

I think the memory of the Trump trauma is going to be vastly fresher 25 years from now than the memory of 9/11 is now. I think Donald Trump is going to haunt this country, its consciousness, and its cultural memory in a way that will be quite extraordinary. It will be the opposite of the classic pandemic response of, “Well, let’s just never talk about that or think about it again.”

Hello, and welcome to the latest edition of the Lawyers, Guns & Money podcast. I am here today with fellow front-pager Paul Campos. My name, of course, is Robert Farley, and this is one of two podcasts in which we are going to be talking about the legacy of September 11th: what September 11th means 25 years on from the event, and how our understanding of it has changed—how it has affected our politics and our culture.

01:19

Today we’re really going to have a cultural focus. Maybe, Paul, you can think about this metaphor too: in some sense, 9/11 is like something—a giant rodent, say—that a snake swallowed, and we have been watching for the last 25 years as it has slowly passed through the snake. Perhaps now we are looking at a snake of American politics that no longer has this giant lump.

But the reason this comes up right now in particular is that I teach, of course, and this Friday I am pretty sure I will be leading a class where we’re going to have a panel on September 11th. It’s going to be the first time—because these are graduate students—that I have been in a class on September 11th without, I think, a single student who remembers September 11th. I don’t think I’ll have a single student in the room who was even born, who was even alive, on September 11th.

So, Paul, I know you have thoughts, and I know you’ve written about this. What are some of your initial thoughts about our cultural memory of where September 11th fits into the American story?

Yeah. I was just thinking about that topic, and I remembered that I wrote a newspaper column when I used to write a weekly column for the *Rocky Mountain News*, I believe on the first anniversary of 9/11, in which I was asking the question sincerely, as opposed to rhetorically: how would 9/11 ultimately be remembered in American history?

Would it be this cataclysmic event, like the Civil War or Vietnam, or would it be more like the sinking of the *Titanic*—an extremely memorable event, a big cultural meme that everybody knows about, but ultimately not of much historical significance per se? I think I'm leaning somewhat toward the latter view now: that 9/11 has ended up not being ultimately that significant, although obviously it played a key causal role in the Second Iraq War, which was a big national catastrophe.

I am struck by the extent to which it seems to really be fading. Part of that is what you're talking about: generational shift and change.

I was teaching a class this morning in which I was talking about AI issues, and I wanted to reference this meme in science fiction of "the machines are taking over." So I said, "How many of you have seen *Terminator*—the original Schwarzenegger film?" I figured, come on, you've seen *Terminator*, right? Maybe just on VCR or whatever. No one in a class of 22 people had seen *Terminator*. I was like, what?

I have these old-man moments where I'm like, really? I don't wish to trivialize the memory of 9/11, of course—it was a horrible thing, a terrible tragedy—but one way I think about this sometimes is to think about when I was in college. What was happening in the world 25 years earlier? For me, that would have been the late 1950s, the Eisenhower administration, and that might as well have been the McKinley administration. It was a very distant past that I had no connection to other than as a set of historical facts. And of course that's where we are now with everybody much under 35.

I think part of it is just the inevitable shift of generations. But another big part is that, ultimately, 9/11 was one single traumatic day, and as that day recedes, I think it's natural that it has become less and less culturally significant.

That inspires a lot of thoughts. One immediate thought combines AI on the one hand and the fading of September 11th on the other. There are an enormous number of artworks that were inspired by September 11th—*Terminator* not really being one of them, although I am appalled that none of your students have seen *Terminator*. It's a really important movie. It's also a really fun movie to watch.

I feel like everybody has watched *Alien* and *Aliens*, which come out around the same time. But a television series that was super important in the years after September 11th,

and had a huge cultural imprint in the immediate aftermath, was *Battlestar Galactica*. We actually talked about *Battlestar Galactica* a ton on the blog back in the day. It was, of course, a remake of a previous iteration, but it was framed very concretely as a September 11th moment: there had been this surprise attack.

The first *Battlestar Galactica* was framed very much as Pearl Harbor; the second *Battlestar Galactica* was framed very much as September 11th. The entire story spins out in a way that is a direct commentary on the wars on terror—these two major conflicts that followed September 11th and shaped our understanding of it.

It is interesting, too, that even though there was lots of commentary about that, almost nobody talks about it or watches it now. Unlike *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Mad Men*, and others that remain part of the cultural zeitgeist, *Battlestar Galactica* has almost completely disappeared from conversation. That may say something about the cultural relevance of September 11th.

But back to the point you were making earlier: for me, the comparable event—not from my own childhood, but the comparable event to September 11th—is the Kennedy assassination. I was born ten years after the Kennedy assassination, and from age five on, or certainly from age fifteen on, the way people talked about the Kennedy assassination felt very much like how we talked about 9/11 in the immediate years after 9/11.

In the immediate years after 9/11, it was this thing. The media environment, of course, was different and so forth, but it was one of these great media moments where everybody was paying attention. You remember where you were and so forth. That is really interesting, because while I think you could make a very concrete argument that the Kennedy assassination is fundamentally overplayed and overstated in terms of its historical relevance, I'm not sure we're beyond the Kennedy assassination.

And, you know, the amount that Trump talks about the Kennedy assassination, and the fact that we have Kennedy's nephew still harming Americans, basically because his uncle took a bullet in the head—would it be weird, then, to suggest that Kennedy and the Kennedy assassination are going to be fundamentally bigger than 9/11? Or is the legacy of 9/11 going to move on in ways that we just don't really expect, and that are going to be unpredictable in the future?

Yeah, it's funny you should mention the Kennedy assassination, because I was four years old and of course I don't remember it. I was trying to think back now to the 25th anniversary, when I was 29, and remember whether the 25th anniversary of the assassination was a big deal—whether it was widely commemorated or noticed. I

honestly can't remember it being so, although I agree with you that somehow, as a kind of cultural zeitgeist event, it had an extremely long afterlife.

I think I've got to disagree a little bit with the notion that it isn't over. I kind of think it is. It's so long ago now. Donald Trump remembers that, but you've got to be basically 80, right? To the extent that it's remembered or noted, I think it's just wrapped up in all the turmoil of the 1960s. It is seen as a kind of gateway moment to a decade of chaos and violence and things like that. But I agree that for a long time the Kennedy assassination was this cultural touchstone, this linchpin.

There's actually a weird joke in *When Harry Met Sally*. There's a scene at a party where Harry has brought a much younger woman as his date, and he's talking to one of the other guests. He says, "She's really young, because I asked her where she was when Kennedy was assassinated, and she said, 'Ted Kennedy was assassinated?'" Even though I love that movie, and I think on the whole it's superbly written, that's kind of a stupid line. It doesn't make any sense. In 1989, if you were a 25-year-old woman, you would have been acutely aware of the JFK assassination as a cultural touchstone, even if you had no memory of it.

I agree with you that the JFK assassination in a way seems to have had a longer afterlife than 9/11 as a cultural traumatic moment. But I do think it's pretty much gone at this point, partly because nobody really cares about the Kennedys anymore. RFK Jr. is there, and he is very widely hated, and nobody else in the family really means anything. So I don't know. But my basic take is that I agree with you: the assassination of JFK seems to have more cultural heft than 9/11, as disproportionate as that might seem under the circumstances.

In terms of the memory of the Kennedy assassination and how things played out in 1988—I was 14 at the time—it was, of course, a different media environment. But I remember *Newsweek*, *U.S. News*, *Time*, and the things we used to have back then all running big glosses and commemorations.

There's another problem here, too. Boomers and people who are alive now consume media in a different way, and there were more boomers alive at the time with direct or near-direct memory of the Kennedy assassination.

I wish I agreed with you, but it's the GOP and its conservatives, right? Donald Trump was going to take the bulk of older people anyway, because that's just how demographics work in the United States. But there's a lot going on in the way Trump

talks and thinks that is about trying to summon this pre-collapse, pre-fall America. I think for him, especially in 2024, that was part of the appeal of bringing RFK Jr. into the fold.

I've gone back and forth with myself about how relevant RFK Jr. actually was to the 2024 election, and I'm increasingly coming to the deeply disappointing conclusion that he probably was pretty relevant. I don't know if he was the decisive factor, and even if he was decisive, it wasn't just because of Kennedy.

What makes you think that? I'm not trying to be contentious about it; I'm just curious. Why do you think anybody really cared about Junior, specifically? I realize some people cared about the MAHA thing and all that, yes, but about RFK Jr. specifically?

The precise moment I came to this, or at least to this very worrisome thought, was when I was on Facebook and really upset about some stupid thing RFK Jr. had said. I said something like, "Look, if you are the sort of person who'll even consider voting for RFK Jr., I want you to defriend me right now." I expected basically zero people to read that, or if they read it, to pay any attention to it. But instead, something like fifteen people saw it and cut me off right then.

Some of them were fitness influencers who, I came to learn, held RFK Jr. in far greater esteem than I had thought possible. But there were also some older Americans who viewed him as a relevant, important figure and said, in effect, "Yes, this is a person I am taking seriously."

Taking RFK Jr. seriously—for someone you mentioned it, I remember at least somewhat vaguely that, in the early Democratic primary polls, when he was still a Democrat, he was polling at some ridiculous number, like 15 percent or something. I remember being appalled and thinking, what is the matter with people? The fact that this guy is a complete crank is extremely well established. You don't need Woodward and Bernstein to break this case. All you have to do is Google and ask yourself what some of the things are that RFK Jr. has advocated and claimed to believe in, and it's just one nutty thing after another: Wi-Fi causes cancer, the COVID vaccine was engineered to avoid Jews, chemtrails are real, and of course all the COVID stuff. It's incredible.

I also have a sharp memory of seeing somebody in Boulder, just a few blocks from my house, with an RFK Jr. sign in their yard. This must have been in the summer or something, and I had this distinct urge to go up, knock on the door, and ask, "What the hell? What's the matter with you?" I just wanted to meet them, like Margaret Mead in Samoa, trying to figure out who these people are. So maybe there is still something left

to the Kennedy mystique, even though to me it just seems incomprehensibly atavistic at this point. But it's a weird country.

I don't want to belabor the Kennedy comparison here, but for a lot of people I think RFK Jr. tells a coherent story of America since Camelot—since the fall—combined with this giant *Forrest Gump*-esque scope of having lived every bit of American life, from the heroin addiction onward. I don't know if you listened to the podcast we did with Elizabeth, where RFK Jr. actually got Keith Richards back onto heroin at one point. One of the times Keith managed to kick heroin, he went out and partied with RFK Jr. and got back on heroin. RFK Jr. has this kind of epic story that fits into Trump's understanding of Camelot and the fall in a way that was coherent for a lot of people who voted for him.

Well, apparently that's true, but I just find it utterly incomprehensible. The whole Camelot thing was phony from the beginning. And look, I'm a baby boomer, so I understand how dominant we are in terms of cultural demographics and narrative. But it was 65 years ago. At some point, isn't there a statute of limitations on this stuff? It's like if Connie Francis were still the biggest musical star in the United States or something.

But to get back to 9/11, I do feel, now that we are talking this through, that 9/11 seems further away in a lot of ways than the Kennedy assassination seemed 25 years after the fact. There were so many people who found the Kennedy assassination to be this shattering psychological event. I can see how that would be the case, but I think with 9/11, maybe it's because we are more desensitized. We are more bombarded by the constant rush of images and history and whatever crazy thing Donald Trump said today, or whatever war we have just started.

It reminds me of a Neil Young lyric, from a song where he is singing about playing Woodstock. He says, "I'm a million miles away from that helicopter day," because he and Crosby, Stills & Nash had flown in on a helicopter. That's kind of how I feel about 9/11. Even though I'm 66 years old, and 25 years in the past is psychologically much closer to me now than it was when I was 30, 9/11 still feels very distant on some psychic level.

Here is an example that may tie in with the *Battlestar Galactica* point. I remember when the second *Lord of the Rings* movie, *The Two Towers*, came out. There was all this talk that

it could be understood within the frame of the war on terror: this battle of good versus evil in a very Manichaeian kind of way. I don't think anybody would see that movie that way today. It just wouldn't seem to have any connection or relevance to that.

I remember some weird cranks writing in lefty magazines, accusing *Lord of the Rings*—and Peter Jackson—of essentially attempting to justify the Iraq War. In certain circles, that association lingered for a while.

It's interesting, right? That association kind of outlasted the immediate moment. I can't remember: how much of a *Star Wars* person are you? I don't think I've ever known.

We're pretty anti-*Star Wars*. On a scale of one to ten, I would say I'm a four. I've seen most of the original nine movies, but I've only seen most of them once, and I really haven't seen any of the other stuff. So, you know, lukewarm.

The prequel trilogy is really about the Bush administration. It's not so much about 9/11 per se. The 9/11 moment in *Star Wars* is the destruction of Alderaan, and then the destruction of the Death Star shortly afterward. I love that the Battle of Yavin is actually the point where they start dating before and after; it's such a nice touch.

It is interesting to me that there is a generation that loves the prequel trilogy more than you and I loved the original trilogy, and almost none of them associate it with the war on terror, despite the fact that George Lucas was very clear—especially in the third one—that “this is how democracy dies, to thunderous applause” was a very George Bush-era line.

24:35

Let me show you my ignorance here: is the prequel the one that started with Jar Jar Binks and all that? Yes, three. Okay, yes, absolutely. I remember only that the third of those three movies was tolerable. I thought the first two were horrible, and I would have no desire to see them again. But anyway, I can see how people would read that through the lens of contemporary politics in a way that we just have.

I saw the original *Star Wars* in the movie theater when it was released. I was 17 years old, and I remember thinking, “Oh, cool.” But I certainly didn't think, “Oh, this is really a comment on post-World War II American hegemonic decline.” I was just like, hey, this is kind of a cool movie.

I don't think 9/11 is really living on as a cultural artifact nearly as much as a lot of other things. Even the JFK assassination spawned various movies, novels, and other memorable cultural works. Vietnam is much more culturally encoded and memorable. When I think about 9/11 in terms of cultural memory, maybe what remains is some nostalgia for the sense of national unity that was generated immediately in its wake. But that nostalgia is tainted by the fact that national unity now seems utterly chimerical.

Can you imagine—am I remembering correctly that Donald Trump was essentially disinvented from the 9/11 ceremony in New York City because they didn't want him to speak there, for obvious reasons? My understanding was that he made a set of demands about prominence in the ceremonies that they were unwilling to comply with. I could be wrong about that, but that was my understanding.

That seems perfectly believable and obviously makes all kinds of sense, but it really captures the moment. Can you imagine Barack Obama or George W. Bush making demands about how the ceremony had to be all about him, as opposed to the people who died, the survivors, and so forth?

I don't know. I find it difficult to talk about anything in the relatively recent American past without thinking about the way Donald Trump has absolutely tainted everything. He's like this contagion. We saw it this week with his absurdity in the context of his incredible fabulism about being carried out by two big, strong firefighters from, I guess, the building right next to the Twin Towers or something. It's just a crazy story, especially given that he was only 55 at the time. Why is he being carried anywhere? And also, why would anyone pay any attention to Donald Trump in 2001, when he was a washed-up nobody? That was even pre-*Apprentice*, right? He was about as relevant as Men Without Hats or Men at Work or some ridiculous piece of '80s arcana. So, yeah, the man is unfettered by reality.

This leads me to my next question—my next thought. I don't want to fish too much for this, so I'll phrase it carefully: do you think the cultural forgetting of September 11th has been a gradual, smooth process, or do you think there have been important inflection points in how we have moved on to other things? Part of the argument here would be that we don't really ever forget anything; we just replace certain cultural touchstones with other cultural touchstones that become really important in our memory of the world. Does that question make sense to you?

Yeah, sure, I think so. I lean more toward the notion that it has been more disjunctive rather than just a smooth slope. There have been major inflection points over the last 25 years that have caused 9/11 to suddenly recede further into the past rather than fade in a smooth, linear way. The whole calamity of the Great Recession was significant. So was

the election of Obama, which, however naive that might seem in retrospect, really did seem like a completely transformative moment.

I remember being at the convention when Obama was nominated and gave his acceptance speech in the big football stadium in Denver. A friend of mine had an extra ticket, so I went. I'm not generally a very sentimental person about politics; I'm usually pretty cynical. But it was genuinely moving. It was like, wow, I cannot believe we are doing this. We're actually going to have a Black man run for president on a major-party ticket, and I think he's probably going to win. All of a sudden, that just seemed like a different world.

31:06

And then, of course, in a completely different way, November 2016 suddenly seemed like a completely different world. COVID was also a deeply disjunctive, disruptive moment, with a complex relationship to historical memory. As a lot of people correctly predicted, we have made enormous efforts to jam everything about the pre- versus post-COVID world down the memory hole.

Then we have had the incredible trauma of the last two years. I'm writing a book about this, and I am constantly revising it because I feel like I'm writing a historical chronicle of complete madness. It's a long book, and I don't think I mention 9/11 in it—not that my particular authorial tendencies prove anything in particular, but I think it is interesting. I did throw Trump's latest craziness about the commemoration into the appendix. So I am basically agreeing with you: I fall on the side of disjunctive events rather than a smooth, gradual fading.

Right. From my perspective, you cannot make Barack Hussein Obama intelligible outside a 9/11 context. In a very practical sense, if Barack Obama does not take his position against the Iraq War, which was a direct outgrowth of 9/11, he does not defeat Hillary Clinton in 2008. Maybe he becomes president eventually, but he is not president in 2008.

He framed his candidacy not as the negation of September 11th, but certainly as the negation of a particular way of thinking about September 11th. At the same time, I think he would be equally open to saying that September 11th colored his entire presidency,

especially on the foreign-policy side. There were things he could not do and things he had to do because of September 11th and its memory.

The two truly disjunctive moments, I think—and you mentioned both of these, and I agree with both—were the election of Donald Trump and COVID. The election of Trump does not feel to me like it is about September 11th at all. Rather, it introduces a new ongoing American catastrophe: the Trump era, including the Biden presidency, has been a ten-year catastrophe so far, with something new happening every single day that pushes the memory of everything else out.

That, combined with COVID, reset a lot about how we remember. I am not surprised that we are shoving the actual experience of COVID down the memory hole in favor of a stylized vision of what COVID was, one that bears little resemblance to how COVID changed our lives back in 2020. What I did not expect was that COVID would not only shove itself down the memory hole, but would shove everything else down there too.

That resetting was really striking. For one thing, who remembers what the 20th-anniversary commemorations of September 11th were? They were so overshadowed by our conversations about COVID. I do think maybe the amount of attention the 25th anniversary is getting is, in part, a little bit of a makeup call for the fact that the 20th kind of just didn't really happen. Maybe the 25th also just feels more significant in some mysterious numerological way.

I have some sense that we may look back on the entire period from 9/11 through the end of the Trump presidency—whenever that might actually be—as a series of national traumas that got processed in various ways. But to return to our central theme, 9/11 may end up well down the list, maybe even near the bottom of the list, of the five or six most important historical ruptures or disjunctions. I don't know why exactly, but it seems to me that it is very much fading.

Let me conjure up a grim comparison. I think the memory of the Trump trauma is going to be vastly fresher 25 years from now than the memory of 9/11 is now. Donald Trump is going to haunt this country, its consciousness, and its cultural memory in a way that will be quite extraordinary. It will be the opposite of the classic pandemic response of, "Well, let's just never talk about that or think about it again."

It's going to be something like the Troubles in Ireland. There's a scene near the beginning of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where the adults all start screaming at each other about Parnell, and the narrator—Stephen Dedalus—is just full

of fear because of the intensity of their feelings. I think Donald Trump is our Troubles, to put it in another cultural context.

Yeah, unfortunately I share that view. I don't know if it was necessarily going to be that way if 2024 had turned out differently. I think we might have been able to push him—and his memory—into the dustbin of history if 2024 had gone differently. But even then, he probably gets elected in 2028 despite the fact that his brain has turned into oatmeal and he is falling apart before our eyes.

Less facetiously, it is maddening to think about. Forget 2024—what if 2016 had gone the other way? If that coin flip had come up differently, I don't think there is any doubt that, if Trump had lost in 2016, the entire Republican Party—or at least the party elites—would have concluded, “This is the wrath of God visited upon us because we nominated this guy.” They would have done everything possible to crush him, and I think he probably would have faded away except as a weird cultural curiosity. Instead, he became the dominant political figure of our age because of a coin flip in November 2016.

I know we were mostly talking about culture and not so much politics, although the two are tied together. But I did want to run one last thing by you. And by the way, it has not escaped notice that we have not had a more substantial, complete, and full reaction to the miracle in Ann Arbor this last Saturday. I'm going to have to do a blog post about that eventually—probably in the next few days.

Hear me out for a second: the whole narrative around that has spun off into this crazed conspiracism that is really emblematic of the age. I even talked about this in class today because we were discussing conspiracy theories. It's symptomatic of unhinged clickbait internet culture.

For people who don't follow this, Michigan won the game on a controversial call at the end. It's quite unclear whether the call was incorrect; it was certainly arguably correct. The whole notion that there was some conspiracy to have Michigan win the game is completely banana-pants. Yet the entire sports-media complex fastened onto it as if it were some enormous scandal, even though it was really a very ordinary event in the course of a sports event.

Right. Loomis was actually here in Lexington, and we watched it together. We watched the Oregon–Boise State game, and then we watched that game. I swear to God, I stood up and yelled, “Are they just going to replay the last second until Michigan wins? Is

that the plan here?" I know intellectually that's not defensible, but that is exactly how I felt about it.

There was a very bad illusion created by NBC because their game clock on the screen was not actually the game clock on the scoreboard. So if you were watching the replay, it seemed absolutely obvious that the clock had expired, when in fact that was not the case. NBC then exacerbated the situation by failing to recognize that they were mischaracterizing what had actually happened.

43:07

I understand why people got very upset, because everybody wants to see a huge upset, and people hate Michigan for understandable reasons. But it immediately fell into this conspiracist rabbit hole. It's a trivial issue, but I think it captures the zeitgeist: people immediately leap to that explanation, even normally rational people.

Even normally rational people—like Will Leitch, who writes for *The Athletic* and is usually a very good sports commentator—wrote this utterly unhinged piece about how this was all a conspiracy by the Big Ten to have Michigan win. I was like, are you nuts? This is basically David Icke lizard-people stuff. Anyway, I really do have to write a blog post on this.

To connect it back to what we talked about—and then I want to move on to one other thing—we are in the age of conspiracy theory. I think we can tie this back to the earlier conversation, because the ur-conspiracy theory for America remains the Kennedy assassination. I don't find it accidental that Trump himself, all the people around Trump, and the greater Trump-world universe are so prone to conspiracy theory and remain so committed to it.

That is one of the enduring ways in which the Kennedy assassination still colors American life. It's such a contrast, because the Kennedy assassination is a conspiracy theory, while September 11th was an actual conspiracy. But it is not a very interesting conspiracy theory because we know who did it. A bunch of people conspired to do a thing. In that sense, everything down to Michigan getting an extra second is, in some way, a mutated child of the bullet going through John Kennedy's head in November 1963. That might be too much—but maybe not.

I want to emphasize two things at this point. First, I have read the Warren Commission report, which probably makes me one of roughly one in 100,000 Americans who has

done that. I'm not claiming that makes my word gospel, but from a purely empirical standpoint I find it amazing that the conspiracy theories around the Kennedy assassination became as extravagant as they did, given that it is not actually a mysterious murder. It is totally straightforward who did it, why he did it, and how he did it. There is no mystery. It is about as open-and-shut a case as you are likely to find in that kind of context.

It is astonishing that people managed to build so much around it. I understand the cultural reasons for that: people absolutely needed a narrative that made sense to them to explain this traumatic moment. But as a forensic exercise, it is not very interesting—just as 9/11 is not very interesting as a forensic exercise. We know who did it, why they did it, and how they did it. The only real questions have to do with exactly how much negligence was committed by the Bush administration, and the answer seems to be quite a bit.

The conspiratorial mindset that was not created by the Kennedy assassination, but was certainly exacerbated by it, is really remarkable, given that it is not an interesting historical mystery in the way that many events of that type are, to some greater or lesser extent. I think there is an interesting connection here between the JFK assassination and the 9/11 conspiracy: there are no real mysteries in either case.

The last thing I wanted to point out is something that has been interesting to me. It was part of both Trump administrations, but it is more surprising to me in the second Trump administration. I chalk it up as one of the legacies of 9/11 that is still sticking with us, whether that legacy is surprising or unsurprising.

Before September 11th, Muslim Americans were a very small part of the voting public. There was not a lot of polling to determine their partisan preferences, because nobody cared very much: they were a small group and concentrated in particular places. But as far as the polling we have suggests, they were not quite as rock-ribbed Republican as white evangelicals in the South, but they were a fairly conservative-leaning group that tended to vote Republican. That changed on September 11th for obvious reasons.

I find it fascinating that, especially in the second Trump administration, there seemed to be a moment when the GOP could reach out and recapture Muslim voters because of the Gaza situation. Instead, we have seen the opposite happen. Anti-Islam activism and anti-Islam rhetoric are almost as poisonous—or perhaps more poisonous—now than they were on September 12, 2001. I don't know why that is, but it does seem to be one of

those legacies of September 11th that is still with us. It is a weird legacy to have at this point.

But the legacy is not only the legacy of September 11th. It is also the legacy of Donald Trump. He is the one who made it completely respectable to engage in the most vile, overt racism with no apology whatsoever. The Republican Party in 2012 did its postmortem and said, in effect, “Maybe we have to try to be a little nicer to Mexicans once in a while.” Then Donald Trump decided, no, we’re going to crank the racism up to eleven, and that is how I’m going to win.

49:53

That actually is a formula that worked: basically having America’s racism completely off the leash was, at least some of the time, a successful formula. And it was sure a lot more fun than pretending not to hate Black people, Mexicans, and Muslims in particular. I should mention, for our commenter Karen, that misogyny, of course, is a huge part of this as well.

Yeah, I think one of the things that has changed about our cultural memory of 9/11 is that now we have this utterly loathsome racist who is completely unafraid to let his freak flag fly in terms of all of his racism, as opposed to George W. Bush, who was a terrible president but who was not a racist, either personally or ideologically, as far as I can tell. That is a huge shift in the culture.

Right. Well, do you have any final thoughts for the audience before we roll out?

Well, I guess one thought I have is that I am surprised that 9/11 ultimately seems a lot less significant than I thought it was going to seem. Even though I wrote a piece a year into it basically asking that question—will it really fade?—I think the answer has been, a little bit to my surprise, yes.

I think that when the current gerontocracy finally departs the stage, 9/11 will be like the Battle of the Somme or something: a purely historical memory that does not seem to have much, if any, relevance to contemporary American life.

One of the things that surprised me was that when I was putting together my syllabus for this year, I didn’t even notice—it didn’t even occur to me—that I was having class on the morning of the 25th anniversary of September 11th. It was only when I stopped and thought about it. I don’t think anybody else had thought about it either. We didn’t put together a panel; there was no university remembrance. It just didn’t occur to anybody.

You know, something I find a little interesting in terms of that is something that never even occurred to me at the time of Charlie Kirk's murder, which was on September 10th of last year. It didn't even occur to me that if it had happened one day later, they could have really gone for some sort of Christological martyrology or something in regard to that. But yes, you're right: I do think the lack of more overt commemoration is a really interesting cultural touchstone.

Well, thank you, Paul, and thanks to our audience—everybody who listens to the podcast. We'll be coming back with another 9/11 podcast, where we'll talk about international relations. I think we'll publish these soon. Thanks so much for joining us.

Thank you again for listening to the Lawyers, Guns & Money podcast. We would like to thank Elizabeth Nelson of the Paranoid Style for supplying 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 & Money podcast or any other aspect of the Lawyers, Guns & Money project, please visit us at www.patreon.com/lawyersgunsmoney or donate at the PayPal link on the website. Thank you.