

Jewish Comedy and a History of the American Right What Happens Next – 05.01.2022

Larry Bernstein:

Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein.

What Happens Next is a podcast where the speaker gets to present his argument in just Six Minutes and that is followed by a question-and-answer period for deeper engagement.

Today's discussion will be on Jewish Comedy and a History of the American Right.

Our first speaker today will be Jeremy Dauber who is a Professor at Columbia and the author of Jewish Comedy: A Serious History. I love comedy and want to know more about what makes Jewish comedy extra special and so funny.

Our second speaker is Matthew Continetti who is the Resident Fellow in Social, Cultural and Constitutional Studies at AEI. Matthew has a new book that was released this week entitled The Right: The Hundred-Year War for American Conservatism. I want to learn how the views in the Right are not monolithic and how the coalition has disagreed over foreign policy, trade, and immigration.

Buckle up.

If you missed it, check out last week's program on gentrification and kidnapping rich people, check it out. It was wild.

Our first speaker was Mitchell Schwarzer who is the author of Hella Town: Oakland's History of Development and Disruption. Mitchell will discuss why both the wealthy and the poor oppose new building and change in Oakland. The Not in my Back Yard has become the mantra in California, limiting growth and driving up real estate values.

Our second speaker was Tom Sancton who is the author of The Last Baron: The Paris Kidnapping that Brought Down an Empire. The book is crazy, fast paced and fantastic. It is an unbelievable true story about the kidnapping of one of France's leading industrialists.

I use interns to help me prepare this podcast, and I am looking to hire a new batch of interns for the summer. Historically the interns have been seniors in high school, college students, or recent graduates. Interns will read assigned books to decide if they are show worthy, we will review last week's show to learn how to make it better, and interns will be exposed to all aspects of podcasting. Please let me know if you are interested.

You can find transcripts for this program and all of our previous episodes on our website whathappensnextin6minutes.com, and you can listen on Podbean, Apple Podcast and Spotify.

Let's begin with our first speaker Jeremy Dauber. Jeremy good luck on your six minute presentation.

Jeremy Dauber:

A lot of people on this podcast talk about their points and they make three different points for two minutes each. And what I decided to do in talking about Jewish comedy was do something slightly different, which was to make twice as many points taking half the amount of time. So, six points because there were six different funny ways Jews do comedy.

The first is Jewish humor comes as a response to persecution. One of the ways of dealing with trauma is to make a joke about it. You can cope with it and feel better. So, one kind of Jewish comedy is a response to persecution, trauma, and antisemitism.

Another is Jewish comedy as social and political satire. Jews have had social, political, and religious institutions and they mock and make fun of them.

A third kind of Jewish humor goes back to this idea that Jews are the people of the book. It's a certain Jewish comedy is a witty bookish. It is very intellectual, practiced by the elites who had facility with texts.

The fourth kind of Jewish comedy is of the body. Jews have bodies, just like everybody else. They can have a vulgar comedy. Mel Brooks is bodily humor and intellectual comedy is Woody Allen, although his neurasthenic jokes about himself are very much of the body. You have those two different kinds, the wit and the bodily humor.

Our fifth kind of Jewish comedy is about metaphysics. Jews have flourished and suffered and lived through thousands of years of diaspora due to their self-identification as a people with a relationship with God, even if it's a God that they don't believe in, don't trust, and are angry with.

An example is someone like Tevye the Dairyman in Sholem Aleichem who is schlepping through the shtetl and talking with God and arguing with him. You look at the world, at God and at Jewish history and put that all together. That kind of Jewish comedy is metaphysical and it's pervasive.

The sixth kind of Jewish comedy is the Jewish folk tale. This is the Jews as a people who have their culture, folklore, and stories and how it applies to us today as it did to ancestors thousands of years ago.

Larry Bernstein

Is Jewish humor unique?

Jeremy Dauber:

Yes and no. It's unique because it has the details of Jewish history and culture and experience. That's what makes it Jewish humor. But it's not unique in those categories that I just described. It could be applied to other groups of people as well. Jews have an extremely long and quite varied set of experiences to draw on because of their diasporic nature over different continents and historical eras.

Larry Bernstein:

In your book, you reference biblical stories as a source of Jewish Humor. When I think about Jewish comedy, it's a secular and not an Orthodox one. I have never seen an Orthodox Jew in a comedic film or standup club. It is exclusively secular.

Years ago, I read aloud to my son Chaim Potok's novel, *My Name is Asher Lev*. The book is about an orthodox boy who wants to be an artist and that requires him to learn about the non-Jewish world. Asher paints a spectacular work of his father on a cross. It stuns and upsets his father and gets him tossed from his congregation. Humor often depends on pushing the edge of social norms and that might be pretty limiting for the orthodox.

Jeremy Dauber:

It gets to two different phenomena that are linked. The first is the role that comedy plays in religious societies. There's a great deal of humor in traditionally religious Judaism. It can be blasphemous. It can be obscene. In my class on Jewish humor I teach a 17th century poem about the genitalia of the patriarchs of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This is rough stuff within a religious context, but it was done within this poem, this festival framework. Today there are many kind of religious comedians, and they work within the frameworks of their society, as we all do within ours. Even contemporary comedy clubs there are certain things that you can and can't do.

The secular American Jewish experience defined themselves in contradistinction to an Orthodox religious experience. And they do that in comedy as well. One way of doing this is to create a narrative that traditional religion is not funny. It's very serious. And our narrative of liberation allows us to embrace humor that they just don't get the joke. But I don't think that it's historically accurate.

Larry Bernstein:

In preparation for my son's bar mitzvah, a group of kids met with our Rabbi to discuss how to prepare the biblical interpretation speech that is given by each bar mitzvah child after his Hebrew reading of the Torah. My son asked the rabbi, "is it appropriate to use humor in the speech?" And the Rabbi said that humor is core to the Jewish experience, and that he tries to employ humor in every sermon. It is proper and encouraged to use humor in interpreting the bible. But be respectful.

Jeremy Dauber:

Let me applaud your son's impulse to bring humor in and particularly around the Bible. There's a lot of different humor in the Bible, a lot of different comedy. One way of being respectful, I'm not saying this is the way that your son's rabbi meant it. But one way is to take that humor seriously.

You could say that Eddie Murphy or Lenny Bruce took humor very seriously. Sometimes the humor is a mocking humor of Jewish superiority saying, we've got God on our side. We may find that discomfoting, but that's not to say it's not comedy.

Larry Bernstein:

Well, I think what the rabbi meant was that it would be inappropriate to do a fart joke or a vulgar skit like Sarah Silverman, or physical comedy like a Chevy Chase fall over the bimah that would've been off limits.

Jeremy Dauber:

Right.

Larry Bernstein:

Now, if he wanted to use witty intellectual humor related to his torah portion that would have been perfectly fine.

Jeremy Dauber:

Every place has its own sociological rules. Your synagogue has one set of rules, and an Orthodox shtiebel will have different rules.

Larry Bernstein:

Jews are only 2% of the U.S. population yet they dominate the comedic world. Jon Stewart when he got an Emmy for comedic writing said "For those critics who said, 'How could you possibly put together a team of comedic writers with only eight out of nine writers being Jewish?'" He lifts up the trophy, "We showed them."

Jeremy Dauber:

(laughs) That's great.

Larry Bernstein:

So, why is there an overrepresentation of Jewish comics?

Jeremy Dauber:

Jews were discriminated against and couldn't get into a number of professions. Mass entertainment was not prestigious as it is today. It was about making a living. I just wrote a history of comic books and one of the reasons that Jews are so omnipresent in the early days of comic books is because it was a crap medium, comic books. (laughs) So, they could get in.

Then you have network effects. My cousin needs a job, he's kinda funny, let's bring him in," For a lot of the 20th century, there is a very rational explanation for why Jews are so overrepresented, and I think it's this combination of social discrimination and network effects.

Larry Bernstein:

In the Jewish culture, there are just a few fields that your mother will find to be an acceptable occupation. There is the law, medicine, finance, real estate, accounting, tax, retail, and comedy. So, if your grades aren't great or you can't wake up early in the morning, comedy sounds like a real opportunity.

Jeremy Dauber:

(laughs) I think part of the question was it was legitimate for whom? Even within Jewishness, we have people saying, "I am working 16 hours a day, because I want my son to be a doctor or a lawyer. I don't want him to go off and be in showbusiness.'

And then that status changed. "My son the podcaster," (laughs)

Larry Bernstein:

I dunno, the pay isn't too good.

Jeremy Dauber:

As this became higher status, it became more of an aspirational Jewish practice rather than practical. For a long time, it was either people who were familiarly in showbusiness, or this was the job that they could get. As the decades went on, it became more socially acceptable.

Larry Bernstein"

Let's move on to intellectual comedy and use Woody Allen as an example. I grant your point that it sounds intellectual, but I think it is more of sham intellectualism, it sounds smart but its funny because its idiotic or simply nonsense.

Jeremy Dauber:

That is a great and incisive observation that you're making about Woody Allen. He was so influenced by Mike Nichols and Elaine May, who had that same kind of faux thing.

Allen said, "I'm not an intellectual, and everyone insisted on taking him as an intellectual," so I think you're absolutely right about that.

That was the beauty of Woody Allen, faux wit in his New Yorker pieces like the private detective parody of God is dead and we have to find out who did it.

Larry Bernstein:

Jerry Seinfeld wrote an article about how he writes, edits, and improves his comedy and that his work is a craft. What do you think of Jewish comedic craftsmanship?

Jeremy Dauber:

That's a really wonderful question about craftsmanship. A technical dedication is something that really can play across a wide spectrum of comedy.

It can take as much craft to set up a good fart joke as it can to do a polished, witty, elusive one-liner, but in either case, you have this spectrum of attention and care that different comedians put into these things.

I cherish the hard work and awed at the genius of off the cuff or out of nowhere. Its incongruity and shockingness can knock you off your feet. So, there's benefits to both approaches.

Larry Bernstein:

Don Rickles is a perfect example of a comic who can insult with machine gun accuracy. You are laughing three jokes back.

Jeremy Dauber:

(laughs) I love Rickles. He has such a connection with his audience. He's famous as an insult comic, creating this communication where he knows the people who are gonna be okay with being insulted, he knows how far to take it.

Larry Bernstein:

Sometimes you take it too far and then you get hit in the face. I guess Chris Rock didn't know his audience.

Jeremy Dauber:

(laughs) Yeah. The circumstances around the slap, as it's (laughs) become known, I think are not 100% clear to me.

Comedy norms change all the time. And one thing that would have been entirely fine 100 years ago, for example, making fun of people with a medical condition. If this had been an unfortunate hairstyle choice that would've been one thing. But it was because Jade Pinkett Smith has alopecia. We now say, "we shouldn't be making fun of people with medical conditions. That's not really the right thing to do."

Whether this deserves a physically violent response is another question.

One of the things that I teach is a Yiddish play from the late 19th Century in my comedy class. It makes fun of people with stutters. Isn't that funny? Now, it's gross to have that.

Larry Bernstein:

Some Jewish comics get nose jobs others change their names to sound less Jewish. My own great-grandfather changed his name from Palominsky to Bernstein to sound less Jewish. Is that still necessary to hide your Jewishness? Jackie Mason seems to flaunt it. Jew or not a Jew?

Jeremy Dauber:

(laughs) It depends on changing times and circumstances. Jackie Mason had a hugely successful career on Broadway for going Jewish.

On television Chicken Soup was cancelled because he was getting complaints of being too Jewish. After Seinfeld there's more depictions of Jews on television.

Larry Bernstein:

In the Dick Van Dyke Show, Carl Reiner was the creator and originally played the Dick Van Dyke character in the pilot. But he was perceived to be Jewish. George Costanza's name was changed to sound not Jewish, but the character is all-in.

Jeremy Dauber:

There is no question that television and media are much more comfortable in 2022 with a much wider depiction of demography, ethnicity, and identity. Seinfeld is now 35 years ago, as hard as that is to believe, that it premiered in 1989 is much closer to 1955 (laughs) than it felt like at the time.

Larry Bernstein

Let's talk about Jewish comedy and metaphysics. This is the concept of the relationship of the individual and God. In the bible, Jewish characters talk with God seemingly all the time. Abraham has an active conversation with God over killing Isaac. Moses is trying to weasel out of going back to Egypt, please God send my brother instead. Job gets angry with God over his mistreatment. But in Fiddler on the Roof, Tevya's conversation is one way. Talking to God with no response, and that allows the use of humor, because God gets to play the straight man. Sort of like the gagged prosecutor in the Woody Allen movie Bananas.

Jeremy Dauber:

(laughs) The first instance of laughter in Jewish literature is where Sarah laughs ironically because she thinks she's not gonna have a kid because she's post-menopausal. But God says that's not funny. You don't understand the way that things work, because I'm God and I can do whatever I want, and Sarah then transforms her laughter into a laughter of acknowledgement. It uses irony.

Tevya, as you say, does not have the privilege of God responding to him. The conversation that he's having is kind of with himself. He is amusing and comforting himself. Maybe he's also kind of explaining the world and providing himself with some solace.

It's doing something very serious helping him make sense of the tragedies that befall him in his life. And there are really parallels between the two, where you have this humor in the text, but it's being used for a very deep purpose. And that's why I sort of juxtapose them in my writing.

Larry Bernstein:

It is like a modern soliloquy strategy that allows Teyva to speak directly to the audience about what is on his mind without being compared to Hamlet.

New topic, another aspect of Jewish comedic craftsmanship, where the generic joke provides a structure for embellishment and personalization. I'm thinking about the Aristocrats joke where you have a structure that allows for creativity by the joke teller.

Jeremy Dauber:

One of the things about The Aristocrats, which makes it such a good example, is that it is a scaffolding, which is, ethnically, religiously, culturally neutral, and you can put in whatever you want into it.

The Aristocrats itself is not an inherently Jewish joke, but you could make it into a Jewish joke by virtue of whatever details you put in and that's very frequently the case with a lot of entertainment genres. A romantic comedy isn't necessarily Jewish, but you can certainly make a Jewish romantic comedy.

You can make anything Jewish, but, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is.

Larry Bernstein:

Jewish humor tries to push the edge of what's sociologically tolerated. Mel Brooks in The Producers is poking fun with the musical number Springtime for Hitler and Seinfeld has an episode where Jerry makes out with a girl during a screening of Schindler's List. Do Jewish comedians excel at testing boundaries?

Jeremy Dauber:

There are definitely some Jewish comedians whose Jewish comedy pushes the edge, and there are others who are very comfortable doing some of the nightclub acts at the Copa. When Larry David came back to write the series finale of Seinfeld, where they get thrown in jail because they are monsters. People didn't like that because they had affection for the characters. But David and of Seinfeld do push the edge.

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic is Norman Lear, the Jewish archetypal comedy All in the Family and the audience's response to Archie.

Jeremy Dauber:

Well, that's a great question because it gets ultimately to that dynamic between the artist and audience. Lear is a self-identified liberal who felt that the Bunker character was someone who was not to be admired and not a hero. And the reason for All in the Family's remarkable success was that people identified with Bunker, they thought he was great.

Lear is a great artist who is like a thief with the hole in his pocket. He leaves more than he carries away. That he couldn't help but make these characters so human that people did identify with them, even if that wasn't Lear's ideological and political intent.

Larry Bernstein:

How is Andy Kaufman's comedic style different from other Jewish comics?

Jeremy Dauber:

Kaufman is an exception to the rule. We've been talking about comedies creating a communication with your audience and trying to have a positive response from your audience. Kaufman was often interested in bewildering his audience sometimes even enraging them. Kaufman was a genius and was able to make his own space.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode on a note of optimism, what are you optimistic about with Jewish comedy?

Jeremy Dauber:

We have this new kind of media for more voices and new jokes than we ever could have before. There are more platforms to hear more funny things. And millions of people are interested in series about ultra-Orthodox Jews on Netflix. The success of *Shtisel*, which has its comedic elements, show that there are audiences for Jewish comedy.

Larry Bernstein:

Thank you so much Jeremy. Alright, let's move on to our second speaker, Matthew Continetti, who is a resident fellow at AEI. Matt has this new book out entitled, *The Right: The Hundred Year War for American Conservatism*. Matt, please go ahead with your six minute presentation.

Matthew Continetti:

Most histories of the American Right begin shortly after the Second World War and culminate in Ronald Reagan's presidency. In my book, *The Right*, I begin the story much earlier and end it after Barack Obama. Reagan is not the central character but one character among many whose rise was not inevitable.

The Republican party of Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis has a lot in common with the Republican Party of the 1920s: Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge. The American Right prior to the Second World War stood for non-intervention in foreign policy, restriction of immigration, and a protectionist trade policy.

The Republican party under Donald Trump is against deploying troops overseas and illegal immigration. Trump called himself, "tariff man."

A theme of my book, *The Right*, is the ongoing dynamic between conservative elites and the broader grassroots populist revolting against expert wisdom, top-down governments, bureaucracy and the elite guardianship of institutions.

Elites and the populists often find a common antagonism toward liberalism in American government, American culture, universities, the entertainment industry and the media.

Beginning in the mid-20th century, conservatives found that the way to power was the populist grassroots. But that didn't necessarily mean that the conservatives and the populists always saw eye-to-eye.

During the Cold War, anti-Communism provided a foundation for an alliance between the conservatives and the populists.

After the Cold War, many of the fissures between conservatives and the populist grassroots came to the fore. The issue of immigration, the simmering discontent with George W. Bush's policy of regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan and the integration of China into the global economy.

This tension between conservative elites and the Republican populist grassroots grew with time. And culminated in the rise of Donald Trump who was the agent of populist revolt, not only against liberal elites but also against conservative ones and that's where we find ourselves today.

Larry Bernstein:

Conservatives do not all agree on the major political issues of the day. Views evolve as constituencies change and social norms evolve. Each party is desperate to get to 51%. The Democratic party changed its political positions over time as well. Take immigration. Cesar Chavez opposed immigration because Mexican laborers would undercut wages of his union workers.

Matthew Continetti:

There's more coherence on the Democratic side on immigration. There was a change in the attitude of unions toward immigration in the last 20 years when unions saw immigration as a threat to wages of their members to a possible pool of recruits.

In the Republican party, there is still a debate between the business community which does favor relaxed immigration policy and the populist Republicans who are against immigration.

Larry Bernstein:

The Republicans are sore that the compromise from Reagan's immigration legislation that traded border enforcement for expanded citizenship wasn't enforced by Democratic presidents, so I suspect that the Republicans would prefer to do nothing.

Matthew Continetti:

I think that's an accurate statement of the Republican position. The last time there was an amnesty authorized by Congress for illegal immigrants was under Ronald Reagan. Reagan said

that the border enforcement and employer enforcement ought to be followed, and they were not as you mention. And that has made many Republicans and opponents of immigration very leery of the deal that would regularize the status of illegal immigrants.

I just don't see the possibility of any compromise.

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic is foreign policy. The Republicans included both isolationists and internationalists in the party leadership over the past 100 years. Senator Lodge opposed the League of Nations and Trump wanted to bring the troops home and reduce our obligations under the alliances. In contrast, Eisenhower and Bush were true believers in the role of NATO and multilateral institutions to keep the peace. In the 1960s LBJ started the Vietnam war while McGovern protested foreign wars. Both political parties' positions are inconsistent.

Matthew Continetti:

Foreign policy is where you find the greatest diversity of opinion within both parties, and I think that's been true throughout the history.

The Cold War established within the Republican party what one scholar calls, "Engaged nationalism." A foreign policy that's nationalistic, believes in American hard power, and that America shouldn't be tied down by multilateral organizations like the United Nations. America should have troops stationed overseas to meet threats in Europe and East Asia.

The engaged nationalists believed in alliances like NATO, in free trade to empower our allies through economic growth and to hold up America as a model of democracy.

These were all policies generally agreed upon within the conservative movement during the Cold War period. It's before the Cold War, when you didn't have the threat of the Soviet Union, and after the Cold War, when the Soviet Union is removed that figures like Buchanan revert to a disengaged nationalist foreign policy. Still nationalistic, still believing in American power, in American freedom of action but disengaged from the world. No forward defense. No alliances. Protectionist economics. Closed immigration.

The George W. Bush foreign policy of preemptive war and regime change intensified those differences, made this discussion more vitriolic within the party.

On the Democratic side, Bill Clinton seized on that unipolar moment when America was the sole superpower to engage in a variety of humanitarian interventions believing in multilateralism, international organizations and alliances. There's been a retreat from that position on the Democratic side that is more like the McGovern position you mentioned earlier.

One of the reasons I wrote my book *The Right* is to push back against the idea that *The Right* is just one thing.

People take the figure of Reagan. They think he's the standard of the American right that he's the model everyone should follow. My point is he's one model. There are many different schools of conservatism, and they have often competed for dominance within the right. And we've seen a transition in recent years between engaged nationalists and Trump.

Larry Bernstein:

The voter composition of the Republican Party changes over time. Vermont used to be very Republican and now New England is solidly Democratic. College educated elites used to be at the center of the Republicans. Today, non-college educated whites vote 2:1 Republican and are core to the party. We should expect Republican policies to follow the interests of its primary constituents.

Matthew Continetti:

Yes, I think that's right. There's no doubt that the growth of the non-college educated vote within the Republican party has been incredibly consequential for American politics. The migration of non-college educated voters from Democrats to Republicans is what has fueled populism on the right.

My American Enterprise Institute colleague, Michael Barone published a book before the pandemic on the two parties. And he said, the groups of people who composed the two parties have changed over time. But fundamentally, the two parties have always stood for a certain type of American, with the Republican party representing the people who feel they are the true American community and the Democratic party composed of out groups.

Larry Bernstein:

Michael Barone spoke at one of my book clubs a couple of years ago about his book you reference *How America's Political Parties Change and How They Don't*. And my takeaway from Barone is that immigrants' national origin and religion matter for current voting patterns. The fact that Wisconsin and Minnesota were settled by Norwegians and Swedes affects their voting behavior and differs from the German Catholics who settled near Milwaukee.

Matthew Continetti:

The real value in what Barone does is look at ethnicity and religiosity. Rather than looking at the White vote, we could disaggregate it, as you said, the descendants of German Americans or Swedes, and then trace their voting patterns over time. Ethnicity is a much more interesting lens to look at American politics than the reductive frame of race.

The other thing he does is look at religiosity. The real change came beginning in the 1970s, when it was less what religion you were than how often did you practice it.

This idea that church, temple, or mosque attendance is the real metric where you fall politically is an important transformation in American politics.

Larry Bernstein:

Your book *The Right* explores the evolving intellectual policy debates in the context of the political environment.

Matthew Continetti:

My book is unique because it tries to synthesize the ideas with the politics. I try to weave what the intellectuals were doing with the major developments in American politics during this 100-year period. The decomposition of the New Deal Coalition over Vietnam and the civil rights movement after the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. This is the major story of the 20th century politics.

Were they reacting to ideas? Well, it's not as though they were picking up Ludwig Von Mises. What they were reacting to was the rise of the anti-war movement over Vietnam, the student revolt on campuses, rising crime in the cities, and the squeeze on wages because of inflation.

The most receptive audience was the hard hats that's where you see this dynamic between the conservative intellectuals and populist voters. Those construction workers at the World Trade Center who fought the anti-war protestors in the so-called hard hat riot. Nixon loved the hard hats.

Whether you call them middle American radicals, the silent majority, or Reagan Democrats, they have provided the votes for Republican majorities over the last 50 years.

Larry Bernstein:

What do you make of Tom Frank's argument made in his book *What is Wrong with Kansas* that suggests that the Kansas voter makes a mistake by voting against his personal interests?

Matthew Continetti:

The thesis is that social conservative voters don't know what's in their economic interests. And, voters find value issues more important than economic ones, the political takes preference over the economic.

If the voters in Kansas want to vote Republican because they think that the Republican party is on their side on the right to life or the second amendment rights that makes as much sense to me as it does suburbanites in Northern Virginia voting for the Democratic party that is a supporter of rights for LGBTQ Americans.

Values matters. They matter to both sides and usually take priority over economics.

Larry Bernstein:

You make the argument in your book that intellectual but not scholarly magazines like *Commentary*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The National Review* and *American Affairs* are critical to the conservative movement. I have subscribed to *Commentary* magazine since high school, but very few people read it. Why do you think that these intellectual magazines have such outsized influence if politically interested people and politicians do not read them?

Matthew Continetti:

People don't read the little magazines. They're also not reading the great works that those magazines popularize. They may not have heard of Milton Friedman, Norman Podhoretz, Irving Kristol, or Leo Strauss. But the magazines filter these ideas that make them accessible to people who are involved in politics.

You're right, most people in politics don't read these little magazines. Some people do. I mean, you read it, Larry. Enough politicians read them to draw ideas, and they get a policy proposal out of them. And it's important that way.

The little magazines are directionally a barometer of what the climate of opinion, as Milton Friedman used to call it, at a given moment.

During Trump's presidency other magazines came into existence to explain and influence the Trump Administration, journals such as American Affairs. The Claremont Review of Books is now central to the Trump world and continues to rise in popularity.

Larry Bernstein:

Readers of Commentary and the Weekly Standard would have been shocked by Trump's rise to power and the political issues that pushed him forward in his presidential campaign. Many of Trump's ideas on foreign policy, trade, and immigration were vehemently opposed by the conservative intellectual writers at these magazines.

Matthew Continetti:

I agree. For someone who had just been reading Commentary, The Weekly Standard, or National Review in its Against Trump issue in 2016, the Trump victory would be a surprise.

Trump was a master at social media and leveraging the social media power to advance his political prospects.

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic. Conservative talk radio led by Rush Limbaugh has more listeners and influence than political magazines.

Matthew Continetti:

Yeah that's right. Limbaugh, his audience might not have read those publications, but he did. Rush was very aware of the intellectual scene.

Rush Limbaugh is an incredibly important figure in my story. Many people master an industry, very few people create the industry that they master, and that's what Rush did. Rush Limbaugh created nationally syndicated talk radio and found a huge audience, tens of millions of people,

were receptive to it. And he also had unique talents as an entertainer who was very conversant with ideas.

Rush was taking the articles published in these journals and popularizing them to an even larger audience.

Larry Bernstein:

One of the great conservative intellectuals of the period is Milton Friedman. He had many policy recommendations. Some got implemented like eliminating the draft in favor of a volunteer military. Friedman also recommended a negative income tax to reduce the disincentives for work, but it had no support among Democrats at the time. Recently, Andrew Yang is using a similar concept with a universal basic income, but it is now unanimously opposed by the Republicans.

Matthew Continetti:

I would say that the negative income tax example was influential in the development of the earned income tax credit.

Friedman proposed this as a substitute for the welfare state rather than a supplement. And I think Andrew Yang has been perhaps strategically ambiguous in answering the question of whether his proposed UBI would replace the welfare state in its entirety or simply be another add-on. And you're right to say there is no way Republicans would support another welfare entitlement. However, if one could replace our welfare state with a cash grant that would cover all expenses, there are members of the right who would be receptive to that.

Larry Bernstein:

In your book, you discuss the influence of the conservative academic Harry Jaffa. Why is he an important conservative intellectual?

Matthew Continetti:

Harry Jaffa wrote one of the most important books in American political thought. It's called *Crisis of the House Divided*, and it's a study of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. I recommend it to everyone. It is an amazing work.

It establishes Lincoln as a political philosopher. After that book, he became interested in politics. Harry Jaffa penned Barry Goldwater's famous line, "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice" from the 1964 Republican Convention. A line that was among the many reasons that Barry lost that election.

Harry Jaffa settled on the idea that America was the greatest. That America is the synthesis of classical and modern philosophy and anything that goes against Lincoln and the founders will lead us down the path to totalitarianism.

Larry Bernstein:

American exceptionalism is a fundamental idea for conservatives which is in sharp contrast to Barak Obama who said that American exceptionalism is as true as Greek exceptionalism.

Matthew Continetti:

The right has long believed in American exceptionalism and what made the American unique was a founding. We didn't emerge from tribal warfare and ancestral kings.

It was the first time it had been done on this scale in human history, and especially these principles proclaimed in the Declaration. The idea that all men are created equal. That the king has no right was a revolutionary concept that Americans introduced to the world.

The American conservative movement said that's something to be defended. The American founding and a constitutional order which protects individual liberty.

Obama went against the tradition of rah, rah, rah, America. We're exceptional." Obama was the first to say, "I believe it in the same way that the Greeks think they're exceptional."

It provided a clue of to where American politics was headed. Because when you look at American politics today, we're not really arguing over the size and scope of the state.

Instead, what we're arguing over is what it means to be an American. Who counts as an American? What is American history? What are the lessons to draw from it? Does American exceptionalism exist?

Whose values ought to rule?

Larry Bernstein:

Conservatives focus on the role of institutions instead of group identity. The importance of the church, business, the military, and thousands of smaller but important institutions like the United Way or the League of Women Voters. Society is centered around the family and not the state. Conservatives fight for these institutions. Changes to them should be incremental because of respect for the way that institutions are managed. There must be a reason that institutions work the way they do because of life complicated and not obvious. In contrast, the liberal view has attributes from the French Revolution that radical change can solve intractable problems, damn the institutions.

Matthew Continetti:

Right. Conservatism is associated with defense of inherited institutions. In American context, what institutions are those? We don't have a king, an established church, or an aristocracy. We do have the American founding, the family, civil society, and the market.

There's always been a tension between conservatism and populism that is often anti-institutional that wants its will imposed immediately.

Larry Bernstein:

In the Fall 2021 Virginia Governor election, public schools and education was an important political issue. The Republican Youngkin argued that content and the curriculum should be determined by parents, while the Democratic candidate said that this decision making should belong with the teacher and education experts. And this debate highlights the differences between the role of parents versus bureaucratic experts.

Matthew Continetti:

Youngkin is on the side of parents who are disgusted at the way schools handled the pandemic and things taught in schools.

Youngkin doesn't have Trump's personality. He's not as combative as DeSantis. He is a potential model for Republican leaders. We can do it with a smile and a fleece vest." And that can go a long way.

Larry Bernstein:

The biggest surprise in the political world is the changing voting patterns of Hispanics as they join the Republican party.

Matthew Continetti:

Hispanic voters care about the same thing as voters everywhere. They want a growing economy, safe streets, good schools, and affordable healthcare and childcare.

And what they saw under Trump was rising paychecks, jobs, and an economy that was recovering quickly after the pandemic shock. There are plenty of people who showed up here legally 30 years ago, who claim Hispanic ancestry, who are infuriated that people are just walking over the border, and they want to deal with illegal immigration.

I think the Hispanic voter is in the same position as the hard hats in the late 60s and early 1970s. With assimilation into America, they are now more aligned with the Republican party.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode on a note of optimism, Matt what are you optimistic about?

Matthew Continetti:

I'm optimistic about our Constitution and the political institutions it created. They've been through a profound stress in the past couple years and have survived. It's the role of American conservatives to defend them. Not to look to a single person, a specific figure or a personality. But to preserve it against its challengers, which can come from both the left and the right.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks to Jeremy and Matt for joining us today. That ends today's session. I want to make a plug for next week's show.

The first speaker will be Jeremy Dauber a Professor at Columbia and the author of Jewish Comedy: A Serious History. I love comedy and want to know more about what makes Jewish comedy special and so funny.

Our second speaker is Matthew Continetti who is the Resident Fellow in Social, Cultural and Constitutional Studies at AEI. Matthew has a new book that was released this week entitled The Right: The Hundred-Year War for American Conservatism. I want to learn about how the Right has changed from William Buckley to Rush Limbaugh to Trump.

In case you missed last week's show, check it out, it was on the war on the backlash against gentrification with Mitchell Schwarzer and kidnapping rich executives with Tom Sancton.

As a reminder, I am looking to hire interns to work with me on this podcast.

If you are interested in listening to a replay of today's What Happens Next program or any of our previous episodes or if you wish to read a transcript, you can find them on our website Whathappensnextin6minutes.com. Replays are also available on Apple Podcast, Podbean and Spotify.

Thanks to our audience for your continued engagement with these important issues, good-bye.