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REBELLION: HOW ANTILIBERALISM IS TEARING AMERICA APART—AGAIN

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OPENING REMARKS:

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DISCUSSION:

ROBERT KAGAN

Author, "Rebellion: How antiliberalism is tearing America apart—again"; Stephen & Barbara Friedman Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Brookings

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**MALONEY:** Good morning. I'm Suzanne Maloney, vice president and director of Foreign Policy here at the Brookings Institution. And I'm really delighted to welcome you today to this very special event celebrating my colleague Robert Kagan and his new book, "Rebellion: How Anti Liberalism Is Tearing America Apart Again." "Rebellion" explores the historical forces that have brought the United States to this very fraught political moment, in particular the long history of opposition to liberalism and to government that has shaped the character, institutions and dynamics of America from the time of the revolution, from from the time of the revolution to today. This is a really remarkable book. It's a deeply researched effort to situate our current politics in historical context. It offers a powerful reminder that our imperfect union is the product of enduring struggles over the ideas that the founders embraced in forging the unique American system. Our political debates today will shape the future of that system, as well as the liberal international order that Washington has helped to create and sustain. Before I turn the floor over to our speakers, let me offer very brief introductions of their very distinguished careers. Bob Kagan is the Steven and Barbara Friedman senior fellow at Brookings. He is also an editor at large at The Washington Post. He's the author of many books, including two volumes in a trilogy that examines the history of America's role in the world. The most recent of those volumes, "The Ghost at the Feast: America and the Collapse of the World Order, 1900 to 1941," was published only a year ago. He's also the author of "The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World," which was published in 2018. We're joined today also by Michael O'Hanlon, who will moderate the conversation with Bob. Mike is a senior fellow, director of our Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy and Technology, and director of research for Brookings Foreign Policy. Mike's latest books include "Military History for the Modern Strategist in 2023," "The Art of War in the Age of Peace: U.S. Grand Strategy, and Resolute Restraint," released in 2021, and "The Senkaku Paradox: Risking Great Power War Over Limited Stakes," published in 2019. We're eagerly awaiting the next book soon to come. You can pick up a copy of Bob's amazing book at our on-campus bookstore, and he will be signing copies. For those of you who are in the audience here today, a final reminder that we're on the record today. We're also streaming live, so those who are viewing virtually. Please send us your questions via email at [events@brookings.edu](mailto:events@brookings.edu), or via social media using the hashtag rebellion. For those in the room, we'll reserve the final minutes of this discussion for questions and answers, and staff will come around with microphones. Bob, congratulations and thank you for this masterpiece the floor is yours.

**KAGAN:** Thank you so much, Suzanne. I really appreciate it. It's it's wonderful to be here at Brookings, and not least because I get to be here with fantastic colleagues like Suzanne and Mike O'Hanlon. I have been here now something like 13 years. I guess you both have been here longer than that. So, it's great to have

joined your family, and and I have to just say I have to thank Brookings in general because, you know, it's in Washington. People are usually focused on what, what's going on right now and, policy recommendations and what's happening in the world. And Brookings, has for me provided a place where I can do long-term research. I mean, this book took me a year to write, but the last book took me 12 years to write. And Brookings very patiently allowed me to do that. And it's really one of the great qualities of the Brookings Institution that they, that they have, patience for people like me. So, just big thanks to to Brookings and to my, my wonderful colleagues. I'm going to only, speak very briefly because I'm really looking forward to my conversation with Mike. This book began, as many books do, with a question. And the question was, why are so many Americans willing to support a presidential candidate who clearly has no respect for the American Constitution, who who attempted to become a dictator in 2020, and after and and and as because of, you know, at the time of January 6th, makes no secret of his, intentions for a second term, etc.. I, I used to believe, I mean, for a long time, I mean, until fairly recently, the people just didn't get it. It wasn't clear to them, there was a lot of, issues that complicated the matter. People look back, as Jamie Dimon said, and while the economy was okay, you know, and, and, and, and I never understood how it is that the last part of the Trump administration, where he attempted to annul a free election, didn't bother them and hasn't bothered them enough to shake them away. And I wound up concluding and going back and doing a lot of, historical research, to show that, first of all, there are, I would say many millions of Americans who do want to see, our system fundamentally changed, if not overthrown. Some of them say it very frankly and talk about regime change, as the scholar Patrick Deneen does, but also as J.D. Vance, who's a potential vice presidential candidate. And the regime is not just the Biden regime, it is the regime. It is our regime. It is our system of liberal democracy that the founders established as a result of the revolution and in the writing of the Constitution. That is what, these people are opposing. And, and the fact is that we should not be so shocked by this, because we have had a fundamental, powerful anti-liberal tradition in America from the very founding of the Republic. And and I think it's worth taking a moment just to consider the fact, which I think we sometimes forget, for a variety of reasons, that the American Revolution and, particularly the Declaration of Independence, was, a real revolution in the history of humanity that, there had never before, the American founding been a government based on the principle of universal individual rights, rights that the founders referred to as natural rights, by which they meant not granted by God or a god, not granted by an authority like the king, not granted by government, and not even granted by the Constitution. The Constitution was merely designed to protect what they regarded as these inherent natural rights, that all people shared and, and, what we often talk about the American Revolution being the product of the enlightenment and, and things that were happening in Europe and also England. The fact is, it was a sharp break, even from the

European Enlightenment, which was not about ultimately liberalism in this regard, liberalism as defined by universal individual rights. The English people believed that there were rights that Englishmen enjoyed, but those Englishmen were only Protestants, for for most of a certainly up until, very, you know, until the late 19th century, Catholics were not granted the rights or the rights that everyone else was granted in England. And so what's unusual and I would say almost you could argue contrary to human nature, is the idea that not only do you have rights, and not only does your family and your tribe and people who look like you and people who believe in the religions you believe in have rights, but that all people have rights when they don't look like you, they don't talk like you, you don't agree with them. They hold different religious views than you, but you have to protect their individual rights as well. It's very easy to take for granted that that this is, an ideology to live by. But if you look at the grand sweep of human history, no government prior to the United States had ever been formed on the basis of that. And so, it's understandable that from the beginning then and the founders were well aware of this fact that the principles that they had enunciated, were not necessarily reflected in the way American society was actually structured after all the revolution occurred, in a in a system that was not yet liberal. And as Benjamin Rush said, we've changed the nature of our government and the principles on which our government is based. But have we changed our habits? Have we changed our practices? And obviously, the answer was no, because of a significant section of the country was engaged in, in slavery. And and make no mistake, at the time of the revolution, at the time of the founding, they knew that Blacks had rights and they were violating them. Jefferson is very clear on this point. So this gap existed, on race issues. It existed also on religious issues, even though the founders were very clear about separating church from state, and they really did not want religion in government. Nevertheless, for many decades after the revolution and the founding and the Constitution. Many states had religious tests for government. For participation in government, you had to be a Protestant or you had to be a Christian. And so there's always been this gap, and there always been a significant movement of Americans fundamentally in rebellion against the founders liberalism. And you can go all through history and see this movement. I compare it to the the demon spirit in the Stephen King novel. It takes different forms over the, over the centuries. But but you can recognize it. I, the one thing that I was struck by is I went back to do the research, if you listen, if you read the way people were talking about what McCarthyism was, what the John Birch Society was, what Pitchfork Ben Tillman in the late 19th century was, it is a striking how similar their descriptions of the movements, what they wanted, the language they used to articulate their grievances are exactly what we hear today from the MAGA movement, of Donald Trump. And so I conclude on the basis of this, that we are facing, once again, a significant challenge to our system. It's a consequence of the Republican Party being taken over by anti-liberal forces, which is something that has occurred over the past

few decades. There was a time back in the 19th century when the Democratic Party was controlled by anti-liberal forces. I think the last time Republicans were dominated by this, and the country as well, was the 1920s. In many respects, I think the 2016 election was almost identical in its meaning to the 1920 election, the only difference being they elected Warren Harding in 1920, not Donald Trump, but that these movements are recurring. And what's what has happened in this case, as I say, is they've captured the Republican Party, and therefore we face the challenge that we face today. The core of the Trump movement does want a different form of government, whether it's a white nationalist, in its orientation, whether it's white Christian nationalist, it's in its orientation. There's plenty of evidence out there. You can read the book and find it, but you can also read dozens of other articles to see that that's the case. Which leaves us with the final question, which is, okay, if that is the core of Trump's movement, how do you explain all the other people who are supporting Donald Trump, people we used to refer to as the normie Republicans? And that is the biggest puzzle of all, because these were people who happily voted for John McCain. They happily voted for Mitt Romney. They happily voted for other Republicans who were not at all in the mold of this anti-liberal force that Donald Trump represents. And now they're perfectly happy voting for Donald Trump too, which, I can only attribute ultimately, to, the fact that they, they just don't really care that much about whether the system is preserved, and largely because I think they think they'll be okay in this new system, whatever it is. My prime example of that these days is, is the statements that Jamie Dimon made in Davos a few months ago in which he said, I don't know, Trump was kind of right about NATO, kind of right about immigration, etc., all of which was a signal to say we're going to be okay in a Trump administration. We, the financial corporate community, are going to be okay in a Trump administration. And I think that is a general view among white Republicans that they don't think they are going to be the targets, of whatever the Trump administration, happens to bring. And so what we face is something that Thomas Jefferson worried about, during the revolution, what Abraham Lincoln warned about in a famous speech he gave in 1838, his famous Lyceum speech, namely, that the American people, or at least a significant portion of the American people, have lost the fervor for liberalism, by which I mean the founders liberalism that is necessary to sustain our republic. James Madison created a system consciously pitting selfish interests against selfish interests and which, you know, at least in its design, assumed that human beings were flawed creatures and would and would be selfish. But he even James Madison, said that without virtue, we are finished. And I think what we are lacking today to, to use a pretty obscure word in our common language is virtue, by which I mean the love of liberalism for its own sake. That is what our system demands of us, that we love liberalism, that we love individual rights for all. Not just for ourselves. It's a very hard thing to ask humans to do. It's a very hard thing to ask humans to sustain. I think many of us have come to had come to the conclusion that we should have,

out of that period of, of anti-liberal resistance. Just as I think people may have been shocked that 100 years after the end of the Civil War, the South was still insisting on white supremacy and resisted the Brown v Board of Education and desegregation. And here we are a decades later, and we're still facing, that kind of force. So, as Lincoln said, we need to renew our, our belief, our confidence and our passion, for liberalism, if we want our system to survive. The American system, unlike most, current governments in history, is a voluntary, arrangement. It depends on the consent of the people. It depends on, voluntary, acceptance of these fundamental principles, which I think we've, we've lost, and it's time to renew them, or we may lose them for good. In this election, that's what I think is at stake. Anyway, I went on longer than I meant to. I'm really looking forward to having our chat with Mike. Thanks for --

**O'HANLON:** Bob, thank you. It's an amazing book. And thank you all for being here and filling up this room. It's nice to see everybody enthused about the importance of this topic and this great book, which is mostly a history book, although obviously, as you say, it began with a question about today. I just wanted to first congratulate you, Bob, and tell you that, 20 years ago, when you were almost 20 years ago when you published "Dangerous Nation," you helped me understand American foreign policy better than I think I ever had before. And now you've helped me understand America better than I ever have before. And so you've not only been a great friend and colleague, but just a great teacher. And so this book, is you again, spends most of its time on periods prior to the 21st century. And so I wanted to if I could ask you to talk a little more about the American Revolution, I was just riveted by your treatment of that. And I'm going to I'm going to put a question before you, maybe to provoke you in a second. You already made some good comments and some helpful comments, but I want to go further into that. But first, I think we have to deal with semantics because a lot of people are going to be wondering, what's this guy Kagan, who people used to call a neocon, now being the great defender of liberalism? And if Donald Trump saw this book, I'm sure he would say, hey, if people want to say I'm not a liberal, that's good by me, you know, because he doesn't know what you mean when you use the term this way. And I've wrestled for a long time with the way the international relations literature uses the term liberalism differently than our political discourse. And I always wondered if maybe there couldn't be a better term that wouldn't have this confusion. You've convinced me that it probably is the right word. But it's taken me a long time to understand that. So could you explain to everyone what you mean by liberalism? You said it in passing, but let's just spend a little time on getting that definition really clear in people's minds.

**KAGAN:** Yeah. And it's a really it's obviously, as you know, it's a fraught. The word is fraught. It means so many different things to so many different people. And and so, right. I think it's important to remember what liberalism originally meant, because that is what is at stake here. And, and what it meant, quite simply, is, as I, as I mentioned it, it's the, it's the universal. It's the belief in universal rights. It's the belief that all human beings are born innately and, with it's the, it's the it's the language of the Declaration of Independence. If you want to know what the what the definition of liberalism, it's the language of the Declaration. And I think what's what's important is we have a in especially in the modern context, liberalism is often also tied up with how much government spending should you have or etc.. And I have to say, the founders, differed on the question of the role of government, in, in society. Hamilton, was what you might call an early industrial policy type guy. He wanted to have the economy, organized in such a way with, with significant government involvement to try to attach the wealthy to the system, etc.. Jefferson had the opposite idea. He wanted to have the government basically support the yeoman farmer as he imagined it. Kind of a bit of a myth, but nevertheless, that was the way he looked at it. The important thing to realize is you could be on any end of that spectrum and still be defending liberalism. Both Alexander, Alexander Hamilton and Jefferson were defending liberalism. I'm going to we can have a discussion about Jefferson and slavery, but believe it or not, he he knew he was a hypocrite. I just want you to be aware of that. And everybody told him he was a hypocrite at the time, including Alexander Hamilton. But but for the purposes of the Constitution and the founding, they were both interested in liberalism, even though they had very different views of economics, and of what the government's role should be. And so also, I think it's important to understand liberalism doesn't it doesn't answer all human questions. And I think sometimes we wrap up, a lot of times liberalism wrapped up with the enlightenment so that it's it's associated with the idea of progress, for instance, people say liberalism delivers economic progress. That's why we like it, etc. it may or may not deliver economic progress, but that is not why we value liberalism. And I think, I think it's important. Liberalism does not promise progress, except the progressive, acceptance of different groups that have had their rights denied to them. So the the progress we see in liberalism is the recognition. Sometimes people talk about creating rights or expanding rights. That's not what's happening. It's recognizing rights that have previously been denied people. And so in that sense, there's progress. But liberalism does not solve the questions of the human spirit. It does not substitute for religion, even though it is a kind of faith. And I think it's important to realize that. Liberals tend to think of them, of their views as being the truth, as being the sort of, you know, the way Frank Fukuyama would put it. It's the end point of human development. It's the highest stage. And the fact is, no, it's a faith you've decided that you believed in. And when the founders say these truths are self-evident, that is not that is not a statement of fact. When they say that governments are instituted in order

to protect these rights, that's an interesting statement. It had not been true until until, until the founders. So I think it's for me, it's important to not, associate liberalism with things that liberal was never intended to deliver. It may have had the effect of delivering these things, but that is not its goal. And even if the country were poor, I would hope we would still support liberalism, which is to say, fundamental individual rights. Sorry, very long questions to very short answer.

**O'HANLON:** That's really good. I'm, I'm going to I'm going to actually read from page 86 of your book, which just reinforces this, because I want people to get a little flavor. So you should buy the book and you're going to get it signed if you get it, today. But this is, Bob talking about Douglas versus Lincoln and their debates in 1858 and their sort of ongoing political rivalry even thereafter. Although, of course, Douglas passed away shortly after Lincoln became president. But Bob writes, "Douglas's insistence that the people could vote to approve the enslavement of others, and that this democratic decision to do so gave slavery legitimacy was a profoundly anti-liberal argument. The founders and the revolutionary generation had well understood that even the people could be tyrants, and that protection of natural rights would sometimes require overruling the decisions of the majority. The nation was founded not on the principle of popular sovereignty, but on the belief that all individuals possess natural rights that could not be abridged even by democratic processes. Finally, Lincoln rejected Douglas' claim and called on Americans to rededicate themselves to the radical liberal conviction that all men and women are created equal, a moral truth that could not be overridden by a mere vote of the people." So, as usual, well said.

**KAGAN:** Well, and that's important because we often use democracy and, you know, as, as the way of describing our government and, and of course, it is a democratic government. And I don't think you can actually preserve liberalism without democracy. But you can have democracy, at least for a time, without liberalism. And certainly, democracy doesn't guarantee liberalism if as, as we know, since, you know, we did democratically approve slavery, you know, by implication, decade after decade after decade. And then, by the way, we democratically approved, Jim Crow and the denial of rights to to Black people, etc. etc. So, it is important that the core of what America is, is, is liberalism. That's what makes it different. You can have democracy, but it's the liberalism that's critical.

**O'HANLON:** And the role of the courts therefore becomes crucial. And you're a little bit nervous about where things are today in that regard. But you certainly point out the way in which that's evolved over the centuries.



**KAGAN:** Yeah. I mean, with the court today, I think is at least partly anti liberal. And to say that should not again be shocking. The court was fundamentally anti-liberal, I would say through most of American history. You know, when the court was approving, various, slavery or demands of the South, etc., it was partly because they were appealing to the Constitution, which was still obviously not certainly not opposing slavery, but also because they also believed that Blacks were were, were not equal to Whites. So, and I think what we see on the court today, and also as I somewhat, I guess, controversially suggest that the whole theory of originalism is in some ways antithetical to anti liberalism, because it doesn't I mean, it's antithetical to liberalism because it doesn't recognize what the founders did recognize. They knew that the way Americans were conducting themselves at the time of the revolution was not what they were aspiring to. And they knew that that this gap existed. I found a quotation from John, John Adams, who was probably one of the more conservative of the founders, saying, next thing you know, the women are going to be asking for the vote. And young and all kinds of people are going to be asking for the vote. And I think he didn't like that. But he knew that it was the natural and inevitable consequence of the principles that they were, upholding and that he wasn't claiming in any way to stop it. So, they as I say, it's important to realize because we, we sometimes we get to the conversation and you say, well, the founders are a bunch of hypocrites, full stop. And of course, they were hypocrites. They were. As I say, they knew they were hypocrites and they created a system designed ultimately to remove the hypocrisy. And we have in some respects been moving in that direction. But not and I and this is I hasten to get into this, and I'm not even answering your question. I hate that. Not inevitably. You know, that is the part of it that I think you know, it isn't just that once you lay out the principles, inevitably things begin to fall into place. It was specific events. In some cases a specific war, in other cases, demographic shifts in or another war, etc. specific circumstances either strengthened or weakened liberalism in the American system.

**O'HANLON:** You know, reading you over the years, I've, I've taken away that you are not a complete fatalist or a pure realist in the IR sense of the term, international relations, because you do believe that change is possible, but you always underscore that change is hard, slow, and reversible. Progress may be possible, but it's not inevitable. And it's always hard and slow and fragile.

**KAGAN:** Exactly, exactly. And I think, you know, we just tend to when we get into the realm of ideas. And again, not to be picking on Frank Fukuyama, but this idea that, you know, this notion that you had a battle of ideas and one idea won. That's not the way the world works. Power is a critical element of what idea wins. And, and the win is never a permanent win. And I think in particular with the case of liberalism, again,

historically, liberalism is an aberration. And we live in a very brief window in which liberalism has been predominant in the world, because the most powerful country in the world has been liberal, at least mostly liberal or attempting to be liberal. It doesn't have to be that way. And, and and I think, you know, if I had to say, you know, at some point over the next centuries, it's not going to be that way, and we will have a reversion to a more normal, overly, overwhelmingly autocratic world.

**O'HANLON:** Let's talk a little bit more about the American Revolution, although you've referenced it several times. But I want to, first of all, recommend this book just for that chapter alone. Even if you don't want to read more about where we are today and Donald Trump and all of that, this helps me understand the revolution. And, it's something I've been trying to understand better in the last few years with my own writing, but Bob helps me enormously. So let me sort of throw a Joe Sixpack summary of what you say about the American Revolution at you and see if, if I'm anywhere close, you basically at least my interpretation. Some of what you say is, you know, life really wasn't that bad here in the early 1770s. The British weren't really treating us that badly. And, pretty low taxes. We complained about the increases they put on with the stamp tax. And, you know, we had the Boston Tea Party wasn't that fun. But this is a pretty nice place to live along the Atlantic seaboard. And we weren't doing so badly. And. A lot of people who wanted to break off from Britain. They didn't want to do it just for these liberal principles. They just didn't think it was natural that a faraway king should have any business governing this great landmass that was going to grow with time, and the expansionism that was inherent in people's thinking already back then was maybe not always articulated, but it was there. And so people knew. There's no reason some small island 3,000 miles away would rule a whole continent. This is supposed to be like the Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Mr. Hand and and and and Spicoli version of of of history in my interpretation. But so we needed to make it about something bigger. And a lot of people did genuinely believe it could be and should be about something bigger. But it was an argument that had to be sort of built up and spread and articulated. And in some sense, we even we even got carried away, making it more than some of the people who were making it even really believed it. But they needed a bigger idea to attach this movement to, to create the kind of fervor that would actually justify and sustain a revolution. Because the revolution was hard. It was. There was a lot of tough fighting. There was an uncertain outcome along the way. And so we needed to build up this big idea. And that big idea became the idea that's more in the Declaration of Independence that you call liberalism, that we're natural rights and that. So it was partly a vehicle for motivating the revolution that we wanted for other reasons. We didn't always or partly for other reasons. We didn't want it to be ruled by this faraway king. And so if we

needed to invent some bigger ideology or concept to justify our split, liberalism became it. Is that partly accurate?

**KAGAN:** That's that's partly accurate. I don't know that we as in this case. But, but, no, I guess what I would say is. Until the until, the 1760s and early 1770s. People, the the Anglo-American colonists were pretty content with their lives because they'd been left alone by Britain. There was this long period, I'm sure you learned in your textbooks that people still learn things in their textbooks. A period called benign neglect, where basically the colonies were allowed to do whatever they wanted to do. The English didn't care that much. They were preoccupied with other things. But as a result of the what we call the French and Indian War, but what they call the Seven Years War, which was very much for the benefit of the colonists. The British turned around and said, okay, it's time to start making some sense of this empire. You guys need to start paying up, etc., etc. and and while while taxes was definitely on people's mind, etc., they were not wrong to to fear that what the the relationship between the Crown and Parliament, in England and the colonies, was not what they thought it was. And, and they realized that basically they had no rights. You could say. The issue was taxation, but but but but the core principle was that the metropole was doing whatever it wanted in the colonies, and you just had to deal with it, and you had no representation. And so, you know, they really did. And they talked about being enslaved in this way. And the rhetoric sounds, again, overheated if the issue is taxation. But if the issue is, do you actually possess any rights that the that the central government is bound to, to respect? Then the question is the answer is maybe no. And and I think we underestimate the Boston Tea Party is like, you know, it's kind of a funny episode, but but what it led to which the colonists called the Intolerable Acts, was really intolerable. You know, the British basically occupied Boston, closed the port, replaced the government with a Crown government, court. This was, you know, there were huge numbers of British troops and people in Boston were forced to take them into their homes. So in a sense, they had no rights whatsoever. Why is this important? Because not only did they need a justification for why they were no longer going to be part of England, which was the last thing on their mind when they started. As Mike said, nobody thought they were going to separate from England. They thought they would get a new arrangement where the Crown would recognize their parliament and they'd have two equal parliaments, etc. but when they realized that that wasn't going to happen and they needed to base their rights on something prior to that, their rights were guaranteed to the extent that they were by the English Constitution, which is a contract between the Crown and the people. But if they were divorcing themselves from the Crown on, what were they going to base their rights? And then, you know, if I had political philosophers here with me, they would say it all comes from Locke. Locke came up with these

theories as a result of the of the Glorious Revolution in 1688 about how there were these things called natural rights, which people which the governments were bound to respect. England was not based on that principle, including at the time of the revolution or for decades later. But but that was what the colonists clung, cling to in make in saying, okay, our rights are based on the principle of universal rights. And that's how you get to the Declaration of Independence. But in addition to that, there was also the the experience of having their rights fundamentally deprived. And if you look at what the Bill of Rights, the Bill of Rights is basically everything that the British just did to us. We want to make sure that never happens again. And so you go through all the different, the different amendments and they're like, yep, that happened to them, that happened to them, that happened to them, especially search and seizure, which, by the way, we've allowed to become eroded terribly. The founding, if you want to ask me what the founders will be shocked by, it's the degree of a government and police power in terms of getting into your business. But but in any case, it was one they were highly attuned in a way that was rare in, with the idea of individual rights. That was their obsession. And so the government that was founded was founded out of an obsession for protection of individual rights, which was both theoretical and practical. And, and it's important to remember that because that fervor and this is what Jefferson worries about, he writes in his notes in the State of Virginia in 1781. But a couple of years before the war is going to be over. He says, boy, when the war is over, I wonder whether we're going to be able to continue this fervor. And he actually said, we better get all these rights in place now, because pretty soon the American people are going to go back to their quotidian lives making money, and they're not going to care about rights anymore. And so anything that we. Don't settle now is never going to be settled. And boy, was he right. But but, but this idea that, you know, it was a unique moment of fervor, with all kinds of factors coming together which created this system. It was a one. And I don't want to say that the founding was a kind of a miracle, but it was it was a it was a non-miracle in the way that life is a non-miracle. It required so many factors. That's why when people talk about the inevitability of liberalism and the rise of this, oh my gosh, it required so many unanticipated factors to come together to create this fervor for rights. And it's not surprising that it's easy to lose that fervor over time.

**O'HANLON:** So in the interest that now of getting to the modern day and also getting to your questions fairly soon, let me see Bob if I've, in following the sweep of history forward after the revolution, if I've accurately identify what I think are maybe five main phases that you talk about of pushback against liberalism and obviously everything leading up to the Civil War and then the Civil War itself has to be seen as one major episode. But then there's Reconstruction or the failure of Reconstruction in many ways, and the origins of the Ku Klux Klan, very anti-Black, anti 13th, 14th, 15th amendment and effectively forces an end to the remaking

of southern society within about a decade. And then there's the period in the early 20th century that you also touch on in your "Ghost at the Feast" recent book in which the Ku Klux Klan comes back, but now it has more targets than simply African Americans. It's also after Jews and Irishmen and Germans and Catholics and, and it becomes very prevalent throughout the country, geographically and otherwise. And it's almost in bed with political figures and parties because it's found a way to make itself look nice in some respects, at some times, in some ways, and yet still do all of its nasty stuff on the sly, as well. And that's a big phase. And this, this is a period where, as you point out, immigration goes way down to after it had been very high. It goes way down, starting in, I think, the 20s and then through roughly 1970. So we had had a country that was 15% foreign born around the turn of the 20th century, down to only 5% foreign born by 1970, and 15% again today. I'm almost done with this quick summary and then you can let me correct it. Then we have the pushback against, a lot of what was happening in the 50s and 60s and, you know, a reincarnation yet again, of the Ku Klux Klan, but also, you know, again, largely, a push back against the civil rights movement. And then we have today's era with all of that encompasses. Have I basically summarized your main phases of anti-liberalism correctly?

**KAGAN:** You have, Michael, because you're fantastic. And what I want to emphasize about that story is, is the lack of steady continuity in any particular direction. And, and to try to bring home the fact that, it isn't -- we can also go backwards. Because that is what happened after the turn of the 20th century, the huge -- the by the way, the founders' attitude towards immigration was open immigration. Of course, they said they wanted whites, but, within that, which by, which, by the way, meant they also didn't want Asians, but, but but within that, Jefferson's attitude was, if you came and live here and abide by the laws, you're, you're you're going to become a citizen. And so the notion of immigration restriction, was, was not part of the founders' ideal. But, nevertheless, with the huge influx of immigration beginning in the middle of the 19th century, but accelerating and bringing in people from other parts of Europe, Jews, southeastern Europeans, you know, all kinds of different people, really led to a real concern in the United States by white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, from white Protestants, not necessarily Anglo-Saxon, that their country was being changed and inundated. Poison the blood? Yes. Poison the blood. And and by the way, in a much more structured, intellectually respectable fashion than, than today, you know, when you, when you say that the Ku Klux Klan dressed itself up and made itself presentable? No, it didn't it was presentable because its ideas were acceptable, broadly accepted. You know, the 1920s, I think when we. You think of the 1920s? We think of F Scott Fitzgerald and the Jazz Age and flappers and all that kind of stuff. It was the most racist period. The most prejudiced period, in American history, after after the Civil War, in some respects, because, immigration

didn't, didn't go down. It was shut down in 1924 by the incredibly harsh Immigration Restriction Act, which specifically go back and read the news stories about it. Specifically, the big headline on one of the newspapers was "Nordic Victory" because the 1924 election, I mean, Immigration Act was about limiting, immigration to people from Nordic states because in those days, not only was the huge distinction made between whites and non-whites, but there were big distinctions made within white, within the white class. So, you know, they had this idea of Nordic whites, Mediterranean whites, inferior alpine whites somewhere in the middle. They did intelligence tests to prove that Nordics were more intelligent and Mediterranean, etc., etc. which is why sometimes when I hear people yelling about identity politics, it's too much identity politics, this country has been obsessed with identity politics throughout its entire history. And the thing that I've the people forget about the 1920s and 30s particularly is the the incredible power of the eugenics movement. That's something we've kind of swept under the rug because Hitler made it look bad, you know? But up until Hitler, people, very respectable people. Sam Huntington's father was president of the American Eugenics Society. Very respectable position. Harvard professors, etc., believed scientifically that that there were differences between the races. Again, all of which we're now hearing again. And so the point being, antisemitism, for instance, was not a prevalent factor in a 19th century America. Anti-Catholicism way, way more important. But after the turn of the century, with the influx of very large numbers of Jews, all of a sudden antisemitism became a thing in general. The country, as I say, the white Christian country got it. And really, the white Protestant country was in a panic that they were losing control. And this what is known that, you know, what people refer to as white anxiety? You know, white anxiety is not a new phenomenon. It is another constant throughout American history. And sometimes, it becomes a dominant force. And I and I think we need to remember that. Why did it stop becoming and why did it lose its dominance? Two reasons: the Depression -- three reasons: the Depression, the the immigration that had already occurred before 1924, before they shut it down, completely changed the demographic complexion of the United States and World War II, which utterly discredited for a time racism suppressed, a lot of that, which is why and really, World War II is the birth of the liberal era that we've been living in up until now. And the the advances, the the deepening of the founders' commitment to liberalism, the broadening of that founders' commitment to liberalism as a consequence of World War II, to the depression and demographic changes which lead to a liberal dominance, which is precisely what the what the Trump movement is complaining about. They complain about being oppressed by liberalism and they are right. They have been oppressed. Anti liberals have been on the bottom rung until now, until they managed to seize control of the Republican Party.

**O'HANLON:** So how do you rank today's threat to liberalism compared to these previous ones and the periods you've been talking about in the book? How much of a threat to the Republic is the Trump movement or define it as you? Well, if you don't want to use that proper noun, but you want to think of it more generally, just, you know, how bad are things today? How dangerous is this moment in American history?

**KAGAN:** Well, I think it's very obviously it's very dangerous. I'm running around screaming and yelling about it all the time and to no great effect, as far as I can tell. But, but I think it's very dangerous. And what you have here and this is, this is what this is what makes history and differentiates history from political science or political theory. What you have is the intersection of a unique individual with a broad movement that that always exists. And it's the it's the interaction of those two phenomena, that have created the danger that we're in right now. I think Trump is a pretty unique. He's not unique as a demagogue. We've had demagogues exactly like him again. And I say, if you go back and read what people wrote about Ben Tillman, it sounds like they're writing about Donald Trump, including the uncouth this including the language, including the breaking norms, etc. but, but but so as a demagogue for anti-liberal forces Trump is right as is right out of central casting. What makes him different, though, is his personality. And I'm not a psychiatrist, so I'm not going to make any clinical pronouncements, but it's pretty clear from everybody who knows him that Trump is a fairly unique individual in his lack of human empathy, and I think, you know, has no real connection to anybody and clearly also has no real connection to the principles and the beliefs that that sort of undergird America, even from the broadest conceivable perspective. And so he is what Daniel Bell referred, called McCarthy. He is a wrecker. He is a destroyer, of this, of this and, and it, only out of his it's his pure naked selfishness makes him a dangerous person because he does not he wants what he wants, and he doesn't want to be denied what he wants. And he discovered a lot of things in his first term. And this is why when people talk about his first term and say, don't worry, his first term was fine, this is a different Donald Trump. First of all, his first term was not fine. He tried to overthrow the government in his first term. But but you know, even setting aside that he is he is a different creature today. And it is very clear, especially, as he, you know, dances. It's unpleasant for him, I'm sure, but he is dancing through this court, all these court challenges, when he emerges from the other side, if he's elected president, he will have demonstrated that the American court system has no ability to constrain him. And if you think that they can't constrain him when he's not president, wait till their inability to constrain him when he is president. We've already seen that the court, won't stop him. So, setting aside, if you just take this individual. And say he is about to become the least constrained president in our history. He is not constrained by the courts. He will not be constrained if Republicans control the Congress. He will not be constrained by the need to run again,

necessarily, because either he's not going to run again or we're not going to have another election that that could be conceived of as fair. So we are taking someone who his closest supporters acknowledge is a narcissistic child. And we're going to give him more power than we've ever given anybody else in history. I again, getting back to my original question. I understand not liking Joe Biden. I understand not liking Democrats. I understand being upset about what's happening on campus. I understand being upset about another dozens of things that are going on in America today. I do not understand why the answer to that is to elect a man like Donald Trump, who poses the most threat to our system that I have ever that that I think we've ever seen in our history since the Civil War. And, and the fact is and again, but what I want to emphasize is it isn't obviously just Donald Trump. That's the problem. Obviously, the problem is also the American public, that is either willing to support him or indifferent to whether he, wins or not. And so, that puts us in a, in a in a time of real danger now. You know, there's a certain number of people who say, oh, well, okay, so we'll have Trump for a few years. It'll be kind of a dictatorship, be terrible. But then we'll get past that and we'll move on. And I'm like, I sure hope that's true. I really sure hope that's true. But I don't feel like going through that. I don't feel like experimenting with dictatorship in the United States. So, I'm sorry, another rambling answer to a pretty simple question.

**O'HANLON:** No. It's great. It's a great answer, but it's really troubling. I sort of wish you hadn't said it, but it's it's but very clear. And let me ask this. There's this is my last question, and I'm sure many of you would like to get into this as well. There's a tension, at least as I perceive it, in your last, you know, chapter or so. And it's not because of anything analytically unclear in your thinking. I think it's just an unanswerable dilemma to some extent. But you talk about some of the people who would like to attach themselves to a Trump presidency to create a different kind of America, or even regime change, or even overthrow the Republic. And some of them have very clear views on what they want to replace it with. But they're all also fairly obscure to a lot of us. I didn't recognize most of the names admitting my own ignorance. I'm glad that you're bringing them to my attention, but Donald Trump himself doesn't seem to have that clear of a vision of what he'd like to replace our democracy with. He seems more like a Mussolini or a Franco, I don't know who the right historical figure is. You even you even mention Hitler. But. But regardless of what the right example is, or maybe Mobutu Sese Seko, I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Congo. Trump seems a little bit like him in some ways, but it strikes me that Trump himself is just going to be tactical, and he's going to have a long enemies list, and he's going to be willing to do some things that certain people who want to attach themselves to his cause will want to do, but he himself will meander. And you see it on the abortion issue where he tries to use that politically to his best advantage. But I'm not sure he knows what new abortion



regimen he'd like to see in the United States beyond just one that helps him politically. So. Isn't it possible that what we're going to have is just if Trump wins again, is this tactical, you know, zigzagging on a lot of issues without a clear endpoint in mind? And maybe that winds up even though, as you say, he learned lessons from his first term that he he won't repeat. But the zigzagging part is maybe almost our best hope that he really won't want to go along with one of these apocalyptic or White supremacist visions or what have you, that that he'll be just really about, you know, somehow satisfying his own ego day to day. And, and hopefully that means that some of his actions ultimately cancel each other out.

**KAGAN:** Well, that is a hopeful thought. No, it is, it is a it is an issue. I think the people who want to the people that I'm referring to, and, and and they're obscure. But part of the reason they're obscure, I think, is because they're honest and we're not ready to hear what they're saying. So the person you're referring to, one of them is this, Patrick Deneen, who had a had at least two, at least one bestselling book, but I think two and I mean best-selling. And his last book is called "Regime Change." And the regime he's talking about is not the Biden regime but the American regime. And and and so he gets kind of shunted off to the side because he says these things, frankly. And what he says frankly is, by the way, what they want to create. And this is what this is part of your answer to the question, what they want to create is what they call a, a common good. But what they really mean is a Christian commonwealth, and they're very clear about that. Both Deneen and Adrian Vermeule at Harvard say very explicitly they want to have a government that is founded on Christian principles and and and articulates Christian principles and defends Christian principles. Now let's go let's go back to Donald Trump. The interesting thing about Trump right now is that the one group in this perilous moment for him, and I think it's worth understanding that this is a perilous moment for him. We can joke about it all, but I don't think he wants to wind up in jail. And he's and he needs people who will support him no matter what he does. And he has those people. And those people are this core group that I'm talking about who are fundamentally, I know we don't like to use this word because it's a nasty word, but I just don't know any other word to use. They are white nationalists. They have an ethnoreligious definition -- if you want to put it in a nice, friendly fashion -- they have an ethnoreligious definition of America, which is not, in fact, the definition of the founders' definition of America. And they are willing to support Trump no matter what he does. And it's interesting on abortion, even though he has a huge following among anti-abortion advocates and even among the evangelical movement, they they are willing to give him a pass on whatever he does because they know why he's doing it. Now, what he would do on abortion if he were president, I would, you know, he'll heal. And so what I think we need to realize is whatever else is true, and look at the way he's running. He is hewing closely to this group. He didn't run. He's always been a white nationalist, by

the way, let's not forget how he introduced himself to the American body politic when he first thought of running for president in 2011. In 2011, he ran for president. He was ahead in the polls on the basis of one issue. Do you remember what the issue was? It was birtherism. I'm sorry. Birtherism is saying the first American Black president is not actually an American. In coming out that way, he signaled to this group that he was one of them. And he has been one of them ever since. And now, at this moment of personal peril to him, they are with him 1,000%. He needs them. He needs. And yes, he knows that he can get away with a little meandering on abortion because he knows they're going to forgive him, but he is going to be fundamentally hewing to them both, as in the candidacy, if he loses and wants to challenge the election, he's counting on them to support him, which they will. And if he wins and is going to be in various wars with the Democrats over one thing or another and attempting to implement some of the things that he wants, he's going to rely on them to be with him 100% and look at his language in this campaign, the poison the blood campaign, the dictator for a day campaign. He was asked recently at Time magazine, you know, what's with the dictator stuff? And he said, the people like it. And that's what we need to understand. The people like it. Okay, so he is he's also talking about how he's going to create in the, in the Justice Department, something to look into anti-Christian bias. We know what that means. Okay. He he's running on, on white anxiety and he intends to do something about it. And those are the people. So the second answer to your question is who is coming in this time? It's not going to be all these guys who just happened to be Republicans, and he didn't know who else to pick. So here they are. You have got people very determined to fundamentally change the nature of this government and in very specific ways. One of the people who is often talked of as being a likely chief of staff for Donald Trump, says explicitly he wants to bring America back to the 1920s explicitly. And he and wants to put God back you know, it's time for America to be the Christian country that the founders intended it to be, etc. etc. So I think we need to be understand that even though Trump is an undisciplined egomaniac, his his undisciplined egomania is going to go in a certain direction. Okay. And, and, and that even if there isn't sort of jackboots in the street and a complete takeover and a authoritarian dictatorship, it doesn't take much at the federal level for the country to change fundamentally. And I'll just end by this point. This country tolerated local violence against Black people, routine violence, lynching, murdering, abusing, etc. it happened. It was constant throughout the South for over well over a century. And, and, and the federal government did nothing about it. Okay. We've been living in a period where when bad things happen to certain people, the federal government, has to take the side of the victims, as it did ultimately, on the various, you know, shootings of Black people by the police, etc. If Donald Trump were president, do you think that would be the reaction, do you think? And so it doesn't take much at the federal level to change the tone, which has all kinds of implications at the local and state level. And so I

think people are just as usual. It's a failure of imagination. We think things are going to be roughly the way they've been, and that's the way we are. But that's what human beings are. We can imagine a little change, but basically things will be the same. We have a hard time imagining real change. And that's what I'm trying to say, is that and in this case, what I'm really trying to say is it wouldn't be real change that we've never seen before, folks. We've seen it before, and it can happen again.

**O'HANLON:** Thank you, Bob, but let's go to your questions in the audience. And please wait for a microphone and identify yourself, please, along the way. And we'll start here in the front row and then work our way back.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** Well, thank you very much for your presentation. I'm going to buy your book, and, I have two questions. Pick one. One is, with respect to the Cold War and liberalism. Is it your view or do you have any comments about the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union over the hearts and minds of people of color, and that I think I personally think that made a difference in the passage of civil rights bills. And secondly, on the media, the people you're talking about who talk about Trump, my sister-in-law, for example, lives in Kentucky. She hears a completely different news newscasts in Kentucky. Her she thinks she's virtuous. She thinks she's doing the right thing. Thank you.

**KAGAN:** Well, they're both good questions, so I feel like maybe I'll answer both questions. You know, on the on the Cold War, I don't think, you know, there's a lot there were a lot of there were certainly negative effects of the Cold War in American society. I think the anti-Communist, you know, the sort of red baiting that occurred was, was a factor. But I think, I think it's absolutely true that, first of all, most importantly, the World War II was the engine for civil rights. But but the Cold War was also because if Americans were saying we just fought a war for democracy and freedom, and we're now fighting again for democracy and freedom, there was pressure to live up to that, to some extent. But I guess at the end of the day, I feel like it really World War II was a much more significant factor in the civil rights movement than the Cold War, though I think the Cold War helped. Is that was that the question you were asking? Yeah. You know, I'm at the point now and I understand about the buffer, you know, the, the siloing of news, etc., but I really at this point, I feel like if you if you can watch Fox News and think that Trump is virtuous, it's because you were deliberately excluding all other information. And I again, I'm willing to believe that people just don't know when they can't see, etc. but I'm less and less persuaded of that. I really think that people see what they want to see. They're persuaded by what they want to be persuaded by. They're going to Fox because they know Fox will tell them

what they want to hear. And I think they go in, they're already pro trump before they get there. And so they're just having their basic views reinforced. And that's what I mean to some extent. We're all like that. We all like to see our views, reinforced. But there is too much information out there for people not to see. And so I'm no longer in the poor Americans that can't get it right. Problem? I'm more in. The Americans are refusing to get it right problem.

**O'HANLON:** Man here please, the third row.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** I'm a fellow at the Wilson Center. Thank you for for your presentation and for your book. How do you conciliate American liberalism with American foreign policy? And going back to the beginning to that fantastic chapter in the American Revolution. How do you conciliate the internal struggle to look for recognition of rights with the desire of expansion over the continent? Thank you.

**KAGAN:** Yeah. No, I mean, look, liberalism is a funny, has has two quality in this early period that you're talking about. Some of this was inherited from English Protestantism, actually, which was the belief that this is we are bringing, civilization to places that don't have civilization. And, and, and in some respects, the Lockean element of this sometimes had a, had a, had had the effect that you're talking about. So, for instance, John Quincy Adams, who was hardly the most conservative, aggressive, monstrous person in the world, nevertheless looked out at the territory controlled by Indians and said, they're not making proper use of the land. Because there was a very fundamental theory which was inherited from England, that, you know, you're supposed to make use of the land and build it up and create it. That's what is therefore, you know, and so these people are just they're just running around on it. They're not doing anything with it. Therefore this isn't what God intended. So there's a lot of, you know, a lot of inherited Protestant Anglo-Saxon expansionist tendency and a sense of who's inferior and who's making good use of the, etc. And so that is, something that that's a hold over. Now, it's also true that liberalism in, in, in telling people that they should be able to do what they want and government can't stop them from shouldn't stop them from pursuing their happiness also meant that the government couldn't stop them from taking Indian land away from from the Indians. And and, you know, you go through the early period in the 1790s in particular, where the government was constantly making treaties with the Indian tribes that they fully expected to honor, but they would not politically, they could not stop settlers from moving in and taking over the territory, and then the government would come in behind them. So this is one of those cases where I think liberalism did not lead necessarily to the most moral outcome. They certainly didn't believe, that whatever rights which they did believe Indians enjoyed,

nevertheless didn't get in the way of the fact that the Indians were in the way of what they wanted to do. And here's what this is. This is a truth, and it's a truth that explained the persistence of slavery to where most human beings, if you give them, if their interests clashes with their principles. They're going with the interest. And so that is true. Now on the other hand, if you look at American foreign policy writ large, Americans, especially in the 20th century, have had a foreign policy at various different times, guided by liberalism. I think America entered World War II, and I know we think we didn't enter it, that we got pushed into it. But that's nonsense. We we took all this. We Americans took all the steps, that ultimately led into World War II. Why? It was actually about the defense of liberalism. It was not even a perception, necessarily, of our own security being at risk. And I would say we're doing it again in the case of Ukraine. America doesn't have a vital national interest in what happens to Ukraine. It may not even have a vital interest in what happens in Eastern Europe. After all, we lived with Eastern Europe under Moscow's control for decades, and we were fine, right? But what we are concerned about is the conquest of a liberal state by an aggressive anti liberal state. And I think we are responding the way we've responded in the past. So, you know, as is often the case, it's an incredibly mixed picture. And there's been, you know, violations of human rights in the name of liberal progress. And then there's also been an effort to support liberalism. I don't know if that's a satisfactory answer to your question, but your question is impossible to answer.

**O'HANLON:** Let's try over here in the fourth row, please. Yes, sir.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** Thank you so much. Very interesting conversation. I just wanted to talk about kind of your point. Your last point about Ukraine. Do you see the seeds of the liberal ethos, outside of American borders? Potentially in Ukraine, potentially in Eastern Europe?

**KAGAN:** A liberal ethos? Yes. Yeah. I mean, Europe is fundamentally liberal, I mean, today. So and I think that, what, what Ukrainians want is to be part of a liberal world. Now, maybe they don't all know what that exactly means. You know, Poland also wanted to be part of the liberal world, but then I think, had some questions about whether they really wanted to be part of the liberal world. And so you can't assume that just because people want that now, that that is what they are necessarily. And of course, there is conflict in Europe today about about liberalism, just as there is here, although I think its origins, are different. But I think I think what Ukrainians want today is to be, is to be part of the liberal world.

**O'HANLON:** Here in the fifth row. And then we'll go to the woman right behind after.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** Hi, Mark Lerner, I don't think you're using the word liberalism correctly.

**KAGAN:** Then I'm. Then I'm screwed.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** The founders, the founders believed in natural rights, and they believed in, negative, rights or liberty rights. Meaning that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness I'm entitled to. But it doesn't mean someone else has to provide them to me. And somewhere along the line, 1900s liberalism flipped to become a positive right. Meaning I am entitled to things like housing, food, medicine, and those rights can be taken from other people. Resources can be taken from others and given to me. And that's the fundamental problem that people have. It goes to the attraction to Trump because people are saying they don't recognize this liberal world now. It's not the world that America was founded upon. And therefore, you know, when I can't get a job or I don't have enough money to send my kids to college or afford things, and then you talk to modern liberals and you say, what's the most important thing facing the country now? And they say global warming. They don't have a connection to that. It's they don't see the world the same way.

**KAGAN:** Okay. I feel better now. You definitely don't have the right definition of liberalism. Liberalism is not every good thing that you want in the world, you know? And, liberalism is agnostic on the question of global of global warming. It doesn't mean the global warming isn't a problem, but liberalism does not have an answer to that problem and doesn't profess to have an answer to that problem. And and as I say, on the question of of of spending and redistribution, the founders understood, they knew there was going to be taxation, and they knew that what taxation meant was that the many would be taking money from the few. They knew that was going to happen. And what they wanted to do was to have that happen in such a way that everybody's rights could be roughly preserved. By the way, they were also conscious of the fact that excessive wealth could be a problem, that that people who didn't have enough money, would be, could be at a disadvantage also in a, in an overly wealthy society. But look what they did not do. They did not put any strictures on the accumulation of wealth, even though they knew that that was a risk because -- and here's where things get controversial, etc.. But, you know, obviously liberalism is, is, is and the critique of liberalism, certainly from the left and Marxists is that it is about property rights. And so therefore, you know, Charles Beard said that the revolution was really just about people who had money consolidating their position, etc. But if you understand what Madison in particular meant about property rights, what he was basically saying was, if you don't have property, if you don't, if there is nothing that is yours, including the clothes on your

back, what is it that government can't do to you? What is the line between you and the government? What do you what is yours? What is your where do you get autonomy from? And that's why I think that, you know, that's why you couldn't move away from the inviolability of property which which leads to all these other kinds of problems. And again, liberalism doesn't have an answer to inequality, other than a democratic answer to inequality, which is wealth, this redistribution which, which we have. And so and I think that it is not the case, even though the people you're talking about sometimes say and feel that they're trying to get back to the original liberalism of the founding, I don't think that is what they want. And a lot of, you know, if you go back and look at, you know, so much opposition to big government is inevitably intertwined with the state's rights issue, which is ultimately about race. It's about the South's ability to protect itself from those who would interfere in race relations, whether it was slavery or afterwards. And so I'm very suspicious. I don't believe that people want to go back. I think it is precisely this. Is my point. They can be it. But again, you can be upset about global warming. It doesn't mean that you should therefore, oppose, you know, the founders' liberalism, which I think ultimately do. I'm going to say one final thing. This movement is not about economics, and it has never been about economics. If you go back and look at these past movements, they have the full range of people. What unites them is not money issues. What unites them is race, ethnicity and religion. And it's a real mistake to say there's a Trump movement because the economy is not taking care of these people. Because for one thing, is Trump offering them the answer? By the way, Trump is going to pay off the Jamie Dimons of this world when he's elected, not the poor workers. And the poor workers aren't even asking to be paid off that way. They're being asked to be paid off by revenge. And so I just I don't take those arguments seriously, and I don't like the argument that I hear often, which is the left is making us do it. We're going crazy because the left is driving us crazy, and therefore we're supporting Trump. You know, I'm sorry, we're all adults here, and the left can drive you crazy without you turning to a dictator.

**O'HANLON:** Last question here, please.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** Hi Allegra Chapman. I'm a consulting on voting and democracy issues. Thanks for this really rich conversation. I'm looking forward to the book. I'm really struck by your point about, how the founders believed in liberalism, but hypocritically didn't practice it. And then you jump forward to today. We're not only are those in the MAGA movement and Trump himself not practicing it, but they don't even believe it. And, you know, I guess we can talk about the many reasons or the many causes of how we got there. Whether it's bowling alone or as you pointed out to, you know, the fact that the more diverse we become, the more Whites are trying to hold on to their control and power. And I agree with that. And yet at the same time,

too, going to that the the woman in the front row's point, you know, the news and Fox and etc. is, is, is very much at play here. But what do you say about, you know, the fact that, yes, a lot of, a lot of whites are jumping on this and you could say that, you know, it's because of it, because of white nationalism, but there are an increasing number of, Asian American, Latino, Black Americans who are also swayed, swayed by these issues. I mean, it's very attract -- some something that Big Daddy is pushing happens to be very attractive. And how do we get out of it? I mean, I know that that, that that doesn't require a short answer, but I'm just curious is your thoughts of how we get out of this problem of our entrenched belief system?

**KAGAN:** Yeah. Well, the last part of that, I wish I knew the answer. I mean, I'm, you know, I think that we, we we're suffering from a lack of civic education. I think that people don't understand, you know, look, some enormous percentage of Americans believe that the founders intended to create a Christian America, which is absolutely untrue. So you have to ask yourself what is going on in our school system that they have come to believe that. So I think one of but but I can't civically educate everybody in time for 2024. So I don't I don't know, you know, I don't know what I don't know what to do about that in terms of the, the polls showing, various minority groups who you wouldn't think necessarily moving in Trump, let me just say, can I just can we just wait until the election to see whether they actually go there? I don't know how much to read in these polls, but but if I had to explain it, I would explain it in the same way I spend a fair amount of time in the book talking about what happened to the mid-century or the early 20th century immigrants like, you know, Italian Americans, Irish-Americans, etc. who used to be on the bottom rung of society. You know, Irish Americans were depicted as ape like creatures in the Thomas Nast cartoons, etc. and who used liberalism, used the declaration, used the liberal elements of our society to climb their way up to, recognition and a relative equality, in the system, in a sense. Then when they came, they were not regarded as white. And over time they came to be regarded as white. And once they were regarded as white and had made it into the white American family, then they were white, and then they start saying, well, well, there's all these other people coming in. And and so you had a shift in among immigrants from needing liberalism and therefore being committed to liberalism, to not needing liberalism and therefore being willing to kind of that we've crossed the bridge, we're going to raise the drawer, you know, we're going to we're going to pull it up. And and that is going on it. And I think that I'm sure that's also going on among a certain percentage of the Hispanic community. And again, people who came here legally and took many years to get in are resentful of people who are getting in, you know, much quicker, illegally. And I understand that. And again, all these groups can have plenty of grievances. I just don't know why they think Donald Trump is the answer for them. You know, the one thing that I'm confident of is that this is going to be, the next Trump administration is going to be an



effort to roll back a little bit, you know, the ways in which whites have been pulled that, you know, have been forced to live in a more equal society and to start sort of rebuilding the white position in the world. I think that is pretty much the stated campaign promise of Donald Trump. So whose hide is that coming out of? And so I'm hoping these people realize that, maybe Republican suburban white males may accurately think that they're going to be cool in a Trump authoritarian society. But I sure hope that people who are of Muslim descent and people who are Black and people who are Hispanic, and people who are non-white, people are women, understand that they are going to be the losers, in, in whatever marginal ways this government changes, they're it's they're going to be the victims of it. You know, at the end of the day, I don't know how to persuade people of things that they can't be persuaded by. I mean, these days I feel like there's nothing more futile than the effort that I'm engaging in. And so, thank you for entertaining me and letting me, letting me do it. But I hope that those people understand that. But by the time they go to the polls. Put it that way.

**O'HANLON:** But please buy the book and please join me in thanking Bob.