

[Transcript] The Realignment / 341 | The Last Days of the Baby Boom and the Future of Power in America with Philip Bump

Marshall here. Welcome back to The Realignment.

Hey, everyone. Welcome back to the show. Today's episode is actually one of my favorite in a long time. I'm speaking with The Washington Post's Philip Bump, but his new book, *The Aftermath, the Last Days of the Baby Boom and the Future of Power in America*.

As I joke at the top, the book came out a few weeks ago, so I had enough time to actually finish the book and ask a lot of deep questions about itself. I know folks have always been interested in this conversation about baby boomers, millennials, Gen Z, where does the long oft forgotten Gen X cohort fit into this. So, lots of great stuff, takeaways for Democrats, Republicans and everyone is interested in where this country is going. Of course, I should note that this is a great opportunity for you to ask follow-up, supercast questions. So, if you'd like to support the show, we are funded by a supercast five a month, 50 a year or 500 for a lifetime membership. You can go to realignmentdespercast.com and submit your Q&As along with supporting the show. Last but not least, today's Friday. So, the sub-stack is back from its post event, IATUS. So, you can also click the link at the top of the show notes with the link to the newsletter. You can also go to and search the realignment sub-stack to get access there as well too. Huge thank you to Lincoln Network for supporting our work. Hope you all enjoy this conversation.

Phillip Bump, welcome to the realignment. Thank you very much. Happy to be here.

Best thing about booking an author a little after the release of the book is I actually have time to read the book instead of pretending that I'm going to complete it three days before application date, which is the actual truth about how this Norway works. But no, actually write the book so I can ask you real questions based off of it and just say up front that I loved it. I think it's so useful. Here's my big question to start with. How much of our conception of what America is, what the cliches are, how much of these are bling in your view and how much of them are actually about how baby boomers see the countries? For example, think of a cliché, America

is a center right country. Social security, it's the third rail of American politics. If we grow up in a world where A, like the polling's different on politics with Gen Z, but then B, Gen Z isn't even confident that social security exists, is that even a third rail anymore? So how do you think about that conception? Yeah, I mean, I think that the Z sort of comes with the gory, not by just saying that everything that America is today, everything that we understand about America today is a function of the baby boom. And I mean that without hyperbole, right?

This is a generation that was so big, and you've read the book, but for listeners, 1945 is 140 million people in America. And over the course of the next 19 years, there's more than 76 million kids born, right? Or about 76 million kids born. That's more than 50% of the entire population that existed in 1945, all of a sudden as babies and eventually teenagers, babies, kids, you understand how life works. But the point being that the United States then has to accommodate them and has to accommodate them politically, it has to accommodate them economically,

creates all these new businesses, it creates all these new political concerns and political demands. And eventually over time, as the baby boom continues to get older, it just reshapes everything in its path. It forces the new construction of schools and funding and, you

know, it helps boom the economy, both in specific industries and overall, there are all these ways in which the baby boom forces America to accommodate it. And so I think it's probably true that at any point in time in American history, the oldest generation is most responsible for shaping what America is. But that's more true with the baby boom, specifically because it is so big and was so much of the American population for so long. And only with the rise, the advent of the millennials and Gen Z, are we seeing this countervail force and political politics and economics and culture, which is helping to pull the United States in a new direction. So to answer your question, you know, without getting into specific points, I would say that most of our understanding about what America is, is a function of the baby boom having existed.

So here's a related question. What is a habit trait aspect of America that you think is inherent across the various generations we're going to discuss here? So what does silent Gen America still have in common with Gen Z America? Yeah, I mean, I mean, there are a lot of things, right? I mean, it's obviously the case that now, of course, I'm going to be sort of backtracking on the answer I just gave. But obviously, there is an element of Americanness that is, you know, that is consistent through time, you know, what America is and what it's meant to do.

Idealized, you know, often, not necessarily instantiated in the way that a lot of people would hope. But, you know, obviously, America is a place where there is opportunity for everyone economically in theory, right? And we see, you know, the book obviously details ways in which that is less true for younger generations than it was for older generations. But these are still ideals that we hold. The idea that America is a place for freedom and free speech and free enterprise, like those sorts of ideals are consistent over the course of American history, I think it's safe to say, and things that I think people in every generation can appeal to and hold as aspirations. It is just that the way in which that manifests is disproportionate for different generations in a way that I think can contribute to some of the generational tension that we see.

Let's talk about the generational tension aspect, because I'm not quite certain if American politics is best explained by tensions between baby boomers and rising millennials and Gen Z, or rather just tensions between boomers, right? So like if majority of voters are still boomers, isn't it probably better to articulate, and you could obviously expand this, but isn't it probably better understood as the 60-something Republican congressman from Florida versus a 60-something congresswoman from California? That seems to be more at the core of the fights we're having. What are examples of where we're actually seeing deep generational conflict at the level I think where Vietnam would probably be the right standard to hit? Yeah, no, you're right. I mean, obviously, when we talk about specific political fights that comes down to specific politicians, that's absolutely true. And the baby boom is by no means homogenous in terms of its politics, right? You know, the example that I like to use and that I cite in the book is the fact that yes, it is the case that the Republican party is disproportionately older relative to the Democratic party, and that means they have a higher percentage of baby boomers than does the Democratic party.

But it's also the case that the resistance to Donald Trump that emerged in 2017 was a function primarily of older college educated white women, right? Baby boomer women are the ones that led that resistance. The baby boom itself, when you look at party registration, is fairly even between Democrats and Republicans. So yes, when we talk about the effect of the baby boom politically, baby boomers do have a lot of the votes and they do send a lot of people to Congress,

but those include both Democrats and Republicans who fight among themselves. When we talk, though, about the power of politics that the baby boom continues to hold, it overlaps a good example that I like to use overlaps with economics, which is housing, right? So we have these baby boomers and these baby boomers were able to buy houses when houses were relatively cheap when there was an abundant supply of housing in the United States. Over time, they begin to see these houses as a storehouse of value and something that they, when you ask them, they say, I'm going to use this as something for when I retire. This is going to be part of my retirement, you know, the way that I afford to retire. As such, they are incentivized to try and protect the value of those homes. And so they, you know, when we have this process that allows homeowners to weigh in on whether or not we should expand the amount of housing in an area through apartment buildings or new housing complexes, they're incentivized to say no, because it retains the value of their house. And that's true of Democratic and baby boomers, and it's true of Republican baby boomers. And it's true to some extent, I'm sure of, you know, millennials who are lucky enough to own homes and things along those lines. But we see this, particularly now that baby boomers are reaching their retirement age and more conscious of the need to protect that value. We see this, it is not a partisan political decision that's being made, but it is a broad decision that is a function of how many baby boomers own homes and just the scale of that generation having this shared quality and approach to this particular issue that changes the politics around it. And so, yes, you're absolutely right that when we talk about things like, you know, what are we going to do with, I'm not going to say social security, because that's increasingly something that baby boomers are very concerned about. But other political issues that it does come down to this sort of partisan bickering, but it is absolutely the case that when you look at the baby booms simply by virtual skill, and this cohort making similar decisions about similar things that it has a sweeping political effect that does not depend on partisanship and partisan unanimity. That was the perfect answer, because I think you got at a narrative framing flaw in my framing, which was, you know, I moved to Texas, but I still can't stop my DC brain. I reduced American politics to the battle between a congressman and a congresswoman. But if we're actually looking at people's lives to your point, Congress isn't going to vote about how my local Austin neighborhoods have a debate about low income housing or expanding zoning. It's actually a deeply local issue that is going to translate in a different way. So what are some examples, other than housing, maybe, if there are any, that fit into that dynamic? They're not what we would traditionally see as political, but actually there's deep generational tensions within them. Well, I mean, the primary thing that we're considering in this moment is where government spending should go. And I mean, it's at federal, state and local level, right? So there is one of the reasons I think that there is so much tension between older and younger Americans in this moment. You know, there are obviously a lot of reasons, but I think one of the central reasons is that for the first time, the baby boomers really feel as though they are not the primary generation that's attracting the attention and resources of government, right? And that so literally since birth, the baby boomers have been the primary focus of the American government. I myself and Gen X, Gen X just sort of got carried along in the wake of the baby boom. It wasn't as though there was like, okay, now we need to turn our attention to Gen X. It was just sort of like,

okay, we still got to deal with baby boomers. Gen X isn't as big, so we don't have to worry about them as much. Obviously, generalizing probably here. But then you get to the millennials and Gen Z. And so now we have, you know, I talked about that the analogy it's used in the book that I use generally is that the baby boomers compared to a python swallowing a pig. And so the python has swallowed this pig, and then the pig sort of works its way through its python. It's a really gross analogy, but you get it. And as it gets to different parts of the python, it has different parts, different effects on the python's body. Now we are, and people forget this, people now are at the part of the python where, where the boomers are starting to retire. And so it is a new shock to the American system that is focused on retirees and seniors. But it's happening at the same time that we have these large, this large millennial and Gen Z generation, millennials almost one to one, when you look at the number of boomers that there were, you know, when they were 40, and the number of millennials there were when they were 40, there's almost as many millennials as there were boomers. It's just that the population itself is larger. But so you have this large group of people though that's competing for resources. And so when you think about what should the federal government be spending money on, should it be spending money on social security, or should it be spending money on building schools for kids or childcare, pre-K? You know, millennials have very different views than new baby boomers, right? Millennials are like, look, I'm starting my family. We need to invest resources in pre-K. We need to make sure that I have the capacity that I need to take care of my kids. You know, I need to be able to afford a house. I have this outstanding college that they have different financial needs in this moment, and are appealing to government resources in a different way than our older Americans. And we know from, you know, both both academic research and just looking at the results of elections that older Americans tend not to support things like voting for funding for education because they don't have kids at schools. And so, you know, I mean, it is, you know, that can come off as disparaging, but it's, you know, it's very rational. If you are an older person, you don't have a kid in school and, you know, the government is trying to make you decide, should I raise taxes in order to pay for, you know, more educational services? Or should I instead keep taxes where they are? It's very rational for you to say, look, I'm not using that. I keep taxes where they are. But then that sets up this intergenerational tension as well, this tension that's based on the discrepancy in age. And so there's a lot of things like that that are now happening, particularly because the millennials are starting to vote more and having a more active voice in American politics. That's another great example of the argument about, you know, preschool, pre-k, and then school funding. I'm curious, though, to what degree is there a partisan breakdown amongst millennials and Gen Zs when it comes to, for example, the school funding issue? So on paper, you could say, look, you're young, you want investment in your children, but, you know, you are fighting with the old people. But if you're a traditional, like, conservative, your, your, your generic principle is now we think that private charity and, you know, big government, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and there are plenty of red states like Texas that haven't exactly invested the same amount of resources and like K-12 education. So to what degree is am I just imposing a baby boomer centric view of America's political debates

onto younger generations? Or what to what degree does a Gen Z or millennial Republican say, yeah, like my elders, I also believe in them and the government and don't care as much about school funding. Yeah, I think that's probably true. And it's very easy, you know, and I try very hard in the book not to fall into this trap of assuming that generations are, you know, they all act in the same way. We just talked a while ago about how that's not the case with boomers. You know, it is the case, though, that when we talk about millennial and Gen Z Republicans,

we're not talking about a large population of people, right? They exist, and it certainly is. That's the answer. But I mean, like fundamentally, you know, I can't say that I have seen polling that shows how millennial Republicans feel about a particular issue in part because you'd have to oversample the population so much in order to get a significant number of people there, right? When you look at, and Pew Research has done good assessments by generation of political identity, there is one group of people in the millennial generation that is more Republican, Democratic, and that's white males. Everyone else is much more Democratic

or at least more Democratic than Republican. But one of the things that's fascinating, of course, and this is sort of an aside, admittedly, one of the things that's fascinating is, of course, white males make up a much smaller percentage of the millennial generation than they do of older generations, just because the younger generations are much more diverse. And so not only is it the case that the only group of people that is more Republican than Democratic in that population is white males, but white males are also a smaller percentage of it. So to answer your question, I am absolutely confident that there are conservative young millennials and Gen Z people who feel very frustrated at government spending on these things. It is, however, the case that they are a smaller percentage of that population than is the case with older people. And it's also the case, based on both polling and people with whom I spoke, but there are some things on which political views for younger generations don't really deviate that much from older generations. That things like government spending really aren't a motivator in the same way that climate change is or that LGBTQ issues are for younger generations. There's not a lot of people who are getting really ginned up. We do hear, obviously, there's the Bernie Sanders wing of young progressivism, but that polling doesn't suggest that there is the same breath of feeling about things like government spending as there are about things like climate change. Obviously, those things overlap. But I don't think it's safe to say that this is a young generation that necessarily is like, let's spend money on everything, at least based on the polling that I've seen. Okay, so I want to ask you about the climate change one, because I always struggle with that example, because it seems to me to be too tidy of a narrative like young generations, they care about climate change, Republicans don't care about climate change, and they're going to be punished at the polls for that. What is the evidence that beyond, you're going to remember this example. Remember when there was a black, I believe a black candidate in Virginia, where when you asked voters, they said they were going to vote for them, but they weren't going to vote for them. It was the concern people had with Obama in 2008, where basically when you poll people, but what was the example? I'm going back to the two. It was a Bradley effect. I think it was LA, not for two. Yeah, the Bradley effect. Basically, the idea was that when there was this candidate and the polls were a disaster, because it turned out people gave the answer they thought they were

supposed to give, which actually reflect their actual behavior of voting patterns. I get the sense that climate change is like that, or climate change is like that when it gets particularly, when it's apolitical. What evidence do we have that there is a significant number of millennials who are actually making their voting decision based on climate change?

Sure. No, it's a great question. The Bradley effect is now, I think, known as the Trump effect on the right, just for record, because that's the argument there. You like electoral politics, so let's dive into this. The point is this, that you are absolutely right, that there is not good evidence that young people's views on climate change are affecting political outcomes. I think that there are two reasons for that. The first is that young people just don't vote that much. We know this. We know that older people vote. We know why older people vote more heavily than do young people. I have seen these claims that young people saw this surge and turned on 2022. I'm skeptical of them. I don't think they're well-rooted. That may turn out to be the case. I don't think we have evidence to say that now. I think that 2022, like most elections, ended up having fewer young people vote by substantial margin than older people.

But it's also the case when you do polling that what you see is that a lot of people care a lot about climate change, but they care a lot more about other things and have other things that are primacy. And I wrote about this prior to the midterms that we see in polling. Democrats, for example, are very likely to prioritize climate change, but to do so alongside a number of other things. And so when you have two candidates, one of whom comes down to if you have a candidate who is

mediocre on climate change, but also a Democrat in an election that is increasingly framed by Democrats as being an existential threat to American democracy, you're going to go out and vote for the guy anyway. And there aren't a lot of Democratic primaries that come down to a Democrat who supports climate change or one who opposes it. So I think that that choice doesn't actually come up very much on the left. But the short answer is young people don't vote as much as older people and at the end of the day, most people who are making voting decisions are less likely to vote primarily on climate change as an issue. Yeah, I guess for me, basically,

if you want me to pundit for a second, the test, A, believe on climate change at 15 different levels.

But I guess what I'm getting at is I'm just looking for a test case where there's a cost to millennials believing that. So for example, if there is a ballot initiative where millennials like, let's say like increase the number of nuclear power plant permits that are allowed in the state, if millennials say increase the price of gas or millennials like drive a,

let's say a ballot initiative in California that increases the price that puts a carbon tax on, I'll be convinced in that. But until millennials are forced to reckon with cost and it's not just a freebie of like, yay, climate change, because A, we believe it's true, but B, it's a signor of like higher education, those are the issues. I guess that's what I'm just kind of looking for. But I think that's a very fair answer. And I think the next question then would be, what's the other version of this gun control policy? Obviously, we have like a very, very explicit movement of young Gen Z people who grew up in this post 2000s gun culture that I graduated in 2010, can't identify with because it just wasn't the same thing. But you know, Kyle Rittenhouse was also Gen Z. I'm not saying he represents a broad movement, but within a, you know, within a generation, there are multitudes. So how should we think about the gun control issue like within Gen Z? I think you're asking a broader question, which is what the

long term, this isn't true, you're not, you're not doing this in both cases. But I think this question in particular deals with what's the long term effect of having these political views among these younger members of the younger generation. It is obviously the case that we talk about things like climate change and gun control, that American politics is to a large extent calcified around the existing views of the people who will power who tend to be older, right? And so it's important as we discuss this, both recognize the younger people have a more limited voice in politics in part because they don't vote as much, which is their own fault in part simply because people who are, you know, already elected power of incumbency and, you know, the average age of Congress being, you know, as high as it is, you know, that also obviously gives the older generations more power. But, you know, one of the things that was very apparent as I was writing the book is that the way in which older Democrats and younger Democrats fail to see

eye to eye because the important issues for Democrats shifted over time, I think is unrecognized. And

so you have, for example, a lot of young Democrats feel very frustrated with older Democrats because

they feel like the older Democrats haven't done enough on climate change and done enough on LGBTQ

issues and probably not enough on guns. And older Democrats feel like, A, those weren't the fights that were important to them when they were young. And so they don't have the same track record fighting

with climate change. Because climate change wasn't an issue really in American politics until like 2006, right? And so they simply don't have that track record. They can't point to, I've been fighting for this for years, with some exceptions, but also because the way in which young people have highlighted these issues as being ways to make change necessarily conflicts with the fact that change hasn't been made. I remember, and I'm framing that poorly, but I remember back in 2004, for example, Democrats were very, very agitated around Howard Dean's candidacy and the idea of providing healthcare for everybody, right? This was a big thing on the left side of the Democratic Party. And there was a lot of frustration among Democrats who at the time had just come out of, they only been out of the White House for one cycle, right? Bill Clinton was there for eight years and he had this triangulation strategy where he acted more moderate than his party to a large extent, was able to be successful. And so there were a lot of Democrats in 2004, he felt very frustrated with the left side of the party who were like, what are you talking about? We can't do that. We just lost the White House. Let's try and get the White House back and let's be practical about what we're doing. But that too is this sense, it's just sort of this, you're sort of glued to the ground to some extent by the fights that you've already had and the lessons you've already learned,

but young people haven't learned those lessons yet. And so they feel frustrated by older Democrats and older politicians in general, because they feel like those people aren't taking challenges or risks that they ought to be taking. And that's true to some extent because older politicians have tried to fight those fights and already lost them and may be bad at perceiving the ways in which

the political train has actually shifted. You know, Diane Feinstein in California had a very

famous incident when she was challenged by the sunrise movement in her office. And you know, she said something sort of dismissive to them. And I think, you know, it was hard for me not to understand that as Diane Feinstein sort of saying, look, I've had this fight, I've lost this fight a thousand times and like, you just don't get it. Whereas the sunrise movement is like, this is a new era and this is a new time for change. But of course, that hasn't manifested to the extent that the sunrise movement would like in part because the people making decisions are the people who are who are glued to the ground in the way that I just described. So that's sort of a long way of talking about it. But I think an important aspect of it is simply that the people who are empowered have been power long enough that they feel as though they've learned lessons, which may not actually be instructive for what American politics looks like at the moment. Which is so helpful. I mean, it's kind of funny you ever we hinted at this debate that the Democrats are having over like the 1990s, like triangulation, the neoliberal era, I'm funded by the Hewitt Foundation,

so obviously I'm interested in that project. But like, it's easy to just say, oh, those rascally corporate centrist neoliberals and ignore the disaster that the Reagan presidency was for the Democratic Party at a national level when it came to the presidency. And then of course, losing the House for the first time in 40 years after Hillary care. So like the lesson I think for Gen Z years is maybe we are in a new era, maybe things actually are different. But you should actually reckon with it gets unimaginable to imagine losing 49 states today, because the country's just gone so much more that there aren't that many swing voters up for grabs to swing that direction. But those those are those are really centering things. So okay, the big question I'm really wanting to put on your least analytical hat for this because I want to know this personally. So you're Jen, you're Jen, you're Jen X. I'm a middle, middle millennial.

What is your assessment of the boomers? I can narrative because like right now we're in this like, and just beyond like, okay, boomer like attacking boomer is both an ideology and like a cohort is now very, very fashionable was also becoming conventional wisdom that we're supposed to say with such promise, they let us all down. Right. Doing this book like what is your actual just take on the boomer generation at a narrative level? I'm looking, I have the book in my hand, I'm looking for the quote that I think best describes it. And it actually is not for me, it is from Landon Jones, who wrote a book in 1980 called Great Expectations, which I used to sort of jumping off point for my book. So it was, you know, this is 1980, very early in the boom, it was sort of a here's who the boom is. And like, here's how they're already shaping stuff. And so I, in part, this book is a an update to that book 40 years later, let's see what the boom is up to now. And so Landon Jones, when he wrote this book, I'm just gonna read it here. A woman and born in 1946, which is the first year the baby boom once remarked to me that for most of her youth, she thought that all new generations were afforded such attention. Only much later, she realized this wasn't the way it always was, we were the ones who were different. And I think that's a really, that's actually, I put it in the introduction of the books, I think it's a really good encapsulation of the way in which the baby boomers progress through time. It has been the focus of American attention economically, culturally and politically in a way that no other generation has and out of necessity because of its scale. And so it is absolutely the case that the baby boom has been afforded a different level of attention than any other generation. And I think that a lot of baby boomers, even to this day, don't understand it. And so when I've

been asked this question, as you might expect, as I've been, you know, talking about the book, how do I feel about the boomers? And I think there are two things I'd say. The first is that I think that all of us fail to understand the way in which the boomers reshaped America. And we sort of just look at like, oh, you know, these old people that disagree with me on stuff, they're real pain in the ass, right? And it just, it fails to account for the fact that they, they, they, they grew up in under entirely different conditions and entirely different set of expectations than young people today. And I think that they ought to be afforded at least the consideration that like, you know, if you don't get how you're different than younger generations, that's fine, because younger generations don't get how you're different from them either. And so I think that's fair. And then just the extent to which they really are, while there are very clear differentiating demographic factors between older, particularly baby boom Americans and younger ones, it is the case that the boom itself is a includes a enormous number of people, definitionally, and they all have different characteristics. And, you know, some of them are massively wealthy, a lot of them are extremely poor. And some of them own houses and some of them don't. And some of them are, you know, the majority of them are whites, but a lot of them aren't. And, you know, they're all these ways in which the baby boom is itself, of course, a microcosm of the United States, which it must necessarily be because the baby boom defines what America is today. And so I think that, yes, you know, and I'm happy to spend five hours talking about why there exists this generational tension in the moment. But how, how the baby boomers are, when you think how you feel about America today really is essentially how you feel about the baby boom because the baby boom is so responsible for America is that is especially that last part, I think the best way to articulate that. So here's another question. As you're writing this book, you're just obviously deeply aware of how easy it has become narratively cliched when writing about generations, you know, have, you know, imagining rice paddies, Vietnam and like, fortunate sunpying as like the baby boom, like experiences, the, the contradictions between the new frontier and the race society, body, body, body, body, body. So to what degree is our understanding of various generations hampered by the obvious need to have these like load stars that we're kind of like will be towards. So for example, with your generation, I make MTV reference. My generation is like a little up for grabs. It's funny, I interviewed Kirsten Soto Sanderson a few weeks ago and she said, yeah, like my book in 2015, the selfie though is already outdated because you obviously wouldn't say, yeah, millennials, they're the selfie ones. So like, I don't think selfie is going to be the way you describe millennials. So like a, like, how do you think of these generational images and what would what, what, what images would you assign? Now, when I just said that's kind of stupid, but I said, you have to do it. What would you actually assign? This is this, of course, is the part that gets clipped and like, look at this says, yeah, I don't know if I'm allowed to swear in this or nothing. I think that generations, I like to think of them like horoscopes. It's the point I make in the book. So you're familiar with this, but I like to think of them as horoscopes because they are sort of vaguely bounded. I'm born in, you know, mid to late June. And as such, I'm on the cusp of cancer and whatever comes after cancer or before it, I don't even remember, right? But like, you know, that supposedly has some meaning to people who think there's lots of meaning in horoscopes, right? And that we associate, oh, you know, you're a Scorpio, you are therefore X, Y and Z for people who pay attention to these things. And, you know, objectively, it's meaningless,

you know, I don't mean to offend anyone who thinks that the, you know, the open nature of the composition of the stars at birth dictates who they are and what and how they behave. I don't hold those beliefs myself. And so I like to view generations through that same lens that, yes, that there are, it is useful at times to categorize people collectively as having a shared set of traits, as long as you recognize that it's a large and it is not necessarily represented. It is absolutely true that baby boomers went through a consistent set of experiences, which helped them understand the world in a way that's different than the ones that I did or the ones that you did. You know, when we talk about things like experience in the Kennedy assassination, which most baby boomers were too young to do, that that is something that had a profound effect on a lot of people that you and I didn't experience, right? I lived through the Challenger that had a profound experience, you know, you lived through 9-11, which my kids didn't, that had a profound experience, right? There are all of these ways in which there are things that happen to generations collectively that influence who they're, you know, recessions, right? Recessions are a good thing too. It changes how you feel about spending and things along those lines. So look at the aftermath of the Great Depression. So there are real things, and it is useful for us to categorize people into time cohorts to say, you know, this group of people who are this age and who progressed similarly over the course of time, it's useful for us to talk about it that way. But it is, you know, when we start thinking about what are the characteristics of them and really starting to try and assign things like, oh, Gen X, they're the slacker generation, we should think more about that as being like horoscopes, that like in general, it's like sort of fun to talk about. But beyond the extent to which it captures one of those unique experiences that the cohort shares, it's really just kind of for fun. That's all anyway. What are the, what are the generations like? Yeah, I, you know, I'm not even getting into that. Here's what I'll do. Here's what I'll do. Silent generation is just like Scorpio, Baby Boom is just like Aquarius, Gen X is just like Cancer, Millennials are just like Aries and Gen Z is like, whichever one is like all the rest of them. That's my cop out answer. That is the greatest cop out answer I've ever gotten over 350 interviews because you technically answered the question. There's actually technically an answer to the question. So good, no, good for you. That was helpful. One quick thing, could you, I thought, so obviously the, the horoscope thing is helpful, but I loved you invoking the Kurt Vonnegut. Understanding. Could you, could you explain this one? Yeah, no, it's good because it's one of the things about the Baby Boom that's different from other generations is that it is a real demographically defined event, right? So, you know, talk to the Census Bureau, which I did and ask them about generations and they'll say, well, we recognize the Baby Boom. It's a generation and we recognize it as a generation because there's a big spike in births that happened in starting about the middle of 1946 and lasted until 1964. For obvious reasons with 1946, obviously. Yeah, yeah, right. Well, yeah, that's sort of the general understanding. And, you know, people raise this too that, you know, when we think of the Baby Boom as being a function of soldiers returning from night from World War II, that's obviously not still the case by 1960. So there were other factors. So, yeah, so the Census Bureau looks at it and says, hey, this is a real, real demographically identifiable generation of people, other generations, not so much. Those are mostly constructs of polling or marketers or, you know, people like you and I sit down like, let's how do we think about these groups? So,

Kurt Vonnegut has this great analogy. He is talking about this fake religion called volcanism. And so there are, in this religion, there are real organizations and there are sort of fake contrived organizations. An example uses the book as like a Hoosier. Like a lot of people go around and call themselves Hoosiers because they're from Indiana, but doesn't really mean anything, right? And it's not like, it's not like there's a significance to it beyond just sort of having this collective identity. And so those, those things he calls grand faloons and real organizations, real like meaningful relationships are called carasses. And so the Baby Boom is a crass and every other generation is a grand faloon. And now I'm realizing I may have actually gotten those terms backward,

because I'm going to use them as common parlance. But that's what I believe is a grand faloon. That's right. I knew this was going to be a test. And I was like, I will be impressed if he tells this like correctly. That's kind of how it goes. But I think, I think that's so helpful because it kind of gets at the whole, are you like the Cusper thing? So if you're, if you're a millennial born in 1996, are you Gen Z? Well, it's because the distinction between the two is a little less substantive than the 1946 one. If we're thinking like those, that that's the exact way of understanding

how those are different. Okay, so we've got our last two sections here. What are the other two? Just a record, I did get the difference between grass and grand faloon correct.

10 points for Gryffindor to make another very, very middle stage.

Well, I wrote all those books with my son right now. So I can, I can, I'm,

let's talk Harry Potter. I'm very up to speed. Yeah, no, it's, it's a whole other thing. I think the other question I want to ask then is, what are just like the implications of all this, right?

Which is another, which is a cop out question to ask. And like, that's like, that's a, I'm on CNN and I have five minutes to do a hit. What's the implications of this? Take it wherever you want to go. It's just like, we, we get it, the demographics, it's complicated. That's what a listener is kind of picking up here's like, what should they be intuiting from this?

Right. I think there are two things. So there's sort of a big picture and there's a small picture, right? And the big picture is that we are at this moment of tension in which the United States is trying to accommodate this new and growing population of senior citizens who have very specific needs. A population of senior citizens that both in terms of scale and percentage of the population we have never seen before, that we need to be able to accommodate. Luckily, we have had,

you know, 70 years of seeing this pattern where baby rumors reach an age and we have to accommodate

them. We should be ready. And in fact, when I spoke to a lady who does senior housing, she was like, ah, we've been waiting for it. Like they've been seeing this coming for a long time. But this is, this is creating this tension, particularly around the allocation of resources, which is a very big picture fight. But what are we going to do in this moment and moving forward as we have this aging population and it is skewing the ratio between the number of people who are young and paying into systems like social security and the number of people who are drawing from those? What is, what is that going to mean? That's a very, very big picture question. But we also have at the same time this more narrow challenge, which is that the nature of the differences between younger and older generations, particularly when it comes to demography, is really contributing to this

tension that we see in American politics broadly. And so when we have things like there is a reason that there that great replacement theory has an audience in this moment. And that is that a lot of Americans, particularly older Americans feel as though America is changing away from them. And that change is often rooted in this sense that American demography is changing in a way that is making America less American. And that absolutely overlaps with older Americans being much more heavily white and younger Americans being much more have much more likely to be black, Hispanic, Asian and other groups. And as such, we see this moment of tension and a very specific issue that is in part a reflection of the differences between older and younger Americans demographically. You know, something I'm curious about. So when you give your answer, it'd be helpful for you to explain like what the villages in Florida are. I'll ask you a personal question and then like a serious policy question. So the personal question would be like, how appealing would living in the community of the villages be to you? Because at first I was like, oh, man, like, I'm not down for but I was like, I'm not serious. I'm like, man, there were a place like, you know, 40 years from now where everyone's like listening to middle school dance party music and everyone's wearing skinny jeans. But I honestly, like it kind of seems nice, like there'd be lots of like, you know, 2000s YouTube culture, you'd be getting Rick rolled everywhere. That actually sounded kind of appealing. So like, what's, it grew on me. So I think this tells a lot about you as a person. What are your thoughts? So explain what it is, what are your thoughts, implications. So the villages is a complex of housing developments that exists just northwest of Orlando in Florida. It's been around for about 30 years now. And essentially what happens is the developers, it's this overarching organization called the villages and they build these town centers that have, you know, like a town square and some shops and so on and so forth that sort of sit in the middle of a bunch of housing developments and the housing developments are ringed by golf courses. And so there are now four of these, there were three when I wrote the book, there are now four of these town centers strung on a really pretty long. I mean, it's, you know, probably about a half an hour to get from north to south in the villages. It is a large complex to the extent that it's sort of reshaping where the population center of Florida itself is. But it is, you know, these town centers are built to be there. They're all fake towns. They're supposed to be, they're supposed to be as though they were real towns around which suburbs grew up, but instead they built the suburbs and then they created a town that was just sort of idealized and have these fake backstories and so on and so forth. And very honestly, it was chill. It was cool. It was like, you know, you walk into the town center and like, you could get a beer for like two bucks, which I'm not used to living in New York. And, you know, they're all these people and they had bands, yeah, the bands were, you know, to your point, it's not like you're getting a hot top to your performance every now and then, but it's just going to chill. You just, you know, it's nice weather. It's Florida and there's a restaurant right around the corner and you can go and grab a burger. And it was just like, they call it Disneyland for adults. And that's important because it's near Orlando. Just quickly, did they solve the, did they solve the bowling alone problem? Because it sounds like they did. Yeah, no, it's a good point. You know, as you're describing it, that's what I mean. This sounds like, not to shout out you mom and dad, but like, they're like in their 60s and they're kind of lonely. It sounds like this sounds, this sounds great. So one of the questions, one of the broader questions is once we start talking about seniors needing to have more attentive care and,

you know, a stronger community around them, at least in terms of like medical care and things along those is what these systems look like, you know, not everyone's going to move into a home. There may be communities that are sort of organically growing up, like, you know, imagine a block in a city where you just have a bunch of older people start to move to, and then you have services that can attend to that block, right? Because of the population of older Americans can grow so much, things like that may be viable. But yeah, no, I mean, it is, it is very, you get a sense of community there, that at least in the town centers is very tangible. And there are a lot of clubs and things along those lines that are built around getting people to feel that way. But you know, as I say in the book, you know, if you're an introvert, it's not the vibe is a little different, right? Because there is this sense of you being present and part of the community that even though when you go to the houses, you go to the neighborhoods themselves and everything's just locked down, it was hard to find anyone on the streets, right? In part because they're all golfing and, you know, being social, but in part because people just want to hunk it out in their homes near conditioning until they go out to the town center and have fun. You know, I wasn't there for a month at a time, so it's hard for me to speak to the culture. But yeah, it definitely does seem that for this group of people in that place looking for that, there absolutely is a sense of community that they could participate in. So as you're describing, you know, as a self-identifying, obviously, typographically, Gen Xer, do you think the village's phenomenon is a like baby boomer phenomenon? Is like, do you think, does this opportunity, because my questions sort of presume that millennials or Gen Xers are going to want that style of experience in the same way? I will say that it is a baby boomer phenomenon in the sense that it was extremely well timed to take advantage of the emergence of a lot of baby boom retirees. So it is from that standpoint. A lot of the people who live in the villages are older than the baby boom because this thing's been around for 30 years. One of the fascinating aspects to it that I discovered when I was there is I mentioned that they're building from north to south. And you actually have this weird intergenerational tension at the villages between north and south because the people who are north bought early and have been there forever and they're in their 80s. And these people who are just buying houses now, you have to be at least 55 to buy them. It's 55 year olds and 60 year olds. That's a huge difference. Yeah, exactly. In terms of what you're doing and what you're engaged in. So obviously, there are a lot of questions about what sort of housing millennials and so on and so forth will want as they get older. There are even questions, for example, I was talking to a guy, one of my questions when I started writing the book is, once baby boomers start to die and they're not going to be living in houses anymore, is there going to be a big glut in the housing market? And one of the points that a guy from Wharton pointed out to me as well, it may not be the case, millennials may not want to live in those houses. They may not want to live in this ex-urban areas of Atlanta or whatever it happens to be. And so I think that same question applies here. But I think it's also important to recognize that the villages, while a very large community, is still less than 200,000 people. And when we talk about the scale of the baby boom, we're talking about tens of millions of people. So yes, I think it has done a very good job of capturing a market. And I think we're going to see a lot of similar markets emerge in a lot of places that may not look exactly like that, but get to the

same sense of working together and having resources centered on older people. And I think that once again, what the baby boom does will help define what comes after for other generations, just because they're going to reshape what this looks like for all of us.

So in our last five minutes, some I rapid fire, but take wherever you need to go. So number one would just be, to what degree do baby boomers living in the scene change America's political geography? So like, California is a hugely important state. We're going to find 20th century American politics. How much is that as a boomer phenomenon? How do you think about that question?

You know, I mean, again, I sort of just take a step back and everything that the United States is at this moment is defined by the baby boom, right? Yeah, California was very much associated with the early, you know, the onset of the baby boom. You know, I have this life magazine from the 1950s here, which talks about the baby boom and that, you know, the boom in the economy as a result of all these babies, and there's a big feature in it about California and, you know, the emergence of California as a place to live. But yeah, I mean, it's just, I don't think it's extricable. I think it's just, you know, that what everything is now is downstream to some extent from the decisions that are made to accommodate this massive search population. So two last questions. So number one would just be, obviously, I've ignored race in this conversation. It's obviously typically the place where you can go first, but I just come away from both like the 2016 and 2020 accounts and also like you're very due to the articulation of how complicated. I just basically, I'm not sure there are any actual conclusions we can make beyond the fact that America is like quote unquote, diversifying at a pure numbers level. What would be, I'm not saying I'm being pessimistic, I'm just sort of like, my takeaway is, okay, we'll wait and see. I'm not going to make any life decisions or predictions about politics based on how quickly that's the takeaway. What's your takeaway on the race issue? No, that's right. My takeaway broadly is not to try and anticipate where American politics is going for a lot of reasons. One is that we don't have a long history of social science research that tells us what people tend to do over time, right? And when we talk about social science research, we're really talking about something that emerged in the last century, even less than that, right? We don't have polling that lasts terribly long either. So trying to draw assumptions from this very limited dataset is fraught. But secondarily, you know, political parties are not, you know, they are not static, right? Republican parties, you know, look at the Republican Party and climate change in, you know, 2006, the Republican Party is like, okay, let's address it. And then by 2008, they're like, no, the heck with that. And then they're starting to come back around to be more receptive to some ways in which you might be able to approach climate change. They're changing because they're responding to what voters want. And so I think it's silly to say young people are going to be Democrats forever, just because the Republican Party made a change to accommodate them. But then there, you know, this issue of demography, which you write is a central part of the book. I think that one way to think about it is we've never seen. So when you think, let's think for a minute, let's just imagine that the unproven idea that as people, as young people get older, they get more conservative. We've never seen a population of young people in America that is as diverse as the young population in America is now. So is that still hold, even if that were true, with that hold of a population that is made up of a

group of people of who's who demographically would be expected to vote even more heavily Democratic

once they're older, you know, African American, older African Americans today, they didn't get more Republican over time, right? So should we assume that young Black voters today are going to like, there are all these assumptions that we make that even if we assume they're true, are based on a picture of how Americans identify themselves that isn't holding up now. But to summarize, you're absolutely right. These ideas that we are able to forecast what American politicians are going to look like based on demography, I think that's inaccurate. So a last question and a request for you to finish with a story. So the last quick question is inconvenient truth for a Democratic politician or an aspiring politician that comes out of this book, an inconvenient truth for a Republican coming out of this book. And then finally, you close with the Birmingham, Alabama story. It's obviously it's not a spoiler because it's the end of the book. You know, then but I thought that was such like a useful that that just it's just it's just poetic. It's how useful about like, we're talking about the fucking 2050s, and then 10 years later, the racial order changes. So don't focus on that part. You're stepping on the story, man. Take it away. I'm excited. It's a good it's a great story. So yeah, take it away. No, I appreciate it. I love this story. It actually hasn't come up a lot in interviews. I'm glad you I'm glad you raised it because I like it a lot too. The inconvenient truth. I think the inconvenient truth for Democrats, we just discussed, which is it is not the case that demography is destiny, or at least we shouldn't assume that it is going to be. I think the inconvenient truth Republicans is the flip side of that that like, you can't assume it's not going to happen. If you're a Republican, you're like, okay, good, I feel better about this. Like, you know, there's still a lot of indicators that you that the party itself may need to change to accommodate the political priorities of younger Americans in a way that they haven't yet done. I think it's very obvious, of course, that the Republican Party made a choice in 2015, 2016 to continue down a trap that I don't think has, you know, is poised for long term success with younger generations. So, so I, you know, I don't think I was terribly surprising, but so Birmingham. So yeah, so one of the things I was conscientious of in the book, the book tries to look forward to about 2060, which is, you know, in part because that's when Census Bureau sort of projects what American demography looks like. So I decided this that I needed to check myself and think, okay, like, how good are people at making his predictions? And so I uncovered this this thing in Birmingham. So Birmingham in 1950 celebrated its centennial and had this big to do. Birmingham, Alabama for folks. Yes, that's right. And so they were building a new city hall. And they decided they were going to do a town capsule in the city hall that would be open in 2050. And so they went and they got letters from all these prominent people in Birmingham and, you know, national newspaper columnists all like, what do you think life's going to be like in 2050? What's the message you want to send? Because these people in 2050 will open these and read these letters. And they did this thing, which I think is super cool. They put it in this iron box and they went and took it to this telescope at the University of Alabama and used that to get starlight from a star that was the exact distance away. So the light that left that star that arrived in the telescope at that moment had left that star the same year Birmingham was founded. And they use that light to light it and settle in torch to fuse this box. It's just the cool. It's very poetic. And then they stuck it in the city hall and they sealed it up. But so one of the

letters I came across was from the police commissioner. And he was just, you know, it was like, a lot of them were pretty lighthearted because, you know, you don't want to be too much of a drag when you're doing something like, you know, it's supposed to be fun. But he always like talking about, Leo, what's police like working to be like in 2050? And, you know, you're going to have to fly to, you know, criminals will be able to fly all over your left chasing down because of course, airplanes are relatively new at the time. And he's just talking about, you know, like, here's my advice for me is I'm just, you know, I'm the head of the public safety in Birmingham, blah, blah. And it was just, it was just very like, it's very utopian in a way. And then of course, you get to the signature and it's Bull Connor. And, you know, within the course of 20 years, Bull Connor becomes this notorious figure in cracking down on African Americans who are seeking to register to vote in the city of Birmingham. He becomes a face of the fight against the civil rights movement. And he had no point in his letter, as you reckon at all with what Birmingham was in that moment or indicate that he has any sense of how Birmingham

itself is going to change even over the course of the next couple of decades. And it's just a reminder that, you know, that he of course was very siloed in very particular worldview that he didn't feel was likely to be challenged, which all of us are to some extent, you know, hopefully with not the same moral implications. But it was just this reminder that, you know, like, you know, Bull Connor is considering what the future looks like. And he can't even see, you know, a decade in front of his face. It's a reminder that, you know, as I'm putting this thing together, I ought to be a little humble, which hopefully it was. No, I think we all should be that's a X full place to end. Phil, since you have the book in front of you, can you shout out the full title of folks to get it from our bookshop, or if they're not going to be accommodating, go to Amazon.com. Sure. It's called the aftermath, the last days of the baby boom in the future of power in America. Excellent. Thank you for joining me on the realignment. Thank you. Hope you enjoyed this episode. If you learned something like the sort of mission or want to access our subscriber exclusive Q&A, photos, episodes and more, go to realignment.supercast.com and subscribe to our \$5 a month, \$50 a year, or \$500 for a lifetime membership. Thanks. See you all next time.