live television, and the fact that we had raised a

generation and a half of Americans who had profound trust in big government and big institutions, there was this idea that the media was this objective, neutral arbiter outside of the cultural and political fights of the day, that conservatives always knew was a lot of propaganda to it.

The myth of 'objective news'. Remember how Walter Cronkite would end his reports, "And that's the way it is." As if the epistemological, existential hubris of being able to say – Don Hewitt used to refer to the nightly news anchors as "the voices of God." As if there was this omnipotent view that they could capture. *New York Times*, "all the news that's fit to print." Well, screw you, maybe there is something we think –

That was something new in American history, something new in Western history. You never had that moment in Europe. In England, you have the *Guardian* and the *Times* and these partisan – not necessarily bad newspapers, they're still good newspapers.

And if you look at the 19<sup>th</sup> century in America, all the papers were crazy partisan newspapers. Tocqueville talks about this. About how the backbone of America, now I'm going to butcher the quote, "the backbone of America is community or association, and the backbone of association is newspapers." Because they were community builders; there was a sense of belonging.

There's this great stuff about the Lincoln-Douglas debates, where the Democratic papers covering it said that "Lincoln was so insensate by being crushed by Douglas that he had to be physically restrained." The Republican papers said that "Douglas was reduced to a quivering mass of jello." I think we're kind of returning to that.

I know from founding the *National Review Online*, I'm sure you find this at *The Weekly Standard*, that a big part of the role of these magazines has always been to cultivate a sense of intellectual, ideological community among a sort of ill-defined, but definitely there, group of people. That's what the internet has been for a very long time. That's what *Salon* was; that's what *Red State*, *Huffington Post* were, they were all community builders. And that is where a lot of people get a lot of their political information.

I think we're returning to that sort of world, and in that sort of world, places like the *New York Times* are having a hard time figuring out what their role is. They try to sell themselves as institutions of lifestyle and whatnot, but it comes across as so smug and so condescending and it's part of that liberal bubble.

And, in that much more free-for-all environment, someone like Donald Trump, who just decides he can give his phone to his Id and say, "Run wild." And I think people kind of find that refreshing. I don't. I find it beneath the dignity of the office, first of all. But I do like watching the left chase every single, shiny thing that he coughs up like a hairball on Twitter.

For those of us who grew up during the great parenthesis, with these certain assumptions of how the media works and how you cover things and all the rest, this is much more of a Wild West moment with fake news and weird stuff and the damage that places like *Breitbart* are doing.

And the ability of the Internet to form instant virtual communities. I'll give a weird example, because it's an easy one to get your head around, and I'm not ascribing this to any political constituency. But, if you were a pedophile 50 years ago, it was *really* hard to find somebody who shared your worldview or predilections. It's a hard conversation to go and say, "Hey, that kid looks" – it's a hard thing to do. Now, the Internet has created this ability for not just evil deviants like pedophiles, but for people who are into all sorts of – Furbies or Dungeons and Dragons and geeks – or all these various video game kind of people. Or the alt-right where very quickly they can instantly get this sense that, first of all, their own personal views are reaffirmed and shared by a large numbers of people; and that, together, they form a coalition or constituency or community that reinforces each other, that gives each other psychic and emotional support.

That's a very different, formidable new thing under the sun. As conservatives we're not supposed to believe in new things under the sun, but this is one of them. How politics deals with some of that is going to be really interesting, and I don't have a good answer.

KRISTOL: That does seem like the gatekeepers, not just the *New York Times*, CBS, ABC, NBC-type gatekeepers, but *National Review* and *Weekly Standard* type gatekeepers within certain movements – of course, we failed this time. And I contributed to it. We had a great package with “a case against Trump” or whatever it's called. It also shows the ability to go around these institutions, the direct communication.

Combined with being a celebrity, combined with a culture that rewards, I guess, a certain kind of brashness, is a nice way of saying it, but you know, vulgarity, let's just say. That is sort of new, I think. I mean, it has now spilled over to our politics, I guess. It's not new; everyone has been lamenting the state of the culture forever. Not forever, but for a long time. And correctly saying, “Things that were not permissible to say in 1970 we are saying in 1990.” And in 2010 they were the mildest things.

GOLDBERG: I think Trump comes out of the Obama presidency for a reason, right? As our friend, your colleague, Steve Hayes – he probably just has a macro in his computer for every time there is a terrorist attack: “Why won't Obama admit that it's a terrorist attack?” But, after every terrorist attack the administration would slow walk, “We don't know his real motives. Maybe it was...” Like Bloomberg after the Times Square failed bombing, “It was probably just an opponent of Obamacare.”

This constant denial of the political international reality, never mind all the politics of transgender stuff and all that kind of thing, that somehow you're a bigot now if you think it is a biological fact that women are the ones that carry babies to term and all that kind of stuff.

I think there's a sense out there, particularly among traditional, older America, that the world has kind of lost its mind. And here comes Trump, who I reject the idea that he's not, that he's purely un-PC, because he loves to use PC against his enemies, he just hates to have it applied to himself. But here is a guy who says “it was terrorism,” here is a guy who says that America used to be great when we could call things by what they are.

The left understandably hears bigotry, but then again, the left hears bigotry in *everything*. Right? If you think everything is racist, you've lost your credibility to say something is racist.

So I think, in a sense – this is the most positive spin I can give Trump as a cultural phenomenon: In feudal China, they had this thing called “the rectification of the names.” In societies, where the names for things and the reality of things starts to become too separate, the names and the reality become too separate, you lose social harmony, you lose a sense of the rightness of the world.

I think there are an enormous number of people, understandably, and rightly feel like the intellectual and cultural elites in this country are telling them constantly not to believe your lying eyes. That if you believe any of the things that you grew up believing, that automatically means you're a racist. And every cop who shoots every guy with a gun, it doesn't matter what the context is, it doesn't matter why it happened, it's automatically a racist act. Even if the cop is black, and even if the victim was shooting people.

There's this, I can't remember his name, but there was this left-wing, racial warrior guy on Twitter that I got into a spat with recently who was talking about the Ohio State terror attack. He says, “So the white police officer who shot a black man is being hailed as a hero.” Without any recognition of the context that the black man was a Somali guy who was shouting “*Allahu Akbar*” and stabbing people with a butcher knife.

But it's that sort of thing that drives a lot of people crazy. And here comes Trump saying that's all nonsense, the elites here are stupid, and I'm going you know –

Part of the problem is, I think is, Trump is a charismatic personality in the social science sense. Sort of like Obama was. People impose upon him things that he doesn't actually reflect, but he's a vehicle for their aspirations, which is a classic definition of a populist leader. So a lot of people just feel like this is the guy who is going to smash political correctness, smash a lot of this stuff, and I think that is an understandable desire.

KRISTOL: I suppose one question is, I think political correctness has been so important to Trump's rise, I very much agree with that. It would be unfortunate from my point of view, I guess, for the conservative reaction to political correctness to be shock-jock-ness, or whatever the word would be, to capture that. As opposed to an intelligent attempt to discuss reality.

But maybe that's sort of inevitable, that there is an overreaction. And maybe you can hope it will settle back into the middle. Or is this is a nightmare scenario of the '20s and '30s? You get crazy decadence – this is a huge caricature, of course – but Weimar crazy decadence. And then you get crazy fascism. That would be kind of the –

GOLDBERG: This is the point I make on college campuses all the time when I talk to conservative college students. Just because rudeness is un-PC doesn't make it heroic or brave. It's a fine distinction. Being rude and crude, just for the sake of shock value, is almost the definition of assinity. I'm just going to be boorish and crass to shock people. That's exactly what you raise your children not to be. But if there's a certain amount of rudeness, or a certain amount of eye-poking that is necessary to making much more important political point, I'm more forgiving of it.

What I think a lot of conservatives don't understand about political correctness – yea, there is a lot of cultural Marxism in it and there is a lot of Nietzschean-resentment in it and all that stuff, and it's a vehicle for left-wingers to impose all sorts of stupid ideas on society. But for the *average* person on a college campus, a big chunk, not all of it by any stretch, but a big chunk of political correctness is an attempt to update manners to account for a more diverse society.

Calling people by what they want to be called isn't caving into the left, it's politeness. It's decency. Africans-Americans, for completely understandable reasons, don't want to be called "colored" or "Negro," they want to be called "black" or "African American." The idea that in 1968 an un-PC, brave person wouldn't give into that is lunacy, right? It's a diverse society and being un-PC as a matter of sort of knee-jerk principle is, I think, in and of itself, a kind of rightwing PC.

Treat people with respect and dignity. Bill Buckley was very un-PC, but a better mannered person you'd never meet. Your dad – very un-PC, but one of the things that made him un-PC was that he was the kind of guy that would stand up when a lady entered the room and he'd pull out the chair. He believed in good manners. It's one of these tensions in the culture right now to be, to have good manners is considered a violation of political rights. I hold doors open for women, and according to the left, that is somehow outrageous. We've got to figure out some of that stuff, but I don't think Donald Trump's approach is the right way.

KRISTOL: I think feminism actually is one of the biggest contributors to, and makes life more problematic in this. But I agree; in a way, conservatives don't do justice to this. If you're a young person on campus, we really do live in a gender-neutral society. Or a society where one is told, legally it's supposed to be gender-neutral. And it is. We're supposed to be gender-neutral, but one also realizes men and women are different. It's not as if it's so obvious how one should treat people. Obviously, one shouldn't assault people on the one hand, and one shouldn't be insanely transgender on the other. But in terms of how actually one should go about one's life as a 20-year-old, or you know, social interactions, it's not so obvious to me what the quite "right answer" would be.

GOLDBERG: It's difficult for people to figure out. Most people want to be nice people, and then they're told they're bigots when they're trying to be nice people. Also, the extent to which intellectual elites, at



least academic elites, are making fools of themselves. I follow this Twitter account, I think it's Peer Review Study, and they had one the other –

KRISTOL: Didn't they just have something particular funny?

GOLDBERG: They had one the other day that this whole idea –

KRISTOL: This is an account that tweets out links to real peer-reviewed journal articles.

GOLDBERG: And they're all ridiculous. This one had one that the whole idea that women don't have as deep voices as men is purely a social construct. My wife, who wrote a book about Title IX and has been following this stuff for much longer than most of us, I remember she reviewed, I think for *The Weekly Standard*, a book called *The Frailty Myth*, where a leading feminist said it is just a myth that women don't have, if properly trained, the same upper body strength as men. As a statistical matter, there are plenty of women that are stronger than me, but as a generality, there's a reason why weight lifters at the Olympics at the highest end are all men. And it has nothing to do with social constructs. It has nothing to do with gender-norm hegemony. It has to do with biological facts. When this stuff trickles down to normal people and they're basically – it's a mass scale of 'emperor has no cloths-ism' that drives them crazy and makes them look to somebody or something that can smash it. In that sense, there is something healthy about all this.

KRISTOL: Trump, at least, maybe blows things up to create a new –

GOLDBERG: A new space. That's possible.

#### **IV: (1:06:33 – 1:28:11) Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millenials**

KRISTOL: What is your sense of that. You speak on college campuses a lot. This is a broad cultural question. On the one hand, one looks at Millennials and they're much derided – I think somewhat unfairly, actually. They were all for Sanders, it seems like, in the primaries, and that was kind of, if you're conservative, a little worrisome, a retread socialist. They're sort of more pro-political correctness than we are, I suppose. On the other hand, one can look at them and say there are some healthy things going on there. Do you have a view on where we are in the generations of late capitalism, and advanced cultural decadence, and all that kind of thing?

GOLDBERG: I'm torn about this kind of stuff. One, as conservative I am deeply sympathetic and prone to 'You kids get off my lawn-ism'. When I first came to Washington and I'm part of what they call Generation X, and I watched –

KRISTOL: You're a little too young to be a Baby Boomer, right?

GOLDBERG: Just barely. I watched how Baby Boomers were the ones who were obsessed with these generational stereotypes. I find that generational stereotyping is a form of secular astrology. "Oh, you were born during this demographic cohort, therefore you must think this, right?" I hate the phrase "the greatest generation," just as a way of example, because it is a way to get bravery on the cheap. *If* you storm Normandy, way to go. Thank you for your service. But if you were in county jail, but were the same age as the guys who stormed Normandy, why do I get to call you 'the greatest generation'? There's this idea of this sort of demographic or birth cohort transitive property of enlightenment, or heroism, or chivalry, or any of these kind of things is all nonsense. I believe in individuals.

When I came to Washington, it was really dispiriting and infuriating how many fellow Gen Xers exploited older Baby Boomers, or exploited Baby Boomers by claiming the mantle of identity politics. "Oh, you *have* to include someone of my age group because you don't understand us and you can't..." As if older people have never been young and don't know what it's like to be young.

KRISTOL: This was the '90s right? Let's have a TV show, only with 31-year-olds.

GOLDBERG: There was a lot of that kind of stuff and I always rejected it. I agree with you that there's a lot of things going on. Millennials now are the biggest demographic cohort, right?

KRISTOL: Just passed the Boomers.

GOLDBERG: The idea that you could talk about any group of 74 million Americans, whatever the number, with any sweeping generalizations is kind of nuts, right? We do it because we're lazy journalists, and that's what lazy journalists do. This attempt to digitize rather than analyze the society.

So that said, I do think there's a real problem among kids at elite schools where they – it's this amazing thing where, and I make this point on college campuses all the time. If you go to a top 200 campus, top 100 campus, and you're from an affluent family and you're not there on some sort of scholarship or whatever, but even if you are, as a general proposition and you go to one of these schools, your food is paid for, your housing is paid for, your security is paid for, your heat is paid for, your electricity is paid for, your Wi-Fi is paid for, your books are paid for, your tuition is paid for, much of your social life is paid for. Maybe you wait tables, maybe you don't, that kind of stuff. And yet, you think you're incredibly independent.

There is – I think you judge a lot of political movements by their definition of utopia, and I think that there's a thing, particularly in American liberalism, that sees the college campus as the definition of the best society. Where everything is taken care of, you're just supposed to explore your highest, best self. The greatest crime you can commit is to be mean to somebody. And I think that's a real problem. I also think that one of the reasons why political correctness is succeeding on college campuses, and I've written a bit about this, is that people like you and me are partly to blame, and parents are partly to blame.

Political correctness, broadly defined, has been around since at least Adorno and Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School were doing their craziness. It was as dumb and as weird and as stupid when Marcuse was talking about "repressive tolerance" and all this nonsense. It never got a foothold with very many people outside of a certain subset of radical left-wingers on college campuses until this generation.

I think, and a friend of mine, Steve Horwitz, at St. Lawrence University, Jonathan Haidt has written about this, what you had happen was, in the late 1980s, there were a series of kidnappings of little kids, and that was part of this sort of freak-out among parents about not letting your kids just run wild. And their lives had to be planned. And, particularly among affluent people – I see this with my own daughter and I try to fight it, it's hard – you see these parents whose kids have their days scheduled to a fare-thee-well. They're driven from this and they're driven from that, and there's very little free-range play.

We've raised, among elite kids, this entire generation – again, speaking in grotesque generalities – of kids who have never had, in a significant way, the need or the ability to, or the opportunity to settle interpersonal disagreements on their own. There is always a third-party intercessor. There's a coach, there's a teacher, there's a parent. Someone who comes in and says "Oh, you and Billy have to play nice." We know from social science that kids really need rough and tumble play in order to understand how to navigate interpersonal relations. As Steve Horwitz points out, he says "What would you expect when you get a generation of kids raised this way?"

They go to college and they're away from home for the first time. First of all, they would want a much more aggressive, *in loco parentis* from the administration. They have never really dated, they don't know how to deal with interpersonal sexual stuff, and so they might want a contract that explains what the rules are. Right? If they take a class where someone says something, or they teach something, or they expose them to something that is scary or makes them feel uncomfortable, well, maybe they want a trigger

warning. You know the left, women's studies departments have been around for a long time teaching utter nonsense for a long time, and I know this having gone to an all-women's college.

KRISTOL: Previously an all women's college. Unless there is a transgendered issue.

GOLDBERG: I'm the Rosa Parks of gender-integration. But it never had a wide appeal beyond a very small subset of kids, and now you get the rank-and-file kids who have grown up as these protected creatures, buying into the arguments of political correctness in a way I don't think they ever have before. It's a real challenge. I think the issue starts at the home. The helicopter parenting is a sign of this problem where you need – I grew up in New York City in the 1970s. My mom and dad kicked me out of the house and said, "You and your brother go play." I was mugged. It was a different place.

I'm raising my daughter in the 1950s, and I worry about these things. I see it among her friends and the kids at school, where everyone's really nice but they don't know how to navigate life in a way that I think kids from previous generations did.

KRISTOL: I share also your dislike of all the generational stuff which becomes such a pop-sociology thing at some point. I'm not sure exactly, I guess the Boomers, really, I mean, I have the greatest respect for many people of the greatest generation, my parents and so forth. Of course the greatest generation's kids were the Baby Boomers. So if it was such a great generation, how come they produced the rebels of the '60s who were their parents? Their parents fought in WWII almost by definition. If you look at the chronology, almost.

GOLDBERG: One of the reasons, according to some sociologists, was guilt. Their parents did this great amazing thing; we have to do something great and amazing.

KRISTOL: The parents spoiled the kids because they went through the Great Depression, and this was finally the chance to give your kids something you didn't have growing up. So suddenly you get – I mean, life is complicated and there are these back and forths.

I do think, on the cultural side, the germ of truth in the generational side is people have some sense that, well, it does matter when you grow up chronologically in the sense that the technology is very different, and the culture is very different. Growing up in a world of Facebook, email, Twitter is probably a different experience than growing up in the '50s or the '80s. Which had their own odd things, you could say, that were different from previous generations. People used to have long debates about TV, what effect is TV having on our kids. But that seems to be dwarfed by the effects of social media, right?

GOLDBERG: And kids aren't watching TV the way they used to, either. I agree with that entirely; and to the extent that generational analysis has merit, it is much more a story of the technology that you grew up with and how it relates to culture and all the rest.

I did think that this is a point that, again, conservatives have struggled with for a very long time. Conservative intellectuals, in particular, really love to argue about ideas. We just love ideas, right? We want to argue that ideas have consequences and all that kind of stuff. Certainty, that is how we make a living. I'm not excluding myself from that. But, if you go back and just look at social history, the breakdown of the family begins, and has much more to do with, the rise of the automobile than it does with any idea that escaped from some East German lab. The problem is that you can argue with Nietzsche, you can't argue with a Buick. That's the sort of problem.

KRISTOL: Or the Internet.

GOLDBERG: Or the Internet. That Internet is just out there and you can grapple with it, you can make arguments about how to deal with, but I think it was Carl Hess said that, "Tools have more to do with changing humanity than Jesus did." Or something.

I mean – I think one can overdue some of that stuff. But, technology is a huge driver of social organization, social understanding, art. I mean, there is a reason why art has become more abstract and more ridiculous. Some of it has to do with all sorts of bad ideas, but some of it has to do with simply the invention of the camera. You have to, all the sudden, embrace art as an expression of an idea rather than a representation of nature or reality, because it turns out that technology is better at that than anybody with a paintbrush is going to be.

KRISTOL: Feminism and the sexual revolution are big deals, but the pill is kind of a big deal. Conservatives have always loved, I think it's Richard Weaver, a book of his essays, *Ideas Have Consequences*. Heritage used it as a model for decades, maybe. I've of course – yes, as you say, people like us want to believe and we do ultimately, I think, believe that, that fundamentally that's probably the case. But, yes, technology has a lot of consequences. And there you can't just rebut technology, you have to think how to adapt it, use it, curb it, maybe.

We were talking about this before, off-camera, about Daniel Bell and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. That's always been a powerful argument that no one sat around and – I mean, someone did sit around thinking they wanted to be against capitalism, but a lot of it, capitalism develops in a way where it begins with thrift and goes to consumerism and ends up in Trumpian debt, and bankruptcies, and lavish showing off. Sort of semi-fake products, and I don't know how much that is driven by critiques of capitalism.

GOLDBERG: I have a lot of views on this because I'm working on a book that is right about all this stuff. One of the things I think people don't appreciate is that capitalism, a lot of it comes out of Locke, obviously, and that sort of political tradition of liberalism and *philosophes* and all of that. But, you know, you could take Max Weber's *Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which is still probably one of the main arguments about where capitalism comes from and all the rest. The Puritans, or the you know the Protestants who – not the Puritans, who am I thinking of? Who are the predestination guys?

KRISTOL: The Calvinists.

GOLDBERG: The Calvinists and those guys, right? I mean, they didn't say "Oh, we have to adopt this new understanding of market economics in order to get into heaven." It was that in order to get into heaven, we have to live as if we were selected to get into heaven. That means living upright, decent lives of thrift and hard work and all the rest. It turns out if you do those things it throws out these benefits of affluence and all the rest. So many of – capitalism depends on values and virtues that it cannot create, and cannot restore once lost. And I think, this is one of the points that your dad would make quite eloquently in one of my favorite essays of his, "When Virtue Has Lost Its Loveliness," or something like that.

KRISTOL: "When Virtue Loses Its Loveliness." Which is a quote, I guess, from Fitzhugh, I believe, a Southern slave defender. Who was sort of attacking Northern industrial society for destroying lovely things in the course of this implacable progress of industrialization.

GOLDBERG: We should be clear that your dad was not in the argument on the side of slavery.

KRISTOL: Not at all. Shows how far back the critique of capitalism –

GOLDBERG: This critique of capitalism goes back to Justus Moser and medieval Germany and all that. The problem that we get into – which gets back to Daniel Bell, I think – is that when you live in a purely consumerist society, where you listen to the way Donald Trump defends his wealth and his behavior as a businessman, it has nothing to do with the virtues that gave birth to capitalism. It's all "I was just trying to maximum profit. I was greedy for me." He keeps talking about how he was "greedy for me." That is not

how Adam Smith would talk about it. It is not how most of the Robber Barons, who were not really robber barons, would talk about this kind of thing.

KRISTOL: Andrew Carnegie would not have said that.

GOLDBERG: I know some very wealthy people who don't like Donald Trump because they think he gives rich people a bad name. But we live in a society where you can claim that anything you did, bribed politicians, all the rest – which Trump has basically admitted – is worthwhile if it helps your bottom line.

That sort of thinking spells the end of capitalism, rightly understood. But we live in this culture. I mean, you see it in things like rap music: "It's all about the Benjamin's," it's all about the money. That is not actually capitalism or conservatism, properly understood, and I think we're going to need to figure out a way to getting back to talking about how these virtues are good in their own sense, regardless of whether or not they make you rich or happy.

KRISTOL: That would be amazing. I sort of have this sense, too, that Obama takes nanny state-ism pretty far down that road. "Life of Julia," the thing we all mocked before but we know was pretty effective in 2012. That was the cartoon about this apparently single woman that kept getting good things from the government. That was Obama's vision of democracy and not what we'd all like to see in terms of vigorous self-government, and taking care of yourself, and self-reliance.

Then, Trump takes a certain aspect of capitalism to a kind of ludicrous extreme and dead end. Maybe out of this you get a cultural reaction and reformation. That would be a pretty amazing irony of history moment if we get a constitutional revival out of Trump, we get a cultural revival out of the most vulgar person to ever be in the White House. I like that idea actually.

GOLDBERG: I like that idea, but there is also the possibility – It's a little off topic, but when Steven Bannon says "I'm not a white nationalist," Trump's senior advisor now, who was the CEO of the campaign, "I'm not a white nationalist, I'm an economic nationalist." I take him at his word. I don't think he's a racist, I think he's incredibly cynical man who exploited a bunch of racists, even if he disagreed with them.

But this idea that economic nationalism isn't simply nationalism is nonsense. There's never been a society that embraced nationalism that didn't embrace economic nationalism. And economic nationalism, properly understood, is socialism or some type of command economy stuff. And nationalism is not conservatism. Bill Buckley used to say that he was as patriotic as anybody in the world but there wasn't an ounce of nationalism in him.

What I worry about is that instead of this glorious revival where he is this antibody, this macrobiotic thing that turns on our immune systems and revives democracy, is that it has this catalytic effect on more tribalism. That's certainly the left's response.

KRISTOL: That seems, just looking at the world, there's quite a lot of evidence of that.

GOLDBERG: All around the world we're in a tribalist, nationalist moment.

KRISTOL: The reaction to the nanny state, welfare state, politically correct state has been a tribalist revival. Not what we would think of as a healthy, conservative, you know, revival.

GOLDBERG: It's interesting. I was reading a book by Ernest Gellner where he made this argument I had never heard before, and I'm not a real Hayek geek but I'm close, and he made this argument that Hayek and his colleagues at the Austrian school in Vienna embraced their limited government, constitutional free market, rule of law stuff as a response to the swarthy, dark hordes of bohemians and Hungarians who were coming into Vienna at the time.

I never heard this argument of Hayekianism as a sort of racist response but the reality is that – I spent a lot of time thinking about this – even if that is true and I’m not sure that I buy it, that’s the *right* response. Right? The right response is not to say we are going to have one sort of rules for the white, Viennese upper-crusters and another set of rules for others. It’s that everyone’s going to be judged by the same standards, it’s going to be rule of law, it’s going to be limited government, and everybody has to obey the same set of rules and structures. That is what I would hope is the response to Trump. Not to say that he’s perfectly analogous to a bunch of swarthy bohemians in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

But I think that’s the right response from conservatives, is to double-down on this idea of what Arthur Brooks would call, “the innate human dignity of everybody.” Of this idea of ‘simple rules for complex society,’ not picking winners and losers. That’s where I think we should go.

KRISTOL: Again, it would be an irony of history, a kind of Hegelian thing where you get liberal political correctness, [then] a kind of unpleasant and bad, you know, nationalist, ethnic nationalist, ethno-nationalist reaction. But then, out of it, somehow people decide neither is what you want and you end up with a more old-fashioned rule-of-law, limited government and so forth.

GOLDBERG: Isn’t that the theory, I know it’s come under some criticism, but the theory where secular pluralism comes from? You had these religious wars in Europe, and it turned out that they realized you’re never going to kill all the Huguenots, you’re never going to kill all the Catholics, so maybe what we got to do is put away our swords and have this safe zone in public where everybody is treated equally. Maybe that is the response we’ll get.

KRISTOL: Of course, you need a [John Locke](#), and others to then invent, and Montesquieu and the Founders, to invent a theory that makes that more possible than just a stand-off, status quo truce.

GOLDBERG: Fortunately, Locke has done a lot of that work for us. And we have *you* to update it.

KRISTOL: I was going to say *you*. That’s a good note to end on. Jonah, thanks so much for joining me today, it was really great. And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]