Marshall here. Welcome back to The Realignment.
As listeners know, especially Deep Cup Ones, I've interviewed a lot of founders, venture capitalists, and tech proselytizers on this show. I've interviewed A-16Z's Mark Andreessen, Shri Ramakrishnan, and Katharine Boyle. Matthew Ball came on to talk about the metaverse. David Sacks of the All-In podcast came on Ukraine. Keith Reboy and Mike Salana from Founder's Fund,
Peter Thiel's VC Fund made an appearance. Plus, we had Jill Lonsdale. Of course, Ashley Vance came on a few months back to talk about the privatization of space.
Since I like to have friendly interviews with people that have different points of views on different topics, I wanted to speak with someone who doesn't quite see tech with the same Rose shaded glasses as everyone I just listed. That said, I also didn't want to just have that conversation with any old critic who could be easily dismissed as an angry journalist, throwing stones from the rafters. My guest today, Jonathan Taplan, perfectly fits the bill of where I was looking for. He's the author of The End of Reality, How Four Billionaires Are Selling a Fantasy Future of the Metaverse, Mars, and Crypto.
He's worked across every industry and cultural wave of the last century.
He was Bob Dylan's tour manager in the 60s, a participant in civil rights movement, produced films of Martin Scorsese and Gus Van Sant in the 70s, helped save Disney from a hostile takeover in the 80s, plus worked with Merrill Lynch on media acquisitions on Wall Street, and created the first video streaming service in the 1990s. Today, he's the director emeritus of USC's Annaberg Innovation Lab and the chair of the Americana Music Foundation. If you're particularly interested in Jonathan Taplan's background, which we spent a decent amount at the start of the show discussing, I highly recommend his recent book, The Magic Year's Scenes from a Rock and Roll Life. On the tech side, there's plenty to disagree with him on, especially when it comes to Mars and space, but there's a lot to take away from this conversation, even if you are a big fan of the tech categories he criticizes. Of course, a huge thank you to the Foundation for American Innovation or supporting the work of this podcast. Hope you all enjoy the conversation. Jonathan Taplan, welcome to the realignment. Good to be here, Marshall.
Listeners know that I usually like to dive right into book, whether it's a biography or a policy proposal or kind of a manifesto, and I tend to avoid getting into the biographies of the authors, but I think your background is so key to the conversation we're about to have. Can you start us off in your high school years, you know, you're at boarding school, civil rights movement, all the way into the 80s and 90s, rather than have me just try to recite it in 10 seconds over the introduction. Yeah, you know, I grew up in the early 60s, you know, went to boarding school.
It was an all-white, all-wasp school, and at some point I got deeply involved in a group called the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which was, John Lewis and Bob Moses were the two
progenitors of that movement, and it was kind of the youth wing of the civil rights movement.
And I ended up writing as I was the managing editor of the school paper that the school should integrate, which caused a lot of trouble, but ended up happening, so that was a good thing.
And then in the summer of 1965, I had graduated from boarding school and was on my way to Princeton,
and I went to the Newport Folk Festival, which was the year that Bob Dylan decided to go electric

on stage, which was kind of one of those break moments in the culture. The folkies had been very politically involved, but it was all acoustic music and acoustic instruments, and bringing rock and roll onto the stage of the Newport Folk Festival was kind of an apostasy.
The fans booed. I had gotten a backstage pass and had been introduced to Bob's manager, Albert Grossman, and was working for one of Albert's other groups, the Jim Cross and Chug Band. So I was kind of very close to the whole thing, and when Bob decided literally on the spur of the moment to go electric, I helped set up the stage and everything, because they needed an extra road manager. And then my career with Albert Grossman continued from there. I would go on weekends to do road managing. Princeton was still an all-male college in those days, and so it was much more fun to go out on the road. The opportunity cost was about as low as it was ever going to be.
Right, right. And then I dragged my butt back to Princeton Sunday nights and go to school, and then I worked for Judy Collins, I worked for Janice Joplin, and then the band had made an album called Music from Big Pink, and they asked me if I would be their tour manager, and this was in late 68, and I said yes, and then I graduated in 69 and went to work full-time for Bob Dylan and the band. And so that was an extraordinary time. Went to England, the Isle of Wight with Bob, met the Beatles, you know, just it was the magic flowering of that period.
You referenced a book I wrote about it called The Magic Years, and then I did that for three years, and then George Harrison asked me to produce the concert for Bangladesh. I did that. When Bangladesh
was all over, I realized that none of the musicians I really loved were still touring or wanted to tour, and so I had a inkling to go to California and see what was happening in the movie business, and I was so naive, 24-year-old kid, I didn't know you weren't spending, you weren't spun to spend your own money making movies. I never had heard of OPM, Other People's Money, and I met a young film editor named Marty Scorsese. He had a script which became Mean Streets, and I myself and a friend financed it for $500,000, and then I was a movie producer, and fortunately Marty made a great movie, and I was able to get my money back and do quite well on the movie, and continued to produce movies for about 10 years. I found myself at Walt Disney in the mid-80s, and a guy named Saul Steinberg started a corporate raid on Walt Disney, and he expressed his intention to break it up, split it into parts, sell them off, and I got some friends in Texas, kind of near where you are in Fort Worth, the Bass Brothers, to essentially save the mouse. They invested and sold their real estate arm to Disney, and put enough stock in friendly hands, and so they paid me as their investment advisor, and they paid me more money than I'd made in five years for three weeks' work, and so they said, why don't you go to work for our real investment banker, Meryl Lynch, and in those days when the Bass Brothers told Meryl Lynch to hire someone, they did, and so I went to work for the Mergers and Acquisition Group, did that for four years, did some interesting deals, Viacom helped Sumner Redstone, but ultimately missed the creativity, and in the early 90s went back to making movies with a German director named Vim Vendors, and then I made a movie with Gus Van Zandkult to die for, and then in the mid-90s I came up with this idea of a streaming video on demand platform, and built that called Entertainer, Microsoft, and Intel invested about $100 million. We were doing pretty well in the early 2000s, and then the major studios who were giving us all the movies decided they didn't want another competitor in that space, and so they just stopped giving us the movies, and so we had to close it down, and I sued them all in federal antitrust court, and so needless to say I couldn't go back to being a movie producer,

and so the dean of the Annenberg School at the University of Southern California said, well why don't you come teach, and so I did, and then I won the antitrust suit three years later so I could afford to teach, and stayed at USC for another 10 years, formed something called the Annenberg Innovation Lab, and then started writing books. I wrote a book called Move Fast and Break Things, which was really the first Tech Lash book, so to speak, and that brings us to where we are now. This is my second book on that subject.
And this is the key thing. The reason why I wanted you to give folks the full spectrum of your career once again, I really recommend the magic years, is that I don't know if you've seen the Chamath Palahapatiya Man in the Arena discourse. He's based, all these people are coming after Chamath because of his SPACs and how the deals have been great for retail investors, and his basic pushback has just been, look, like I'm in it. I'm in the middle of things. I'm in the arena. This is the Theodore Roosevelt quote. And all of you guys are basically a bunch of critics throwing tomatoes at me from the stage. And I think the key thing is that you are a critic of the technology industry who very much has been in the arena. So I think just up front, we can dispense with a lot of the immediate pushback to some of the press offices of venture capital firms who I tend to book guests from because that's a very key thing. So let's really start here. I want to focus on the end of the reality, the book here. You're critiquing four different visions of the future. We're getting into Web 3, crypto space and transhumanism. I'm going to go with the metaverse. I'm going to go in a kind of not exact order here and ask you a question about the metaverse. So you were a founder and CEO in the digital streaming space. You're critiquing Zuckerberg's efforts to build the metaverse. It's not there. Users are interested, etc, etc, etc. But your own efforts in the space 90s to 2000s did not work out. So given that fact, I worry if we just dismiss the early failures of the metaverse, we're like someone at Blockbuster 2003 saying, oh, look, see the streaming services will never secure long term IP or cooperation from the studios. Therefore, our model is secure. So how do we separate initial business failure and let's just say dead ends from technology in the long term winning out over the status quo?
Well, my critique of the metaverse is that it just doesn't make any sense. Do you, Marshall, want to spend seven hours a day with a virtual reality helmet on? In other words, Zuckerberg's business plan, which he told Ben Thompson, you know, the famous analyst, was that every minute that you now spend in front of a screen, you would spend in the metaverse in his vision of what the future is. And so the problem is, even the people who make it don't want to spend that kind of time in the metaverse. As you can see from the book, one of the leaders of the team said, why aren't you, to his team members, why aren't you going into the metaverse? And when you go into horizon worlds, the virtual world they've created, there's almost nobody there. It's like a ghost town. So the problem is, you know, Andreessen says, well, we need more fantasy. The reality has not been a good construct for us. And I disagree, you know, I mean, my basic critique of all of these things is that technology has a real role to play in fixing the planet, whether it's, you know, carbon issues or whether it's lack of housing. There's a wonderful company right in the town that you live in that builds 3D printed houses that cost $65,000 to build a small 3D printed house. And in LA, we're spending $600,000 to build housing for homeless people, for each house. So there's many ways that technology can help us. But these guys, whether it's Musk or Zuckerberg or Andreessen or Teal, seem to be

intent
on creating some kind of new reality of escape. Musk believes the planet is essentially dying,
and we need to have a new planet. So we've got to spend $10 trillion to go to Mars. Well,
that's absurd. Think of what we could do with $10 trillion in terms of, you know, making sure that
we have an energy future that really works. So my criticism with the metaverse is more that
it doesn't make any sense. And the second thing is that it's basically taking you
all the problems we see that social networks have caused. And let's just take
young girl suicides or young girl self harm or things like that.
All of these are going to be exacerbated by the metaverse, because, look, it's one thing to be on
a social network, somebody, and I know that face of Marshall is actually Marshall. But if I'm dating
somebody in the metaverse, and I've created this avatar that has nothing to do with my real look,
right, I've basically taken Chris Hemsworth's body and put it on my thing. And the girl is not
sure if that's me or what the real me is. Neither of us want to actually meet the real person.
We want to stay in this fantasy. This has been proven by survey after survey of people who have
tried to do this online virtual reality dating. So I don't think that's healthy. And I think
the biggest problems that we're facing are problems of just humanism. That's why the whole
transhumanism thing is so worrisome to me. And we'll get to transhumanism in a second.
I just want to put a pin on the metaverse conversation, given the blockbuster versus
Netflix metaphor. The key thing, then, is if it's 2004, the blockbuster executive is incorrect,
because at a core level, streaming made sense. People were in their homes. They have cable.
They have satellite, et cetera, et cetera. They have the internet at a logistical level.
Obviously, folks would like to take that to the logical conclusion and be able to watch,
rent, et cetera, videos that way versus driving to their local blockbuster eight miles down the
road. So it would be a bad idea to dismiss something that fundamentally makes sense because
there have been some temporary business hiccups. Your point on the metaverse is even if Mark
Zuckerberg
perfects the perfect business model, the perfect microtransaction for every single new, let's say,
like let's say it costs you $10 or 10 Bitcoin or 10 ETH to get the Krimms-Hemsworth body,
that's not his problem. His problem is that people don't want to do that in the first place.
I think that's a good way to disentangle in those examples then.
Right. Exactly. That's exactly what I'm saying.
So then the next category is the space and the Mars one that you brought up here. And this is one
I'm very, very, very curious about. And this is why I'm combining the magic years and the book
you're writing today. Once again, I was born in 1992. So all of my understanding of the 1960s
comes from books and by speaking to folks like you. But as if I understand the 1960s,
I'd love you to push back on this. I don't see how you can't do the Kennedy new frontier thing,
a name for the moon. Try to pass, once again, LBJ completes this, but at least try to pass
Medicaid, pursue civil rights at home. These are all deeply ambitious, government-centric
products that require public spiritedness. I fail to see how you can disentangle that from
the optimism of the space program. So for example, we'll get into foreign policy a little later,
you talk about how in your ideal world, we would drive back American commitments abroad
and reinvest the money at home, climate change, healthcare, etc. But in an era where people
basically don't think the government can do anything, I think that big projects like space

are actually a key component of that public trust and public spiritedness. That's just kind of my initial pushback feeling. I'd love to hear your response. Okay, so let's go back to JFK and we need to go to the moon. So we were in a kind of existential technology race with the Soviet Union that had started when they put Sputnik up in 1958 and had not abated at all for five, six, seven years. It was just like, are we the technological power that we say we are or is communism really the place where the future is built?
So I believe that Kennedy was kind of backed into that commitment. And so what were the supposed benefits of going to the moon? Well, we'd find out what was there and could we go mine the rocks? Or was there some exotic mineral that would make an energy future that was better or something like
that? And along the way, people said, well, we invented Tang because we needed powdered orange juice in a bag and that they could make and that was an invention of the space rights, right?
Okay, so then we went to the moon, we brought back the rocks and there was nothing there.
The rocks were just rocks and there was nothing, no exotic new minerals, nothing was any different.
So then we stopped going to the moon because it didn't make any sense economically to spend seven million, 10 million, 50 million for each time to go there, you know? So now Musk says, okay, we need to go to Mars. And we say, why? And he says, we need to be a multi-planet species. Why? Well, he says, the earth may collapse and, you know, it may be impossible to live there.
So we need to start a second community. So the cost for the first trip to go to Mars is 10 trillion and then that's Elon's estimate. Now, where is that money going to come from? From NASA, right? You, the taxpayer are going to pay for that. No venture capitalists in the right line are going to pay for Elon to go to Mars because we don't know what would be there that would be of any use to us. We've got now the same issues. Oh, well, there'll be some rocks or there'll be, we'll do space mining or something else. Okay, we'd have to go there. We'd have to live in a kind of biosphere like dome because you couldn't go outside. The radiation is too strong. You get cancer in 15 minutes. There's no oxygen. So we'd have to import hundreds and hundreds of tons of liquid oxygen just to supply 100 people in this biosphere dome. They'd be trapped in there. They couldn't go
anywhere. And, and so the people at JPL, where I spend a lot of time, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, they'd say, we should continue to send rovers, which we have done already, to Mars. They can dig for rocks. They can, you know, analyze atmospheric radiation levels. They can do all those things. And besides, we don't need to get them back because that's half the problem. Okay, it's one thing to go to Mars. But how do you get back? How do you have enough fuel for the rockets? How do you, you
know, and, and besides, you don't have to keep people alive. Rovers don't need any oxygen. And they can do all the things. So there's an old saying in NASA, no Buck Rogers, no bucks. And the idea was that if you didn't have men heroically flying through space, that no, but the public was never going to go for funding these missions. So this is must think. So let's say it costs 10 trillion. Musk is going to make two trillion as a profit. Because that's a basically his, his basic profit margin. And his NASA work so far is about 30%. So it makes no sense. There's no really legitimate scientists who think this is a must thing. And, and all it is is an extension of, as I call it, the digital military industrial complex. And I know you and I may have different

views on that. But for maybe 70 years, since Paul Nietzsche wrote NSC 76, there have been companies who have profited mightily off of our need to be in a race with somebody. Soviet Union, now it's China. You know, the more I read about China, the more I think it's it's a society with extraordinary economic problems. And yet we're making it up to be a frontline competitor with the United States and all vision of capitalism. And I think it's nonsense.

I think the way you told the story of the moon program is actually very helpful in this follow up then because by the way, I hate Tang. I've never enjoyed Tang as a millennial. I never, I never kind of understood that we got Tang. I always got the commercialized version in the store. I thought it was terrible, one of my least favorite lunch snacks. So I'm always going to be very skeptical of the Tang pitch. But I got on the more serious note of it. A, we've gotten several things from the goal of going to Mars. We've gotten SpaceX up to now, right, which is reducing the cost of launch in the first place. So the cost of launch has fallen.

You have a reinvigorated space program, which after the George W. Bush and the Obama administration was basically on the death bed, it seems. You have Starlink, right? Like if you're if you're in Ukraine right now, and there's a whole debate about whether or not you on Mars should even control Starlink, people should check out Ronin Farrow's New Yorker piece on this.

But like at a minimum, the end goal, the extreme goal of going to Mars is fundamentally transformed our world outside of the great power Cold War moon landing framework. So I'm curious what your response would be to those examples of like, these are very specific ways that the world has been made better by this crazy goal.

Well, look, there's no doubt that there needed to be competition in rocketry.

Lockheed Martin and Boeing had kind of owned that for, you know, 30, 50 years. And so you get a new competitor, which is always a good thing. So what's the outcome? Now, SpaceX is the only platform to get people to the space station. He owns that business. He has a total monopoly on the space transportation business. In other words, so yes, there was a new kid on the block, but then the other people received and you and I, it's the classic creative destruction Schumpeter analysis, the new kid comes in, undercuts everyone else in terms of cost structure, wins and then becomes the monopolist. As far as Starlink is concerned, and this is reported in my book long before Ron Farrow, when the Ukrainians started to get close to the Russian border, Elon took a map and drew a line and essentially geofenced the Starlink communication capability. So within 20 miles of the Russian border, all of a sudden they had no communications.

He made his own decision that he didn't want to piss off Putin. And so he shouldn't give them communications as they're going towards Russia. Now, whether an individual private actor should have the power to do that is something I think even the army, the Pentagon worries about deeply. And Ronan, God bless him, did some really good reporting on that part in terms of the concerns of the Defense Department on doing that. And obviously the concerns of the Ukrainians as well. So I mean, the problem for me with Elon is he moved to where you live because he didn't want to pay California taxes. He says government's too big. Everything needs to be given to private industry. And you've described pretty well the privatization of the space business. All those heroic Apollo 11 movies that we saw, that was the United States running that show. Now it's all privatized. Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk and to some extent. Don't forget Richard. Own the space business, right? So is that a good thing or not? I have questions. It's the same as Donald Rumsfeld wanted to use a lot of mercenaries and Black border people in a rat. Was that a good thing or not? Maybe not. Okay. But the second thing is, Elon, for all his libertarian rhetoric and everything, is a crony capitalist. SpaceX totally financed by NASA. Starlink totally financed by governments. Tesla sells carbon credits to every other automobile manufacturer and takes in about four billion a year. That is the difference between Tesla being a profitable company and not being a profitable company. Now, in terms of he's now making a deal for his plug-in stations all over the country and getting huge subsidies from the Department of Transportation for providing those to any other car. So he is a classic crony capitalist. And that's inconsistent with his libertarian rhetoric.

You know, a couple of things. So if one was good on the line, I'd love to hear what your publicly minded US space Dennis Kobe, because to your point, I actually totally agree with you, but it's a bad thing to have a complete privately owned dependence on SpaceX when it comes to getting to their national space station, Lyft, etc. There are market forces. There are such things as public goods. And we don't want for good or for ill national security decisions to be made at the whim of a stock price or the price of Dogecoin week to week. So totally agree there. But before we were reliant on Elon Musk, we were reliant on the Russians for space Lyft, which I think is just 100 trillion times worse than that. So if either status quo or if either the pre-Elon status quo or the Elon status quo isn't good, what's your alternative? Putting aside Mars, what ideally would the situation look like today?

Well, look, I think the idea of having really good rocket capacity to go up and let's say the James Webb Space Telescope had a problem. And it had to be, it couldn't be fixed remotely. You don't have to send somebody up there and fix it. So you need rocket capacity, right? And maybe you'd fly a new version of the shuttle over there and get out there and fix it. But that's important because things like the James Webb Space Telescope are important to understand the origins of the universe and what's happening. And why do things happen? So these things are crucial. And I'm not even against sending another version of the rover, the Mars rover up there, if we think we need a better version. I think the people I talked to in JPL say the one that's there is doing an incredible job. And all they need to do is send another mission up there to collect the like two tons of rocks that the Mars rover has already dug up from the surface to bring them back to Earth. So that's something that doesn't need any humans, okay? So I think I have no problem with there being private space ships. If Jeff Bezos wants to be a competitor to Musk in the heavy lift thing, he should do that, right? And if Musk makes as much money as I think he probably will make, off of his work, other competitors should, if market forces make sense, should come into the market and maybe undercut his prices, you know? So I don't have any problem with Elon Musk per se. I just think that there's a gigantic gap between his rhetoric of small government, get out of my life, don't regulate me and what he's really doing with just saying, pay me money. Yeah, and that's an interesting follow up on the crony capitalism critique. Because actually, I think you entirely make that in good faith, but I actually dislike the generic critique of crony capitalism because I think it really

undercounts a certain governmental center left post new deal like innovation, how the American system operates, which is that like we have private actors, we have public missions, we have a government, we have money. So the way that we win the technological aspect of the Cold War isn't through Soviet style, top down design, industrial bureaus that are 100% government owned and directed
like we partner with companies. Obviously, there's corruption, things go too far, we won't even get into the like Blackwater part of the Iraq war. It's a whole other, I think, especially as we're seeing of the Wagner group, there's I think we should be really limited when it comes to the kinetic side of that. But just on the very public side of it, it seems like our system of private actors engaging in publicly funded missions actually works. And yes, Elon's a hypocrite, but I don't think we should be looking to Elon for his political philosophy or insights. I think if anything, a problem is a lot of people like in the broad public, take the billionaires you are, take away in the book too seriously when it comes to those matters. So like in my ideal world, we'd say like, well, Elon, do SpaceX, I'm not going to judge you on your political consistency. So what do you think about that? Well, I mean, Ross do thought and I don't know what you think about Ross, but I spent on the podcast a couple of times. So I know Ross. Yeah. He's a smart guy. He says that Elon Musk is without doubt, the most powerful voice on the right. In America. Accurate. Okay. So one thing, one thing, one modification, because this has changed since he made that statement, not just the most powerful voice, I say the most powerful actor because of X and Twitter. And now he actually can turn the dials. So this yesterday, he wrote that that the Jews were preventing, you know, X, Twitter, X, whatever you want to call it, from succeeding. He literally said, the ADL is behind the thing to keep me from getting any advertisement. It's all a Jews fault. Now, that is an extraordinary thing for someone to say in this day and age. So let's not, let's put aside Elon as a political actor. I think I have a lot of problems with it. And I think that the fact that, you know, people can't really understand how it is that, you know, 75% of the Republican Party still thinks that the election was stolen. They don't count the force of social media on most people's news consumption. In other words, the only way that could happen is that 75% of the Republican Party are not getting actual news. They're getting feeds from their Twitter or Facebook accounts that tell them what to think. And that is really the problem that we have. And so I don't think that Musk has any right to be able to do and have the power he has. And let me say just one other thing. The conception of the internet itself was a very kind of optimistic notion of your notion of bottom up, right? The government would build these protocols, TCPIP, HTTP, and would, would basically just say, this is the way the internet works. That's what the government's role was. And they financed it out of the army, the Defense Advanced Research Project. And then private actors would come in and it would all be bottom up and it would be completely decentralized and it would be networked and all those good words that you and I both think are helpful. But what happened? Within 10 years, you had Google owning 92% of the search business. You had Facebook controlling four of the largest five social networks. You had monopoly because you've studied Metcalfe's law, as I have. Networks tend to get giant and everybody wants to be on the network where everyone else is. So I'm just saying that it just doesn't work the way theoretically it's supposed to work. You know, we have all these Milton Friedman acolytes who think you just leave it all alone and the market will always deliver. But you know as well as I do that the market doesn't always

deliver. And so there is a role for government to kind of be in there and there is a role for the antitrust division. There is a role for the Federal Trade Commission. And that's kind of thing that quite frankly Elon doesn't like and neither does Andreessen and neither does Teal and neither does Mark Zuckerberg. So this is where I just want to do a quick sidebar.
Full disclosure, despite my appearance, the last thing tells it, I am Jewish so I want to ask about the ADL question. So I'm going to play Elon for a second and say, look, Jonathan, were my tweets aggressive, offensive? That's my deal. I pretend you're 1980s iteration and you're advising this big investor. This is Elon speaking then. Here's my problem right now. My problem right now is that the ADL as an organization is aggressively speaking to advertisers about the health and safety of this platform, which causes the platform and advertising revenue because Twitter Blue has not worked out on a couple of different levels to crash, which is really limiting the ability of me to actually run this site and make it a profitable business. Therefore, I have one of the biggest accounts on Twitter. I am going to use my voice to push back against the work of the ADL, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. What is your from out of business level? And this could also not just PR. I mean, at a business level, what would your advice be to him to navigate this situation without tweeting unhelpful tweets, which I will totally agree on?
So I would say, look, you came in and you basically eliminated the content moderation team. You fired the ball. The head of content moderation finally quit. He tried to hang on for a while and then finally quit. And so then your surprise when the ADL, which just monitors Twitter, says the rise in anti-Semitic language on Twitter has been on the level of three or 400 percent since you took it over. And you don't think they have a responsibility to push back against that? That's what their name
is, the anti-defamation. Their job is to point out where the sources of anti-Semitic rhetoric are coming from. And they're coming from Twitter. They're not coming from Facebook. They're coming from Twitter because Elon said, hey, sorry, hey, everything's free speech. And I'm a free speech absolutist. And that means that even if you're anti-Semitic, it's okay. You can be here on this platform. And so then you get what you asked for. And so I have no sympathy for him whatsoever, that he's complaining now that the ADL is being somewhat effective in getting people not advertised on this future platform.
So it seems that from takeaways, because I know there are some folks at Twitter listening to this podcast, it seems that at a fundamental level, there's a trust collapse. So it's not just that the ADL is showing up and talking to advertisers and that is just sort of, they're just like, okay, you're right, we're not spending money anymore. There's been a cascade of events since the acquisition that have just broken that trust between the advertising teams and Twitter because once again, they want to sell it. These are capitalist companies, right? They want to sell things. So there's something broadly going on here. And what must cannot assure these companies is,
hey, if you advertise here, you're not going to have a massive scandal in six months. So it seems the advice would really just be recognize what went wrong here, recognize that like a pitched Twitter battle with the ADL probably isn't going to end well. And at a minimum, do the hard work of figuring out how do you balance the desire to have a platform that's centered around speech with the need to pay the bills. And I also would have helped if they hadn't, if they were going to do that route they took, they really shouldn't have turned Twitter blow into a tribalist enterprise

where it's like, that was the dumbest thing to be like, why, I don't understand why you didn't just come in and say, look, guys, we're all, because you know, the funny thing is if you read your books, there was already a bipartisan consensus that advertising driven social media wasn't already a good thing. So it seems that you could have just come in and said, hey, guys, let's have this thing paid by subscribers by people who want to be here, people who want to support the community, we don't want to be dependent on advertising. But by making it into red team, blue team that instantly nuked the ability to kind of follow the New York Times model. So I think that's really relevant. So in our last section, I want to hit the two other areas, substantively, but quickly. I think the most frustrating area is the transhumanism category. And I've had biologists in a Boston on the podcast, so you can say things that I'm not quite comfortable saying, someone inviting me, someone into my home, but just give a summary of your transhumanism critique.
Well, Francis Fukuyama, as you probably know, wrote the end of history, says that transhumanism is the most dangerous idea in history. And what we mean by transhumanism is the general effort to change the human body, to make it able to live to 200 years old instead of 100 years old, to be able to design your embryo, to have certain genetic qualities, such as intelligence or lack of male pattern, pattern baldness, or be very fast, have very twitch, good twitch response, so you can be a fast runner, you know, all these things exist today. CRISPR allows you to do these things. Now, the ethicists say you shouldn't do it, but they all exist. And there are some rogue scientists who are playing around with it, you know. So, but the next thing is what Ray Kurzweil at Google calls the singularity, which is this notion at some point, and he says, you know, 2040, the artificial intelligence will be much smarter than humans, and that we will no longer be the dominant species. And so people like Peter Thiel are looking into some way of merging their own consciousness into the AI so that even if their body went away, Peter Thiel could keep running Palantir. Even if, I mean, he hopes very much to live to 160 or 180, right? And he's going down to San Diego to get blood transfusions from 20 year old boys in order because he's proven at his lab that, you know, old mice stay alive longer if they get transfusions from young mice, right? So, but he's also working with people who believe that they can send nanobots into your body to fix certain problems that happen in your liver or someone like that. The point of the notion that we end up merging human with computers seems to me problematic. I think all four of these people really are looking to replace nature with technology, to rebuild a society in such a way that few of them, the people who own the AIs, would fulfill the most primal human dream, to be gods. When Ray Kurzweil was asked to believe in God, he said, not yet.
And so they actually believe that we're going to enter this age of spiritual machines, as Kurzweil says. So these God machines that will tell us what to do, that will run this society, we'll do all of that. To me, that's something I don't want. And, you know, in the town that I live in, which is Los Angeles, we're seeing kind of an existential risk right now. What are these two Hollywood strikes about? Well, on the writer's guild side, Marvel, the Marvel Cinematic Universe would like the possibility of putting every Marvel screenplay that was ever written into a large language model. And then instead of a screenwriter, they'd have a prompt writer. And that person would say, okay, let's make a new screenplay. And the Hulk will meet Captain America and Iceland. And then Black Widow comes in and, you know, gives it a four paragraph prompt.

And in a day, the AI will spit out a screenplay. Now, Marvel owns that screenplay 100%. Doesn't have to pay any royalties to anybody else and everything. But of course, that screenplay will not be any better than the bad TS Eliot poems that you can create on on chat GPT. So they will then, because there were lots of screenwriters out of work, they will hire some good screenwriter for 10,000 a week for three weeks to make it more human. And then, and they will also gain the advantage of actually getting a human's name on it too, because the copyright office says it won't copyright something that's purely written by a machine. And then they solve their problems. They've cut their costs radically. They've cut the time to market radically. And but the artists will be out of work. Now, I can say just one thing, having worked with Bob Dylan, who I consider to be a genius. Chat GPT will never write like a Rolling Stone. It will never write Hamlet because AI believes that all of the human knowledge that's ever been needed or ever will be needed is already out there on the internet. And the idea of these large language models is simply to remix it and put one word in front of the next to another and make something that is just enough new that it doesn't cross the copyright thing. The same thing with these image generators, you know, so I think we're at a really critical point. I'm not worried about AI taking over the world and, you know, you know, that's something other people to work with. But I am worried about AI eliminating a huge number of jobs. I mean, I've been to an Amazon R&D facility where there's five people and 5,000 robots, and it works just fine.
You know, and it doesn't escape me that the people who are pushing universal basic income the most
are Muxra, Zuckerberg, Mark Andriesen, Peter Thiel, and Elon Musk, because they see where the future is going. So there's two futures on offer. One is which we put the collective public goods, as you call them, to fixing the problems of this planet, eliminating homelessness, getting the air cleaned up, you know, getting the rivers cleaned up, all these things that we know how to do. And the other is that the future will be a world in which most people will not have a job, and they will sit at home and live on universal basic income, maybe paid in crypto, if Mark Andriesen has his way. And from Zuckerberg's point of view, it'll be great, because they'll sit at home, and maybe they'll go on into the metaverse, and date Kim Kardashian, and, you know, pretend they're Tony Stark. That is not a world I want to live in. Now, I'm 76, so I probably won't have to deal with this, but you will.
I think the last two, actually three last, three last questions. So one, this is a follow-up to the Francis Fukuyama quote, VU Invoke in the book, and kind of discourse on the key takeaway, and why that was so scary for me was this idea of it. It's hard to have in a world where people are able to augment themselves or change their inheritance. It really limits the democratic nature of so much of what Western liberal society is premised on when it comes to equality, inherent human dignity, those different things. I'm curious what you think in the world today, like what the limits are, because like to a certain degree, like the fact that I could send my kids to super-offensive private school versus some kid goes to some crappy public school, like what do you just think about? Like, how far can we stretch the world we live in today, the world of reality, where you think we start stretching the nature of what makes a democracy work? Well, look, if you and your wife decided when you have another child, I don't know, or just got married, no kids yet, but hopefully. When you guys decide, and they do a genetic test on the embryo, and they say, oh, this embryo has a 40% chance of male pattern baldness, it will be

in
the 50%ile of the SAT test. It will have blonde hair that will eventually fall out, but again, whatever. And you say, well, I want to improve that. I want to improve. And they say, okay, for a million dollars, we could fix that. We could make them in the 90th percentile of the SAT test. We can make sure he's not going to be bald. You know, okay, you could do that. At that point, Thomas Jefferson goes out the window. All men are created equal is not true. And by the way, if Peter Thiel can live to 170 years old and keep running Palantir, what does that mean for all the young people trying to come up and make it in the companies? If my damn generation can continue to hang on forever, we've hung on too long. What is the problem? We've got a gerontocracy. It's like the Soviet Union and the Andropov era. You know, all these 85-year-old politicians, and you know, I'm a Democrat, but I'm not happy the fact that this guy won't div it up and let someone else come on. And so, I mean, and you know, Mitch McConnell is going to hang on. It doesn't matter if he freezes every week, and you know, in front of the microphone. He's probably just not going to do any press conferences for a while. You know, so I worry. I have a lot of work. But on the other hand, I see a resistance march. I see the people on the picket lines in Hollywood are saying, no, I see that young musicians and young chefs trying to make, and you see it in Austin, trying to make a non-industrialized music and a non-industrialized food system. I see all sorts of hope all over the country of people saying, I want to, I'm not going to just put on my headphones and listen to Spotify all day. I'm going to learn how to play the banjo. You know, I mean, you know, I spent a lot of time with Rhianna Giddens. She's like, to me, she's a light in the darkness, you know, and that makes me feel good. I feel that there's people that are pushing back.
So here's the closing question, which I'll merge into one semi-giant one. I've spoken to a lot of young founders and builders in the crypto space. So not the, well, I spoke into Mark, but we didn't talk about crypto in that context. And something that they really like to do is they frame what they're doing in the language and specific historical analogy to what you in your cohort did in the 1960s. Crypto, especially in New York, in LA is very counter-cultural. And the way it articulates itself, it says, hey, look, we're trying to decentralize these big Web 2 platforms. Web 3 is going to be more decentralized, all those different aspects. And the way I've kind of asked you to close this is my biggest frustration when I've spoken with them is they haven't understood the, you know, Daniel Patrick Monahan issue of politics being downstream from culture. Because many of the arguments that they kind of think are cultural are actually like deeply political ones, like, oh, like, we're going to have to build a dow if it's going to buy the Constitution. And it's so great that we'll vote where it goes. But wait, guys, like whoever has the most ownership via the tokens would actually have the most votes. So it's actually not a particularly use of political structure. So I'll just ask you to close in the Monahan quote, like, politics, technology, culture, those are the three places you've placed your career in. What's the order? Like, what's downstream of what, how should we think about that moving forward?
Well, you know, there's an old quote from the business world, culture eats strategy for breakfast every morning. And I think it makes a lot of sense. In other words, you can have a strategy for your company and say, this is what we're going to do. But if your culture is screwed up, it won't make

any difference. People won't eat the dog food. You know, I mean, here's what I think about crypto. First, it's not decentralized. You know, as Dorsey, Jack Dorsey said, you don't own web three, the VCs do, it will never escape their incentive. It's ultimately a centralized entity with a different label. Okay, so that's the first thing. The second thing is, if you recall in the winter of 2021, as football season was getting to a climax, the football games were flooded with ads for FX and crypto.com and all the other exchanges, there was Tom Brady telling you should be in crypto and there was Matt Damon saying fortune belongs to the bold and Larry David and LeBron and Steph Curry and every, everywhere you look, there were ads pushing Bitcoin. Now, at that point, Bitcoin was at 60,000 a coin. And so you put $250 million of TV advertising, there was so much advertising that they called the Super Bowl in 2022, the crypto bowl, right? So the suckers flood in, it's a classic pyramid scheme, right? The suckers flood in, buying at $60,000 a coin, the 2% of the people that own 90% of the Bitcoin sell a huge amount of their coins, which they got for almost nothing because they were in the beginning of the game. And by May, Bitcoin is at $19,000 a coin. So the, the pearls that came in in, after the advertising flood, lost most of their money. And of course, the whales that own most of the Bitcoin made out like bandits. So where's, what's the purpose of it? It has no, as, as the scientists wrote, as you saw in the beginning of my book said, it has no real purpose for a large scale financial transaction. All it is, is playing on this nonsense idea, which Ron Paul floated 20 years ago, that the dollar is a, is a false construct, and it's all going to fall apart. Now he, he's saying this for 25 years. And of course, it never happened. But that doesn't stop people from playing on that same fear that the government is somehow
hiding something and, and you know, the dollar is going to completely collapse at some point.
At least when you bought gold, you could melt it down and make some jewelry.
You buy Bitcoin, you can't do anything with it.
I think that is a, oh, and just the, so you think that ultimately,
yeah, I think that's a great place to end the podcast. Can you just, since we've talked about a couple of your books, could you obviously just shout out the full title of the end of reality? And then of course, the magic years too. Yeah. So the end of reality of four billionaires are selling a fantasy future of the metaverse Mars and crypto, it goes on sale today.
Uh, the magic years seen as from rock and roll life, which is a history of the 60s, 70s and 80s, both in music and, and, and movies.
Excellent. Jonathan, thank you for joining me on the realignment.
This has been a delight. Thank you very much.
Hope you enjoyed this episode. If you learned something like this sort of mission or want to access our subscriber exclusive Q and a bonus episodes and more, go to realignment.supercast.com and subscribe to our $5 a month, $50 a year or 500 for a lifetime membership rates. See you all next time.