

[00:00:20.570]

I am back with Andrew Sullivan. Andrew, thanks for joining me again. It's always wonderful to talk to you, sir. So. First, we should just say that this is a simple case, you are a freshly minted podcast. And I'm quite honored to be your first podcast collaborator here at least. I mean, obviously, you've done podcasts in the past, but this is your new Dish podcast. What's going on over there? Tell me about your plans.

[00:00:46.590]

Well, we're I'm incredibly psyched to do this with you is the first one. We're going to do this every week, we hope. And the idea is to be able to have a conversation which is not constrained by all the pressures that are on us now in the media, wherever we are, and to talk openly and and reasonably with people of different views, believe it or not, and to hash things out in a way that you've always been a master of doing.

[00:01:12.390]

And so I couldn't be prouder to be launching this alongside you in what seems to be now a tradition. Right.

[00:01:18.960]

Every four years we get together and explain why we're both miserable about the coming election. But why are we going to vote anyway? So thank you. It's a big honor and I'm psyched. And this is a big new adventure for all of us. Nice.

[00:01:31.890]

Nice. Well, I'm very happy to do this with you. I must say we have quite a checkered past here, however, because four years ago I think we jinxed the presidential election. We had the brilliant idea of doing a podcast wherein we proved that we were in touch with Hillary Clinton's flaws as anyone we were. We were not to be outdone by any aspiring Trump voter. And then in that podcast, we quite brilliantly to my ear turn the tables after about an hour of running down Hillary to make the case that Donald Trump was much, much worse.

[00:02:08.910]

And despite all of our lesser of two evils, casuistry, we got four years of Donald Trump. So let's not do that again. I don't know.

[00:02:18.660]

Our influence terrifies me, you know? I mean, how could one possibly speak without the thought of changing world history? But we'll do our best, I'm sure.

[00:02:27.630]

So I will start with you. So you want to start with why Biden is a problem or what you know with Trump this time?

[00:02:34.260]

Well, I think I think some of that's going to come up because I think you and I have have some concerns about what we how tongue tied everyone is around Biden's flaws, you know, for understandable reasons. But I want us to say something useful at this point that just on the off chance that there are any persuadable people out there. But I must say I'm pretty pessimistic about that. I suspect that almost anyone who's planning to vote for Trump at this point is probably out of reach of our arguments.

[00:03:07.320]

And I mean, that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to reach such people. But let me just describe what I think the audience is for. Whatever we might say here. I think anyone who is in the Kuhn cult or who thinks Trump has been put in the White House by Jesus to save the world, or someone who thinks that, you know, Tom Hanks and the Dalai Lama and Michelle Obama are all cannibal child rapists, those people are obviously not within range of us.

[00:03:36.720]

And I don't know how big a group that is, but there's an impressively large group of people, it seems to me, who are in a kind of, you know, whether they're kuhnens or not, they're in a kind of personality cult and they will be immune to anything. I have to say here. And I can't imagine you're going to make a dent either. But there are a few objections that come from what I consider to be smart or otherwise sane people who are planning to vote for Trump.

[00:04:03.420]

And the number one objection I get and if I could distill it down to something this person might say, it's something like. After hearing me go on a tirade about Trump, this person will say something like, you know, I get that you don't like his personality. I don't like his personality either. And I get that you find him to be uncouth and offensive and so do I. And but none of that really matters. What matters is policy.

[00:04:33.620]

And his policies are fine. In some cases, they're better than fine and they're better than Biden's are likely to be because Biden is going to be captured by the left socially and economically. So I'm wondering what you do with that objection. Yeah, I weirdly, I've I have been getting some of that the last week or so for more people in my personal environment, people who. Keep telling me that, yes, I've lost my mind a little bit because I have become a victim of Trump derangement syndrome and that the policy options that are coming before us are so horrifying.

[00:05:15.780]

This I mean, this I would just I don't really agree with for several reasons. I don't think that the issues that Trump really campaigned on, he's really done a great deal for. I don't think, for example, that if you thought that it might be time because of the impact that free trade has had upon various industries in the US and certainly for white, non college educated workers, that therefore Trump's critique of what had been going on was not without merit.

[00:05:49.940]

And I agree with that. But there has been no real success on tariffs, for example. I mean, there's been some minor tinkering, but we haven't seen a turnaround in manufacturing. We haven't seen a turnaround in things like coal. We haven't seen what he promised in 2016. We haven't even seen any serious, permanent or bruited policies in controlling or changing the dynamic on immigration, which, if Biden gets in, will be back to square one. We haven't actually seen a war of ideas that has defanged some of the worst elements of the left.

[00:06:32.780]

If anything, Trump seems to me to have presided over enormous strengthening of elements on the extreme left and that he has been their best friend in so many ways by making it almost impossible to counter some of these trends on the far left without seeming to defend the indefensible. So on those people who want substantively, or are sympathetic to, a more adjusted, as it were, conservatism, I don't think Trump has been competent enough to deliver it. And I don't think and I think in many ways he's been extraordinarily counterproductive in that effect.

[00:07:09.540]

And so I wish I could say that, you know, he had a point about immigration. He had a point about trade. He has had a point about white working class people in the West, but failure to deliver, failure to prove that he can do anything about these things. And in fact, when you look at it, he's almost not mentioning either of those key issues- immigration and trade- this time around, which suggests that really his attachment to these causes was entirely instrumental and that really all he's about is his own, his own sense of his own power and his own centrality to any conversation about anything.

[00:07:44.970]

So I don't think that the argument that somehow some of the issues he championed are legitimate has been borne out in the last four years. I think he's I think, for example, he's done more to stigmatize

and taint the cause of some kind of control of mass immigration than anyone on the left could ever have done. And and I think that's really emboldening the people that he said he was trying to oppose and disempower.

[00:08:11.040]

Yeah, well, your point about the way in which he's empowered the far left is is very important because this is a very common claim- that Trump is some kind of bulwark against the craziness on the left. But to the contrary, Trump has empowered the far left. His ugliness has given the far left whatever semblance of justification it's had. Right? His flirtation with racism, his failure to clearly repudiate white supremacy...

[00:08:45.930]

I mean, he has repudiated white supremacy to a greater degree than people on the left to give him credit for. I mean, he has actually done it in places, but he's done it so badly and so unconvincingly that he is almost the perfect goblin to merit the counterreaction on the left. And so the all the craziness of the "woke-ness" cult and the overreaching of Black Lives Matter and all of that has happened on Trump's watch. And you could certainly argue in large measure because of Trump and because of how bad he is.

[00:09:21.540]

So just the idea that he is somehow a corrective to this seems crazy. And what I would expect to have under Biden is not, you know, the full capture of Biden by the 'wokeness'. I would expect all of us to be able to far more credibly pivot and turn our attention on the wokeness and repudiated I mean, not that not to say we haven't been doing that, but we now do it under the shadow that the right and the far right under Trump has managed to produce.

[00:09:54.750]

Whereas under a Biden administration, the wokeness can be discussed, as you know, in terms that that reveal it to be as unhinged and unpragmatic as it is. The manner of his politics, which is that the truth is entirely dispensable, that narratives are what really matter, that he can give a speech and he's been giving these campaign speeches, which are essentially built upon a complete fantasy about what is going on as well.

[00:10:24.690]

I mean, covid is the most obvious example in which he's declaring that it's over and we've succeeded at the moment, that it's surging even in the places he's visiting. And if you could go through his listen to the last debate and I try to follow the arguments that he's making because I I want to understand what's happening. And they just impossible to follow because they're built upon complete lies and delusions half the time. Fake statistics, invented scenarios, complete hyperboles in ways that completely distort any kind of rational debate so that you're reduced when you absorb the way Trump discusses with the resort to feelings, essentially tribal feelings, feelings of emotion that he seeks to, to evoke and to exploit in a way that are rational.

[00:11:17.340]

Functioning is short circuited. Because how can you begin to counter, argue Trump when it is simply a stream of inventions that are entirely and always self-serving, combined with a constant attempt to trigger and to inflame anybody who might conceivably take an issue with it? And there is something about that that creates a political dynamic in which other actors, those opposing him, because they can't actually engage reasonably with certain arguments, with evidence, they then are empowered to put forward their own narrative, their own delusions, their.

[00:11:55.260]

Own tribal fantasies to counter what he's doing in a pointer to the extent to which I really think we're lost, we we are truly lost. When you listen to the debates going on, there is not a shared set of facts. There isn't a shared understanding that we have to apply reason to these facts. There is no deliberation happening at all. And when I when I wrote like four or five years ago now that this kind of rhetoric, this kind of worldview, which is entirely narcissistic, which is entirely subjective, which is

entirely about feeling and emotion, this is an extinction level event for liberal democracy, even as much as liberal democracy requires all of us to engage in a respect for counterargument, reasonable counterargument and to and fro and and trying to accept the result of some kind of deliberation.

[00:12:55.270]

This he has completely subverted in our psyches and in our public debate and therefore empowers irrationality everywhere, including on the left, so that we we've witnessed people saying things and what he called truthful hyperbole. When you think about some of the insane things that he said, well, I think of describing the multicultural, multiracial dynamic America in 2020 as a form of white supremacy is nothing but a mirror image of this truthful hyperbole, which makes it almost impossible to engage with reality.

[00:13:33.790]

That's what he's done and he's not solely responsible for it. And I'm not going to say that workless or far left of the attack upon liberal democratic values he entirely created. He didn't. He was partly a product of that. But we have a test case of whether he can make it better. And in fact, he, by the very manner of his engagement in the discourse, is making it much, much worse all the time.

[00:14:01.410]

Yeah, he has this this almost supernatural ability to make his enemies worse, people, you know, or behave like sociopaths. I mean, he being this. Sociopath manages to corrupt even the well-intentioned reactions to his norm breaking and I mean, this is what bothers me so much about this this allegation of Trump derangement syndrome or just this claim that we get that you don't like him as a person, but that doesn't matter. The problem with that is that it doesn't even begin to make contact with the the criticism of him as a person which is actually relevant to his governing and his assuming the responsibility of the presidency.

[00:14:46.350]

Because as president, it really does matter that Trump is a terrible human being who values nothing beyond his own personal gain and who lies more than any person in human history. These are not private flaws. These are flaws that have done immense harm to our politics and to our society. And I mean, just look at covid. I mean, covid as just one one phenomenon, which is in my mind, it's not even the main problem with his presidency thus far.

[00:15:19.110]

But it's just one case where these flaws, you could argue, have led to the deaths of some tens of thousands of people who wouldn't be otherwise dead. But for what he has done to the messaging around the around the public health, messaging around the pandemic. And, you know, more broadly than that, I think it really matters that we have become the kind of society that could give a person like this so much power and responsibility. I mean, it's just like when you think about the underlying values here, do you think about if you're you know, if you're a parent and and you could list the virtues that you you hope your kids embody by the time they become adults, you want your kids to be intellectually curious and generous and honest and have integrity and have moral courage, have empathy, compassion, wisdom.

[00:16:13.650]

Every parent would aspire to this. And Trump is the living, breathing negation of these virtues. He not only has none of them, he is just bursting with their opposites. Right. He is greedy and malevolent and uncomprehending and is completely unaware of his deficits. Right. I mean, he's just this may sound like, you know, a mere opinion about his personality, but it's not. I mean, these are statements that are every bit as objective about him psychologically as saying that he is, you know, overweight or that he's taller than average or that he's got, you know, bronzer on his face or whatever conspires to make him that color.

[00:16:50.970]

And it matters what kind of person you put in this role and whatever you want to say about Biden. And we'll talk about the scandal that no one will talk about. I don't know if you have any information about

our opinions about that, but, you know, whatever you might want to say about Biden and whatever, you know, peripheral corruption he could be found guilty of. There is no question that as just as a person, as the ethical core of him, as a person, he is on another planet from Trump, and that has to matter.

[00:17:24.320]

I think maybe an interesting comparison here is Bill Clinton, who I think characterologically is pretty awful person, but nonetheless was capable of operating, even if he was, let's say, economical with the truth. At times there was at least some kind of respect he gave to the notion of making rational arguments with evidence and a respect he took even with when he was being persecuted by a special counsel with nonetheless going through the motions of cooperating with it, even at one point being deposed and speaking to something which, in contrast with the things that Trump was accused of in impeachment, completely trivial.

[00:18:09.080]

But Clinton was able, in some ways his personal character did, I think, affect his probably, but not to the same extent.

[00:18:16.010]

And this is the key thing here, it seems to me, is a kind of extraordinary and extreme pathological narcissism, which prevents Trump literally from understanding the experiences of anybody outside of himself and his inability to see that he is just one part of a bigger system and that, in fact, as president, he has responsibility for the interests of other people, too.

[00:18:42.590]

So that pathological narcissism, which is which is really deeper in him than I've ever come across in anybody in public life, means that when you come to a situation like suddenly there's a covid crisis, what are your instincts, your instinct, if you were a regular, reasonably normal person is, blimey, we've got to do something about this. How do we figure out what the most sensible precautions are? Let's let's pick up the pandemic playbook that we had inherited.

[00:19:12.710]

And you might even think that some of his instincts politically would be very successful. So, for example, he's kind of the guy that likes to shock Borders. Well, he could have shot every border. He's kind of the guy that seeks to control the country, seeks to put himself at the middle of it. Well, he could have made all sorts of gestures to shutting down the country, to imposing mass.

[00:19:32.960]

He had incredible leeway to do whatever he wanted. But if especially if your goal is to control the epidemic, what did he do? He immediately understood this to be a possible threat to the economy, which meant to his reelection. So his instinct was to deny it, to push it out of his mind, or if it did happen, to try and tell a story that made it not important. So he continually and persistently lied in order to push this out of his consciousness because he was concerned it wasn't affecting him, even though, of course, it would personally in the end.

[00:20:10.940]

But that basically incapacitated him from from making any kind of sane judgment about this. You know, he in some ways you would think this xenophobic germophobia.

[00:20:21.410]

I mean, this is a man that won't let anyone near him or didn't historically, it wouldn't wouldn't shake anybody's hands. If someone coveney him in the Oval Office, he would ask them to leave. He was pathologically hostile to germs. That's why he likes fast food, we were told. I mean, you never press the Lois button on an elevator because he was terrified of germs. Why didn't this guy use all those things he had in his armour to launch a real campaign against covid, which would have helped him actually politically in the end?

[00:20:52.700]

Why? Because he simply, narcissistically couldn't believe that if he were to reduce economic growth, it would harm him politically. That's all simple Short-Termism inability to see beyond that. And the other thing we learned in the campaign, of course, is that within his own structure, within the Republican Party, within his own administration, we saw this as long ago as the first campaign. No one, no one, no one has any authority to stop him doing anything.

[00:21:21.230]

He he's really extraordinary in his ability to persist with his his narcissism through any advice, criticism, other alternative viewpoints to such an extent that it's a kind of blindness that that when the real shit hit the fan, when the emergency happens, as it always it often does in a presidency, he just didn't have the skills to do. His narcissism was so pathological, it prevented him from doing even obvious and sensible things.

[00:21:55.340]

Yeah, he is a kind of moral and psychological paradox in a way, because he it's almost like, I think of the the fine tuning argument for God. And you and I have debated religion in the past. Ah, I don't remember. You put in any weight on the fine tuning of nature's constants as proof of the existence of God. But many have done that. And just to remind people, you know, if the gravitational constant were slightly different, you know, there'd be no formation of galaxies and all the rest.

[00:22:23.220]

And if. The charge on the electron were different with than many things would follow that would be incompatible with life, and it turns out that these constants are tuned within, you know, the tiniest fraction of a hair to values that are compatible with the universe as we know it. And any change would make things worse. And it's almost like he's the virtues I listed a moment ago. It's almost like he's got these tuned to their worst possible settings.

[00:22:53.300]

But this doesn't actually make him the worst possible person. I mean, when there are people who are objectively worse than Trump, you know, you just, you know, compare him to Hitler. Hitler is worse. But the things that actually make Hitler worse are actually virtues like courage and a commitment to something beyond yourself. Right. Like if you add those generic virtues to an otherwise malevolent asshole, well, then he becomes a more competent, more self sacrificing, malevolent asshole.

[00:23:22.940]

Right. So evil gets amplified by virtues in certain context. It's almost like Trump has everything dialed to it's the least respectable level. He is not a courageous person. He's not a competent person. He's not a consistent person. He's committed to nothing beyond himself. But this makes him again, it's it is almost supernatural, the degree to which he manages to skate through situations that would would have destroyed any other predecessor politically. I mean, literally, he is guilty of a thousand indiscretions which would have torpedoed the presidency of anyone else.

[00:24:02.250]

So even someone like Clinton. Right. Who I share your estimation of Clinton? Not at all a fan. And I think he's you know, there's definitely something sociopathic about him, but at least because he was actually quite smart and well informed and paid lip service, if nothing else, to the values of being consistent and competent and all the rest. You know, even as a liar, he felt the burden to lie in a way that his audience would not detect.

[00:24:28.760]

Right. So you have to be consistent in your line. You have to remember what lies you've told. I mean, you have to insert the lie in the right place in the paragraph so as not to have your dishonesty immediately detected. Trump feels no burden of any of that. He is functioning by a completely different psychophysics. And for that, it's almost like he's an extraterrestrial that has been put down into the political context of DC and he's managed to train everyone around him through just sheer destruction of their expectations to accept everything.

[00:25:03.980]

And it really is. I mean, honestly, I think he could have had a Jeffrey Toobin scandal of his own this week, you know, been caught jacking off on Zoome. And he would be fine. Right. Like, literally, his defenders would come forward and say things like that's how much he loves America. This guy is just so full of passion. Anything is acceptable from him to his cult. And I just have never seen anything like this.

[00:25:27.650]

No.

[00:25:28.040]

And I've never witnessed someone capable of believing their own lies with such aplomb and vigor and energy. There's not a single moment in his public life that he has ever seen fit to even qualify, even when he said things that are so grotesquely untrue that obviously he will never concede the slightest scintilla of doubt about it and the huge assertion of a big lie and the self-confidence and the psychological tenacity, extraordinary to insist upon this and to sustain it perpetually. This is four years of sustaining a series of extraordinary fantasies which started by telling us even when we can see it with our own eyes, by starting with telling us that his inauguration crowd was absolutely bigger than Obama's.

[00:26:17.540]

Whatever your lying eyes are telling you when you look at that, that his ability to say that and to insist that it be true and somehow, by virtue of his own psyche, to force those around him to accept it.

[00:26:30.770]

But he but even more because their inconsistent fantasies, even within the frame of his own utterances, within the span of of a few minutes. Right. Like he's he's he doesn't even have the burden of being consistent with what he said thirty seconds ago.

[00:26:46.680]

Yes. And that is the key to his domination, because because the people around him have to agree to both things. I mean, they have to agree to first that black is white and they have to agree to the black is blue. And that is the way in which he enforces his domination. This is an entirely primitive, primal, dominant mode of engagement. It is utterly it's a warlord mentality. It is a mafia boss mentality. It is.

[00:27:17.930]

I will say whatever and you will believe it. And the I honestly, I think the capacity to pull that off is a function of some kind of extraordinary mental disability, I mean, psychological illness, that it that there's an energy to this. I mean, look at the man. I mean, he's 74, right?

[00:27:37.440]

That's one version he has.

[00:27:39.010]

He has the virtue of energy that is otherwise incomprehensible. I mean, the guy is he's the picture of health and it's a perverse kind of health because he's obese and he doesn't exercise. And he you can tell he he's you know, the rumors about him eating nothing but crap are almost certainly true. But it's it's like he is. And this is a unfortunately fairly depressing comparison with Biden. I mean, just the physical presentation. I mean, Biden looks that they both stumble over their words, but Biden's stumbles look like senescence and Trump's just looks like more TRUMP.

[00:28:12.790]

Yeah, there's it's it's it's it's you know, when he says maybe I'm immune, maybe I'm a Superman, my genes are like these incredibly powerful things. I mean, and the truth is, I mean, I'm just have to sit there and say, you know, I really don't know anybody with this level of energy sustained this long with this amount of stamina.

[00:28:33.220]

I mean, for God's sake, the man had covid-19 only a few weeks ago. You see his mid 70s. And I once thought for a minute that reality would actually impose itself upon him. But no, no, he's even immune to that.

[00:28:49.240]

Right. So I take it back. He's got he's got one dial that's not tuned to the worst possible position. I envy him his energy. That's just the way he has always campaigned. I mean, that is there's something quite amazing.

[00:29:02.400]

There is something there is something about mental illness that can provide that kind of energy. That's why it's inexhaustible, because it's built upon a real psychosis within it. It's real desperate need never to sit still. I mean, the man has clearly never spent a moment in reflection, never spent a moment in silence. I doubt you get no impression this man has an interior life. It's entirely a directed it's an empty void within that is constantly seeking affirmation and in that desperation has a kind of unbelievable energy that also in the past defeated his creditors, defeated anyone, anybody rival of his in the real estate.

[00:29:47.050]

Just in the end, even though he crashed his company, even though he bank I mean, he he he gave banks unbelievable headaches. In the end, he's indefatigably required them to finally leave the table, forgive the debts, cut their losses or his ability to not pay people, his ability to sue people into submission. This is a very deep and ugly you know, I I do think of the ancients understanding what a tyrant is.

[00:30:16.000]

I think what we've seen is the tyrant is to Plato and Aristotle. Out of control, personally, out of control, entirely, a function of his appetites which are insatiable and which there is no governing process within his mind. There is no ego to control. The air is all it, and it's all momentary. So and it's that impulse that frightened me and still frightens me, given the system that we live in. And one of the things I've watched is, is, you know, people were worried that he would become a dictator or something.

[00:30:53.960]

And I looked back and looked through what I wrote about him four years ago to see if I, you know, screwed up, if I had exaggerated and. I do think some of us didn't fully. Assimilate his incompetence or his laziness, and and that is a huge relief in a way.

[00:31:13.990]

That's my point about, you know, the comparison with with a truly evil dictator is he doesn't have the competence or the commitment that would elevate him to that slot. I mean, he would need more virtues.

[00:31:28.360]

He would need to have a sense of responsibility, which is what we understand to be adulthood, which is that you understand that your own actions affect others and you are cognizant of that. He has never seemingly grown up at all.

[00:31:41.260]

I mean, this is a child like person of extraordinary appetites and impulses and whims and fury, the anger, the rage that drives him all the time. I mean, that is also prevented him, for example, for in any way reaching out to others or to expanding his base. He has not sought to persuade people. He sought to rally them because persuading others has to give them some status, some some equality to him. These are people who could choose this order, and he has to persuade them that that implies that he's in some way different to them, even if it's a minimal form of deference.



[00:32:19.570]

He can't do that. So it has to be constant rallying rather than persuasion. And that's why he's not expanded his base but has increased its fervency. And I don't think that's going to end entirely. But I think if he were to lose and I'm pretty sure he will, but I'm not still part of me that wonders if these polls have really captured what's going on out there.

[00:32:42.940]

Yeah, well, we're right to be shellshocked from last time around. So we are.

[00:32:48.400]

But he also, you know, it turns out he kind of wants to be a talk show host sitting in the Oval Office, that he that he talks about his own administration as if he were observing it as opposed to directing it, and because he lives in a strange world without actual responsibility. So, hey, I just got the biggest platform in the world. I will tweet thirty thousand times irrational, crazy insults. And and and and I think that is I mean, the impact that that's had on all of our psyches over four years cannot be overstated.

[00:33:26.620]

I think of him as president is like being in a family where one person is mentally unwell.

[00:33:32.960]

You're over time, every everyone becomes mentally unwell.

[00:33:37.150]

It takes you so much bandwidth. I mean, that's I can't imagine even his supporters, even people who love him, I can't imagine they feel that this change that has come over our society in the last three and a half years is good.

[00:33:50.890]

I mean, it's just everyone has to be exhausted by politics taking up this much bandwidth and not just politics, but the tribal politics, like intensely emotional, psychologically exhausting, emotionally draining, constant conflict, rage, emotional outbursts. This is all heat. There's almost been no light at all. And I certainly think that psychologically I've been I mean, I'll admit it, I think he's gotten into my head. And has Hannas created I mean, I had a clinical depression just a couple of months after he was elected.

[00:34:29.980]

And I know that as a joke. I'm saying that having too absorbed a crazy person every day that you can't really avoid. It reminds me of those people that have to live in totalitarian regimes with the picture and the face of the Dear Leader is constantly in your eye. You can't you can't get away from it. It's on your wall.

[00:34:50.070]

You have to adhere to it. You have to you have to acknowledge it at every time so that there is no space left.

[00:34:56.970]

If you have a time without Trump.

[00:34:59.400]

And what do you what do you make of the fact, though, that there are people you know, if we haven't already driven them from our audience, there are people listening to us who just don't understand this allergy we have to trump. It's like. So, you know, I would just kind of ran through, you know, all the reasons why I find him to be a despicable person. But there are people who just don't see this about him.

[00:35:25.680]

And I and now I mean, honestly, it's so evident to me that it's that I can't I don't really have even a theory of mind for someone who can't see any of this. But I mean, he's a kind of for me, he's a kind of and this is you know, this just plays into the hand of anyone who would accuse me of Trump derangement syndrome because of this kind of has a quasi Freudian structure. But if you told me that I was going to suffer some kind of neurological illness that would make me exactly like Trump, I would fucking kill myself.

[00:35:59.640]

I mean, honestly, I think the last the last time we spoke, I think this was in one in one of my diatribes about Trump years ago. I recall the scene in The Exorcist where the you know, the priest is performing the final ineffectual exorcism of of Linda Blair. And and I think he's strangling her. And and the the devil comes into him, you know, visibly comes into him and he shines out from his eyes, you know, the the green the green eyes of Satan.

[00:36:27.660]

And at that moment, you know, he has this moment of kind of wrestling with himself and then he hurls himself through that window and down those stone steps.

[00:36:34.260]

And that's exactly what I would do. I mean I mean, honestly, like, he he everything I hope to be, everything I everything I admire in myself and want to to increase and everything I'm depressed about myself and want to change. Everything is pointing in the opposite direction from what Trump has fully actualized in himself. And it's just so he is a kind of super stimulus to me. It's just he is just the most appalling person I can name.

[00:37:03.870]

Right. And again, I mean, honestly, it's like the invidious comparisons to someone like Osama bin Laden are honest. I do not feel the same way about Osama bin Laden, though. I recognize the harms that he caused based on his ideology. And obviously, I've said more than my piece against jihadism, but Osama bin Laden is as a person is far more understandable to me and far less reprehensible personally, psychologically than Trump.

[00:37:30.960]

And I think the way people and this is just a guess, because I'm honestly, genuinely shocked when I look at polling and find, for example, that white Catholics are 50 50.

[00:37:42.150]

Now, I was you know, I brought up a Catholic. I am a Catholic. There are certain core I mean, we can disagree about the religious faith, but there are certain values that are taught.

[00:37:52.320]

And he is literally the negation of every single one. I mean, there it is almost impossible to come up with someone less officially Christian in the virtues than Trump is, and yet half of them think he's OK. And look, here's one thought, is that they're not really thinking about him. They're thinking about the people they hate thinking about.

[00:38:14.310]

Those he drives the liberals crazy, as you hear, you know, on at least from my microphone. And they love that about him.

[00:38:22.270]

And I understand that that's the thing I. I totally get that they honestly drive me up the wall. I get into irrational states of loathing of of some of these people. And they're in my class and they are all around me. I live with them. And at some point I'm just God damn these people. And if and he is if you imagine that people are just blinding themselves to who is and just are so consumed by loathing, contempt for the elites, then you can see how psychologically you can support him without thinking

too much about him.

[00:38:59.040]

And and he is if you think of him as one giant middle finger. Then it works, and I do think there is and I do think the way in which the media has responded and which other institutions have responded, including things like the FBI and CIA and the mainstream media in its broad sense, and even the judiciary who have gone nuts.

[00:39:23.240]

Let's let's they have overplayed their hands in ways that equally undermine our confidence in a liberal democracy. This seems as if it's all to some great tribal struggle. And if it is that tribal struggle and you know, you hate those people, well, maybe it's tolerable. Maybe he's maybe he's just simply a weapon at hand. And given the the sort of way in which those elites have never truly copped to their responsibility for some of the worst decisions in the last 30 years in this country, especially insofar as they affected regular working class white people, I think is integral to understanding his appeal as a concept.

[00:40:07.310]

And I can't I sympathize with that. I really do. And I've tried to learn from it at the same time. He is so despicable and so dangerous. I mean, the fact that we are sitting here a week before an election and neither you nor I can know for sure that one of the candidates, in fact, the president will wait patiently for all the votes to be tallied, where there will be no question that there will be a clear and obvious transfer of power, that we will be resolved.

[00:40:38.630]

We will have this big conflict, but it will be resolved and we will move for the fact that we don't know that for sure. The fact that this man is even holding the stability of our system as a weapon shows an unbelievable level of recklessness and irresponsibility and a true danger to everything. And I'm you know, I'm so tired of being told right now that you overestimate it. You hyperventilated. He doesn't get a dictator's loveable. And this is a very sort of world weary sense.

[00:41:08.420]

Yes, but what are we supposed to do when a president says, I may not abide by the results of the election? Are we supposed to sit there and say, oh, well, we know he doesn't really mean that or we'll be fine? No, that's not our responsibility. Why are we being put in this position at all? How dare this man come into our democracy and threaten it this way? It is unprecedented. Well, I'm not really sure about this, but at this point, like, no, fuck you, that is not tolerable.

[00:41:35.690]

No party should support it. No one can tolerate it. And yet he does. And by doing that, for those of us like me who are institutionally very conservative, who believe that liberal democracy is fragile, needs to be defended. This is this is this is a crime against our very system of government. The fact that this man can sympathize with and openly support people who are engaging in the most hideous repressive measures like Putin or she or he could actually withhold tell she don't worry about putting all those workers in concentration camps.

[00:42:08.840]

I'd be with you if I were ever that. This is sorry, but it's just it's it's not a personality flaw. It's a it's a critical undermining argument to everything that we believe in in the West. Yes, so you've just hit upon the the worst current thing about him, and it's the one recent fact that I think in isolation, I mean, forget about everything else we've said about him and or could be said about him that I think should be a deal breaker for somebody.

[00:42:39.120]

The fact that we have a a sitting U.S. president who will not commit to the peaceful transfer of power should he lose the election. I mean, this is just so unbelievable and it is so dangerous and irresponsible that I think that that should be the only thing you have to know about him to know that

you can't vote for him. I mean, I really do think that there's that that really does supersede any other concern we could have about anything. And and there are literally a thousand other things that almost rise to that level.

[00:43:15.240]

I mean, the fact that he's a someone who repeatedly has asked why we can't just use our nuclear weapons. Right. I mean, he's the one person in our society who can launch a nuclear first strike. And he seems to be conflicted over the ethics there. There are literally hundreds of things like that that we could dredge up to disqualify him or prove his unfitness for office.

[00:43:38.280]

But the fact that he will not commit to a peaceful transfer of power here and the fact that he's willing to roll the dice with the obvious harm that that is doing to our politics and the risk that is amplifying for political unrest in the aftermath of the election. I mean, it's just the thing that's amazing to me is that that he has not lost support on the basis of that. I mean, I would I would think that his support and his support should go to zero after saying, I mean, the only thing he could say that is equivalently crazy to this.

[00:44:16.560]

And he almost did it. I mean, he he made a joke about Biden getting assassinated at one of his rallies the other day. But the only thing that's actually analogous to him not committing to a peaceful transfer of power is for him to actually encourage his supporters to assassinate Biden. If he stood up at a rally and said, listen, we'd all be a lot better if one of you put a bullet in this joker right there. If he did that, the truth is, I'm not even sure that's worse.

[00:44:42.810]

I think it might be more shocking to some people. But the fact that he is willing to roll the dice with endless allegations that the election is rigged, there's no way he could lose. But for essentially a Democrat run coup and he's not going to commit to the peaceful transfer of power and he's just willing to just let that aftermath play out with four hundred million guns in the society. It is unbelievable that we're here and it's doubly unbelievable that we haven't seen the support for him go to zero on on that basis.

[00:45:16.560]

Yes. And the truth is that I am genuinely frightened of a close result. Which he refuses to acknowledge. I'm genuinely frightened of unbelievably specious attempt to call the election on election night, regardless of whether we've completed or voted. I've counted all or even a majority of the votes. The fact that I'm afraid that he could indeed call for violence in the streets in his defense, that he could stoke and would talk about this as if he weren't ultimately responsible for law and order in the United States is simply unique in the history of the United States, that we're unique in the history of Western democracy, actually, and given the passions that he has created and given also the racial fault line that he has mined and given the radicalization that he has also enabled.

[00:46:12.090]

But not he hasn't created it entirely himself, but he has definitely made it worse. We're talking about probably the most dangerous period in modern American history in terms of the stability of the actual regime, of the stability of the system when the person in charge of the system openly speaks of no responsibility for maintaining it. In fact, because, again, I come back to this pathological narcissism he cannot see outside his own.

[00:46:40.490]

Personal pride, ego and self-interest, that we are still in a terribly precarious situation in this country and I will I will not breathe easily or sleep well until he is removed from office.

[00:46:59.360]

And I felt that way because I can't ever see because he's never given us any indication of any limit, any limit to what he will and will not do. It is a constant process of shock. And when you look at

classical depictions of crazy tyrants, this is their capacity as part of what maintains their power. They never tell you the limits on what they can do. They always keep you guessing. We'll see what happens. It's one of his favorite phrases, which is a threat.

[00:47:31.100]

It's not an observation. And his his refusal to ever put any outer limits on what he can and cannot do in terms of this culture is is unique and it is terrifying and and I'm sorry, but Republicans and conservatives who sort of roll their eyes at this as if what they're witnessing is entertainment.

[00:47:55.220]

Truth is, I don't think I've seen the rank and file Republican response to his unwillingness to commit to a peaceful transfer of power. I mean, how have you noticed how Republicans spin that and bracketed or or otherwise convey their reasons for not taking it seriously?

[00:48:16.040]

I haven't seen a clear. Absolutely unequivocal, except maybe from Romney statement from people with power saying this is unacceptable and must be stopped there, tell us that it's not going to happen. He's just joking this constant. He's just joking stuff. Again, it it suggests that we're watching a mini series rather than living in an actual functioning republic.

[00:48:42.440]

But I mean, in this case, he's so obviously not joking. This ball has been teed up for him, you know, now at least a dozen times.

[00:48:51.140]

And every time he declines to hit it in the way you would expect a US president to, I think it's because he sees himself sort of in a lawsuit where you never concede anything and you you until the very last minute when you if you are forced to settle, you may be forced to settle, but you'd certainly never give away any leverage in advance, which, of course, might be a sensible strategy if you are a private actor within a system which is already guaranteed some basic security when you are actually the president of the United States and you're putting the entire system at risk, I just think there's an incredible complacency about the stability of the system, which really does help reinforce to me who thinks of himself as a sort of classical conservative, just how anti conservative this Republican movement is.

[00:49:42.830]

It is absolutely contemptuous of procedures, norms and institutions, has absolutely no concern for their preservation. Does not even see the system that we live in for what it is, it is simply a TV show. It is simply a talk radio show. It is simply a forum for entertainment. And yes, I can get moved east another way, but by the entertainment, I can get really pissed off at all these crazy lefties. I can I can love listening to Joe.

[00:50:14.090]

I can do all that, but I'm not. I'm not going to keep my eye off the ball of sustaining the system. I've read enough history. I've seen enough. I've read enough literature to see what is in front of our noses, which is this guy should never have been in there ever.

[00:50:32.560]

Yeah, there's now this this loss of trust in institutions. But the loss of trust is, to a shocking degree, warranted. I mean, there has just been a hollowing out of institutions. And there's a you know, there's been a denigration of them to the point where, you know, you're just not even sure how many competent people are left in positions of responsibility at places like the FDA and the CDC. And, you know, the press has based on its own.

[00:51:03.580]

I mean, for the very dynamic you described to me, like so much of the counterreaction to Trump, the necessary counterreaction has been so deranged by how bad he is that now you have something like The New York Times is the worst possible incarnation of itself because it has been so captured by the

spirit of the resistance.

[00:51:26.350]

And it's true, for example, with some of these quotes that struck down his immigration rulings, which were self-evident from the get go within his purview, agree with him or disagree with him, that some of these legal and judicial arguments to be thrown up by some of the courts which have eventually been shut down, have nonetheless been discredited. The courts, I think, in a way that was always a danger in this. The overreaction was always going to be as dangerous long term as his his is his excrescence.

[00:51:56.140]

And and that's what the trick is within liberal democracies to keep trying, keep these things at bay, because otherwise they cannibalize everything. They cannibalize the rule of law. I mean, what he's done with the Justice Department, for example, I mean, what he's done to the credibility of the FBI and which is, I think, terrible. And as much as we do have to have trust in neutral institutions that enforce the law, and if the FBI doesn't have that trust, we're in terrible trouble.

[00:52:26.320]

At the same time, he's provoked reactions within those systems that I think have been excessive.

[00:52:32.760]

I, I do think and in the media, I mean, I think the the Russia obsession, the notion that we were going to prove that he is a paid agent of the formerly from the 1980s onwards.

[00:52:46.180]

I mean, this stuff was was a fantasy and it was even though there are a lot of troubling ties between him and there are simple. There he doesn't have any qualms or scruples about taking aid from anyone, and he naturally sides with dictators because he likes them, he thinks they're cool.

[00:53:05.980]

He thinks they're the ones that really know what's going on. So he support for us or he's close to Putin with completely overdetermined.

[00:53:13.990]

But the entire establishment had to engage in what turned out to be a three year long goose chase to find some obvious smoking gun, which was never going to be there in the first place and has thereby helped discredit. A great deal of these institutions, I mean, I think what you read in The New York Times today is is is that is that when you read, for example, Ben Smith, The New York Times, not to get personal at this, but who is who's who's who's defending keeping the Hunter Biden staff out of the press?

[00:53:45.350]

When you realize that this is the person who published the Steele dossier without any qualms whatsoever or any context or anything other than here it is. Let's have a look at it. You begin to realize just how the press has discredited itself and in public opinion also. And I must say so. I mean, I look at places like CNN and I just I can't believe it anymore.

[00:54:04.510]

Yeah, it's completely broken. It is. It is broken so badly. And and a function of this, of course, is that it's also incredibly boring. You look at what's happened in in mainstream media, and it is one endless, tedious recitation of the same prejudices and views without any and you've seen them internally be incapable of accepting a diversity of opinion within their own ranks. It's been a terrible period for media, even though they have done incredibly well financially by pandering in this way and by becoming essentially abandoning any pretense of neutrality if they don't realize that that in itself is also an attack upon liberal democracy.

[00:54:50.660]

And I want there to be a newspaper where I can which I can trust, and I want to read a newspaper that I don't read every page and feel there is an obvious agenda here that that even I who loathe the man and despise many of his policies, I still find irritating and and crude and self discrediting.

[00:55:12.410]

Well, that's just a crucial line that can't be crossed. I mean that there are so many valid, honest, well calibrated things you can say against Trump that you never need to exaggerate. You never I mean, people I say this knowing that some people have been listening to me for the last hour or think I've exaggerated his flaws, but I can assure you I haven't. But to take the one piece of fine print I put out earlier on is that, you know, he has this very frequent attack against him, that he didn't condemn white supremacy and that he in the aftermath of Charlottesville, he said there were good people to find people on both sides and left it that right.

[00:55:51.530]

That's simply untrue. You can take five minutes to listen to the press conference where, you know, the fine people utterance first escaped his mouth. And it's within 15 seconds of of saying that he said, I'm not talking about the white supremacist, you know, that we should condemn them utterly. He was absolutely clear about that, that he was talking about what he imagined to be a different crowd of people who were simply protesting the removal of monuments that were dear to their heart.

[00:56:19.850]

Right. And these are these were not the tiki torch carrying antisemite.

[00:56:23.890]

He made it. He did make a distinction that the press simply lied about. And Biden lies about it and Kamala Harris lies about it and whether everyone knows they're lying or not or they just can't be bothered to figure out what is one.

[00:56:35.830]

I don't know. Wonders whether Daniel Dale has ruled on this. There are other things that have said about him that are not true, that are unfair.

[00:56:43.950]

Yeah. The point is, you never need to do that, right? You never need to be dishonest with respect to.

[00:56:51.740]

Yes, but there a gender in doing that because they want to racialized this, that the left has done a great sterling, constant job of saying that what this is really about is not in liberalism, it's not the dangers of a person who doesn't who can't be trusted or who is a fantasist or a narcissist or dangerous person. They they want to make this into proof that, in fact, all of America just voted twice for Obama is is a white, not just racist, but white supremacist.

[00:57:21.830]

And therefore, they have to up the ante all the time. What's fascinating to me is that after four years of that. Full use of it, it looks as if Trump is going to significantly increase even from a very low base, but nonetheless increased support among blacks and Hispanics. And if Biden wins, it's going to be because he won over elderly whites rather than so. The actual data that we're seeing does not does not portray this. And you also realize that the people who were critical in giving Biden the nomination were basically solid black Democratic voters who who who have their feet on the ground and their head screwed on.

[00:58:00.030]

Right.

[00:58:00.390]

Who understood that it is not in the interests of African-Americans to have their entire neighborhoods ransacked with with looting and rioting and and and inflames. The people do want to see police

misconduct held to account. They do want to see real reform. And there is a huge, I think, majority for practical common sense reforms in in restraining police abuse. Absolutely. But that is being blown away by an attempt to create this sort of grand racial tribal narrative that isn't actually borne out in in reality.

[00:58:34.200]

And that's also the case with the question of immigration, where where what are completely genuine and completely legitimate democratic arguments about how much immigration should we have, how little immigration we should be, the how should we enforce? These are completely legitimate questions for politics. And yet we are told that anybody raising these issues or even having anything but a completely permissive view is inherently thereby a white supremacist.

[00:58:57.720]

Now, of course, when people are being told that. The things that they just wanted to have a voice on, that they are bigots for even raising it. Of course, they're going to be more concerned and hate the people calling them bigots than the person they think might actually, in the end, stand up for them. And that helps helps Trump do what he he wants to do. I don't I think I think Trump is. Yeah, I think he's I think in the sense that he's dismissive of African-Americans and contemptuous of and lacks any empathy or compassion or any sense really of the nuances of history is a racist.

[00:59:33.860]

Yes. But do I think he's the kind of long standing white supremacist seeking to oppress? No. He's desperate for minority votes. He champions them. He talks about them all the time. It's more complicated than that.

[00:59:46.840]

And I think, well, he is totally without ideology. You know, he's not committed to anything. I do think I believe, you know, to a moral certainty that I have evidence that he is racist. Just but it's not especially public evidence. I've talked about this before, but I know at least two people who have it directly from Mark Burnett that he buried The Apprentice tapes and that that on those tapes, you've got Trump using the N-word in earnest, not talking about it as a as a word, but just just using it, because that's what he calls these people.

[01:00:23.050]

We also know that he's a rapist. I mean, this is not this is not up for dispute.

[01:00:28.990]

So you just struck a point of contact to the Hunter Biden scandal that no one will talk about. The truth is, I haven't looked into this enough to have formed an opinion about it. I just know how inconsequential an exercise that would be, because the truth is, there's basically nothing that could be there that would swamp the invidious comparisons I've made between Biden and Trump thus far. It's like, you know, even if you could prove to me that, I mean, to take another scandal that no one wanted to talk about, the allegation that Biden had sexually assaulted somebody who was working for his campaign or whatever was 20 years ago.

[01:01:07.540]

At a certain point, The New York Times talked about that, but only to sort of put it back and in the closet. It didn't seem especially credible, I think, in the end to people. But even if it had been every bit as credible as the allegations against Trump, well, it's one allegation against, what, 20 in Trump's case? I mean, so it's like there's nothing you're going to find in the Hunter Biden story that is going to rise to the level of the corruption I already know Trump is guilty of.

[01:01:39.700]

And that's why it's deeply uninteresting to me. But I share people's concern that we are now in a place in our democracy where we feel like we can't even report stories because they could so destabilize our politics so that we would wind up with four more years of Trump. I mean, I think it is, in fact true as a matter of just the changes, you know, hourly changes in public opinion that Comey is reactivation



of the of the Hillary Clinton investigation in the last week of the campaign is why Trump became president.

[01:02:17.890]

I mean, it was obviously it was there many other variables here, but that was the thing that changed the polling decisively. I mean, you can just essentially time it to the hour, but we're here. So I don't know what should we be doing with Hunter, Biden and and Joe Biden at the moment?

[01:02:32.920]

I've I've thought about this, too. I think the reason why they did have an impact is because it played right in 2016 as it played right into the existing narrative of Clinton as a crook, basically, and as a and as a very deceptive and self-interested old fashioned, corrupt politician.

[01:02:50.020]

And so it hit that way, although the truth is that even then we're talking about a massive double standard, because whatever you could convict anyone else of in that regard, Trump has that in triplicate.

[01:03:04.360]

Yeah, I have I have done my best to read these stories about the Biden's laptop and when I think it rather like you rather casually. Like you, I think well, compared to Ivanka, compared to Dongzhou, compared to the unbelievable open, proud corruption of this obviously corrupt family in the White House. This is trivial. And I think and and I do but I do think that carefully engineered last minute partisan oriented sudden revelations should be met with skepticism and restraint from the media.

[01:03:40.360]

And I think that's perfectly sensible, what the Wall Street Journal did in reporting this out and telling us what wasn't there, actually, that there wasn't anything.

[01:03:50.440]

There was the right thing to do, the extraordinary attempt to forbid any discussion of this in any other media source. The way in which bring this up is regarded as some sort of horrifying thing, whereas in fact, obviously it seems to me Hunter Biden is a corrupt individual, the way in a legal way, most of the time there's nothing illegal about the way he parlayed and peddled his connection to his father. And this is a problem. It is it pales in insignificance compared to what Trump is doing and has done.

[01:04:26.260]

And it doesn't implicate Joe himself. But the the way in which the mainstream media has responded instinctively to suppress this story and the way in which social media then reacted also by suppressing this story. I cannot, but I'm nervous. Yeah, this is this is a media that is not and is more interested at this point. In controlling the news then then then then airing it, and I don't think the Giuliani slightly nut ball interviews about this or that, some of the details of this, I don't think that that persuasive I don't think it would dramatically shift, but I don't like the idea that we have a media interested in keeping from the public stuff that might change their minds about a political debate with at this point in a in a campaign.

[01:05:19.690]

I just don't like it. It's not what our instincts should be as journalists. Our core instinct should be what the air, what's in it. It shouldn't be to put it out there like Ben Smith did with the Steele dossier. It should be, however, not to say this must never be talked about. And what I've seen I mean, the refusal to air this except on FOX and then there are some lonely people like Matt Taibbi who is interested in in writing about this, and Glenn Greenwald, who is, I think, trying to write about this intercept, but that you won't find it anywhere is troubling to me.

[01:05:54.280]

And especially troubling because if we do get a change of regime, if we do get Biden in, then all these people are going to be involved not just in suppressing information, suppressing information on

behalf of those in power. And I see I see the mindset among my peers in journalism, and it it kills me, they really do believe that their job is to advance, quote unquote. Social justice is not to get as much information out to people as possible and let them decide for themselves.

[01:06:24.990]

And that's a that's a. It's a really disturbing thing, and I've seen it up close and I've seen the pressure socially on people not to do this and being a journalist is to be an asshole in so many respects. It is. It is to embrace your position. Is the skunk at the party, the person bringing up the unpopular stuff, the the stuff now you can do it responsibly, irresponsibly. And I'm not I'm not saying this stuff should have been spread all over the place immediately.

[01:06:54.960]

But I am saying the way the media has responded, this seems to me deeply unhealthy. It speaks to a rot in in mainstream media and its understanding of what journalism is. And it concerns me. It really does. I don't I understand why people want a last minute comi with some bullshit distorting everybody's views at the last minute. But and I do think this was cynically done by partisan people for partisan purposes, but.

[01:07:21.820]

Hunter Biden is almost certainly a shady individual, and Joe Biden's refusal, refusal even to address the question, simply to dismiss it out of hand is a smear job as opposed to engaging it.

[01:07:35.410]

Similarly, his refusal is absolute refusal to say where he stands on the question of court packing, which is an incredibly important topic, and to have been supported by the mainstream media in in not answering these questions. In fact, cheering him for not answering them is troubling and certainly troubling for the future.

[01:07:53.800]

It reveals that the media is disposed to treat and social media are disposed to treat much of American society as dangerous children. But the truth is that given what has happened and given the dangerous child half of our society voted for last time around, that's not totally unwarranted. I mean, there really is this concern that even with however scrupulous you are to deal with the information, it is a kind of informationally, it is a kind of toxic waste that will get spread around.

[01:08:27.700]

And given the asymmetries here, I mean, what's so amazing is The New York Times gets one thing wrong to its everlasting discredit, whereas Fox need not get anything right, you know, and they're both considered news organizations. And Trump can lie and lie and lie and lie. And no one cares. And it can be as obvious as the sun is in the sky and yet catch Joe Biden lying clearly. And that could completely derail his campaign, but for good reason.

[01:08:56.570]

I mean, those are those are the norms we want. We want to get back to a world where to catch someone lying in public life dictates a real reputational cost. You know, how did we get so far from that? Again, in trumpeting everything functions by a different physics and awareness of that, this hero is just paralyzed us in trying to deal with it.

[01:09:17.990]

I get it. I think you're absolutely right. I think social media can do things that are really destructive. And I do think some level of responsibility from those who control the social media and is important. I'm just concerned that it gets to a slightly pathological and rather knee jerk attempt to suppress information rather than to get it all out.

[01:09:39.610]

And what's also then the Streisand effect is by trying to suppress it. You're now calling attention to it.

[01:09:45.760]

And it's although it seems like they have managed to squash it, I don't think the fact that there isn't really anything really damning in this about Joe Biden himself has helped keep this thing from not being the central. And of course, it shouldn't be a central issue in the campaign. Of course, Tucker Carlson, sitting down for an hour to spread the stuff is clearly not really a function of journalism. It's a function of partisan warfare.

[01:10:09.190]

At the same time, again, I'm being squishy here, but I. I do think you have to as a journalist, if this stuff comes out, you have to, for example, ask Biden, is this untrue? Do you do you are you telling us that this is a complete fraud, that this laptop is not home to Biden's, that nothing in this is true about Hunter Biden? Is this is this an entirely false flag operation? And the fact is he hasn't been forced to say yes or no to that.

[01:10:36.430]

Right. And and he should be forced to say yes or no that we should know if he thinks this is an entire fabrication or if he thinks it's a real thing that somehow they got hold of this laptop. It really is onto Biden and but it's being distorted or manipulated or that those are two options. He hasn't been the press has let him get away with that.

[01:10:56.680]

So let's say we escape the worst possible outcomes here and arrive at something like the best possible from our point of view, which is, you know, Biden wins in a landslide and there is a peaceful transfer of power. And Trump tries to I mean, it's interesting to consider what he will attempt to do as an ex-president. I guess I'm just wondering what what aftermath can you imagine for Republicans? Just imagine the Republicans who will at that point try to diminish their culpability for having enabled Trump for four years, just culturally, politically, what is this, the process of resetting going to look like?

[01:11:43.990]

It's almost like you need Truth and Reconciliation Commission to give people the space in which to offer the appropriate mea culpas and to get a reboot.

[01:11:54.640]

I'm not sure it's that hard because I think you can make an argument and I'm looking at sort of centre right parties in Europe on this. This there are things that Trump identified and elevated that are real. There is a real worry about large swaths of the working and middle classes in the West being completely left behind by globalization and the power of unrestrained global capitalism. And there is also a genuine question of how fast a population can change demographically without being counterproductive in terms of provoking racist, xenophobic or nativist responses when it is at what is a historic peak.

[01:12:41.330]

I mean, not seen for another over a century of something like 14 percent of the entire population of the United States not having been born in United States, which is as high as it's been since the early 20th century after which there was a very draconian immigration law. I think there's those issues can be integrated into a more sensible and liberal Democratic conservatism that that you can harness patriotism, you can harness traditional values with skepticism towards completely free trade and with some more control and enforcement of immigration laws in a way that is a completely plausible and probably quite popular position.

[01:13:26.490]

And it's something that, for example, in the UK, the Tories were able to do quite successfully and win an 80 seat majority, the biggest majority in in decades in the UK parliament. And even though they're struggling with covid, obviously that's that's quite an achievement. I don't I'm I'm quite optimistic about the possibility of a kind of adjusted conservative. It's not going to be a return to neo conservatism. In foreign policy, it's not going to be a return to neoclassical economics, it can't be because they have become, I think, a victim of their own success.

[01:14:03.660]

So I do think there's a possibility for a figure to emerge to say we get what you were saying. We realized this guy was out of his mind. I mean, they're not going to say it quite that boldly, but they will emphasize things like the rule of law, give and take in a democracy, those kind of values. But what I to be honest, what I really hope is that Biden Biden will be and present himself as being a unifying president.

[01:14:32.310]

And that means really, first of all, finding a way to try to keep us and keep this economy alive during covid, which is going to be brutal in the next six to nine months. But I do think there is a real opening for a major stimulus. I think there's a real opening for major infrastructure investment, for green energy investment. I do think there is an appetite for repairing our traditional alliances, which could be very popular. And I do think there's an appetite for police reform, which is not framed in terms of some sort of great reckoning with institutionalized racism or white supremacy, but which is geared towards bringing the races together around law and order and protecting everyone.

[01:15:22.600]

I, I think there is. A real opening for that kind of center, centrist Democratic position, which is going to actually, in policy terms, be a shift economically to the left. And I think if Biden is able to do that without caving to some of the more extreme cultural and social elements in his coalition, he could be extremely successful. And so I my hope is that we might move away from tribalism.

[01:15:52.640]

I'm encouraged by Biden's quixotic but enduring belief that he can talk to a few Republican senators and get some kind of support. I do think that Biden uniquely does not trigger white voters in a way that another Democrat might. I do think that that there will be a big fight within within the Democrats over who's going to win. And in my darker moments, I think Biden is just out of it and will cave and will will bring in so many crazy ass turkeys into the situation that it will all become terrible.

[01:16:28.430]

But I don't want to give up on that possibility. It's not like Biden. Biden has run a campaign for the center. He has not, even though he has endorsed big infrastructure spending and debt, which I think is probably necessary given the extraordinary crisis of the global economy in this epidemic. But I think in general, he's quite appealing to lots of people, as we've seen. And I think he's also a decent person in the as inasmuch as he wound outrageously lie, he won't stir up racial animosities.

[01:17:05.490]

I was just today, for example, he just came out very simply and said that the riots and looting in Philadelphia last night are just unacceptable and wrong, period. And that's important. It's important that the cops understand that the president is not going to sell them out at every opportunity, even though he's going to be tough in making sure that the injustices that are there are are examined and root it out. You know, I just wonder whether Biden isn't actually a better spokesman for Obama is that Obama was even though Obama was incredibly eloquent, there was there was just something culturally that didn't that clearly it didn't.

[01:17:40.010]

I found him unbelievably inspiring and culturally ennobling and and wonderfully. But clearly, that didn't work for large numbers of people. And they felt alienated to some extent. And Biden is not that the fact that the Democrat Democratic base picked this guy, the fact that. Black voters disproportionately picked this guy is encouraging to me, and it's an opportunity for us to revive a certain liberal Democratic, I mean, those in two small L Molde terms around this rather conventional figure of Biden.

[01:18:17.730]

I can't wait for that. And I can't. I won't. I so desperately want the temperature to go down. I want I want some of the tension to be released. I want I want a president I don't have to think about for a few weeks.

[01:18:31.110]

I want I want someone whose core psyche I'm pretty comfortable with, even though Biden over the years is driving me nuts. And he's irritating in some ways. And he's he's he's he's confusing and and he can be and he has been a blowhard. What's interesting to me is the Biden they've given us in this campaign. It's not that Biden, he is more the elder statesmen come together. Let's all get along. Figure, elderly, figure, someone who represents a past understanding, for example, of bipartisanship.

[01:19:04.230]

And these are things that they have advertised. They put them front and forward. That matters in terms of how the administration will evolve. He's going to have enormous pressure on him from the left. But I think my hope again, I can't guarantee this. And part of me is pessimistic, but my hope is that he can really do that. He can put together a civilized civil coalition around the center. And I think that and I actually think this is another debate.

[01:19:34.980]

If he gets a really big win, I think that helps him against the left because he's going to bring in a whole bunch of Democrats into the Senate and the House. You are going to be answerable to swing voters in marginal seats. And and if you look at the way the Democrats responded, the way they campaigned in twenty eighteen, if that is where Biden goes, then I think it's quite possible he'll he'll, he'll, he'll do very well.

[01:20:01.320]

And but as you point out, he is the elder Biden and you know, to the point where it does not seem irrational to imagine that he's a one term president and he's he may well be succeeded at some point in the middle of his term. By Kamala Harris. I mean, actuarially, it would not be a terrible surprise. So how do you view the prospect of a Harris presidency?

[01:20:34.020]

Well, you ask me that question. This is the part we cut out so as not to give energy to Trump voters.

[01:20:41.190]

Yes, I. I'm not that I wasn't that to be honest with you, there's an element of her that that obviously seems to be tough minded and. I'm certainly in favor of women in high office, and that's a plus as far as I'm concerned, there's an element to her that has seemed a little unserious, to be honest with you. I mean, I remember her in one of those debates where she said that within 100 days, if they didn't pass gun control legislation, I can't prove exactly what she said she would make.

[01:21:13.140]

She would do something. She would enforce it herself. And I'm like Bridon actually in that debate said, well, you know, constitutionally you can't do that. You know, that's not within the powers of the president. And I was like, wow, that's an obviously good point, and I waited for her to respond. She's she's a prosecutor. She knows the law constitutional and she just kind of giggled and laughed and said, oh, come on, Joe, we can do it if we try.

[01:21:37.620]

Yes, we can. And I was like, that is not a serious person. Right.

[01:21:41.640]

But in terms of fears that she is is a fool, you know, avatar of the weakness, I think make her history as a prosecutor would suggest that she's not among the defund the police crowd, whatever lip service she's paid to Wackness.

[01:21:56.760]

No, but she's also seems to have a finger in the wind and is is a somewhat canny politician. And we'll see.

[01:22:06.560]

You have to die for her to succeed. I think there's still quite a chance he'll be hanging on for four more years.

[01:22:11.910]

I don't think he's going to run again. And I do think, therefore, after the midterms, there's going to be a real fight for the future of the party. I can't imagine running for a second term. And I do think that also gives Biden an opportunity. You know, if you are trying to be the unifier, if you're trying to be the person who settles things down and attempts to put us back together in some way, then not having an interest in your own perpetuation for second term gives you a kind of platform to do that more in a bipartisan way.

[01:22:44.100]

And I do think that's Biden's instinct. I do think he misses the old politics. Now, there are many who say, don't be an idiot, the Republicans are evil, that they will they won't compromise. They can't deal. They will probably oppose, for example, unbelievably necessary stimulus during covid. They will probably do what they attempted to do with Biden, with Obama, which is, you know, basically try and cripple his ability to repair the damage.

[01:23:12.780]

That depends how badly they're defeated, I think, and who's left. And it also depends on whether they take the same attitude to Biden that lead you to Obama. And I think Biden does have some serious relationships in the Senate, particularly that helps him.

[01:23:26.370]

I do think he's better at congressional engagement management than Obama was for for psychological reasons. And I do think Biden is capable of of reminding many people in the middle. What I'm thinking, particularly white people say in the Midwest, that the Democrats aren't viscerally in characterological hostile to their interests and ideas. And I think his religious faith plays a part in credentialism him in that way. His background does. And I think especially in a health crisis, I think there's something about his ability to empathize with people who have been stricken with grief and illness in your truckle.

[01:24:09.960]

Yeah. Is is actually important. We need it.

[01:24:13.320]

I mean, there is nothing feigned about that. I mean, whatever, you know, whatever you do or don't know about him as a person, his backstory as someone who has suffered bereavement upon bereavement. And, you know, in the first case, just the most shocking kind. I mean, the idea that someone with these reserves of compassion and just empathy for human suffering, I mean, that alone would be such a change in the office of the presidency and for most of the traditional Irish Catholic families in England, everything.

[01:24:47.230]

But we're all I know that guy. I know that can. And and I know he's he's he's a good guy. I just I just know that. And I can't tell you how deep. Once yearning for justice and human decency in that office, and I do think they've been very effective at putting that across, I do think that. Some kind of in the presidency is a weird thing, it's not a prime minister and there is a role in which the president does, as it were, bind, bind the nation in a series, in a matter of grief.

[01:25:20.830]

And what we have been going through requires some kind of ability to understand that.

[01:25:28.240]

I think, for example, the way Trump dismissed drug abuse in the Hunter, Biden talking to a Coke addict and crackhead, a crackhead or whatever, he called him, such a fucking despicable human

being that I mean, I just that detail alone, the idea that in a presidential debate, one of the candidates would attack the other one as the father of a crackhead.

[01:25:52.870]

I mean, that's where we are.

[01:25:55.120]

But when you are also dealing in the context of this awful epidemic, which has been socially and personally isolating, has been incredibly I mean, we've known and lost people. We've lost people. We couldn't visit, we couldn't see, we couldn't help. I mean, I lost my dad and couldn't even go to a burial, you know, and it's there is an open wound in this country that Trump does nothing but pour salt into. And and we also have a crisis of addiction, which this epidemic has made even worse, that we're seeing the numbers of opioid addiction go up again and fentanyl is spreading again.

[01:26:34.780]

We really do have a spiritual crisis.

[01:26:38.330]

I don't I'm going to trigger you, but I know I've read every one claim that words for my own purposes. OK, let's let's say translate appropriately on my say, OK, we're all dealing with existential questions of life and death.

[01:26:52.000]

And if and it does matter that someone is at the top that feels like he's not seeing you entirely, is instrumental to his political fortunes, that might actually take a moment to be with you and to acknowledge we have never, for example, in this country, we've never really acknowledged the deaths that we have. We could have half a million by the spring. And, you know, other countries have had moments where they've stopped to universally celebrate health care workers or those people.

[01:27:18.550]

There have been moments in which people have stopped for a moment of silence in memory of those we've lost.

[01:27:24.640]

I mean, this is this is the other context that we're in right now of this extraordinary dislocation in which we're all living in this uncanny valley of our previous lives, in which nothing, everything seems similar, but just awfully off key.

[01:27:41.050]

And and and the other thing we learn about these experiences, this human experience, I wrote an essay earlier this year about plagues in history. Is that what they do to societies is they spend you in midair for a minute. And they are moments in which you can actually socially really reorganize and restructure in ways that otherwise might not happen.

[01:28:05.430]

And I do think that we're going to see and I and as someone who was, you know, a supporter of Thatcher, Reagan and a lot of neoliberal economics for a while, I do think that it's a and it's quite plausible argument. If you shift from race and identity to class as a Democrat, you you actually have a unique opportunity to build a consensus around more support for working people, more support for people with addiction, more compassion in it, in that context, without dividing us by race and massive inequality that absolutely needs to be addressed structurally with some redistribution.

[01:28:42.660]

So there's a there's a moment here, an opportunity that, again, you don't see this old dudes necessarily harnessing. But I think he might be, in a paradoxical way, a man for the moment, inasmuch as that, yes, he could preside over this without making people afraid of a sort of leftist takeover because old Uncle Joe's in there also could be quite structurally important in terms of the

economy. But also, I think we want a defense of the West.

[01:29:14.100]

We want someone to stand up and defend our way of life against the emerging powers of East Asia and Russia in ways that our current president has absolutely undermined from the get go. And I do think that's a great opportunity for this dude. And I think he should. By the way, I think he should appoint Obama's secretary of state and send him around the world.

[01:29:37.740]

Again, I don't know, an apology to another apology for a second, but this time with real feeling. Oh, but but so I'm I also think, by the way, we're also going to have this like this unbelievably, riotously debauched 20s when we get past when we got past this, people are going against the roaring 20s.

[01:30:02.490]

We're going to be a hundred years later.

[01:30:04.170]

We're going to be drinking everything, like we'd be doing everything with a lot of drug and so on. And anyway, Biden is a transitional figure, but but primarily a sort of binding up the wounds kind of guy. Now, may be being naive here. I'm not saying that these forces of polarization, of tribalism can disappear, that they're going to they're going to be in here if we get through this period peacefully. And if the decision to vote Biden into is is a big one.

[01:30:34.920]

So it can't really be psychologically reversed. If it's a kind of LBJ Goldwater thing, then you can, I think, fix the thing. Hmm. What I fear most is a narrow win that is brutally contested, that leads to unbelievable dissension and violence in the interregnum.

[01:30:56.580]

I mean, those are the nightmare scenarios that are in front of me. I'm just praying that don't happen. I think there's a chance with a landslide that we can get past them. But, of course, you know, we don't know. We live in history. I think we've discovered that it isn't over.

[01:31:10.950]

Yeah, well, fingers crossed, Andrew. I think it's a great place to leave it. I just want to before we sign off, I just want to say something to your audience. I mean, we're on both of our podcast now, but talking to the audience, Amy, you and I have just spoken about all the ways in which bad incentives and pressure have corrupted the media and how difficult that has become to have a sane and intellectually honest conversation about difficult topics.

[01:31:42.780]

And I really hold you to be one among a handful of people who can be relied upon to take intellectual and reputational risks to advance that honest conversation. And and it's getting harder to do that. And the business model of journalism has been inimical to, you know, ordinary people doing that. And it's been taking, you know, extraordinary people are extraordinarily lucky people to do it. And, you know, you and I don't agree about everything. You and I certainly started out debating things and debating one.

[01:32:14.970]

If it's been a few years since I looked back at our first debate about religious belief. But, you know, it was surprisingly hard-hitting if memory serves and the fact that we have arrived in a place where we're friends and we're this copasetic, it just speaks to something about you that I have not discovered in, you know, everyone I've disagreed with in quite the same way. And so, you know, I just urge your audience to support your current endeavor, because the only thing that will allow you to be the voice we need on all the topics you will touch is a secure business model.

[01:32:53.070]



And so, I mean, they should support your podcast. They should support your your newsletter, as I am. And I'm loving your newsletter, by the way. So I know it's uncomfortable to ask an audience for support and. But it's not uncomfortable at all for me to ask your audience to support you, and so I just really urge people to thank you that so much.

[01:33:12.710]

I mean, one thing we do every week is that I'll write my piece, but we really will publish the strongest dissents and arguments against it and force me to engage them in a reasonable way. And no one else is doing that. It's not a comment section where people yell at you. It is it is an attempt to put me on the spot every week to make sure that I'm kept honest by my own readership and. And yes, I mean, we've we've proven that that this can't happen anymore in so many media institutions that have been that have been captured and so supporting us really, really matters.

[01:33:51.290]

And I'm really grateful. You've been an absolute role model in pursuing this kind of intellectual inquiry, and you've helped me calm down and think seriously and be a better writer and thinker. And my readers do the same thing. And if you want to encourage that kind of discourse, please support us. A paywall goes up this week, and and so a lot of you will will will be in that position of choosing whether to actually back us with your dollars or not.

[01:34:24.500]

It doesn't matter. You know, you're welcome. Whatever.

[01:34:27.440]

But please help us. Please, please support the weekly dish. It's out there on Substory. And I'm so grateful for you to support that. And I'm also thrilled that our this conversation is the first of a series of conversations I'm having with some, I hope, some really interesting people in which we will be having the same kind of conversation, which is not which is an attempt to get to the truth. That's all. I just want to figure out what's true.

[01:34:53.390]

And if you if that's your goal and then please be with us and help me do it nice.

[01:34:59.270]

Well, I certainly hope that politics becomes so boring that our next conversation has nothing to do with it, that we won't even be tempted to talk about politics. That's the world I want to live in. Andrew and Damon, that is what that is.

[01:35:12.080]

The ultimate achievement of a liberal society is to is to have moments where we can leave politics entirely behind now as well, to be continued, brother.

[01:35:20.760]

Absolutely. Thanks so much and God bless.

[01:35:22.910]

I mean, I didn't mean that. It just came out with her, with.