



WOODS: All right, we're talking about Donald Trump today. I figure might as well. Got to say something about him. And I have not talked that much about him. I'm looking in my list of episodes. I have not talked that much about him, and some people have been upset about that, that I should be criticizing him more. But then I look back, and I didn't talk about Obama either. Because, I mean, a topic that — I mean, look, it's idiosyncratic. It's called *The Tom Woods Show*. It's whatever interests me. And I generally just — if it's something everybody's talking about, then it just bores me. Like, if everybody's talking about Obamacare, I don't want to talk about it. So I would have perfunctory episodes on Obamacare, but I just hated every minute of it.

So I don't know why that is, but when he did the Afghanistan strike, I had Scott Horton on and we — we've been critical of him on foreign policy from time to time, but I don't know, I just — eh. But sometimes I want to talk about what he means, what he stands for, what he represents, really, because, in a way he's almost not bright enough to fully appreciate what he represents. I mean, he almost sort of gets it, but not fully, really. So that kind of interests me, because I'm just interested in the world of ideas. I'm not interested in his daily peccadilloes. It just doesn't do anything for me. But the Trump phenomenon, the fact that the electorate went for a guy everybody told them not to go for, now, that is interesting to me. That actually is interesting to me.

But when I look over his record, okay, there's definitely some stuff on the economy that is pretty good. But there's some other stuff on the economy that's hopeless, and it really is the case, it's not just a dopey libertarian take on it to say that he really, really has confusion about trade. He does. That's a fact. He really does have confusion about trade. And when it comes to the Fed, he's confused or he wants interest rates even lower and this and that. So we have all that stuff.

We have the appointments. My gosh, I mean, yeah, we cheered because he got rid of John Bolton. That's because he hired John Bolton. You know, what is the problem? Why would you want Mike Pompeo? Why would you care so little for your professed ideas that you wouldn't even look into who the natural people you should appoint to help carry them out would be so? And now with what's going on in Iraq and Iran, and he's just got done saying, he had this big, long series of tweets, *We've got to get out of these wars*, and this and that. And now who knows what the future holds? I don't know. What do you say about him? What do *you* say about him, Jeff Deist?

And by the way, by the way, at the same time — and I'm just setting the stage for our conversation. At the same time, I do think it is a problem when people portray him as a unique evil in American history. There are even some libertarians who, for heaven's sake, unless they know no history whatsoever, should be ashamed of themselves for falling into that particular trap. This is the opportunity for libertarians to point out: look, it's the whole regime that's the problem. I was telling people this during the Obama years. I was telling Tea Party people this, that, listen, repeat after me: if the successor of Barack Obama who happens to be a Republican winds up doing the same things this guy did, I will also be upset at those. I did that exercise with some Tea Party groups, to say that I'm sick and tired of you telling me this is a unique evil, and then you turn around and there's another party doing the same thing, and suddenly you're standing up and saluting.

Like, we should be talking about the whole regime is the problem. It's not like, well, if only we get rid of Trump, then things would be a lot better because we'd have the American establishment back in the saddle again. And heaven knows we need Henry Kissinger and Joe Lieberman and John Kerry and the ghost of John McCain. We need those people in charge, because they've really done such a good job for us. How could a libertarian think that way? I just don't understand.

I do understand how you could say I don't like Trump at all. I don't understand how you could say he's a uniquely wicked person. Really? Do you know anything about Woodrow Wilson? Do you know anything about FDR? Do you know anything about Harry Truman? I mean, on and on and on. It's ridiculous. And when you point this out, you get accused of *That's what aboutism*. *You always bring up what aboutism. What about FDR?* Well, yeah. Yeah, that's what you have to do when you have a bunch of people who have occupied the same office, you have to compare them. And if you're going to tell me that this guy is the worst one ever or is some kind of unique evil, then yeah, I have to say, if you're going to use the word *unique*, you better look that up in the dictionary. Because for all Trump's faults, he's not Woodrow Wilson. He's not FDR. So I just can't get over libertarians who, they're just so thirsting for mainstream respectability, they want to raise their hands in the back of the class and say, *I'm also against Trump, everybody*. Hey, Mr. New York Times Reporter, sir, you see I'm against Trump? Come on, are we reduced to this?

DEIST: [laughing] We are, Tom. We are absolutely reduced to this.

WOODS: [laughing] We are. It was a rhetorical question.

DEIST: The thing about Trump is he may have gone around the bend last week with his strike on an Iranian general in Iraq. If this ultimately leads to an escalation of things with Iran and an actual war with Iran, then of course everything is going to be very, very different in our assessment of him. That will be absolutely, wholly, totally unforgivable. And especially given what we already know about our endless entanglements in Iraq and Afghanistan and where they've led to. And Iran is not Iraq or Afghanistan. Iran is something like 80 million people. It has a real army. It doesn't have much of a navy or an air force, but it has a real army. And so this is no joke. There are US interests and soldiers up and down the Persian Gulf that Iran could touch, so this is no joke. It's an unfolding situation, and of course one which he might have horribly bungled, despite having gotten rid of a Bolton. I mean, it's hard to fathom.

But here's my take on Trump. First of all, I think he is a man who is uniquely susceptible to flattery. I think he likes listening to praise, and if people around him are able to skillfully manipulate that, he can probably be talked into things because he has sort of a fighter's instinct. He likes to punch and counterpunch, but he doesn't have much in the way of ideological moorings. And why would he? I mean, what in his past would make you think that?

And I'll play armchair psychologist for a second. He is old enough, certainly his father was old enough, to come from an era where Manhattan was really different from the rest of New York City, and Manhattanites sort of looked down on the other boroughs. And so I think his father and then Trump himself have craved respectability from the Manhattan establishment as he came up through the ranks, or they came up through the ranks, in real estate development. And they would never really be accepted. They would always be outsiders in what, at least in Trump's father's day, was still sort of an old-money system in New York. And so I think that may have affected him growing up, this sort of need to brag and to inflate himself and to win at everything and to lack any sense of grace – which, I forget, which is the big one in Penn and Teller? Oh my gosh, I can't recall.

WOODS: Oh, Penn.

DEIST: Penn, yes, the big one. He was on Trump's reality show *The Apprentice*, and I saw a segment with him, it might have been on *The Joe Rogan Show* or somewhere else, where he basically said when you're around Trump in person off-camera, this is a really joyless man. He

apparently doesn't laugh. He just doesn't have the ability to laugh unless it's some sort of mocking, derisive laugh, like laughing at someone in a nasty way. And Penn also said that he doesn't listen to music. This is not a guy who would turn on some music and enjoy. So he's a very strange cat and really, really different. But I mean, there's been plenty of strange cats in the Oval Office. I mean, Richard Nixon was a very strange cat in many ways.

But when I think about Trump, I like to go back — I think this was something I argued on the Contra Cruise a couple years ago. Imagine Donald Trump didn't exist, and imagine it was towards the end of Barack Obama's term, and you went to the Democrats, you went to the left and said:

Look, guys, after Obama, I've got some bad news for you. The next president is not going to be Hillary Clinton or Joe Biden or whatever. The next president is going to be Republican. I'm sorry, but I have a crystal ball and I'm telling you the next president is a Republican. But good news: it's not some red-state governor like the aforementioned Mike Huckabee or whatever. It's actually a sophisticated New York City developer. And not only is it a sophisticated New York City developer, it's a guy who has had a series of trophy wives and has a really beautiful and stylish and chic wife from Eastern Europe who speaks a bunch of different languages. And in the course of this hypothetical person's career, they have been in and around New York circles their whole life. They're quite a wealthy person, allegedly a billionaire. We don't know that. This person is very comfortable with and has rubbed shoulders with all kinds of folks from different walks of life: gay and lesbian folks, Jewish folks, black folks. He's well regarded in the African American community, and he's actually lauded by people like Al Sharpton. This person is not animated by social issues like abortion or prayer. This person is absolutely not a Christian conservative in any way. This person actually is quite favorable towards unions and advocates trade protectionism. And some of our listeners might recall that back in the dark ages before Trump, Democrats liked tariffs.

So if you put all that in a blender and said, look, okay, if that's the next president and it has to be a Republican, gee, that at least sounds like a Republican we'd take. So all of this hysteria over Trump is all about tone and style. It's not about substance. As you said, he's not a unique evil. He's no more or less fascist than some of his more immediate predecessors like Obama and W. This idea that fascism is just some generic term we use for anything we don't like, fascism means, first and foremost, an authoritarian ruler. Second, a melding of corporate and state power. Third, a suspension or dilution of liberties, suppressions of press, putting people in jail, that sort of thing. These are the basic elements of fascism, and if you look at it that way, is Trump more or less fascist? You know, okay. I don't know.

I think this was the left's reaction to Hillary not winning. I mean, in other words, there are things that are just very difficult for people to overcome psychologically. We all have this. So in our personal lives, when certain memories or certain things in our past are difficult, we have a psychological coping mechanism whereby we create a narrative in our head that explains it in a way that we can live with better, that makes us more at ease with an uncomfortable situation. I think that's basically what happened when Hillary didn't win. So many people's world views about this sort of arc of progressive social democracy that was just unstoppable and that was inevitable, when that didn't happen — and of course, Brexit was a precursor to this, by the way. When it didn't happen, people had to come up with a reason for this.

And the reasons are that America is this deeply retrograde and racist country. Trump colluded with the Russians to have \$150,000 worth of Facebook ads, and dummy Americans actually changed their votes because of them. If that's true, by the way, if this Facebook ad buying thing is true, that's a strong argument against democratic voting, if people are that weak, that they look at a Facebook ad. My God.

WOODS: Yeah.

DEIST: So I think these were psychological coping mechanisms to deal with the fact that Trump won. And from a libertarian perspective, it was never about Trump. It was never about his policies, so called. It was never about his cabinets or who he'd appoint or any of that stuff. It was about the simple fact that that many people were willing to go off the reservation, 60, 70 million people, and vote for this unknown in the face of what seemed to be just an absolute lock by Hillary Clinton.

So look, the guy kneecapped the Bush and Clinton crime families in one election. He sent Jeb Bush away looking like some sort of bedraggled puppy dog. I mean, this is a big deal. This is a big deal. I'm not sure America goes back to how it was before. And social media plays a role. This is not just Trump. But shouldn't libertarians look at that, at least back in 2016 when it happened, with some degree of optimism and say, wait a minute, if that many people could sort of shift gears, then there's some hope in that.

And I think that's true. I think that's still true. Go back to 1992, Ross Perot, third-party candidate. Okay, Ross Perot got 19 million votes. People forget about that. That was about 20% of the voting electorate. He got 19 million votes. And then in the next election, everyone just went back to the Rs and the Ds. Nothing changed. So what we have to understand is Trump won as a third party. A third-party candidate won, and libertarians take no cheer or heart from this? I mean, that's crazy. A third-party candidate won.

This is a guy who had no friends within the GOP establishment. He spent something like a third of what Hillary Clinton spent, so forget campaign finance reform. Trump winning absolutely blew all arguments for that out the door. Anybody who brings up Citizens United ever again in the federal context is just a moron. He had no ground game. He had no GOP precinct chairs, none of that state-by-state, precinct-by-precinct ground game that a Jeb Bush would have had or a Mitt Romney had or whatever. And he still won. I mean, he basically won as a third-party candidate. Now, I understand he had an R next to his name, which brings a certain cohort of just moronic automatons vote for you. I understand that that gives you ballot access very easily. I get that. But in essence, Tom, he won as a third-party candidate.

And so you've got to look at that as a lot of people are really fed up. And so that can go in a bad, scary, nationalist, fascist direction, or that could go in a good direction for liberty. But if you can't even acknowledge, if you've got to say, *Oh my gosh, Trump is so much worse than Hillary* – a lot of libertarians not only would have preferred Hillary to Trump; I think a lot of DC libertarians in particular would have much preferred the sort of technocratic, left-of-center elite person to Trump. I think a lot of them would have preferred Hillary to Ron Paul, I mean, honestly. So it was really something. And some days, I honestly still can't believe he won. I mean, I still wake up and I see what this guy is tweeting, I think, oh my God. So I'm old enough to have grown up in a world with Walter Mondales and such, and this was just unthinkable, but I think 25-year-olds just think this is how it is.

And so what does this mean for liberty going forward? More than anything, I hope it means that there are some cracks in the foundation of US hegemony and US foreign policy, because neoconservatism is going to be the death of us. It's going to be the death of us overseas, and we're going to create enemies to the end of time. And it's going to be the death of us domestically, because we're going to add 1 trillion, 1.5 trillion, 2 trillion every year until, you know, good luck getting your Social Security.

So I've always thought that if that fiscal conservative known as George W. Bush, if he had gone to the American people back in, '01, '02, when he was making the case to basically reignite his father's war against Saddam Hussein, if he had said, *Look, we all agree we've got to fight them over there so we don't fight them over here. Saddam Hussein had yellowcake uranium. He was harboring terrorists. He has weapons of mass destruction. Clearly, we have to go get rid of Saddam Hussein. We're all in agreement, right, that this is the right thing to do. And because I'm a conservative, we're going to pay as we go, and every household is going to be*

assessed an additional \$500 per month that you have to send in until Saddam's out of there, can you imagine?

I mean, the Iraq War would never have happened. It would have been an absolute nonstarter. But that's not, of course, how we fund foreign wars. And so I really hope that if nothing else, Trump means that there's some glimmers of hope on the foreign policy side of things, which affects so much at home.

WOODS: Jeff, I seem to recall you saying something along the lines of — and you know what? Maybe it wasn't you, but somebody said it. Let's talk about it. That when you think back to how Trump campaigned, he focused on three or four issues. It was trade, it was immigration, and one or two other things, political correctness or whatever. But if you asked him about something like foreign policy, he'd give you an answer, but that wasn't what he was stumping around talking about. He just stayed focused on his main, core issues. And so at least whether you liked him or you didn't like him, you knew what he was about. He's about these things.

So it's kind of like when Howard Stern ran for governor of New York, it was three things. It was bring back the death penalty; I think it was had to do with the tolls; and it was do road work at night, so as not to cause too much traffic. I mean, that was it. He had no ambition to remake your life or to get himself into every nook and cranny of society. He had a few basic things, so everybody knew where he stood.

And I'm pretty sure I've heard you say that if a libertarian were really to make a serious go at the presidency, that should be the model. Not trying to give the libertarian policy report answer on every single thing under the sun, but try and pick three or four things that are deeply unpopular in the country and just hammer away at them. Now, first of all, am I remembering this correctly? And secondly, if you could advise such a person, what would you have them hammer home?

DEIST: Well, Ron Paul did that. He hammered home a couple things: get out of the Middle East. Just repeat that until the cows come home. And use some graphs, use some charts, use some math to show that we're not going to be able to pay entitlements much longer if we keep maintaining this level of deficit spending, and that at some point, all the debt we're amassing is going to make our foreign buyers of US Treasury debt very nervous, and they're going to start demanding junk bond interest rates, which we can't pay. And so I think he would just talk about: get out of the Middle East. There's a natural constituency. And basically the whole country outside of Washington DC and a few suburbs in Northern Virginia and Maryland wants to get us out of the Middle East. I mean, everyone is sick of it. The people in the Reserves. You know, so you've got a huge natural constituency for a repeated hardcore message about getting out of the Middle East.

And you have a smaller but nonetheless extant constituency for end the Fed. And Ron said this time and time again, and I know some libertarians think, oh, no one cares about that and nobody understands it. Yeah, well, that's true. Most people don't understand the Fed. As a matter of fact, that's no crime. Most economists don't understand the Fed. In fact, most monetary economists barely understand anything about actual Fed mechanics. So it's no crime. But there's nothing wrong with being populist when the underlying message happens to be right. And getting rid of the Fed is the right message from a libertarian perspective. So while people don't understand it, they do smell a rat. They do sense that something's amiss, that the Federal Reserve system creates sort of an undeserving class of rich people who are in and around Wall Street, who are a little closer to the money spigot, which is all true, by the way. And so it's a great populist message.

So I think whoever is a candidate, whether that's Tulsi or Jacob Hornberger or whoever it might be, I would be out there talking about war and peace, and getting rid of this central banking system which works to the benefit of a tiny, wealthy portion of society while making all kinds of mischief and phony entitlement spending and war spending possible. It's the great enabler of everything bad Congress does. So those would be my big populist issues.

And maybe there's others, maybe I'm wrong, but I'll tell you what: keeping it simple, there's something wrong with that. A couple shows ago, we mentioned Nigel Farage just talked about Brexit. And within the scope of Brexit, if you were for Brexit, that's all he cared about. He didn't say, oh, but by the way, I'm a conservative so we've got to reduce pensions. Or he didn't say, oh, we've got to reform the National Health Service in Britain, and by the way, in doing so, we're going to have to cut a bunch of doctors. He didn't wander into any other areas of politics where he might find people disagree with him.

So it's a bit of an apples-and-oranges comparison, because UK is a parliamentary system with minor parties. But at this point, if Trump won — [laughing] I mean, look, if Trump won, anybody could win. You know, Dwayne Johnson, the Rock, might be the next president. Tulsi might be the next president. I don't know. But there's a constituency for peace that straddles these two intractable parties, and that's where I think we kick the door down. And if you want to call that America First, if you want to call it isolationism, I don't care. Like Scott Horton says, talk to the right from the right, talk to the left from the left. So it's interesting times, but people don't want a smooth-talking, Pete-Buttigieg, technocratic approach. I don't think that's what's going to carry the day in 2020. So let's just hope that whoever does carry the day is at least influenced somewhat by antiwar efforts, whether those be libertarian or otherwise.

WOODS: Do you think after Trump, whether the after Trump comes in 2020 or 2024, the Republican Party just goes back to Romney-McCain? Can they do that? Is that what they're going to try to do? Has Trump — I mean, you're right. He had a lot of success outside the official precincts of the Republican Party. But if he wants to leave a lasting imprint on that party, he's got to dig his nails deep into those official precincts, and I don't know if he's done that or not. So do you have any instinct about that? What happens after Trump? Do they act like this was just an aberration and we act like it never happened?

DEIST: Well, they certainly can. I think the GOP is done nationally. I think within five or ten years, Texas and Florida are permanent blue. So you're not going to be able to win national elections when New York, California, Texas, and Florida are all blue. It doesn't really matter what Ohio or Pennsylvania do at that point. So I think the GOP is done very soon, nationally. And I think that if they were a better GOP, if they had more instincts of the Old Right, which you and I admire, they would focus on being a state and local party and see what they could do that way. But they won't do that, because there's too much of a gravy train within Conservatism, Inc., within all these people like Mitt Romney. So they can't help themselves. They're not going to change their stripes at this point. So I think it's a permanent minority party soon.

And that's another thing for which we owe some debt of gratitude to Trump. I mean, he put the final knife in the back of the GOP and maybe hastened their demise. And people say, well, Jeff, that's bad because the Democrats are going to vote more left. Yeah, I get that. But all that's going to happen is that there will be a realignment. I mean, there will be a left and right wing of the Democratic Party. And I mean, the right wing of the Democratic Party today — what is that, Joe Biden? I don't know — is scarcely discernible from my perspective from Mitt Romney or whatever. I don't care. What do I care if conservatives and Republicans just sort of reformed themselves in one end of the Democratic Party, and so you have a more right Democratic Party that wins elections in Iowa or something, and a more left Democratic Party that wins in California? That's not something I get particularly exercised over.

But the Republican Party deserves to die. Let's face it: they screwed the pooch and they gave up their birthright. They have no claim whatsoever to any mantle of limited government or constitutionalism or judiciousness or God or anything. I mean, this is just an absolute farce of a party. And if they had spent — you know, all that money that's poured into supposedly pro-life candidates who are mostly GOP over the last three decades, if all that money — these clowns. I mean, if all that money had just gone into actually helping young girls in trouble,

could you imagine? You could have huge hospitals, delivery hospital or something, for a fraction of the money that people have probably spent on pro-life politics.

WOODS: Yeah, or by the way, for that matter, obviously influencing young minds is one of the most significant things you can do, because by the time you get to a certain age, you tend to be set in your ways. So imagine, just think of all the money that was spent on conservative politics that was wasted. I mean, the conservatives, how many victories do they have? They have almost none to point to. What if 1/1,000th of that money had been poured into creating a K through 12 homeschool curriculum like the Ron Paul curriculum? It never occurred to any of them to do that. Instead, they'd rather blow the money on whatever, political consultants. But this practically would have made your lives better, and yet they can't help themselves.

DEIST: Well, it's true. And over the years, they never bought a major studio. They kind of bought Fox News, but they never really — they just don't affect culture in any meaningful way. And they have some outposts like Hillsdale, which is still funded by conservative donors along with tuition. But this is a party that has lost its way and doesn't have anything to appeal to young people. I mean, the Democrats are really evil. Don't get me wrong. They are not well intentioned. That's another terrible thing about dopey libertarians, is they sort of buy into this idea that the right is evil and the left is just misguided. Yeah, that's nonsense. What about the history of the 20th century makes you think the left is simply misguided, but well intentioned? I mean, come on.

But nonetheless, the left can at least offer some things to young people, and that's why I think young people are moving left. And that's a failure of libertarianism. There's no question about it. We've failed in the sense that a lot of young people feel hopeless. They feel like they don't have much of a future. They feel like simple things — homeownership, marriage, children — might be beyond them financially. And as a result, people who don't feel like they have much skin in the game or as much to lose are more likely to vote for radical left policies or support them. So that's where we ought to be. We ought to be in there offering the radical alternative to that, because the GOP is off in a corner somewhere bumping into things. I mean, they're not in the picture, as far as I'm concerned.

WOODS: I more or less see things the way you do. And I don't know, there is still part of me, even after — it's like I'm an abuse victim. You get abused and you make excuses for your abuser. *Ah, well, the abuser really loves me. It's just a funny way of showing it.* That kind of thing. There is still a part of me that thinks that, yeah, the Republicans are terrible and I've spent years and years doing nothing but denouncing them, but the Democrats can't stand the sight of me. That's the difference. So at least these people maybe hold them back a little while, while normal civil society tries to reassert itself. I mean, I don't know.

But whether that's true or not, I think what you're saying is probably correct about the fate of the Republican Party. And it's interesting that it comes about as a result of demographics, because the Republican Party, whether it's libertarian or not, could have tried to stop that and instead cheered it. And now it means there's not going to be any more Republican Party. It's just a very weird thing, that you would actively do something that in your heart of hearts means you're doomed, and yet you still do it. It's just a weird thing to me.

DEIST: Yeah, and the idea that there's a libertarian wing of the GOP I think is mostly disabused by the fact that they had a couple of chances. They had three chances to vote for either Ron or Rand Paul in Republican primaries, in some of those early states in '08 and '12 and '16. And they didn't. I mean, that's just a fact. So I don't carry any water for Republicans, have never been one. And at this point, if they're not useful opposition to the left's march through the 20th century, then I'd rather just get it over with and come up with something new.

WOODS: Well, let's see what in fact they wind up coming up with. TomWoods.com/1566 is the show notes page. I do have a related episode that I'm going to post there that I did years ago with Roger McCaffrey on Trump and the political consultant. Because these are people who you have to pay them five figures a month and they're going to tell you what to do and say

and whatever. And the Trump phenomenon kind of blows that up a bit, because he didn't do a lot of those things, and yet he succeeded. So maybe there was a bubble in that particular industry. So that's an interesting related episode to listen to, linked at TomWoods.com/1566. Jeff, we'll see you tomorrow for one last episode.

DEIST: Okay, thanks.