

**Title: Kevin Kruse and Julian Zelizer, Fault Lines (recorded live at the Decatur Book Festival)**

**Episode: 66**

**Podcast: Half Hour of Heterodoxy**

### **Transcript**

Kevin Kruse and Julian Zelizer appeared at the AJC Decatur Book Festival this year to talk about *Fault Lines: A History of the U.S. Since 1974*. This was recorded on September 1, 2019 at the First Baptist Church of Decatur.

[Applause]

**Chris Martin:** Thank you, Debra, for that introduction and thank you all for coming today. As Debra mentioned, I'm affiliated with Georgia Tech. I also host a podcast called Half Hour of Heterodoxy. Both Kevin and Julian have been on that podcast. Kevin's episode was shortly after New Year's Day and Julian's episode was shortly after Valentine's Day.

I also want to mention that we are recording today's session so this will be an episode on the podcast soon. So the Q&A session will be recorded. If for any reason you don't want your question featured on the podcast, you can talk to me afterwards and I'll make sure it's not on there.

Both of you probably know this already about their background but they are both historians of Princeton University. This is Kevin's second visit to the Book Festival. He spoke here about ten years ago about his first major book, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. He is also the author of *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, which was published in 2015.

This is Julian's first visit here. He is the author of five previous books including a 2010 book about *Jimmy Carter* named by the Washington Post one of the best presidential biographies and a 2015 book, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Lyndon Johnson, Congress, and the Battle for the Great Society*. His next book which we will touch on is about *Newt Gingrich*.

Now to begin, I want to talk about ...

[Applause]

**Julian Zelizer:** Coming soon.

**Chris Martin:** Yes.

**Chris Martin:** OK. Yes. So to begin, this book is based on a course that is taught at Princeton University. It's a modified version of an older course that covered the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So Kevin and Julian updated the syllabus and changed it into a course about the last 40 years.

And I thought we talk about the Cold War because that's one of the most important events of this era. The end of the Cold War is important. But you are teaching undergraduates who are born sometimes 10 years after the Cold War ended. How do you convey the seriousness of the Cold War and how influential it was in shaping our politics?

**Julian Zelizer:** It's difficult and it's funny for many people in the room. It's obvious what the Cold War was. And for the purposes of our course and the book, what it meant when the Cold War started to come to an end in the late '80s and really ends by the early '90s. And it's difficult.

And so in the course itself, part of what we do is we have a lot of video and audio not just to flourish the lectures but to actually try to show through images of the wall falling or coverage of Reagan's negotiations with Gorbachev or showing and talking about conservatives attacking Reagan for simply having these kind of diplomatic interactions, the magnitude of what this event was.

A little earlier in the '80s, we write a lot in the book and the course covers the Nuclear Freeze movement to try to really talk about in the early '80s the real fear that existed that nuclear war was possible and just how heated events had become.

So we try many different techniques. And in the book, we paid great attention to that. And part of what we argue is in the end it doesn't reshape politics here as much as you would think. But we are cognizant of the need to bring back what that were meant.

**Chris Martin:** Go ahead, Kevin.

**Kevin Kruse:** That was beautifully said.

[Laughter]

**Chris Martin:** And another shocking thing for many undergraduates is the party overlapped, the parties overlapped ideologically so you couldn't – if you randomly picked a Democratic politician or Republican politician, you didn't necessarily pick a Liberal or a Conservative. How do you convey that overlap and the change from that era to the present when you are talking about this?

**Kevin Kruse:** Well, that's really something. So you mentioned this course, I'll back up a second, this course was one that I inherited when I started in Princeton in 2000 and it was a course that I think have been designed in 1960 and it was titled The US Since 1920.

Well, as you might know, some stuff happened after 1960 and I've inherited this course that kept getting bigger and bigger and more crowded and more crowded. And when Julian joined the faculty a few years after me, we talked that we would finally cut it up. And so this post-'74 class became one that we co-taught together and the book came out of that, but Julian runs that on his own now and I have the – I did the 1920 to 1974 part. And it's in that course that I really deal and dig into that issue of the overlapping ideologies or the parties.

And you are right, it is something that students and I think maybe many people in the general public take for granted that of course, Republicans are all Conservative, maybe towards the center. Democrats are Liberal, maybe towards the center. But there's a clear ideological sorting. And of course, that's not the way it was for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I think today when people look back for that bipartisan age, they forget that they had to be bipartisan back then. If you were a Liberal, you had to find the Liberal votes in your party and the Liberal votes in the other party. If you are Conservative, you have to find them in your party and the other party. That's how things got done. And so the sorting has moved a lot of that natural need for bipartisanship out of the process.

But the way to really – to do that and talk about that is to bring some of these past figures to life to show them, yes, there were Liberal Republicans in the '60s. And yes, there were some Democrats who were Conservatives to really bring these figures to life and to show how that sorting out started from the '60s onward.

**Julian Zelizer:** And it takes time for writing to younger audiences but also more mature audiences. We really forget how this evolution happened from the 1960s. I mean that has been part of our mission.

And back to your – I'm going to think, back to the Cold War question, my first job was at SUNY Albany. I'll never forget. I had a huge lecture on the US since the '30s. And I taught this great lecture I thought on the Cold War and I had all these things I learned as a graduate student. I gave this multipoint lecture with lots of examples about the Cold War. Finished. I was walking out. And one student nicely said, "Professor, can I ask you a question?" She was like, "What's the Cold War?"

[Laughter]

And that always stuck with me and it stuck with me as we wrote this book, whether it's about the end of the Cold War, whether it's about how divided parties became pretty internally united that part of what we are trying to do with the book is recapture things we assumed we understand but actually were more dynamic, complex, and contested since the 1970s than we remember.

**Chris Martin:** Right. I actually moved to America in 1995 and I remember when I moved here, a friend of mine tried to explain the difference between the parties to me and it was actually a complex discussion which it would not be that complex right now.

**Julian Zelizer:** Well, Newt Gingrich ran – I mean he replaced John Flynt as some of you might remember was a Southern Democrat of a different variety than most current Democrats. And Gingrich was one of the people who understood the new possibilities, partisan possibilities that were unfolding in areas of the country like the South.

**Chris Martin:** So one of the people featured on the cover of your book is Phyllis Schlafly. The peak of her influence was in the 1970s so she is another figure that younger Americans might not

be that familiar with. Yet, she was perhaps as influential as some presidents. Can you talk about her influence and why she is such an interesting figure?

**Kevin Kruse:** Yes. Schlafly is really a fascinating figure for us. She really was a motivator for movement conservatism and really probably embodied better than anyone else the family values politics that rise up in the 1970s. And she is a fascinating figure because her life story is one in which it seems like a feminist success story. She is a lawyer, a mover, shaker in Republican party of politics, overshadows her husband in a lot of ways.

But her politics are decidedly antifeminist. And so, she leads the campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment. And when Equal Rights Amendment came out of Congress in 1972, it seemed like it was going to automatically pass. Five states ratified it within the first day that it has come out of the House and it seems like it's going to be a quick road to ratification until Schlafly organized these forces on the other side and it was an amazing job that she did whether you agree with her politics or not. What she did was really remarkable because she took this thing that on the surface seemed obvious that everyone would be in favor of equal rights for women. Why not?

What Schlafly does is she argues that this isn't about equal rights for women. It's going to destroy the family. It's going to remove women's automatic right to custody or alimony in case of divorce. It's going to remove the right for their – that their husbands will take care of them. It's going to give children rights to speak out against their parents, which really going to break up the American family.

And she is a master of retail politics. And in an era where I think far too many Americans think of politics as something that happens at the White House and Congress, she knew that a lot of the real work is done at State Legislature. And so they lobby the states to fight against the ERA and in ways that may seem corny but were incredibly effective. They baked goods and bread and muffins and they sent them to these legislators. They would show up in their nice floral dresses and they present them this plate of baked goods, "My heart and hands went into this dough for the sake of the family. Please vote no."

[Laughter]

But it worked. And they lobbied these states and they stopped the ERA down its tracks and even with an extension, Congress extended the deadline five more years to get ratified up to '82. They still stop it dead.

So it's a remarkable work of kind of retail politics at the state level. Everyone assumed it would succeed. She brought it down with her forces.

**Julian Zelizer:** And she is really an important figure for us in that early part of the book in that we are kind of challenging two claims about the post-'60s. One is that there was this inevitable shift to conservatism. It just happened. The country was sick of the '60s, '68 was a big mess and the country moved right. Or the argument that Ronald Reagan was simply this pioneering

candidate who was able to introduce the country to a new conservative age. And we really try to bring together a lot of the great work in history and show this was a very powerful sophisticated conservative movement that operated on many levels in transforming these ideas into political power, into public debate whether it was her for the kind of organizing that Kevin is talking about or different fundraising and media entrepreneurs.

We try to really capture the magnitude of the conservative movement in understanding why you see this change in the Republican Party and why the politics shifts. Even though a lot of liberalism, liberal ideas, liberal policies remain very popular and were very enduring even in this period.

**Chris Martin:** And two Georgians are featured here, Newt Gingrich and Jimmy Carter, both of whom entered Washington as outsiders. Newt Gingrich however was able to create a sustained career in Washington. So talk about his personality as well as the structures around him that made all of this work possible.

**Julian Zelizer:** I'll just give a quick one on this because I know I'm happy to come back. But no, Gingrich I'm arguing and we argue a little bit in the book was – he was an important entrepreneur and he understood the way in which a lot of the institutions and the political establishment of the '50s and '60s had become quite fragile as a result of Vietnam, as a result of the Conservative movement. And he exploited that. His personality is brash. It's aggressive. It's in your face. And he really promoted the idea among Republicans that civility should be thrown out the window. There's no need to respect norms and institutions. And if the Republican Party was going to remake itself, the way it was going to do that was by tearing everything down.

And Gingrich's career before becoming Speaker which is what I'm certainly interested in is about finding ways to exploit a new development out of the '60s; cable television, ethics rules, and use them as a partisan cajoles. And he does it really well. And it culminates with him becoming Speaker. The speakership doesn't last as in any Shakespearean story, his strengths become his weaknesses. But for that period, he does – he is a key person in making the Republican Party that we know today.

And then Carter, you want to touch on Carter?

**Kevin Kruse:** Yeah. You've written a book on both these guys but I'll take Carter. Carter really does – Carter sets in motion – one of the things we talked about with Carter, there a lot we talk about in the book, but I think one of the most important ones that you mentioned is Carter really starts to set the model for the outsider, right? Carter runs against the mess in Washington, post-Watergate. He is a one term Georgia governor. He seems to be honest and straightforward. He teaches Sunday school in a Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia. He is a peanut farmer. He runs a warehouse. Talk to reporters in blue jeans, right?

He seems like somebody who is far removed from politics. And so, he is the outsider. Well, he comes in. He becomes the insider. Ronald Reagan, Governor of California runs as the outsider. You get a series of people running more and more from the outside to the point that now we've

got businessmen and the current President who would never run for anything significant before. That's the total outsider.

And so, it starts this politics in which the previous era had been marked by insiders and having decades of experience was what you needed. Lyndon Johnson had been member of the House from the '30s, Senate Majority Leader in the '50s, Vice-President. That was the resume you needed to build to be president.

And then we suddenly enter a world today in which the less you know, the better, which is a kind of a remarkable and I'm not sure that has been born out with recent events. But there really is a remarkable shift and one I think that Carter really does, does a lot to accelerate.

**Julian Zelizer:** And both of them are – I mean there is a similarity – a commonality, not a similarity. Both are exploiting the State of American Institutions in the '70s which is an important decade we argue. And just how many things had weakened and whether it's how change is to the party, nomination process had changed the way we pick presidents to the way Congress had been – really been rocked by internal reform as a result of Vietnam and Watergate. The institutions were ready to be exploited by people who were not from them. And both are totally different people as you all know. But they are both kind of using that outsider image. They are both willing to challenge pretty conventional ideas within their own parties and they both go very far in different ways as a result of the state of the country in the 1970s.

So for very – figures who are very far apart, I do think that's an important foundation on which they built their careers which we try to talk about in our '70s chapters.

**Chris Martin:** And another interesting thread in conservative politics from the 1940s to the present is the reaction to the New Deal. The New Deal is almost this character that doesn't die because so much of libertarian and conservative politics is a reaction to it. And yet, you begin your book in 1974. So when you are teaching this course, do you take a detour and talk to students about what the New Deal and why there has been sustained effort to turn it back?

**Julian Zelizer:** Well, yeah. We do it in the course and we do it in the book. I mean '74 we picked as an important year. The President of the United States resigns. And today, that kind of might be something we can't even remember as dramatic. But it really was. And so we thought that was a good point. It's a year where a lot of the tensions in the country are coming together from the economic crisis to Vietnam is really coming to a conclusion to issues of the presidency.

And so, we use '74 as a great starting point. But we do move back and forth. And the New Deal is essential. It sets the terms of the debate as did the Great Society for what a lot of the periods since the '70s is about. So we really do bring back the enormity of what government intervention in both '30s and the 1960s to understand what was at stake when these conservative movements that leads to dismantle. It wasn't just kind of paper thin policies. These are pretty important interventions into the economy.

And the ability to weaken those and sometimes dismantle some of the new deal or great society, we argue is part of why kind of the country ends up in the state that it does today.

**Chris Martin:** And you cover in *One Nation Under God*, how many Christian preachers in the 1950s also thought that self-sufficiency was a tenet of Christianity.

**Kevin Kruse:** Right. So there's a book I wrote, *One Nation Under God*, which started out to be a study of the religious right in the '60s and '70s and I keep common threads like a historian and I keep moving back farther and farther in time. And what the evidence took me was a story that I didn't expect. I have always been told that all of the religious trappings we take for granted today, One Nation Under God, in our pledge of allegiance, in God we trust is the national motto, the national prayer of breakfast, all these things that a prayer chapel in Capitol Hill. All these things that we take for granted today. They all came about in the '50s.

The traditional story I've gotten was that they were all part of a Cold War moment and that we are fighting the godless communists and therefore the country started to build up its own godly nature. But as I started the book, I found that this too was something that was a reaction to the new deal that this language of freedom under God starts not in the '50s but in the '30s. And it's done not to oppose the fear of the economy doesn't come from Moscow. It's this creeping socialism coming from the new deal in Washington, D.C. that they are worried about. And so, they kind of weaponized a new form of Christianity which is what totally the capitalism to fight the new deals.

So no matter where you move across the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the new deal really is kind of a load stone that's always there, always on the background.

**Chris Martin:** Another thread through this period is media and the changes in the media from the end of fairness doctrine, the development of celebrity, news reporters. Talk a bit about some of the unique features of the development of the media and especially Fox News and its influence on American politics.

**Julian Zelizer:** Well, keep going. Yeah, the media is something we've always, both of us, were interested in even as we started the course. But as we wrote the book, it kind of turned into from an issue we discussed in different periods to a theme. And we try in the book really cover just how fundamentally the news media has change since the 1960s where your starting point is three major networks on television that provide about 22 minutes of news every night without the commercials and a handful major city papers to first, the creation of the 24-hour news cycle. And we talk about cable television including CNN here in Atlanta and how it fundamentally changes the structure of news delivery in terms of timing and a constant flow of information.

Then we talk about the end of the Fairness Doctrine. So in addition to a 24-hour news cycle, you lose a government regulation in '87 which put pressure on both producers, editors, and hosts to provide both sides of every issue. And it opens the door to talk radio, a conservative talk radio and then Fox in 1996, much more explicit political news in this 24-hour atmosphere. And all of

this goes even more haywire with the social media world of the early 2000s from Twitter to the internet and online reporting.

And we try to cover just how that world has changed and how the platform through which we have our information actually facilitates, fosters, and favors the kind of divisiveness that we often lament. But there is a reason that you're getting that information that way.

And one other thing is the commercial aspect of all of these kind of outlets is another key feature.

**Kevin Kruse:** And the news articles, one that we kind of expected that we would find and one thing that I think surprised us when we started researching was to see that – and the more entertainment sides of the media actually were informing news more and more. That may seem obvious today but we found back in the '80s, CNN was an important story but MTV actually was almost more important model for what we were looking at because MTV pioneers what they call narrow casting.

And so, the networks engaged in broadcasting and they are trying to reach a big broad audience. What we are going to do is find a slice of that electorate, a slice of that viewership. And it's going to be – for us, it's going to be people are into rock music, right? But other cable channels did the same thing and found a narrow niche in the market that they would go in and they would appeal, and that's something that we see becomes more of a model not just in terms of news networks where you've got Fox News for conservatives, MSNBC for more liberal folks. You've got different channels all across cable for every variety of interest.

And it certainly becomes amplified in the era of the internet where you can find a webpage for everything and the social media where you can navigate your Facebook or Twitter feed for just people who think like you and already have believed the same things as you or in the same back to you.

So it becomes much more as we view these sweeping changes in the media from these three – the mainstream media was a thing, these three broadcast networks, a few handful of big city newspapers, to an incredibly fractures landscape in which not only are there a million media choices but now today, everyone could be their own reporter. You've got a camera and a broadcast machine in your hand and you can get out there. And now, it's kind of a wide open landscape. And as a result of that, there are a million different opinions and a million different versions of what the facts are. And that's a radically different moment from where the story begins.

**Chris Martin:** And you also talk about how some of the wealthiest Americans have influenced politics. You talk about the Scaife family and the Coors family, the Olin Foundation and so forth. How do you think figures like that compare to figures today like the Koch brothers, what are the Koch brothers doing that's different from what was happening in the '70s?

**Kevin Kruse:** Oh, we did talk a lot about that. And this is really an important change. Again, another one that happens really in the '70s. And there's a – in the wake of Watergate, there's a series of reforms that passed through the Congress in order to try to clean up politics. And the money was one of the big things. These checks that have been paid to the Watergate burglars were campaign finance checks. And it was an effort to try to clean this up.

The big change there that gets struck down by the Supreme Court and often forgotten but I think criminally overlooked in the Supreme Court decision, a Buckley v. Valeo. It's William F. Buckley's brother, James Buckley who is a conservative Senator out of New York challenges this. And the upshot of the decision is that it strikes down a lot of the rules for that government campaign finance but it leaves in place an avenue for candidates to self-fund.

And so suddenly, there are no limits of what a millionaire or a billionaire can spend on their own political campaign whereas ordinary people have all these rules and what they can raise and how they can spend. And so at least a more and more wealthy candidates.

It also leads to an increased role for individuals but also businesses to get involved in politics. And this radically skews the national conversation on matters of business, on matters of taxation, on matters of regulation and it shifts things considerably.

Now, the Koch brothers fit a larger pattern because another thing that happens in the '70s there are the rise of conservative think tanks, of Olin, Skiffey, Bradley are all funding these things, the rise of new pacts that are pushing these messages. You get things like the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, all these groups really take off the, the Cato Institute take off in the '70s. And that sets the model.

And what the Koch brothers have done is to take that model really but their energies have been spent on a place that is often out of the national landscape. It has really been focused in on state legislatures. And they've done tremendous work there through groups like – in working with groups like ALEC to really affect state legislatures and really change the laws at the state level where a lot of business actually happens.

**Chris Martin:** One interesting development now is think tanks becoming more openly partisan as well. They used to maintain of some respectability but one shocking development this year is the Claremont Institute to giving a fellowship to Jack Posobiec who is responsible for spreading the Pizzagate conspiracy theory.

**Julian Zelizer:** I mean – but that too – there are all these points in the book where you see not the origin but an origin point for changes that today we see in such a pronounced level. So what Kevin talked that's really important, here's a Supreme Court case with Buckley v. Valeo where the government opens the doors to a kind of money and politics relationship. It gets bigger in its transform. But we were at a moment in the mid-1970s where it almost could have gone a different way. Congress pushed really sweeping campaign finance reforms but they get checked in some ways. They get checked again later on when both parties in presidential races. By the time Obama is running, basically abandoned public financing and open the doors.

With the think tanks, in the '70s, you already see the shift you are talking about. And the new generation of conservative think tanks, they are very explicit that they are going to be more partisan and they are going to be more political. Brookings is their model of what not to do. They are competing for the marketplace. They believe a lot of conservatives that yes, Brookings is allegedly nonpartisan they would argue but it's still very liberal and it's biased. So they are going to try to influence politics and they start to produce their studies in a much more sleek packaging and they tend to be kind of bullet-point presentations so that politicians like Ronald Reagan in 1980 and '81 will read what they have to say and use what they have to say.

And there's much more a partisan world of think tanks is happening by the '70s and '80s. A lot of the groups Kevin talked about in the early part, Heritage, Cato, they are doing this already. And now, we are just in an era where this is on steroids. And what we are seeing is an abandonment of pretense. It's the same thing you see in the media. There has been a lot of partisan news happening for a while now. But now, there's no more restraint. You can have a – host campaign with politicians. And I think that's a lot of what has been going on in the last few years in part of what we are trying to show with the book.

**Chris Martin:** And this would be my last question and we will open it up for Q&A and there will be microphones up at the front. So my last question is about chapter 2. You talk about crime and the crime rate in New York and many other cities in the 1970s. And that fits into this alternative move towards the suburbs.

So Kevin, you've written about how the desire for segregated cities was a motive for the initial segregation. So does it become more complicated? Can you discern or distinguish between people who are moving away because of race and people who are moving away because of crime or moving away because of another reason?

**Kevin Kruse:** It's very difficult and it's hard that you can't pinpoint one. You think about when you move, there was not maybe a job relocated. That might have been a real motive. But if you move within an area, there are multiple factors that would have gone into this.

There are certain people I talk about in *White Flight* who were very explicit that the reason they are moving is race. And this is the benefit of what I was writing about in the '50s and '60s was the city or reporters were asking these questions and people either in the surveys or directly on the record to reporters would say straight up, "Yes, I'm moving because this neighborhood is going colored." They would say. And that was their reason. Or, "We are going to get out of the city. We don't want any of this integration mess. We are moving to the suburbs." They would say that on the record.

So I can say, yes, those people were. You can't extrapolate from that to everyone though. It could be because – not everyone who moved into the suburbs was A) fleeing the city of Atlanta. It was only about – I wrote this book way too long ago, I would say about a quarter of the suburbs were white flight folks. But other people are coming in from other cities.

But what's important is that when they get to the suburbs, whether they left the city for those reasons or they are just new to the region and that's the first place they settle down is in Marietta or Snellville or wherever. No matter what their origin story, they go into an environment where they don't want to have anything to do with the city, right?

And so ultimately, the motive doesn't matter. What happens is you get this new rise of a suburb that is really divorced from the central city and doesn't think of itself as part of Atlanta and rather thinks of itself as a place apart. And that's important not just in terms of conceptually but in terms of the politics, in terms of the policies that take place, rejecting not just metropolitan solutions for integration like bussing but metropolitan solutions to public transit. I mean the opposition to MARTA in places like Cobb and Gwinnett, it still goes on until this day as you all know.

But those in the '70s, there were very explicitly racial reasons behind that. Again, they are more complicated now than just that. But what it does is it seals those suburbs off in the city and you get two very separate and unequal societies.

**Julian Zelizer:** And we try – I think it's an important theme book in that we tell the history of race, in some ways reflecting the shift in civil rights thought. Meaning, in the late '60s and early '70s, a lot of civil rights activists said, "Let's not only focus on intention when someone is being racist as much as institutional racism." When our institutions, whether it's education, whether it's criminal justice, whether it's the structure of suburbs and schools and residential areas, perpetuates racial division or perpetuates racial injustice.

And we try to catalog different ways that you see that since the 1970s even after the Civil Rights Revolution of the 1960s. And it's really in the last part of the book with the current President and some of the groups that have really come to the surface where we talk more I would say about intentional racism as a political phenomenon. But we really try to pay a lot of attention to the history of post-1960s institutional racism as one of the great, not great, but one of the major problems of our era.

**Chris Martin:** Great. Well, I would love to ask you many more questions but we need to move to Questions-and-Answers. So we will have at least one microphone. We will have two microphones. Please phrase your question in the form of a question, not a life story.

[Laughter]

In other words, try to keep it to about 30 seconds or so. Go ahead. Why don't you go ahead, sir?

**Participant:** When you got to Princeton, you inherited a course that wasn't up-to-date and antiquated dealing with a period from the '20s to the '60s. What happens to be the next touch point when someone inherits your course and looks back?

**Kevin Kruse:** That's a great question. I'll hand this off to Julian because that's now his – that's going to be your decision to make.

**Julian Zelizer:** Yeah. I mean look, I don't know what the next touch point or breaking moment is. And I think if you were living in 1974, many people in this room were, you wouldn't necessarily know as that year unfolded that that was going to be a big breaking point. You wouldn't know if it was January that in August, the president was going to be getting on a helicopter and saying, "I quit. I'm out."

And so, I don't know if – just because it's not apparent yet, it might be on the cusp. It would not be a decade break. It will be an event which in my mind totally kind of culminates and manifests this divisive, raucous, contentious era that we are trying to transform. Some would say it's the 2016 election. There you go. Start a new course. But I'm not sure we are there yet. I feel like something bigger is going to happen. I can't give you an answer. I can't prognosticate. But that's what I'm looking for. That's what I'm looking for.

**Chris Martin:** Great. I think global warming might also be an important theme in the next version of this course.

**Julian Zelizer:** And we would not be able to write about it. That's the problem.

[Laughter]

**Chris Martin:** Go ahead, sir.

**Participant:** Yes. In one of my undergraduate history courses, I remember talking about how change happens and there were two theories, one is the zeitgeist theory, the spirit of the times, or the great person theory.

And I've been to a number of talks this week or this weekend and I've heard lots of names. And today, you mentioned Schlafly, Gingrich, Reagan, Koch brothers, the host of media programs. Which do you think is more responsible for the change that takes place, great persons or not so great persons or the zeitgeist? And please don't say both.

[Laughter]

**Kevin Kruse:** I'm sorry. I'm a historian and we are trained to say both.

[Laughter]

I think that the great – and again, the questions in our conversation and the shorthand we have, we all know the great figures so we think of them and they come up. But you can't understand it without understanding what goes on at the grassroots. Again, my own work is – I really focused on grassroots, conservatism in my first two books. I'm moving within that with my new project. But you got to understand in the conversation.

And maybe a way to think about this is Schlafly wasn't originally a great person. She – we know her now because of the grassroots work she did. It's the legislatures. When we think about one of the stories we chronic in the book is the shift that happens on AIDS. At first, AIDS is something that is literally laughed at in the Reagan White House. A reporter asked the press secretary and his reaction was, "Well, I don't have AIDS. Do you have AIDS? Ha ha ha." They joked it out of the room. It's not until five years into his presidency that Reagan even mentions AIDS. And it's totally off the great man radar.

And instead, local activist through organizations like ACT UP forced it on to the national agenda. And they do so through a dramatic protest on the streets, making this issue something that politicians can't ignore.

Fast forward 15 years from that moment in '87 when Reagan finally acknowledges it, George W. Bush, another Republican, who sees himself as Reagan's heir, pledges a massive amount of money to fight against AIDS on a global basis. I think that his probably – that might be his biggest accomplishment as president. And to see that shift happened, didn't happen from one great man to another. It happened from people at the grassroots pushing it.

And so, all of these issues when they – we made them pay attention when the great man or woman finally deals with it. But I really do think the engine that drives this really comes from the bottom up.

**Julian Zelizer:** The most effective leaders in my opinion exploit when that moment has emerged. And I've become more appreciative of this as I developed as a scholar. But Schlafly alone doesn't create conservatism but she can see what has happened in the electorate. She can see the organizational opportunities that emerged.

Newt Gingrich who I talked about and I'm writing about, he is similar. He doesn't create modern conservatism. It's not just because of him. But you see the party changed. It's because he is so astute at what's happening in the world of news media and in congressional politics that he sees those opportunities have emerged.

I wrote out Lyndon Johnson, it was the same thing. So I think the two are not these binary categories. And to answer both is actually to understand why the great people are effective, great for whatever reason. It's not an isolation. And you missed why they are able to change the direction of events.

**Chris Martin:** Go ahead.

**Participant:** We've been talking about the history, the natural history of divisiveness and where that came from. And just in 2016, we had a lot of speculation about foreign interference and inflaming national divisiveness from that. And how vulnerable do you think we are from moving forward with foreign interference and inflaming this type of political approach?

**Kevin Kruse:** Well, that I can say – I said this early when I say this, I’m a historian by training and hindsight so it’s tough to make predictions. I’m also not an expert on this so I can only go by Robert Mueller and the head of the FBI and all the national security people, the national intelligence folks say it’s currently a big issue. So unless something is done to address it, I have to assume it will remain a big problem.

**Julian Zelizer:** And there easily – you have to assume that because the way what is being exploited works. It already without Russian interference is already incredibly divisive. So it was so easy for some Russian hackers to throw information into this ecosystem and to be successful because that’s how our institutions are working. They will work like that in 2020. They will work like that in 2024. And they are going to work like that for a while. So that means we are incredibly vulnerable. And unless the government is taking extraordinary steps to really prevent this, you have to assume it’s happening as we speak.

**Participant:** So on Twitter, you guys do something that all of us wished we could do as well as you do. You fight back. But it’s pretty passive. It’s maybe not having that much effect except when require. So I’m curious to know historians, what can we do to change this history?

**Kevin Kruse:** I think we are starting to see the roots of it. One of the silver linings of this moment we are in is that I think a lot of Americans have started to stop taking their politics for granted. For a long time, this country was on autopilot. In the ‘90s, in the 2000s even, a lot of people thought of politics as something out there and it was national when you think about the President and maybe Congress and that’s about it. And maybe as a good citizen, you get out and you vote every four years. Maybe the really good ones, get out and vote every two years.

What we are seeing now is a real awakening. The people have stopped taking democracy for granted and are getting involved themselves. Running for office themselves. Again, the important ones I think are local and state ones and people are starting to step up and move for those or working on campaigns for those, getting involved in social movements, Black Lives Matter, the Me Too movement, the Women’s March, the March for Our Lives at the Parkland.

These problems clearly aren’t going to go away if they are left solely to the great men in D. C. They need that social movement from below to push them to demand accountability and to say, “Either you act on this or we will vote you out and replace you with someone who will.”

So that is something that I can we can all do to get involved, to get off the bench and get in there whether you’re going to run for something yourself or work in a campaign yourself or get invested in the cause. Pick something you care about that you think is going to get changed because the problem I run into with students is they are constantly thinking about, “Where’s the next great person going to come from? Let’s wait for him. I wonder who the next Martin Luther King is going to be.” They never think that it’s going to be them.

The thing I end my lecture course with and having to kind of counteract some of that great men theory is to remind these students that all these people that they heard about, they weren’t great when they started, right? And they started young. OK? Not to dissuade the older folks in the

audience but what I – I’m talking to a room of college students when I do this and I point out, when Martin Luther King launched the Montgomery bus boycott, he was 25. OK?

When Gordon Hirabayashi violated the curfew against Japanese-Americans, he was a senior in college.

When Tom Hayden founded SDS, the organization that challenged the Vietnam War, he was a junior in college.

Those four young men who sat in dialogue with Woolworth’s in Greensboro, North Carolina, they were freshmen. OK?

High school kids have changed this nation, right? From the students who desegregated Little Rock Central High School to a young woman named Lillian Gobitas who went to the Supreme Court when she was 9. And they weren’t great men or women when they did that stuff. OK? They became great because they did that and they didn’t wait for someone great to come along and do it.

So the lesson here I think that I give to them and I hope I can give to you is that don’t wait for the great men. Be that greatness yourself because that’s how it happens.

**Julian Zelizer:** If I could jump in. I think the fighting back – there’s a clap.

[Applause]

We are both professors and so our primary mission is intellectual life and the world of ideas and trying to promote debate that’s based on facts and reason and smart analysis. We each do this in another world as well, in Twitter, television. We do our best. If that fighting back is in kind of one side versus the other, it’s an effort to bring back sound, reasonable discussions to political questions.

[Applause]

In addition to the kind of idea of where’s the next great activist coming from, I’m a big believer, forums like this, podcast like what you do, these are the platforms that are needed. And I don’t know when you win or lose. It might be not in a lifetime. But the more people that are promoting events like this where you have these kinds of discussions in a church, in a school, in a library, or online, or in television, wherever you can inject some kind of debate about the big questions of our time, that’s a contribution. And those contributions are valuable. They are hard to do because the payoff isn’t always immediate. But I think that’s what we need more than anything.

And so when Kevin is answering, I answer, I’m looking at the room and I’m like, “Boy! This is a great event. This is exactly what we need.”

[Applause]

**Chris Martin:** So as a sociologist, I also feel like I should make a small plug for sociology. And so if you want to understand social change, also read sociology.

So unfortunately, we can't take any more questions, but thank you all for coming.

**Kevin Kruse:** Thank you, everybody.

**Julian Zelizer:** Thank you, everyone.

[Applause]

Thanks for tuning in. If you enjoyed the episode, please leave us a review on iTunes. It helps other people find out about the show. The next episode features Charlie Sykes former radio conservative radio talk show host and current host of *The Bulwark* podcast.

[End of transcript]