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This is the Lawyers, Guns & Money podcast.

Hi, everybody. Welcome to another edition of the Lawyers, Guns & Money podcast.

And we are very excited to have Julia Azari, a professor of political science at Marquette University in Milwaukee, where people are not only talking about the election and talking about the Brewers, but everybody's talking about Julia's book. And I must say, we meant to talk about this last year and couldn't put it together. But we have what we call in the business a news hook, because Backlash Presidents: From Transformative to reactionary leaders in American history is now an award winning book, I believe the most prestigious American Political Science Association award given to books about the presidency is that I forgot what the name of it is. But you get a Neustadt Award, give it an executive politics. Probably should have guessed that. Yes.

So yeah, so congratulations. So it seemed like the perfect time to have Julia come in and discuss this. And of course, an election year is also a timely way. And by the way, we don't actually show the video, I just like holding up the books, it's like we're on Dick Cavett, to sort of set up the setting the vibe. So welcome. And also with of course, is Rob Farley of the University of Kentucky, who you know well, and this will be a somewhat more time disciplined and sober discussion than our NFL preview podcast, let's say, but he will be here as well. So Julia, welcome.

Yeah, thank you so much. I hope you're not going to ask me any NFL trick questions because I do not know.

No, no, absolutely not.

No, we will be this will be strictly political science today. So before we get into, this book, which I think is makes a really fascinating and innovative contribution. And we're going to sort of walk through the sort of three, well, six or three or six presences, depending on how you look at it, that are the focus of the book, I wonder if we could talk a little bit about, sort of situating this book in the context of the field. So we're both scholars in what can be called loosely the American political development tradition, that is the branch of political science that looks for recurring historical patterns, and shows not only how things develop in a linear sense, but also how there was the same challenges that, sort of appear in 1800 appear again.

So what many people saw was new about Mitch McConnell holding out a Supreme Court seat in 2016, I would say, look at 1968, go about, that you always have to see that. And so obviously, your book is influenced by your graduate mentor, Steven Skowronek at Yale, who wrote a classic book called The Politics Presidents Make. But I also think in many ways, goes beyond that, obviously, and I think builds on it and go some places that didn't go. So I just wonder if you could talk a little bit about, sort of how your project relates to the field before we sort of get into the specifics of what you argue and what you found.

Yeah, so there's sort of three pieces of this of this way of situating my book in the field of American political development. One is when I first started thinking about this was really in 2017, which was

kind of the height of talking about norms in American politics, which is something I had I had published on before and kind of norms as informal rules of the game, long before Trump entered the national political scene in any kind of impactful way. And in 2017, you got, Trump was in office, you saw Trump obviously violating norms left and right, and this sort of sense in in the kind of broader commentary world that, this is this is really the kind of way to think and talk about this.

And at the same time that was happening, I also was in a place where I was really starting to think about the presidency and race, and mostly inspired by teaching and you know how when you teach something and you hear yourself say something and you realize like that's an interesting thing. This was teaching kind of history of the presidency course to my students here at Marquette and bringing a race focus into it and realizing that as you look at like the 19th century leading into leading into the presidency of Abraham Lincoln and the formation of the Republican Party and the Civil War, you have these kind of coalition dynamics in the Democratic Party, grand slavery that no one wants to really mess with.

And then you teach the 20th century moving into civil rights and realize there are these coalition dynamics in the Democratic Party no one really wants to mess with. And you start to realize this is the same, this is the same problem. It's just it's just sort of playing out in these two different contexts. And inspiration for all of this thinking and all this teaching on some level, as you mentioned, is the work of Steven Skowronek, who I was fortunate enough to work with in graduate school and who many of us have been inspired by reading. And so his his sort of thesis is that we have these cycles of political time and, one of them that he talks about kind of goes from Andrew Jackson up through Abraham Lincoln.

And so this is a period of Democratic Party dominance and what he refers to as a kind of political order. And then we get then we move into a very long period of Republican political order punctuated by Franklin Roosevelt. And then that order starts to fall apart with Lyndon Johnson and fully falls apart with with Jimmy Carter and then goes into the Reagan era. And then the book, the book actually sort of ends there. So this book originally came out in 1997 and has been updated in various ways. So the book, there's kind of two main ways that I wanted to view the way that presidential politics moves through political time differently as Skowronek does.

And one is that I wanted to bring this race conflict, which I think he treats in the Politics Presidents Make a little bit as, every party coalition's got something and the Democrats prior to 1960 is race, but then, something different for Republicans, blah, blah, blah. And this is sort of one of one of many conflicts. And I wanted to really bring race to the fore and say, what if this is the central conflict?

And, primarily one thing that does is it leads us to think differently about the impact of the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. The other thing is I wanted to start to expand a little bit on what is meant by a political order and maybe look at that through rather than try to be to nail it down and be more specific, which people have done many times. And I think it's very difficult to do that is sort of like the political order is the thing that shapes all the other things. That's not a great sentence. No one is going to approve of that sentence. But that's sort of what we mean.

So I thought instead of trying to explain it in a really kind of broad lens way, what if we really narrow down race and think about how these major kind of political and policy questions around race, slavery, civil rights, and then later, what I refer to as colorblindness, which we can break down a little bit more, sort of post civil rights, racial order. How does that structure political life?

How does that structure the political forces that constrain presidents?

How does that structure party compromise?

And then how does that when we shift again to a normative frame, how does that actually make us think differently about following norms and engaging in compromise?

The two things that generally people present as being pretty good and being kind of normative goals that we should be moving toward. But in fact, if you look at that through a race lens, compromise and norms don't look so hot and look like the things that actually have been holding racially unjust and unequal orders in place. And so that's kind of how I situate this in the field. The last thing I want to say about that, but I can say one more thing, is that Skowronek's book about political time has really been read by people as here are these types of presidents that fit into this four part typology about where they land and this then this recurring cycle. And the book is really the best inside of the book is not the typology.

The best inside of the book is an intervention in the study of the presidency that says we should be less focused on how many bills the president supports to then pass and more focused on what is the impact of a presidency. We shouldn't be looking at who's successful and who's a failure. Like this is a long lasting paradigm, but we should really assess what presidents do to politics. And that is a much more nuanced and fruitful question. And that's the question that I tried to take up in this book. Yeah. And there are a couple and I think that I agree with that.

And so a couple of the insights from Skowronek, which I see carried out here, first is that your presidents are always in the ironic position of sort of being order defining and if they're lucky, order shattering, but also order preserving. And it starts off with Jefferson in some ways, the most order shattering, the one president who can mold almost everything because there's no existing party in Congress to deal with, he's in control. But even then, his inaugural speech says we are all Republicans, we are all Federalists. he doesn't purge Federalists in the civil service. he does a lot of constitutional hardball in the court, but he was very strongly provoked there too. So that, even, that presidencies are always the situation.

And conversely, one of the best chapters of the book is about Franklin Pierce, who's now seen as this kind of weak non-entity. But, as Skowronek points out, one characteristic of those preemptive presidents is that the presidency was their only way of getting any historical legacy. Like James Madison need the presidency to be a prominent figure like Franklin Pierce did need it. And he really did, sort of try to settle the slavery issue and actually had a major impact on American politics, even if not in some kind of longstanding policy sense. And so I completely agree with that. And I can kind of see you sort of picking out those parts of the tradition and expanding it forward.

I think we should also, I'm duty bound because of my institutional position to mention another APD classic, Megan Francis' civil rights in the making of the American state, which I assume, I know you quoted a couple of times, but I assume is very much on your mind here because like you, I was teaching it before Trump. So, then wow, that really goes more insightful. So I really like that way of looking at it. And so we can start here with obviously the two presidencies that you start with in your historical focus, which is Lincoln and Johnson.

And so with Lincoln, I think one thing that you recover, and I think that political scientists and historians have really tried to do this, is Lincoln as a party leader. obviously when your president kind of becomes, in Skowroneks terms, reconstructive, and they kind of create a new political order, although Lincoln's in a sense is the new is the weakest. probably the least persuasive parts of Skowroneks book are trying to link Teddy Roosevelt to Lincoln when everything about the politics just radically changed. Like there's not, he's not really, you know what I mean?

Like, like Lyndon Johnson and FDR are very clearly linked, like Roosevelt and Reagan, but, that's fine. But, I think that you really sort of get at, the sort of tensions that Lincoln had as kind of, a moderate, a anti-slavery but not abolitionist, a racial egalitarian by the standards of a white politician in the antebellum era, but not, by contemporary standards, but also the sort of difficulty in terms of, again, the sort of order, that the Civil War is this order preserving strategy that becomes an order shattering presidency. So in some ways it's defining. And one interesting thing too is that, to bring our transition to Johnson is that, I see all the time now people sort of deriding Lincoln, for the Johnson choice, which obviously retrospect is a huge blunder.

But one thing that you emphasize is, it really was important to win the 1864 election, if McClellan wins, hundreds of thousands of people have died in vain. As political scientists now, we know that the choice of the vice presidency is probably not very important, but Lincoln did not have access to that data, you know. And so really, there's the war cabinet tradition, is a very common one for reason, and in some ways even better in the United States because the vice president has no authority whatsoever, with one notably rare exception, which unfortunately, happened in this case.

But I really was interested in the extent to which you emphasize, Lincoln as a party leader who had just had the ordinary challenges of coalition management, even when he was engaging in the most sort of order, and that even the most order shattering event in American history still begins as an order preserving event. And even the Emancipation Proclamation still adheres to Lincoln's, the parts of the union that take the deal, get to preserve slavery in their states. It's only the states who wouldn't agree to the contract, that we can militarily move in.

So that even in his most order-shattering moments, he's still, basically saying my job as the president is to conserve the constitutional order as well as to sort of lead to this sort of new constitution which would be ratified by the Civil War amendments.

Yeah, so I think maybe it would make sense here to back up and like kind of explain the basic, excuse me, the basic idea of the book, which is that I compare these three kind of pairs of presidents and the fundamental argument is most presidents are, in fact, when you look at race order affirming. I'm not the first person to make that argument. That insight is also elaborated in this book from, I think, 1991 by Russell Riley, where he sort of riffs on Skowronek also and says, I got Skowronek's early version of what became the Politics Presidents Make in political time and says, actually, presidents are constitutional order keepers. And so I argue most presidents are constitutional order keepers, but that we have these sort of three that in the racial element are not.

So we've got Lincoln with the Civil War, we've got Lyndon Johnson, the civil rights presidency, and then we have Obama as the first African-American president, which I think there's a much less kind of established paradigm about what the significance of that was. Obviously, those of us who are old enough to remember it know that it was. And obviously, I think there is substantial evidence that politics since then has been quite racialized. But one thing I think is true is like whatever this era was between civil rights and Obama, that we didn't know what it was while we were living it.

So what I try to do is elucidate those connections and particularly zero in on the fact that all three of these successor backlash presidents, the titular backlash presidents were impeached. And that was really the insight that gave rise to the book as I had to write a memo for a conference on, the state of American democracy. And I was kind of sitting in a coffee shop. And so I was like tooling around reading The Atlantic online. And there was some piece about Andrew Johnson. And all of a sudden it occurred to me that every time we have this sort of racially transformative president, their successor gets impeached. Don't Trump hadn't been impeached at that point. It was fall of 2017. But there was a lot of talk about it in the wake of the Russia investigation.

And I assumed he probably would be. And unlike most of my predictions, that one was true. And by the way, just as Skowronek predicted that Clinton would get impeached in his first term, during his first term. That book got more famous than a lot of political science books.

Right. Yeah. And I can talk about how Skowronek and I also approach impeachment a little bit differently. Clinton falls in this. But I guess what I would say about Lincoln is that what we get from that from that example is the first kind of demonstration of how transformative presidents are still pretty cautious. With Lincoln, it's a lot of caution about ending slavery within the confines of the Constitution, which Lincoln didn't think he was going to be able to do before the Civil War. Lincoln wasn't confident that this was actually possible that, slavery, he was one of the Republicans who thought slavery will eventually die out over generations, but that there isn't really much we can do constitutionally to abolish it.

And even as he's doing this, even after he's doing this, then he gets kind of cautious about about readmission to the union. And one thing we really will never know is just how that would have looked. It's possible that Lincoln would have been had he lived and had Johnson not become president. It's possible Lincoln would have been more of a stickler for sort of the national presence in the South. I'm sure that he wouldn't have been the same as Johnson, but he did actually have a pretty cautious plan in place, a pretty forgiving plan in place for the readmission of the South.

And so one thing that one thing that I find in each of these moments that reoccur is that the politics get really scrambled because all of a sudden these these factional divisions that can often be within parties or within people who are otherwise political allies about exactly what to do now the old racial order has is no longer and exactly how to rebuild those divisions become really important and really salient. And that changes politics and it opens up opportunity. It opens up opportunities for people like Andrew Johnson and Richard Nixon and Donald Trump to become president and do lawless things and also to get impeached. But it just creates it creates these really unique and distinct moments in politics.

And to your point about Teddy Roosevelt, one thing I wish I'd had more time to do is to connect is to draw out that connection because I think that transition of the Republican Party from the party of Lincoln to a party that's really fundamentally focused on other things is really fascinating. And I think Skowronek's work on Roosevelt in that the chapter he has on Theodore Roosevelt, I think you're right.

I think the connection is quite tenuous.

I think it's very interesting that Theodore Roosevelt, one of his things is like we need to be more like the party of Lincoln. We've lost our radical edge. What are we doing here?

I think these are really these are really interesting and telling moments in American politics as we I think come to terms with the fact that the failure of reconstruction is the is the foundation of many subsequent political failures. So that's how I think about that 19th century case, which of course is as a political scientist and not 19th century historian, this is just harrowing to write. the most, the heaviest lift in a lot of ways that's kind of how I think about those cases.

Yeah, Pam Brandwine's work on how, the shift of the Republican Party was a little bit more gradual that, we tend to think of 1876 as this absolute, but it's actually that, I think her point that under Grant and even under Garfield and Arthur, the Republican Party wasn't what it was, but also wasn't what it would become, that there were some efforts in civil rights. And you point out too that, Grant could be a little cautious, but he was also genuinely constrained by the lack of any federal law enforcement. it was a real problem that military occupation or nothing were the only that really was

going to make it very difficult, even for a president like Grant who was relatively supportive of civil rights to really effectively, that was an issue.

And so I kind of liked that, that's so and so I think that, under under Teddy Roosevelt, that, and again, and you point out, of course, the, the inviting Booker T. Washington to the, the most modern civil rights view to the White House still creates this massive backlash that more or less caused Roosevelt to back off the rest of his presidency, which is it, which is an interesting, I think that's kind of an it, it's not core to your thesis, but I think it's a very interesting event that, that sometimes this caution is unfortunately politically justified.

Yeah, like that, that, that incident was also one of the early things in my thinking, I think one of the actually one of the early ways I started developing thinking on this is I taught a class on presidential biography, it was like a like a one credit class for honor students. And so I had a thing on Theodore Roosevelt. And that's there's many interesting things that happen. But that's like a really vivid incident to teach students. And what just to me that really illustrates is what I think is true throughout the book, which is that there is this princess in the P element to race and the presidency.

There's a lot going on with with race and racial progress, and then and then backsliding all throughout American history at all sorts of levels, when it comes to merging the rhetorical power and the symbolic power and the and the actual power of the presidency, with the notion of the advancement of specifically African Americans, but other marginalized groups, too. When you when you merge the power of the presidency with that, it I don't know what kind of words I can use on this in this podcast, but everyone kind of loses their mind.

Well, you can use all of them. You can use all.

Okay. They all kind of come out when you're studying race in the presidency, because you're like, oh, boy, this happened.

Yeah, like that was kind of my takeaway is that whenever that occurs, everyone loses their shit. And that's like not everyone, right?

But a substantial number of people who who behave as if they don't have anything to lose politically from kind of really, angry backlash and the amount of angry backlash to Roosevelt having Booker T. Washington to the White House to have dinner with was quite astounding. And people have written whole books about just that. And you said the rules don't do not expect either. But in any means. Yeah.

Right. And the Roosevelt was not particularly, overwhelming racial egalitarian, but he wanted he wanted he wanted to read the room racially and sort of engage with whatever constituencies could he was, consummate kind of politician. And that's that's sort of how I read that. But that is not an isolated incident, like there's a vivid incident, it's easy to follow. And there's this really, there's a really readable newspaper, paper trail of people losing their minds. But that is sort of that is sort of what I read as the entire the entire world in the Obama Trump years is we've merged the symbolic power of the presidency with the advancement of African Americans. And now we live in an insane political hellscape where the old rules no longer apply.

That's, that's like, that's my that's my read on it. And again, it's interesting, actually, I just got an email from someone who I do not know who read my book, which is an unusual occurrence. I said that he feels the thesis broke down because Obama was not particularly transformative. And I agree with that. Obama did not make any constitutional changes. Obama did not did not set out to

be a racially transformative president. But the fact is, the way that everybody had to talk about race in American politics became different. And you couldn't ignore it in ways that people were, were quite happy to ignore it in that kind of commentary class, leading up to that. And I think that really had a profound impact on our politics.

And I cite Michael Tesler's work a lot in this who has done a lot of empirical work to show how racialized politics became in the public mind after after Obama took office starting as early as 2009. I forget what question I was answering, but I'll be done now. In more popular intellectual could be supplemented with the first white president as well, which was like, Obama is a racially transformative president, irrespective of any policy that it's not the point, which is again, a core point of your book. It's not just about policy and, an important will return to later, but I think absolutely.

Before we yes, yes, yes, sorry. Yes, sorry. Yes, absolutely. Go ahead.

So actually, if I could, if I could pause at this point and, and sort of, and I discussed earlier that unfortunately, I haven't been able to read the book yet. And so I don't mind, I'm familiar with a lot of literature. But it is very interesting to me that there, and, and you alluded to this, right, that, that, we're talking about racial politics, but a lot of this is what is really about African American white, black politics, right? what is sort of interesting to me, in the context of at least the first case you're talking about here, which is, and, we talk about Grant and Roosevelt as if they're really far apart, but they're not right. Grant is president, 24 years before Roosevelt, which, which is kind of is the Clinton administration for us, right?

And not even quite because Grant was still a figure, but, but the other things that are happening here, and I'm really curious, because I don't really know the history all that well, but, TR was, was obviously and Grant were also sort of very relevant presidents in terms of the nation's integration, not just of black Americans, but also especially of Native Americans and of Asians, right?

And that's a huge part of Roosevelt's presidency, and the Native American part is a huge part of Grant's presidency, right?

How are those playing in dynamics that are similar or different from sort of the white-black conflict that is making everybody lose their shit about Booker T. Washington?

Yeah, I cover a lot in this book, and so I don't really cover those, is basically the answer. But what I found is it's just, it's not as, it's not as linear, it's not as sort of foundational to the coalitions. That's sort of what I kept coming back to is those coalitions are sort of like more, my impression, and this might be wrong if I had studied this in greater depth, is that those, those coalitions tend to be more fluid and contingent and situational and policy-specific. And they're sort of linked up, like there's some good work in American political development on the connection between expansion and slavery and kind of, and where Native Americans fit into that. So it's sort of tied in materially with land.

We get to Theodore Roosevelt and Asian American politics integration of Asians in the United States, we get into both immigration and imperialism and kind of a general white supremacy. So I think that's sort of where it ties in is there's a sort of ambient white supremacy. But what I sort of keep finding is the recurrent piece that kind of, it's sort of, its role in the foundation doesn't change is black-white politics, but that there are these more contingent pieces floating around. And that's about as far as I got, to be honest, just because there are so many other pieces floating around.

Before we leave the 19th century, I want to talk a little bit about Andrew Johnson.

I think there's two striking things here. The first, of course, and again, I want to emphasize to the audience that Backlash Presidents is not one of those cottage industry books that just tries to take historical incidents and make it all about Trump. That's absolutely not it. But it is striking and you do sort of quote Johnson at length at a few critical points where a lot of Andrew Johnson's rhetoric is what if Donald Trump was an alcoholic?

A lot of that very specific kind of resentment about how the Freedmen's Bureau will actually be bad for African Americans and all that sort of respect and resentment, which you can also see in the majority opinion for the Civil Rights Cases. It's now time to abandon special rights and for blacks just to be ordinary. So that I think that's the first striking thing is that how much Johnson is very much anticipated the rhetoric that we still hear today, that it's really nothing new under the sun.

And then secondly, how the impeachment of Johnson was that reconstruction was mostly a subtext, that there was this felt need, which obviously Keith Whittington and others have gone into in great detail, to sort of make it a legalistic, which is unfortunate because the legalistic arguments for removing Johnson were frankly not that compelling. The Tenure of Office Act was very constitutionally shaky. But the sort of actual arguments for removing Johnson were quite compelling. And there's a way in which, and obviously part of the failure to remove Johnson involved corruption and so on.

But that I really thought that was a fascinating that I think informs the subsequent impeachments as well, that real, and again, that also gets into our order of transforming order shattering, the fact that even radical Republicans felt the need to make impeachment about this kind of narrow, legalistic thing, rather than Lincoln was elected, Andrew Johnson has never won a fucking election, but he wants to undermine Congress and undermine reconstruction and make the civil war in vain. That's a much more compelling reason to remove Johnson's office, but it was felt that had to be notes about these technical, legal violations. And I thought that was one of the most powerful and important parts of your book.

And I think does inform, and obviously we'll come back to it informs, informs what happens with Trump, but it's its own, but I think it's his own historical, active importance as well.

Yeah, I think that was a really interesting part of this, because one thing that I did throughout the book was when I was reading sources was try to really make sure that I picked sources by Andrew Johnson that were written well before Trump came on the scene politically. Like Brenda Wineapple's book, the impeachers is really wonderful and I loved it and I cited a lot, but it did come out in 2020. And so there, there, it does sort of have the Trump background backdrop, in it in some ways. And I really tried to look at, there's a biography, Andrew Johnson from the early nineties, and that Gordon-Reed has a book that came out some, I forget when sometime in the early, in the two thousands.

And, and there are a number of really excellent works in the sort of field of African-American history that look at this period too. So there are a lot of great stuff that came out pre-Trump. And the reason that was important to me is because as you said, the poll quotes from Andrew Johnson that are about, everyone is going after me. I'm being treated very unfairly, punishing my enemies. It's like the Trump people read Andrew Johnson and they're like, here, here, here's the guy. This is the guy. We want to sound like this guy. And it's, it's quite striking. And I think that you're right. And I haven't, I'm still thinking about this.

I'm in the process of writing kind of follow-up essay because I didn't know this most of the time when I was writing the book, but of course we're now in another Trump presidency that seems

even more racially charged, even more lawless. And there's any number of meeting points between those two things. And we're now looking at probably a democratic house. And so of course, I think there was right today, we're recording this one on October 5th. Rahm Emanuel was talking about how the house Democrats shouldn't impeach. They should do something else. Like this is every couple of days you get a statement from a Democrat who's either prominent or trying to be prominent, trying to stay prominent, who has an opinion about impeachment.

And so, and that is what's also incredibly striking. And it's not absent. It's not absent from the Watergate discourse either, that there is this sort of cautious stance between people who want to impeach and people who want, who think that it is a political distraction or they're not sure. And those tend to be the more legalistic people and the group in the latter camp tend to be African American legislators, or in the earlier case, their allies who are more bold on this and who see the presidency. I didn't realize this till after I finished writing the book and it was already published, but who see the presidency in some sense through Fourteenth Amendment terms and who see kind of neglect of presidential duty as impeachable.

And that's a very different way of thinking about impeachment than commission of specific acts. And yet the way that this, the way the impeachers were kind of improvising at that time is, okay, you come up with these specific legalistic articles and you do, you do this thing and it's kind of like a legal process. That's not entirely prescribed by, by the constitution. There is a lot of leeway, like many things, the constitution is quite vague about how this, how this should look. It gives that responsibility to the house and the Senate, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it needs to look, look like a trial in the specific ways. And shoot, there was something else I was going to say about this and now I've forgotten. Oh yeah.

And Annette Gordon-Reed just has some kind of amazing, she has a biography of Andrew Johnson in one of those series. And he really had, really like puts a great point on this and basically says, what do you do with a president who's not doing their job with tremendous consequence?

Is that impeachable?

And there's sort of like this ambient sense that it is, but it takes several years for that to be, to be realized because there is this movement toward a more legalistic process for impeachment, because that just sort of makes people feel like it's more, it's more legitimate and it builds what is, what is a needed coalition for such an extreme move. Yeah. And, and, and the context of Nixon, I think that, that makes sense in a different partisan environment.

Before we get to that, which I guess is the most important part of your book, one of the most powerful insights in your book is that you, and think of, of Johnson's, proto-populism that you sort of identified two advantages, that a populist president has, and you link Johnson, Nixon, and Trump in this, the first is, is ideological flexibility. And we can argue a little bit later about how much that requires being a party outsider or not, but that's it. And the second thing you argue, and I think the most important one is that sort of denying the legitimacy of political opposition.

And that in some ways is the most important that the idea is that you speak for the people and you speak for the people alone, and that's something that, really is sort of a strain that runs through those two leaders. And I think that is sort of a really, sort of important sort of piece of connective tissue here that I think helps explain a lot.

Yeah, I think populism was what I used as sort of the glue between racial transformation and backlash and impeachment. Because this was, the first like three years I had this idea, it was a sort

of like, my thing I would chat about with other political scientists where I'm like, think about this crazy connection. And I'll go, that is crazy. What do you think the linkages and then everyone's sort of like shruggies and we're making, to put it in extremely social science terms, we are making a probabilistic argument on the basis of a very small number of cases. So you really need a good mechanism in that case.

And in that case, I think the right, so that's where populism sort of came in is this is a connective tissue between I'm the spokesperson for the true people, I can therefore do whatever I want. And also, and so that becomes sort of lawlessness. But also, like I said, it's like you had said, it's ideological flexibility and this sort of tenuous relationship with, with one's own party in certain ways. But I think that also leads to the sort of construction of a mythical majority, which, kind of drew on some of my previous work on, on presidential mandates. One of the things you kind of see there is presidents get a little high on their own supply about how much they represent the country's true majority. Would you say that has any role today?

Right. And it's not even, even Nixon, after 1972, like wins this enormous electoral victory, but it's also kind of shallow. And it's not like that's a, that's like a mystery. Republicans don't win Congress. It's not clear that this, this is sort of, this is a reaction to the very specific candidates running in 1972. It's not necessarily endorsement of everything that Nixon is saying. And so this is not to say there's not a constituency for racial backlash, there is, but there is also this sort of like rhetorical effort to turn it into a groundswell, a popular groundswell isn't necessarily, isn't necessarily supported by, by reality. So that's, and then these impeachments are where a bunch of different realities all kind of collide.

And that's, this transition is, I think that's another important part of your book is that, racial backlash is not total, it's not always politically that it carries its own risks. the Nixon that, so, it's not as if it's just a situation where you get a pro civil rights presidency and then running against civil rights as this political goal that wins again and again, it's actually more complicated than that, that the success of these presidents also shows that there's also powerful constituencies for civil rights. And you have to navigate, try to build a new political coalition without completely alienating some of the more moderate.

And so I think that's brings us to, I think, again, I think the most original part of your book, and I think the most powerful, but I'll let you explain it, the idea that, that race is critical to Watergate, because intuitively, you might think Watergate just involves these sort of very broad abuses of power. And anybody who thinks that it was just trivia should really read Garrett Graff new book, which gets it, that the burglary is a tiny, that this evolved, massive, systematic, abuse of power at every level. But as you point out, these things were not incidental that, from, the FBI's constant surveillance of civil rights leaders, to the sort of prominence of civil rights groups on Nixon's enemies list.

There's one thing I'm gonna hold until later, but I wanted before I get it, I just want to let you explain, how do you see Watergate as being connected to Andrew Johnson and Donald Trump?

Because that's, for the layperson, that's probably gonna be the sort of the most counterintuitive part of your argument.

For sure. And that's usually the part of the argument people push back on. And and usually there's at least one person who remembers Watergate in the audience and say, I don't remember being about race. And I don't remember Watergate. Let's just, I'm just going to be honest, this is a couple years before I was born. But, but I've read a lot about it. And I've read a lot about the 1960s. And

I've looked into some of the historical record. And it's kind of fascinating because if you read this sort of Watergate literature broadly, the race story mostly comes together there. And, and yet there actually is not, there's not another work that sort of foregrounds it. So let me think about anything about how to address this.

The basic story is, is sort of as you say, which is Nixon runs in 1968 on law and order. There's also a law and order and law and order.

Right.

Right. And like, and everyone knows what this means. And if you look at some of the literature on African American history, again, this is like, there's a whole Leah Wright Rigueur's work on black Republicans. It's like Nixon is very alienating to, to black Republicans of which there are, are quite a few more proportionally than there right now. Oh, when you say Edward Brooke is taking over in this, we're likely to set it exactly this time.

Right. Yeah.

Exactly. Yeah. And so these, these both, both sort of elites and electeds and aspirational and also in the electorate, African American folks are, are put off by, by Nixon's law and order rhetoric, by Nixon sitting down with Southern Republicans to win the nomination. And ostensibly, as far as anybody knows, the historical record is that this, this conversation involved promising to walk back school integration and school integration is like a, is like the seventh character in this book in some ways. It, 1954 Brown v. Board. Great. The Supreme Court says, do this. Everyone talks about Andrew Jackson not obeying the Supreme Court. The real case is Brown v. Board. Nobody wants to do this. No president wants to actually enforce this. Yeah.

Including with one exception Eisenhower. Like it's amazing how much credit he gets for Little Rock when like you wouldn't even like say that Brown should be obeyed. He wouldn't even give a rhetorical cover. Yeah.

Right.

Right. He says we're obeying the law. He doesn't come up and doesn't give any sort of moral story about, about school integration. Kennedy is much better on moral rhetoric, but even he is, and these are all well-documented. Terrified. And it's not that they never did anything if pushed, but, nobody wants to be the president who actually comes up with a plan and says, okay, this is what states have to do. And, and it's not even clear what, if there's a mechanism for that, but no one even really is going to try in any wholesale way. And so Nixon says, well, I will, I will slow walk, the school integration, I will slow walk all these things. And he doesn't say I'm going to break the law. He just said, yeah, I'm going to slow walk the law.

And this is, like I said, very kind of off putting. And so there's a constituency that, that throughout Nixon's time in office, starting in 1969, has sort of got their eye on him as someone who's not fully comporting with the law in this regard. And then at the same time, as we know, there is, there is the stuff that eventually gets Nixon pressured out of office, which is his, his, his surveillance, his use of the executive branch against political enemies, many of whom are civil rights activists, Puerto Rican rights activists, Black Panthers, it's, it's anti-Vietnam. It's this whole kind of, to your point earlier, Rob, like different aspects of this, it's this sort of constellation of social change activists.

And what I, what I found doing relatively simple document searches on my computer, from my home in Milwaukee, not even traveling to the archives, is that there are a number of voices in, in Congress and the NAACP who are linking these two things and who are saying we're not making a

lot of progress under Nixon, as we being African Americans in that case. And we're not, we're not seeing this progress. And also we're seeing a president who is very corrupt, and who is more concerned with kind of doing corruption and cheating on his taxes and sort of, they don't really use the word enriching exactly, but it's sort of like this is a crony president doing crony things instead of acting in the public interest.

And what is fascinating to me is that you don't actually see that in many secondary accounts. And I drew a ton on Garrett Graff's book, and I love that book. And I think he really gets nicely at, at the broader social dynamics surrounding the legal story. And a lot of people do, but it's interesting because as much as there are stuff on the social dynamics of Watergate, there isn't a lot that actually pulls all of this together, at least that I found, pulls together the members of the Congressional Black Caucus, members of the NAACP who are talking about impeachment, because they see these two elements as being of a piece. This corrupt president has allowed his African American constituents to languish and has not fulfilled his duties.

And this is happening as early as 1973 prior to when, kind of more moderate members of Congress are talking about impeachment. I'm now going to be like the job talk asshole who brings us, like, why are you talking about what I talk about and reach my conclusion?

But it's actually a way of strengthening your argument, which is one thing that you don't talk a lot about is the sort of critical role of the courts when it comes to both Trump and Nixon and civil rights, that, obviously, from time immemorial politicians have been trying to use the courts to sort of get out of issues of racial backlash. But the thing is Dred Scott was an attempt to do that, but was enormously ineffective, Lincoln ignores it, and it's overruled by two separate constitutional amendments. there are some critical anti civil rights opinions like Cruikshank and the Civil Rights case of Plessy.

But frankly, they're kind of window dressing, honestly, they're minor players, it's not like there would have been robust civil rights enforcement without the Supreme Court, like the Supreme Court is very much a trailer. But with Nixon, Milliken versus Bradley, and I hope more people discovering this than Michelle Adams, this great new book, that's a, basically, for all intents and purposes, overruled Brown, Brown was born, that's a five four opinion, you needed every one of Nixon's four nominees, your turns out differently.

And now it's the Supreme Court, not Congress, not Trump, that has completely destroyed the Civil Rights Act, but without getting the kind of backlash that Tawny did, because the court is much more entrenched. so that, that's one thing that is often it's it's you might think that Lincoln does not leave this long legacy. And I think also because Roe comes down during Nixon's administration, there's this perception that he tries to remake the court, but not really that the Burger Court is kind of a disappointment to conservatives. What people miss is that all the issues that Nixon care about, which is law and order both, was law and order and is something else.

And on race, particularly school integration, the Supreme Court exactly follows Nixon's views in ways that still have not gone, that the the median vote on the Supreme Court has been Republican the whole time. And that part of it has been preserved, leading the way for John Roberts to just, just completely eviscerate that the most important civil rights legislation passes reconstruction. So I don't I not so I mentioned, again, you can't talk about everything. So I'm not judging you for not mentioning that.

But I think that's an even stronger way of pointing out the extent to which racial backlash was sort of critical, both to sort of the response to Nixon, but also that it's this legacy that he leaves through

his Supreme Court nominations, something that Jacksonians were unable to do, and then of course, Lincoln Air Republicans are very skeptical of courts and didn't want, but it's interesting how Republicans have made court such a critical part of their coalition and use it to sort of achieve backlash things while minimizing, imagine George W. Bush signs a bill repealing the Civil Rights Act or allows it to expire.

That's a completely different politics, right? and so it sort of allowed Republican coalition leaders to sort of navigate this backlash without taking the direct hit, which I think is an important part of the story here.

Right.

Yeah, I don't get a ton into the decisions. I get a bit into Nixon's selection of court appointments and you also mentioned a lot of people forget that Congress, the House actually passed a version of the Voting Rights Act amendment weakening preclearance before that gets taken out in the Senate. But Nixon actually tries to get that, removed legislatively, decades before Shelby County almost succeeds. So I'm glad you brought that up because a lot of people don't know that at all. It was actually very difficult to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act under Nixon. So I want to interrupt, I just wanted to.

Yeah, so I go into some of that. And I think one thing that I maybe, know less about the more I think about is this is the linkage between Nixon and Reagan and sort of how Nixon's political project informs what happens later. And in a lot of ways, kind of Nixon, excuse me, Reagan becomes like the, the fruition of all of these sorts of backlash ideas that are, they're not all originating with Nixon. Nixon is very happy to kind of capitalize on them starting in the 1968 election. And I think that also brings us to kind of an interesting piece of what happens with backlash politics, which is these presidents kind of lose the, they lose the immediate battle. They're not removed from office through impeachment.

Johnson sort of slinks off, revives his political career to some degree. Nixon obviously resigns in disgrace and is, not really, not really heard from in a major way again. But the, the ideas that they had take on a much longer political life and so backlash presidents may not be as politically successful, but backlash politics, are sort of allowed to flourish. And I do think that some of that is that the ideas, the big ideas of the backlash gets subsumed in the little ideas about the legalistic ends and outs of impeachment. And that's, that impeachment and, and Whittington has also written about this. You mentioned Keith Whittington and that's another important influence. He was written about the Clinton impeachment sort of like basically lots of little ideas.

And I think that happens in impeachment's even more substantive ones is that they make the ideas very small. They make enormous ideas very small. And that is, I think not an indictment of impeachment itself, but of how it's how it sort of come to be in American politics, how it's coming to be executed in American politics. Yeah. Andrew Johnson isn't able to run again, but he wins the battle over how to interpret the Thirteenth Amendment, which is very important because it's like the state of response and it's more complicated, but on some level, he also wins the battle over how to define reconstruction, in a weird way, like he's, he goes, all right.

So, and I think that's, that's, that's always the strike, and, and, and again, I think we see that Nixon resigns in disgrace, but, that, that his orientation of the Republican party is really, like we see Reagan as the reconstructive president and I'm not going to quibble with that, but, a lot of, of that politics that Reagan masters, you really see the prototype of that under Nixon. Nixon wasn't the person to carry it out in part because the Republican party still wasn't in enough of a position of

strength, to sort of take over Congress yet there, there wasn't the ability to create that new coalition, but, that definitely, Nixon's piano was sort of the playbook that then, then, then Reagan is able to create the symphony and, and which leads to Trump.

So before that, that's always a decision, but, Rob, I just wanted to know if you had anything before we, before we bring it up to today.

Well, that, that was, just the only thing I have to say is that I'm getting more and more alarmed by this conversation because it does seem we're about, like we're about to bring it up to today and, and, obviously, and, we're throwing a lot of different variables and lots of different factors here. obviously the way that Trump approaches politics is far more personalistic than Andrew Johnson, or at least as far as I know anything about Andrew Johnson. Nixon is sort of more of an interesting sort of unique, uniquely American, right?

But sort of, sort of a unique figure in terms of producing sort of a proto-cult of personality. But, I guess my, my question to lead into where we're going next with this is, how does the fact of Trump's sort of very personalistic and really, really, the Republican Party, his transformation of the Republican Party into a cult of personality interact with the conversation we're having here about backlash precedents and the legacy that they leave behind?

Yeah, I think about this, maybe this is my most sort of like APD trait in the way that I think about this, which is that I really think that a lot of our narratives are oftentimes over-blowing the importance of the individual and understating the importance of recurrent structures. And that was one that brought with to the Trump case. I should say, just to be clear about where the book begins and ends, I sent off the final version of it at 5pm on January 20th, 2025. I wrote a piece in response to Trump's second inaugural that afternoon, which is the afterword, but I wrote most of the book not, really not realizing this was going to happen, including some cutting room floor stuff about Kamala Harris's potential presidency.

But really, the book was sort of intended to end under Biden. And that seemed like a reasonable decision in 2023. The thing about Trump and the cult of personality is that I basically described this as being reflective of the idiom of the time. And I think that's true for Obama as well. Obviously, Obama's, cult of personality and take over the Democratic Party is nowhere, nowhere near what we would describe Trump's in many ways. But I think that what we're basically seeing is a world that's very mediated, that's both hyper-partisan and hyper-personalistic. And what that means is that the president is a partisan symbol and a cultural symbol. And so therefore, the presidency is kind of going to be racialized if politics is going to be racialized.

And both Obama and Trump kind of embody that. And that it allows them to be more interested in the politics of Obama creating the politics of Trump than Trump himself. In some ways, this is, as Scott said, sort of a Trump book that's not really a Trump book. There are so many Trump books. Not that there's any shortage of Obama books, but the thing about, right, I think what is interesting is Obama's not much of a legal sort of transformative figure, but he's very much a symbolic transformative figure. And Trump is in large part sort of responds in kind. A lot of what Scott was alluding earlier to Ta-Nehisi Coates' essay about the first white president. I don't, I start with that essay in the intro.

I don't really agree with everything that it says, but it's an interesting kind of starting point is like, you can't really think about Trump except as a response to Obama. Like, I think that's the most fundamentally most important kind of aspect of his presidency. it's Trump's embrace of a racist conspiracy theory that it was his path to the nomination. Like that's when he becomes a prominent

Republican figure is embracing, birtherism as well. And, I don't know to what extent Obama tweaking him about that in public was the real reason he decided to run. It's probably a little more complicated than that, but it's all spec. That's not a trivial part of it either. So that is like a major story for sure.

I think so. Here's, here's how I would think about it. And then the way this sort of feel man's, what I think is the best criticism of the book overall, which is that whether you're talking about, about Nixon and the FBI or Trump and elections, ultimately the argument in this book is impeachment is about institutions and institutions are racialized. And in a certain way, that's not really falsifiable. Because if you're, if you're drawing from the, the sort of intellectual paradigm I'm drawing from all institutions are racialized.

Right. So if the impeachment is, is at the end of the day, with the FBI with, with Nixon, it starts in the FBI and the, and why am I, I can't remember the name of the thing, the Huston Plan. Sorry. It's about the Huston Plan and then Trump's impeachment is about elections and elections are racialized. And like, well, what is the non-racialized institution by which we would, compare this, this theory. So it becomes something other than what we're accustomed to as far as a falsifiable social science theory.

But I also want to say that this is, I think Rob's question is one of the things I have to address in whatever updates I do in subsequent work, because I think that Trump's sort of personal hold on the GOP and Trump's sort of personal role in American politics is a lot more evident in the second election, in the second term than it was to me, and we're sort of writing in the Biden years.

I think it was quite easy to say in the Biden years, this was this weird thing that happened where Trump took over the GOP, won the electoral college, wreaked havoc on the system, and then lost to a, a more sensible candidate. And we'll just, we'll regroup under Nikki Haley in a couple of years. I don't think I was the only person who was operating under that general assumption. Yeah. So this is obviously what we've been talking about for a long time. And this is part because, in the wake of Trump winning, there's some early optimistic articles saying, yeah, maybe this is bad, but basically Trump is going to be what in Skowronek term, is a disjunctive president. This is the end of the line for the Reagan order.

And there were some, some, some, I think, sort of crude version of that, you wrote a much more subtle and nuanced version about that. And then I wrote a piece for the New Republic basics saying, not so fast that, on the one hand, Obama was not really a Clinton like figure in the sense that, he was much more governing in the New Deal, great society tradition than, Obama's, trying to sort of accommodate, sort of welfare cuts and so on. But also that, my prediction was that, that, Trump would be fine, sort of, going forward with a more orthodox Reaganite agenda with perhaps, the freedom, as you say, to sort of remove a couple of its less appealing and less viable parts.

And I think we talked about it, and we basically said, we don't actually really disagree, we're sort of emphasizing different parts of the presidency. And I think that we, sort of, which I, which I think is correct. But one interesting thing that your book made me think about is the relationship between, sort of party and populism. And on the one hand, you point out that obviously Trump in many ways is a political outsider, but it's also striking me the extent to which he's just become a dominant force in the Republican, in a political party in a way that's very unusual in American politics, like almost half a go back.

But, the weird thing about populism is that, Andrew Jackson, who is the first sort of populist president, is also the beginning of the explicitly partisan presidency, the first president to not

pretend to be above faction and above, but to really, he and Van Buren basically create the modern party system. And so I think that, in a way, I think that, populism can reconcile itself with parties, quite well, but I think that actually strike the zero overall thesis.

I think, that in some ways, the most powerful thing is to have some credentials as an outsider, but also be able to be this sort of party leader, but then to use that sort of, basis to be able to say, like, let's forget about privatizing Social Security, but that we could not create this new kind of politics because this will allow us to pursue our more viable goals. And I think that's the key thing here is that what has made Trump successful in the Republican Party is like, if we stop talking about Social Security, we could get tax cuts, we could cut health care. And, that so that it's not about sort of transforming the Republican Party.

It's like, let's focus on what we can, but not every leader could do that Mitt Romney feels compelled to charge up Hamburger Hill with Paul Ryan, because people don't trust him. He doesn't have this magnetic, personality, right?

So I think that it's sort of really, again, so I don't think it's actually really intention with your thesis to say that, weird way outsider populace can actually be sort of, get almost have more ability to take over parties than just sort of ordinary, sort of, good party soldiers can, which I think is sort of a really fascinating and I haven't figured out how to fully articulate that yet, but your book really made me sort of think about that weird tension.

Yeah, so here's sort of how I think about it. Each of these presidents, particularly, particularly later too, but in the Trump case, what the appeal of Trump for Republican elites in 2016, and this kind of speaks to Rob's question about Trump, sort of Trump's specificity. he has universal name recognition as a media figure. I've never not known who Donald Trump was. What a great alternate universe. I never actually thought about that before, but that's horrible. I remember my parents talking about his how bad his hair was when I was like eight years old. I was like, Who is that?

And they were like, he's a real estate developer. I'm like, I don't know what any of those words mean. So, I, but I think what Trump offered Republicans in, in 2016, and this is still in the period, like 2015, 2016, when, when GOP elites are trying to disavow him, what he offers them is the ability to disavow him. Right?

If, like Pat Buchanan is running or whatever you can't, or like Tom Tancredo or somebody, right?

Somebody who's been in Congress under the Republican name or been in GOP politics a long time. You can't say that's not one of ours. Right?

But what Trump does is he sort of offers the ultimate in, in what the Republican party had been for a long time, which is we want those people's votes. We also want to keep our distance. And I think that they thought we can sort of, this is my theory. I don't have any direct evidence to substantiate this, but I think that this helps us reconcile all the pieces of the GOP story is that there, there are a lot of people in that coalition who know like we need those votes, especially now we need these angry anti-Obama anti-immigration people. But we also don't want to embrace that too closely and lose more normal people. And what Trump does is he allows us to kind of let, let those themes stay alive, but also distance ourselves. And so we can strategically do that.

And I think they probably thought that they could strategically do that. And then Trump would wear himself out and get bored. And then, then they could dominate Marco Rubio. And that obviously didn't work out. And I think the other, the other piece of this is both. So those Skowroneks theory of political time and the approach that I take essentially rely on coalition politics as a mechanism that

moves history along. And, what, what I think has happened with Trump, and again, this, I think this is my answer to Rob's question, even though it's, it's not taking on the cult of personality thing is that I don't know that, that, that is the, the framework I would use to describe Trump.

What I would say is this is someone who's been very effective at, at mastering coalition politics and got handed a massive assist in 2020.

I think 2020 allowed the GOP to reformulate its coalition around a bunch of different populist themes. So one was the impeachment itself. Look at those people after me. One was it was to team up with MAHA. It's, it's fascinating to think about, but this was like, although wackadoodle anti-vax stuff was not part of really the first term, this, this all became salient. The best thing he did was develop a vaccine. That's the amazing thing that Trump would become the anti-vax president is just like, it really is like a bizarre use of events.

Right. It was like during 2020, there was a small part of him that was living in the world that was like, let's have a vaccines. We don't have to close everything. You're like, yes, that's a very sensible way to combine facts together. And exactly. And so like this, all of this kind of stuff, I think it was always sort of there, but it's full incorporation into the MAGA brand is, is more recent. And then the, the George Floyd protests, I think are another thing that sort of allowed for a kind of new re-racialization of politics. And all of those things fit into populism and allow them to reformulate the coalition and give them a foundation on which to rebuild the coalition.

And then, and then the universe delivers them an unpopular democratic president and a fracturing democratic coalition over the war in Gaza. And those are just, I think those are just contingent. But that, is kind of how I think about it is I think that the individual personalities involved reflect sort of the values of the time and the ways in which politicians navigate politics. But what is really driving that this sort of political history is the dynamics of the coalition and Trump gets this sort of odd twist of history to assist in his coalition formation going forward. Yeah.

To look at it from the other side, there were sort of two strains of the Republican party who were strongly opposed to Trump. So one are people who genuinely were like appalled by his corruption and his tendency to sort of boast about sexual assault and the like, whatever. And those people basically are no longer Republicans. Like that's given us phenomenal, like, fiery liberal Bill Kristol, like basically people associate with the bulwark or whatever. Like, which again, is another thing that I can't remember being able to get left just like Tom Nichols. Yeah.

Right. Yeah. Tim Miller.

Right.

Yeah, exactly. But I think that the more common never Trumpers, the sort of national review didn't like Trump because they thought that he might actually be an economic populist, that he might actually, sort of shift the Republican party to the left economically. Once it was clear that was not true. Again, once you, got rid of the most unpopular parts of that agenda, then basically people could go then wait, this is a vehicle we can use. This is somebody we could use to transform the Supreme Court to sort of get our tax cuts, to at least take some whacks at the Affordable Care Act and so on.

But now that's created so difficulty for Trump and that, he wins in 2024 in this incredibly hostile environment for incumbents, basically, about, sort of, affordability about, sort of, lower prices about like, let's go back to the economy of 2017. And even those like vile and reprehensible anti trans ads, where they go up, you will miss that they're really about the economy. They're about Kamala

Harris is focused on this, I'm focused on on you. The problem he has now is that, by embracing Orthodox Republican economics, he now has no he's he's in the same dilemma of a war so that, he is actively and I think I actually blogged about this a bit today, that, Democrats have just not been able to sort of make Trump's corruption a viable political issue at all.

But what I think now they're learning is that if you could link it to the bad performance, the economy and these unpopular policies, the fact that the response is to sort of, cut taxes again, and this time to actually cut Medicaid to actually increase people's health care premiums and so on, know that's the danger that what made Trump able to take over the Republican Party right now is also a source of of considerable political power that in a sense, he's lost some of that ideological flexibility that comes with populism because one thing is incredibly effective on the campaign trail to say, I'm going to raise prices to let people think that you're anti war, even though you don't really say it.

I think people probably should have been a little more credible at that time. But like, once you're actually in office, and you're going to war with Iran, the war you create is not going away, prices are still going up, and you're doing things to actively make that worse, including the wars, and obviously, as an Iranian American, I don't have to tell you about the many other associated issues that are coming with that, that I think that's an interesting thing too, is that, that's the sort of downside to sort of merging populism with with being a good party soldiers that what happens when the party and this is this is chronic, right?

What happens to the party has no answers to the particular problems that a moment in history comes up. Trump was incredibly well positioned for that in 2024. But now, it's really turned on him badly. And I think that's, obviously, you didn't have a chance to think about that because you didn't know history is going to play out. But I think that your analysis sort of, that tension between populism and sort of party orthodoxy, I think really helps us understand where we are now.

Thank you.

Yeah, that's that's helpful to think about. So I have one last, one last question for me, we're running a little over an hour right now. So we should probably think about wrapping up anyway. So I don't know much about the transnational politics of democracy in 1870. And I don't, I know a little bit more, but not a ton about the transnational politics of democracy and backlash and racial backlash in the 1960s and 1970s. Although that's certainly there, right, you should have stuff going on, especially in France and so forth.

But of course, right, the politics of race and the politics of backlash are not uniquely American, even before Obama, right? you have you have the flipping of the professional managerial class, really in 2006, in the United States, right, it's pre Obama coalition. And the Trump coalition looks a lot like pre existing right wing, far right European political coalitions that are gaining strength from 2000 on right. And so this is not a uniquely American story, right?

The institutional structures may be playing out in a uniquely American way. But sort of these questions of the populism, the backlash and the transformation of sort of the symbolics of race are an entire Western world type thing going on right now from Latin America through North America through Europe. That's a big thing to throw out there. But I wonder if you have any sort of comparative thoughts about any of this. again, sort of outside the scope of the book, although arguably, I think India fits into this as well, right? different dynamics, but some populism and kind of ethno nationalism going on as well.

I think that I think that what is what is distinct or what I'm trying to kind of think about in the book is how does this sort of filter through through uniquely American institutions?

Also, how does this explain what I see as sort of a periodizing in American politics?

And I'm sure that if I were an expert in French politics or Austrian or the Netherlands, all the places where we've seen these sort of far right surge in research throughout the 21st century, I would have a, a sort of periodizing story as APD people like to say about that. But from my American perspective, it looks a little bit different. The sort of rising decline looks a little bit different. And is more, it seems to me is more directly linked, probably the linkage between politics and politics seems to be more directly linked in Europe. This might be because I'm an American and I have this tendency to think, everything in Europe is makes slightly more sense, or to romanticize proportional representation, which I try not to do.

But I do think that probably helps connect politics and policy a little bit. And so I think that there are some, cogent arguments that anti-immigrant sentiment is actually linked to economic and social change. In the US, it's not as obvious that is always true, that we're seeing here periods of political and social change that sort of track into presidential politics, but is the role of the presidency and it's sort of historical linkage with the US's unique racial history and the way that's built into our institutions that creates these sort of bursts of moments of very weird politics. And I think it's also particularly telling that the Trump moment does not happen in 2008. It does not happen in 2012, right?

It happens in 2016 when the economy is relatively stabilized. And, I take your point about the professional-managerial-class shift and changing coalitions in the Democratic Party, but it's where it takes this racial moment for that to be politicized. So that's my comparative thought. My main comparative thought is that I should do more about this. I would like to be based in Paris, if possible, and take side trips. But, in seriousness, I have been thinking specifically about the French case in part because it's also a presidential system and how political kind of alienation and race and immigration, all that, works differently and similarly across cases.

But what I think in the US is what people have been saying in APD for many decades, which is that we have seemed to have a uniquely sort of punctuated history in the way that our politics works. So I want to go back to a really depressing note by bringing up the name Juan Linz. Let's try to make it a little less foreboding. I've got to like Rob, that's the impression I'm getting.

But we, and I'll link when we put the post up, Tom Edsall, the New York Times sort of got into this question of Trump and political time and mentioned a paper that we wrote together, sort of speculating that we're now in an unusual period that we call the long disjuncture that typically in American politics, there's been this sort of dominant coalition and Skowronek model kind of depends on, everybody is right. Either they're trying to articulate that or they're an opposition president like Cleveland or Eisenhower sort of trying to politically succeed within another party's paradigm. But either way, you can sort of tell like who controls Congress, who's winning most elections, so on.

We're right now in this and not the first period of really close party competition, but the first period of close party competition is the Gilded Age and the first one to be strongly ideological. The big difference is the Gilded Age. There's very little to separate the parties on most ideological issues. This is the first time we've combined close party competition with strong ideological polarization, which is really kind of something new under the sun. So to me, the interesting question is, is this just going to be the condition that is between the sophistication of political campaigns, the sort of power of, is this just something that we're just going to be dealing with constant thermostatic politics and stop and go politics for a long time?

Or do you think that there's the real possibility that like the Gilded Age is contemporary, that there is the possibility for a new broader based majority coalition, whether of the left or the right, but something that is possible to sort of, be a party that can sort of control Congress for more than a cycle or two that can really sort of, with stops and starts and the compromises of our veto point system, but still, did you think that's still possible on majority coalition or just has politics gotten so thick that this long disjuncture, could last for a long time?

Because, I don't really know the answer, but I'm curious as to where you see things headed over the next 10 or 20 years.

Yeah, I think that both are long disjunction theory and the way that I kind of conclude the book and look at the aftermath of what seemed to mean to be the aftermath of Obama and Trump compared with previous presidents.

I think what drives those two things is the same thing, which is the entrenchment of partisanship. And what you're asking is, this is the question I've been kind of asking my students and they've been asking me back in my election class. I don't know and I don't see tremendous potential for a shift in coalition for a new majority coalition emerging anytime soon.

My best simplest guess is that we're going to be in this partisan back and forth holding pattern for a long time. But what I do want to say that I think is a somewhat more optimistic note is that polarization in this sense is not entirely a bad thing. And that in the previous two iterations of this kind of transformation and backlash cycle, what we've seen is the transformative party backs off and the backlash party doubles down. And what I think we're seeing because of partisan entrenchment, because of the way that political fights work is that the transformative party is not going to back off in the same way. We see people kind of trying to back off and talking about backing off, but there is a strong constituency not to.

And so I think that this sort of competitive period where these issues remain live for a long time, no one has the incentive to fully push them off the agenda. And where we maybe do actually see policy go back and kind of flip back and forth between things that are quite progressive and things that are quite regressive.

I think that might be what we're looking at for a decade or more, but I also think that is actually much better than some of the alternatives. So that's my kind of normative read on the situation. It's not great optimism, but I think it's maybe a more optimistic spin on that scenario.

Yeah, that's a great way of how these backlashes transform both parties. I've been thinking recently about Mark Graber's great piece about the 14th Amendment, about how with the exception of Thaddeus Stevens and most of the Framers of the 14th Amendment, weren't that concerned with the wording of Section 1 because in light of Dred Scott, they're like, all that matters is who's interpreting the text. You can write whatever you want, but it's all going to-- that basically, if Southern Democrats take over the Supreme Court, it's not going to matter what we write in Section 1. They're just going to nullify it anyway.

And so they're much more concerned about Section 2 trying to disqualify former Confederates from office, force Congress to take away representation from states that disenfranchised voters and so on. The dark irony of that is that the Supreme Court and Congress of the presidency all work together to nullify the 14th Amendment, but it wasn't a Supreme Court controlled by Southern Democrats. It was a Supreme Court controlled by Northern Republicans. So that they didn't even need to take over the institutions, but still won anyway.

And so that's the sort of real downside that the previous-- or the same way that how painfully long it was to get the Democratic Party to embrace civil rights, that when FDR was a coalition of Northern liberals and Southern segregationists, that obviously had its own costs, that's one advantage of polarization is that it means that Democrats don't have the incentive to fully give in to backlash politics and try to pursue the same voters. And so that's one thing where things are playing out a little bit differently that you haven't seen. And again, you're seeing some of that at the margin, but you're not seeing Democrats saying, well, we might as well give up on voting rights now. The Supreme Court has spoken.

So I do think that is the-- and again, there are downsides polarization, but as my friend Sam Rosenfeld says, there's a reason that people were so dissatisfied on both sides of the ideological spectrum with the party system of the '50s, which made elections virtually meaningless. So that polarization is neither inherently bad or a good thing. It has upsides and downsides. And so I think that even if we're in the middle of a long disjunction, disjunction doesn't necessarily mean dysfunction. It depends on how things play out. And so I do like that as an upside that we at least haven't seen the pro-civil rights coalition just completely give up any aspirations that it had.

And I think that's an important piece of it as well, is that there are real costs that try to come with becoming this sort of dominant, all-encompassing majority tradition. And so perhaps a sort of new kind of successful response to backlash can be forged out of this new political environment. And again, there are a lot more pessimistic scenarios that could come through too. But I do kind of like that as at least that polarization is not all downside. And I think that comparison to the 19th century is really a powerful one there.

Thank you.

So I guess I will, I think we're out of questions, but did you have any any last words or is there a takeaway that you would like to give this audience about backlash presidents and about what you see as the most important insights of the book?

I think the most important takeaway is that this is not an argument for complacency. This is an argument for confronting these issues and coming up with a way to break this recurrent cycle.

I think that's a great last word.

All right, terrific.

Well, Julia, we ran a little long there, but that was such a fascinating discussion.

I think we could, we could, we could, so perhaps this is a good reason for us to get together, again, after the midterms and see where we are there and remind people again to check this out. But again, I really do, if you have any interest in the American presidency or American political institutions, I think it's a fascinating book. You'll learn a lot from it, even if this is something you've been thinking about. And again, it's really the rare book that has a lot of counterintuitive arguments that never feel like pointlessly counterintuitive that I think really allow us to see things new and really link these periods and political history together. So I've really enjoyed, I really enjoyed reading the book. I've really enjoyed discussing it.

I'm glad that it has gotten some of the recognition from our colleagues that it deserves. And I look forward to revisiting the issue again. So thanks so much for joining us, Julia, and thanks as well for hosting us and being here as well, Rob.

Thanks so much, Julia. Thank you so much.

Yeah, thanks so much. Enjoy the next few weeks as much as you can, and let's hope that things in Wisconsin turn out well.

All right, thank you. Take care.

All right, thanks, Julia. Bye. Thank you again for listening to the Lawyers, Guns, and Money podcast. We would like to thank Elizabeth Nelson of the Paranoid Style for supplying as our intro and outro music, I'd bet My Lands and Titles, a track on the album For Executive Meeting. If you would like to support the Lawyers, Guns, and Money podcast or any other aspect of the Lawyers, Guns, and Money project, please visit us at www.patreon.com/lawyersgunsandmoney or donate at the PayPal link on the website.

Thank you.