

Title: Kevin Kruse on Fault Lines: A History of the United States Since 1974
Episode: 43

Transcript

Kevin Kruse: When Roosevelt won landslide victories with the new deal, he still had a large contingent of very conservative Democratic senators in the south and some even in the West. When Reagan came into the '80s, there were still a good number of moderate or even liberal Republicans left throughout the country. It really has only been in recent years when we see this real ideological sorting and purging to some great degree.

[Music]

[From Heterodox Academy, this is *Half Hour of Heterodoxy*, conversations with scholars and authors, ideas from diverse viewpoints and perspectives. Here is your host Chris Martin.]

Chris Martin: Kevin Kruse, historian at Princeton University is my guest today. He's the author of *White Flight: Atlanta in the Making of Modern Conservatism*, published in 2005 and *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, published in 2015.

He and his colleague at Princeton Julian Zelizer have a new book coming out January 9th, titled *Fault Lines: A History of the US Since 1974*. We will be talking about that new book in today's episode.

Hi Kevin. Welcome to the show. I would like to start by asking you about the course that this book is based on. When you teach this course, what part of this segment of history do undergraduates find most intriguing?

Kevin Kruse: So when I got to Princeton back in 2000, I had a course that was "US since 1920" and that was a course that I think was probably designed in like 1960.

So it was already kind of a lot of extra material to fit in there and as the years went on and more and more happened after I started in 2000, you know, 9/11 and the war in Iraq, Katrina and the financial meltdown and all that, I decided that it was time to finally break the course into two and Julian Zelizer had joined the faculty by then.

So we broke my old course in half at Watergate in 1974 and started teaching this new course together of the US since 1974. We did that for two years and now Julian does it on his own.

I would say what really – I think what surprises students the most about this period really is just how quickly things had changed. There are a lot of things that they have come to take for granted in their lives and two of those would be that they've all grown up in a post-9/11 world. So they can't imagine what life was like before that and they've all grown up in a world of the internet and they can't imagine what life was like before that.

So really to walk them back in both directions and get them to understand the impact that several media revolutions have had on their lives, but also the way in which politics both foreign and domestic have radically changed over the last four decades and things that they take as the norm were actually once revolutionary ideas.

Things like tax cuts and the way in which kind of the Republican Party has oriented itself. That's all new change. So their entire world is one that they've both taken for granted and then they suddenly realize has a history and that is something that I think is incredibly interesting for them.

Chris Martin: What about the Cold War? Are they also surprised that – I mean because they were born after the end of the Cold War. Are they surprised to learn about what it entailed?

Kevin Kruse: That I think is the – it was the hardest part for – so for Julian and I, when we teach this and when we work about it too, to really to capture the Cold War tensions especially in the Reagan period when we were both young kids.

So we write about things like the Able Archer scare in 1983 or more memorably *The Day After*, that famous ABC movie, that kind of brought on the horrors of nuclear war. Things that we have grown up with and experienced ourselves are completely foreign to the students we teach today. Again, as you know, they were born after the Cold War ended. They were born even after the peace of the '90s now.

So to give them a sense of how that old structure crumbled, the chaos that came in its wake or at least the uncertainty that came in its wake, about what was going to happen now that America was the “only Superpower remaining”.

Then what happened post-9/11 when that – what George HW Bush had called the New World Order was itself upended again. It really is a state of confusion for the country and it's important I think for students to realize that. There have been several – not in their lifetimes but at least in the lifetimes of their professors have been several fundamental reorderings of the global structure.

Chris Martin: Yeah. I know my students are surprised when I talk about how – there was a point when many Democrats were more conservative than the average Republicans and many Republicans were more liberal than the average Democrat. We tend to find that surprising too.

Kevin Kruse: Absolutely, yeah. That's something that I think is really hard to do these days. Well, they've come of age in a world in which the two parties are very clearly and neatly for them laid out on ideological spectrums: Republicans are on the right. Democrats are at the center to the left and it seems – it's hard for them to understand but it was not so neat. So – and actually they ultimately find it comforting to know that this golden age of bipartisanship that they constantly hear about was actually largely just a result of the fact that both parties were ideologically diverse.

So if you were a liberal looking to get liberal legislation passed, you had to look inside your party and outside your party for liberals. If you were a conservative, you looked inside your party and outside your party no matter what party it was.

So there was always naturally a bipartisan veneer to these sort of things but they were just as ideologically rigid as they are today and they just – they weren't as neatly sorted into the party.

So students, when they discover that today, they sort of take some solace in that of “Oh, we've always been this sort of – in some ways sort of ideologically divided.” It's just that it used to have the veneer of bipartisanship on top of that.

Chris Martin: Now you begin the book with four crises. The first is a crisis of legitimacy and I think people generally recognize that Watergate created this crisis of legitimacy. But when it comes together through the crisis of confidence, the crisis of identity and the crisis of equality, how did you decide to pull those themes out of history since 1974?

Kevin Kruse: Well, those titles maybe seem neater than the categories are because what we really wanted to get into were the ways in which the country is driven along lines of politics, the way in which the old economy crumbles, the way in which old racial divisions crumble and new ones rise in their place and last and most importantly, the way in which old assumptions about gender and sexuality have really been transformed.

So the '70s are our moment where all these old certainties are in flux. So we wanted to capture each of those and to try to kind of complicate them in what we hope would be interesting ways. So that early one on the political crisis, that comes out of Watergate. That's a story that a lot of people have written before.

But what we did is we wrote that story about Watergate and its aftermath and the Ford administration and kind of the shortcoming to the Carter administration too.

That's a familiar story but we pair that in that chapter with a section on the changes that happen in the media and they're driven also by Watergate. So the rise of Woodward and Bernstein, the new vogue of investigative reporting is an important one that we tell.

But we also talk about kind of the challenges to the big three TV networks and the major newspapers that starts in the '70s. So we have this process of the fracturing of the media landscape that starts to take place in the '70s. We've got a great – I love the quote we found there from Jann Wenner, the head of Rolling Stone, who is a liberal. But he's pining for this new landscape in which we will have all these different voices and he explicitly says, “If we had a conservative media network, wouldn't that be great?”

I think he would have a different opinion of what that conservative media landscape has yielded today. But there's this moment in the '70s where things are fracturing and falling apart and there are new opportunities here for change. So we wanted to track that across politics, across the economy, across race, across gender and sexuality.

Chris Martin: And you talk about two movies, at least two, *Network* and *Nashville* and I love *Nashville* myself as an immigrant. I learned a lot about America from watching *Nashville*. Do you assign those movies to your undergraduates?

Kevin Kruse: I haven't assigned the full movies. What we tend to do is we tend to show clips and I have – we've shown clips from *Network* or at least when I co-taught the course we did. I don't know if Julian is still doing it.

Nashville is not one I have assigned but *Nashville* holds a special place in my heart because I'm from Nashville. So a lot of those scenes, the performance of the Parthenon, there's a scene inside a church. Actually it was a church that I grew up in. It's a Catholic church. They passed it off as a Baptist one.

But those movies I think – again it's another sense of what we tried to do in the book to escape the kind of dry, political narrative. We would often use movies like that as a way to capture the national mood. So what *Nashville* does for us is it's all about the uncertainty and the chaos as the country is approaching the bicentennial. It's a big theme of the movie. You've got this invisible never-seen third party candidate who is going around, basically calling all politicians of both parties crooks.

Network is an even bigger one for us just because it's such a fantastic film and it perfectly captures the coming insanity of the media landscape. I mean the kind of the reality TV tropes that are in there, the channeling of anger through media, things that really come into focus in later decades are all really kind of clearly seen in the satire in 1976.

Chris Martin: Do you feel like there are movies set in the '80s and '90s and 2000s that are similar to *Nashville* or *Network* in capturing the essence of those decades?

Kevin Kruse: The '70s really are a magical decade in terms of the filmmaking. Really there's nothing quite like those films in terms of their social commentary. There are great ones in the '80s and '90s and beyond.

So if you look at the '80s, some of the movies we talk about there are things like *Wall Street*, which really does satirize the Gordon Gekko "Greed is good" mantra or *Wargames* and again *The Day After*, which you mentioned earlier are movies that really tap into the Cold War tension of the moment I think incredibly well.

Then the '90s, I'm trying to think of something that would take a similar place. There's more of a – it's kind of a return to the escapist blockbuster of the '90s. You don't quite have those social commentary movies.

I'm sure if I thought about it, I would have something. Nothing comes to me off the top of my head.

Chris Martin: Now jumping to the bit about Jimmy Carter, the candidate in *Nashville*, the candidate you don't see, it seems like maybe it was modeled on Carter and you talk about the

Carter presidency and how he marketed himself as an outsider. In some ways Donald Trump also marketed himself as an outsider. But one contrast we see is the way the Democratic Party reacted to Carter is different from the way the Republican Party has reacted to Trump. Can you talk a bit about what changed over that period?

Kevin Kruse: Well, that's a good point. They are clearly both outsiders and Carter really does – even before Watergate, he's laying down these roots of seeing that his lack of DC experience is actually going to be a plus. This becomes a steady trope over the coming years. You can see it in terms of how Reagan runs, how Clinton runs, how George W. Bush runs, even to some small degree, even though he's running as a senator, as Barack Obama runs.

But certainly Trump makes the most of this so that outsider theme of coming in from beyond the political gridlock and shaking things up is certainly a theme we see throughout the book. Now in terms of the Carter presidency and the relationship to the party, it is radically different and I think what happens here is that Carter comes of power in the wake of Watergate, in the wake of the 1974 landslide election of House and Senate Democrats.

In '76, he unseats an incumbent president and in many ways it feels like this is going to be the new norm and Democrats are going to be in charge. The idea that the Republicans would come surging back four years later with Reagan is far removed from most people's awareness.

So I think the Democrats feel that they can afford a little bit of purity politics in terms of what they want and Carter is deviating from the norm on a lot of traditional policies. He's embracing regulation. He is calling for – he is the coming-out party for evangelicals in national politics.

So a lot of ways in which Carter doesn't fit with the kind of the broader swath of the Democratic Party in '76 and why you have the challenge made by Ted Kennedy in 1980 is that the Democrats are – feel that they're going to win no matter what. Basically, that this is their moment and so why not have somebody who better reflects the Democratic Party.

You don't have that with Trump these days. You saw there was a – some spirited challenges to him in the 2016 primaries. But once he got the party nomination and certainly once he was elected president, the rest of the party has completely fallen in line. It is clearly his party now and a way in which the Democratic Party was never truly Jimmy Carter's party back in the 1970s.

That both insulates him from challenges to some great degree. But it also means that when the collapse comes as it seemingly is on its way for the administration, that means that the party itself is going to go down too. They're going to really own this. It's going to look more like the Republicans in 1974 going down with Nixon than anything that happened with the Democrats in 1980.

Chris Martin: Another thing you talk about in the 1970s chapter is white flight and you've written an entire book about that. I'm sure some of our listeners have read that book. I have. That book was about 10 years old now. Given the research you've done since then, when you reflect on that book, is there anything you would change?

Kevin Kruse: Yeah, absolutely. And I would say I have not – I have spoken more about *White Flight* in the past year than I did in the first decade after it was published, which is – you know, for an author, it’s nice to have people talk about your book.

I would rather not feel the need to talk about the themes that are in that book today because what it means is that some of the issues that I talked about there, particularly early on in the book, have come roaring back.

So you’ve read it and some of your listeners may have read it too. In the early part of that book, I talk about how White supremacy in the early – well, in the late 1940s or early 1950s. White supremacy has to undergo a radical series of makeovers where they have to hide the truly outrageously explicitly racist statements that they previously made and learn to speak instead in a more respectable language of white rights, of white responsibilities, of property rights, of taxpayer rights, of things like that.

So the course of that second chapter of the book is one that really traces the change in White politics going from an explicitly neo-Nazi organization called the Columbians into the Ku Klux Klan, into more respectable homeowner’s associations where they didn’t wear brown shirts or white hoods but just wore their clothes as taxpayers and neighbors and citizens.

So that book really from that chapter on traces the way in which racism becomes respectable. Well, we’ve seen in the last couple of years the resurgence of literal neo-Nazis, the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, of kind of an outspoken white supremacist politics that is from the president’s own lips deemed to be filled with very fine people.

So that’s a radical change. So if I were to have to go back and rewrite *White Flight* now, I think I would have to change one of the fundamental arguments of that, which is that racism becomes much more subtle and thereby becomes stronger.

It’s not subtle anymore and so in a lot of ways, it has really been a bit shocking to me to see that and we’ve come back to this place. I thought we had left in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s.

Chris Martin: And there’s another contrast here which is the nature of suburbs has changed. The suburb that elected Newt Gingrich to Congress is now about 50 percent Democratic. Is that something you would also write about?

Kevin Kruse: Absolutely. So there it’s a reminder that – and this I think would actually underscore something that I emphasize in the book, which is that it’s not about the place itself. It’s not that the suburbs are inherently more conservative. It’s in the process of fleeing to the suburbs that the suburbanites of the 1970s and the 1980s really create their conservative politics that lead them to elect someone like Gingrich.

Those politics are still there. They’ve just moved on again. They’ve moved on to what we would call the “exurbs,” the next layer out. They’re certainly live and well there. That’s something that I track in the book that the – the hottest, the brightest, reddest spots for George W. Bush in 2000 were these exurb counties further out.

The suburbs that have been left behind in 2000 had gone from being 99 percent white like they were in 1970 down to about 70 percent white and they're much more diverse today and in fact a lot of those inner ring suburbs are not just ethnically diverse in terms of older communities that have been there but we see newer waves of immigrants. That's the first place they had. It used to be they would head to central cities. Now they head to these inner ring suburbs.

So they're incredibly diverse and with that diversity has come a change in their politics. So the suburbs have certainly not – are no longer the end point of White flight but White flight is still out there. It's just the process that is leading out to the exurbs.

Chris Martin: There are some themes related to race and gender that remain constant. But one thing that has changed is attitudes towards abortion among evangelicals which you cover in the book. Can you talk a bit about how evangelicals went rather quickly from being rather tolerant of abortion to being anti-abortion just like Catholics were?

Kevin Kruse: That's actually on a book – rests on a terrific book by a scholar named Neil J. Young. The book is called *We Gather Together* and it's a fascinating study and we crib heavily from his findings because what Neil shows in that book and what we explained in ours is that we've – again, this is something that would shock my students today.

We think of evangelicals and fundamentalists as being strikingly opposed to the liberalization of abortion and truth when Roe happened, they were actually strongly for it. So you can see this in the late '60s and early '70s before the real right to life movement has taken off in the late '70s and become a mainstay of religious right.

But a decade before that in the late '60s and early '70s, you see a large number of very prominent evangelical and fundamentalist leaders coming out in support of the liberalization of abortion. So Billy Graham says that he is a strong proponent of what he calls "planned parenthood". He strongly supports the liberalization of abortion laws.

There's a reason his home state of North Carolina liberalizes its laws. The head of the Southern Baptist Convention comes out in favor of this and in this, it's not a controversial stance as Neil's book shows.

Pools of Southern Baptists, of Sunday school teachers, of preachers, of people who you would think of as kind of the backbone of the Southern Baptist Convention. They are pulling 70, 80 percent in favor of the liberalization of abortion and the reason they do this is that they strongly see abortion as the Catholic issue.

They see it as wholly bound up in the teachings of the Catholic Church and this is a period in which Baptists in particular but many Protestants are still strongly hostile to the political stances of the Catholic Church. So it's only over the course of the later '70s with a rise of a more ecumenical religious right when it tries to make connections between evangelicals and fundamentalists and conservative Catholics, conservative Mormons and even some conservative Jews to find a common ground there that will unite them politically and it's at that point that

people like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson start speaking out finally against abortion and making it a mainstay of their movement.

But it's a change that happens with almost whipsaw speed over the course of the '70s from 1974 where these groups are strongly in favor of abortion rights to 1978, 1979 where they're strongly against. It's a remarkable switch.

Chris Martin: And another issue that you talk about is the rise of Religious Right in general. You've written a book about that. Religion has always played a role in politics in almost every country on the planet. What is unique about the Religious Right in America since the 1970s?

Kevin Kruse: That's a great question. I would say – well, following off that answer you just gave about abortion, what's really remarkable is the way in which it becomes politically very sharply conservative but religiously very ecumenical.

So this is the thrust behind – in fact, the reason for the name the moral majority, is they realize that there is a majority that believes in the principles of the Decalogue, basically the principles of the Ten Commandments.

Once you reduce religion to that vague level, it's easy to find common cause and so what's ironic about or maybe unusual about the religious drive in politics from the '80s on is that at some levels, it's largely divorced from scripture and so it's not Baptists advancing the Baptist line or Catholics advancing the Catholic line.

It's rather this broad, vaguely religious but kind of incredibly capacious in terms of the denominations swept up in this movement. But one that moves in directions that to some don't seem to be rooted in scripture at all.

The campaigns against gays and lesbians, there's not a lot of New Testament lines about gays and lesbians. There's not a lot on abortion and a lot of things that would have maybe skewed these true believers to liberal policy measures. I'm talking about taking care of the poor, the environment and things like that, are largely ignored.

So it's a broadly ecumenical movement and that actually gives it its real power and sweep because you papered over the divisions that have long kept these different religious communities at odds and it said, "Well, what generally unites us?" and it's as vague – it's what I call in that book *One Nation Under God*, I call it a lowest common denomination religion.

So once you've got that kind of vague sense of religiosity, that's enough to kind of unite these different camps that ordinarily would have been at war with one another.

Chris Martin: In the chapter *Turning Right*, you talk about Joseph Coors and Richard Mellon Scaife, two figures who have had an outsize influence on American politics but whom few Americans have heard of. How do you approach those two figures when you teach this class?

Kevin Kruse: We approach them as part of a story about the rebuilding of conservatism. It's that there had been – again in the wake of Watergate and we may be coming back to this now. Who knows? But in the wake of Watergate, there was a real sense that the Republican Party was dead, that Nixon had – and because of the party's loyalty to Nixon, had destroyed it all. A Republican operative says you're never going to be able to market the word "Republican" again. It's like the Edsel or Typhoid Mary. It's doomed.

So there's a movement actually to start anew, what they were going to call a Conservative Party and people like William Rusher, the publisher of National Review is behind this. They talk about 1976 having Ronald Reagan and George Wallace run on a new Conservative ticket that actually probably would have done quite well.

So what we talk about when we talk about people like Scaife and Coors and the other ones who have really fueled this rise of the conservative think tank is the way in which conservatism rebuilds itself in the '70s and it does so with those new think tanks which help provide a funding but more importantly I think direction for national politics.

They provide these – the Heritage Foundation pioneers these one-page papers which really help orient political figures especially new congressmen who don't have a lot of time to read all these bills, to orient them in a conservative direction.

So the people like these think tanks are important in terms of providing an intellectual direction for conservatism. Groups like the religious right that we just mentioned and other new right organizations are important for providing sort of the grassroots support for this and then it all comes together. Again as people like Rusher had hoped, under the leadership of someone like Ronald Reagan was able to patch together these different new almost resistance movements to the establishment of the 1970s and patch them together into a new coalition that then becomes the winning accommodation in 1980.

Chris Martin: When you talk about polarization, one of the figures you cite is Norm Ornstein. You cite Norm Ornstein and Thomas Mann and I've had Norm on the show before. Their narrative is that the Republican Party has in their words become "an insurgent outlier" that does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the Democratic Party. Do you feel that argument is right? Do you feel like they get that right?

Kevin Kruse: Yeah, yeah. We would all hand them quite a lot again because we really find their analysis to be dead on and the fact that it comes from Ornstein and Mann who have a long – obviously a long history of reporting on Washington DC but also I think a well-earned reputation as being a fair judge outside of kind of the partisan noise that we see from both sides of being a fair judge of what's going on. But then to have come to that conclusion that they did in that last book is really remarkable. But we think ultimately dead on and I think what we've seen since the publication of that book only emphasizes just how right they were. If we're talking about the Republican Party increasingly becoming an outlier, which is – in many fundamental ways, it's hard for observers to say this. But in many fundamental ways, hostile to fundamental values of democracy.

I think we've seen that in recent years. We've seen that in the States. We saw it in North Carolina. We've seen it recently in moves made in Wisconsin and Michigan where the Republican Party lost the election in different ways and then went about a process of sort of salting the earth to make sure that the Democrats who won were hamstrung from the start to subvert the will of the voters.

So I think we've seen kind of the Mann-Ornstein thesis really play out in very prominent ways in the last election cycle.

Chris Martin: Speaking of Wisconsin and North Carolina and things that are happening at the federal level, some people including Madeleine Albright and Tim Snyder among others have talked about fascism or totalitarianism as appropriate ways to think of these movements. Do you think those are appropriate terms to use here?

Kevin Kruse: I've personally shied away from those terms simply because I think that they're – I'm not sure how productive they are for the conversation. So I can see why others would use those terms. I worry that they almost have the opposite effect of – rather informing people of shutting down the conversation. So I personally haven't used those. Fascism, I haven't used. Authoritarian I think is certainly clear. Anti-democratic, I think it's coming into focus.

So I have a skittishness perhaps unwarranted about using that term myself. But I think those who do are finding themselves on stronger and stronger ground with each passing month.

Chris Martin: Do you think there are some states that are bipartisan enough that those changes won't occur right now?

Kevin Kruse: No, nothing comes to mind. I mean the ones that I would have previously held out as offering some hope are precisely the ones where we're seeing the hardest turn. I think it's because these are states that could be considered purple in the red-blue perspective and because they're on that tipping point that you've seen the state Republican parties in these various places play such hard ball is that – because that makes such a huge difference and they're worried about them tipping back to blue. So they're doing all they can to hold them down.

Chris Martin: E. J. Dionne has a book that covers roughly the same period as yours and his argument there is that conservatives have become steadily angrier because the Republican Party has promised things that they can't really deliver. What do you think about that argument?

Kevin Kruse: I think that's right. I think that's right and I think – yeah, and this is where the part about the media, which is a huge through line that we have in the book is I think so important because those promises made by Republican officials promises to sort of magically stop immigration or to recover a lost industrial economy as Trump tries to do now, to magically win a trade war, those kind of things. These promises are made and they become amplified by this right wing media, things like Fox News or conservative talk radio or internet sites like Breitbart now.

They've become amplified by that. But what happens is when the politicians back away from those promises as they inevitably do when they realize that they – they can't outlaw abortion,

which is a classic one. The religious right kept on being told that – you know, elect us and we will undo Roe. Well, that has been there for 45 years now.

As these promises keep getting made, they get amplified by the media. But then once the politician stops saying it, their words are still echoing through that media, right?

So the promises have been made and there's a new sort of demand on the part of this constituency that they – they were promises and they need to be held accountable. So that has been something that we've seen throughout the last few decades of this tension between the conservative media, which is demanding a sort of purity on these issues and these political leaders who back away.

Now, one thing that has changed dramatically in the last few years is that President Trump made all of these promises and now that he's backing away from them, he's actually not being held accountable by these conservative media forces.

So Fox News has not – you know, flayed him alive for demanding that. Americans now pay for the wall that he insisted Mexico was going to pay for, right? Or different changes that he has made in terms of – or the success of the trade war which they hyped endlessly has now really come back to haunt him in terms of the economic result. I think we're seeing this in the stock market now. We're seeing this with unemployment as major factories are closing like jam plants.

So normally this would be a moment where the conservative media would then hold those figures accountable as they did in the '90s and the early 2000s with the Bush administration and now they're really just kind of carrying water for him and whatever he wants to do, they're saying that's what he always said he would do.

So that I think is perhaps going to hurt their credibility in the long term. But in the short term, it's really keeping people on the right in line with Trump where they would have been in a revolt in a previous time.

Chris Martin: You talk about scorched-earth politics. Maybe returning to Ornstein here. You talk about scorched earth politics when you're talking about Republican opposition to the Stimulus Bill and the Affordable Care Act. You note that the ACA was the first time any major piece of – I'm quoting here, "The first time any major piece of legislation domestic or foreign passed on strictly partisan lines," and that's even though the ACA was modeled on Romneycare and the Heritage Foundation Plan. Given that it was modeled on conservative plans, why do you think opposition to it was so stark?

Kevin Kruse: Well, so Obama and his supporters in Congress had modeled them on those conservative plans in the naïve hope that there was some promise of bipartisanship, that they would be able to – that they would be able to find conservative – or maybe not conservative but moderate Republican voters to come over and support these Republican ideas.

That's clearly why they did it. That's why a third of the stimulus were tax cuts previously proposed by Republican members of congress. That's why the ACA was, as you noted, based in

equal parts on what Mitt Romney had done in Massachusetts and some ideas from old Heritage Foundation think-tank proposals.

So that was the goal was we will meet the Republicans maybe not halfway but a third of the way at least. We're using the numbers of stimulus and that will win over some support. What they didn't count on was the more hardball tactics of Mitch McConnell in the Senate and Eric Cantor then in the house who explicitly told their caucuses that what this new president is trying to do is trying to win some bipartisan cred.

So what we can do is simply deny him that. We can break his promise to craft bipartisan solutions. We can break his promise for him simply by refusing to vote for anything he proposes. That is a line explicitly laid out by both McConnell and Cantor in late 2008, early 2009 if they're going to hold their caucus united and in line and it largely holds true.

So the stimulus is, as you know, entirely on party lines. At the Obamacare vote, you get three Republican senators cross lines and are so vilified for it that one of them, Olympia Snowe, retires from congress afterwards, saying that it's – it has somewhat become too hostile. Arlen Specter switches to the Democratic Party where he tries to make a new home there and ultimately fails and Susan Collins hangs on as the last one of these moderates. She's now the last moderate Republican in New England. I don't know if we would call her a moderate anymore. She seems to be voting increasingly in lockstep with Trump. But she's the last of an old breed of Republican in the northeast that has been completely wiped out in the last few years.

So what we've seen is that the parties have become much more ideologically rigid and it's not a both sides issue. There's much more diversity of thought I think as we saw in the Democratic primary of 2016 on the Democratic side. But the Republicans have really become obsessed with a very narrow and much more conservative vision than they had before. So they're trying to hold together internally and anyone who is – who does not fall in line with this is dismissed as a RINO, as a Republican in name only. There's increasingly less and less space for those RINOs who are – what we would have previously thought of as moderate or even liberal Republicans. They don't exist anymore.

Chris Martin: Do you see any precedent for this in American politics?

Kevin Kruse: Not to this degree. I mean we've seen a – the steady march to the right in the Republican Party over previous decades but there was still home for these moderate northeastern Republicans or we used to have moderate Republicans in California as well. In both places, they have been largely wiped out.

We didn't really see this with previous moves in which we had. Even a president coming in in – with massive support. So then when Roosevelt won landslide victories with the new deal, he still had a large contingent of very conservative Democratic senators in the south and some even in the West.

When Reagan came into the '80s, there were still a good number of moderate or even liberal Republicans left throughout the country. It really has only been in recent years when we see this real ideological sorting and purging to some great degree.

Chris Martin: Now one issue that's not covered in much detail in the book is foreign affairs. You don't talk much about Israel or the brokering of the Northern Ireland peace accords. Is there a reason you left that out of the book?

Kevin Kruse: Purely for matters of space. To cover so much of four decades in 400 pages was a tight task. So there were invariably things that were left on the cutting-room floor.

So as much as we would have loved to go into those issues, the revolutions in terms of the fall of Apartheid in South Africa. It would have been another one I would have loved to do. There was just simply not enough room to focus on that.

Part of this then comes from the fact that the courses we teach – we have a foreign policy course at Princeton. So the courses we teach invariably focus more on domestic politics than they do on foreign policy. But Julian wrote a book on national security politics, which would certainly help shape our view of what was meant by the end of the Cold War, by the rise of the war on terror.

But those big sweeping transformations are the ones that get the bulk of the attention in terms of the foreign policy side and things like Irish reunification just didn't fit.

Chris Martin: And coming back to the topic of the media, we talked about *Network*. But when it comes to contemporary social media, one thing that a lot of Americans are concerned about now is manipulation and deliberately fictionalized news. How do you prepare your students to deal with that world?

Kevin Kruse: That's a great question. I mean at a certain level, I think we do what we've always done as historians, which is to teach our students how to analyze evidence and a key part of that is to determine the veracity. But even once you've done that is to really question, "Who is this aimed at. Who's speaking? What are their assumptions? What are their arguments? What's the reception?"

So that fundamental approach that we would use to a primary document from 100 years ago, it's something they can use for a primary document today. But what they need to do is they need to do what they would do back then which is then to put that individual piece of evidence into a broader context and if it doesn't make sense, if it seems out of place, then to really interrogate why is that. Then is this a valid piece of evidence? Is this verifiable?

Chris Martin: Do students express surprise when they learn about sources that they thought were reliable but then turned out not to be?

Kevin Kruse: Oh, always. I mean the way in which anyone who would – you know, have fallen for a – maybe not an outright con but an urban legend is always kind of surprised and always a little saddened to find out but it's not true. So what I do, when I talk about the creation of

interstate highways is the common belief that one mile out of every five miles of an interstate highway was made straight because the highways were sold as the national defense highways and that straight part of the highway had to be there so jets could land in case of World War Three.

Chris Martin: Right.

Kevin Kruse: Some students have always heard this. It's something they heard from their parents, their grandparents, whatever. Actually that's not true. I've been to the Eisenhower archives. It's actually not a real thing. But what the urban legend does in – and this is where it is useful still is to say, look, people believe that because they knew these highways were linked to the Cold War, right?

So that's an argument that I make in my lectures about Eisenhower's domestic policies of how you can only get anything done if you framed it as supporting the Cold War.

So look, the interstate highways were sold as a Cold War measure. That part about the jets in one mile being straight out of every five isn't true but actually the fact that once the people believe that or had heard that underscores the larger point about these are the national defense highways.

So there's a way of using, of kind of busting the myth as it were, but using the creation of that myth. Why do people believe this in the first place as a way of teaching the truth?

Chris Martin: And I come from a background that straddles social psychology and sociology and one thing I've noticed in the transition from social psych to sociology is the ahistorical nature of a lot of the social psychological work on race. So if you were to recommend books to social psychologists and other social scientists who sometimes take an ahistorical approach and want to understand the history of race and politics in America better, are there three or four books just on the topic of race that you would recommend to those people?

Kevin Kruse: Oh, that's a good question. I mean I would say George Fredrickson's work on race and racism. In fact I'm blanking on the title. He may have a thin title just called "Race". It's a fantastic one.

I think John Higham's book which came in the '50s has really – *A Stranger in the Land* has really held the test of time. It's a great study of the motivations behind nativism and the anti-immigration sentiment. A recent book that I think does a great job of explaining – maybe not the mindset of racism but how racism can become so respectable is Linda Gordon's book on the second Klan, which just came out last year. I reviewed it for *The Nation*. It's a great book and it makes clear the way in which white supremacy can take root simply by seeming wholly respectable and wholesome in a lot of ways.

We don't think of the Klan this way. But the Klan of the 1920s was one that would appear in churches, would – head to carnivals and festivals. You know, Ferris wheels filled with Klansmen and things like that. What her book does is it really makes clear how once it receives a stamp of

respectability, that these racist organizations can really flourish and it's a very dangerous moment.

Chris Martin: Do you think there's something unique about White supremacy and racism in the United States in comparison to nativism and racism in other countries in the world?

Kevin Kruse: That's a good question. I don't think so. I mean I think we've had enough comparative studies to know there are similarities and differences. There has been a lot of great work on the connections between say southern segregation and anti-immigration and what the Germans, what Nazis pick up from that. There have been enough comparative studies between South African apartheid and segregation, discrimination in America to know there's nothing entirely unique about what goes on in America. We like to think of ourselves as exceptional. In a lot of our ways, our racism is unexceptional.

Chris Martin: Now jumping away from the book for a second to your Twitter feed, one person you've debated quite consistently over the last year or two is Dinesh D'Souza. Can you tell me a bit about how you decided to take him on?

Kevin Kruse: There wasn't a conscious plan. It's just that his tweets kept popping up in my feed, from other people responding to him. There was no one kind of quoting him approvingly and this was at a point in which I – I hadn't decided to take him on. But I had grown into this role as many other historians on Twitter thankfully have, of realizing that we have a duty to correct falsehoods and whether they're inadvertent mistakes made by journalists, hopefully inadvertent, or whether they are deliberate lies being pushed by partisans and commen that we have a duty to push back against them.

So he was at this time one of the ones making the most egregious claims about things that I had studied and written on for decades. That it became inevitable that I had to respond to him.

Chris Martin: Do you find that students coming into Princeton sometimes think of him as a reliable source?

Kevin Kruse: No. I've never had anyone think of him as a – no. At least, they haven't admitted it to me. This is – again, I think we – I should underscore that I have plenty of conservative students and some of them are – you know, I have plenty of liberal students too and some of them are great. Some of them are not great students. Some of my conservative students are fantastic students. The best student I had a couple of years ago. I think he now works at the Heritage Foundation. He was one of the most outspoken conservatives on campus and he did the work.

He never would have brought a D'Souza into the classroom. He had certain conservative authors I know he liked and we would talk about in office hours at great length. I respected his point of view there. But no, I've never had a student come in with D'Souza. I think they can pretty easily see through the con.

Chris Martin: If you were to recommend some conservative historians to chapters of young Republicans or any kind of conservative organizations, whom would you suggest they invite to campuses?

Kevin Kruse: In terms of conservative historians, Don Critchlow has done some good work and wrote a nice book on Phyllis Schlafly, which I think is a story that – is a story that a lot of conservatives don't know. But I think a lot of liberals don't know. I've always recommended Schlafly's story. If you don't know, Schlafly was the one who basically – she's on the cover of *Fault Lines*. She was the one who led the opposition to the ERA and was a brilliant political tactician. You don't have to agree with what she wanted to do. But the way she did it was just incredibly brilliant and effective of lobbying these statehouses and realizing that was the real pivot point for this debate.

Liberals were all focused on the *national* issue and what Don shows in this book is how she mobilizes a certain new image of family values to derail what had seemed like a gimme. The Equal Rights Amendment was sure to pass, everyone thought, and she stops them dead in the tracks with some really effective organizing.

Another good one would be Geoff Kabaservice. Maybe I'm mispronouncing his name. I've only seen it in print. I apologize if I am. Who has written a great deal on the Republican Party and he is a conservative himself and I think with great insight.

Chris Martin: Can you tell me a bit about what you have next on the agenda now that this book is coming out in January?

Kevin Kruse: Yes. So my next project is I'm doing a study of John Doar and Doar was the point man for the Kennedy and Johnson administrations on Civil Rights. He's like the Forrest Gump of the Civil Rights era, except he's not an imbecile. He's on the ground at virtually every major event. He's there when Ole Miss is integrated. He spends the night with James Meredith in his dorm room. He's there when George Wallace was standing in the schoolhouse door. He prosecutes the Mississippi Burning murders. He marches ahead of the Selma to Montgomery March. He helps write the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act. So he's all over these major flash points of the Civil Rights era and he is this juncture point between the Federal Government and grassroots organizers on the ground.

So his papers have never before been accessed. About 230 giant banker's boxes full of material that I've been going through the last year or so and just the level of detail alone that this project is going to give me on things that we thought we knew everything about like illness or Selma is really going to be remarkable. What I'm really excited about is that because he sits at this point between the federal government and the local movement, it's just really going to let me interrogate the connections between the national and the local.

As you know, there has long been a debate among historians but the general public at large about who really ultimately deserves the most credit for the Civil Rights changes.

In the 2008 primaries, this is kind of memorably captured when Obama said Martin Luther King was the one who deserved most of the credit. Hillary Clinton said, no, LBJ was really more important and the truth is really as historians will often tell you, it's a little of both.

So what Doar is going to let me do is really to assess out where individual responsibility lays but also understand more importantly the way in which power flowed between these different places, between the federal, state and local level, between grassroots activists and government agents in DC and to think about how all these parts really fit together and how they really operated. So I'm really excited about that project.

Chris Martin: Was he also involved with policies related to affirmative action and diversity?

Kevin Kruse: I hadn't gotten to that part yet. He resigns in '67. So I think it's right when the affirmative action policies of the Johnson administration are taking root. So he's out of government in '67. He comes back in actually during Watergate. He's a counsel to the House Judiciary Committee during Watergate. But he's not really there for the real formative years of affirmative action policy.

Chris Martin: All right. Well, that about wraps it up. Do you have any closing words before we wrap up?

Kevin Kruse: I think we've said it all. This is fantastic.

Chris Martin: Well, thank you for joining us on the show.

Kevin Kruse: It was my pleasure.

[Music]

Chris Martin: *Fault Lines* comes out in Kindle and hard cover on January 9th. You can follow Kevin Kruse on Twitter @KevinMKruse and you can find links to the books that we discussed in today's show notes.

My next episode features Chad Wellmon, professor at the University of Virginia. He's a historian of intellectual thought and we will be talking about his recent essay in which he responds to Jonathan Haidt's assertion that universities must choose between one telos, truth or social justice.

If you have any comments about today's episode, you can contact me at podcast@heterodoxacademy.org or tag me on Twitter, @ChrisMartin76. Thanks for listening.

[This podcast is produced by Heterodox Academy. Find us online at www.HeterodoxAcademy.org, on Twitter @HdxAcademy and on Facebook.]

[End of transcript]

Transcription by Prexie Magallanes as [Trans-Expert](#) at Fiverr.com