Episode 737: America First: Its History, Culture, and Politics

Guest: Bill Kauffman

WOODS: Listen, this book — I'm telling you, this is why I love Bill Kauffman. This is why I belong to the Bill Kauffman Appreciation Society.

KAUFFMAN: (laughing)

WOODS: It's not just a series of chronicles of individuals, but there are chapters on individual people. What I love about it is, if you'll recall Russell Kirk's book *The Conservative Mind*, he in that book chronicles a number of people, but I personally, my recollection of the book — and Brad Birzer's going to dislike me for this — is that each of those people comes out sounding exactly like each other one. They all sound the same. They all believe in order as the mother of liberty. Like, all right already, Russell, we get you.

KAUFFMAN: (laughing) Ordered liberty, Tom, yeah, yeah.

WOODS: I mean, enough is enough already. Whereas each one of these comes across so crisply and differently in these pages. So let me start off with a totally bizarre way of starting. I don't want to talk about *America First* or Donald Trump or anything.

KAUFFMAN: All right.

WOODS: I want to talk about Sinclair Lewis —

KAUFFMAN: (laughing)

WOODS: — because I'll tell you, something that surprised me about this book, about Sinclair Lewis, was that I did what all high schoolers did. I read *Babbitt*, and then actually when I got out of high school I read a couple more of his books just for the heck of it, and I drew the conclusion that he was like a Mencken laughing at middle America. And now you're making me rethink that.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah, Lewis, for the listeners who aren't aware of this, a Minnesota-bred novelist, who achieved fame throughout the '20s. His books *Main Street* and *Babbitt* and others, they're hilarious. They read very well. I'm glad you brought up the Mencken parallel. Like Mencken, you can read Lewis today and laugh out loud, especially *Babbitt*. And yeah, he was thought to be a scoffer at small town

idiocy and the Rotary Club and all this sort of thing. But in fact, Lewis' real beef with small town America is that it wasn't itself. It was falling prey to standardization, and people were adopting their ideas from the distant capitals. And that plays out I think in a lot of Lewis' books, especially *Babbitt,* which is brilliant satire.

And the irony is that Lewis loved George Babbitt. As his wife Dorothy Thompson, whom Lewis called "the talking woman," so you can probably figure out why she was Lewis' ex-wife — but he loved Babbitt. His complaint is that Americans were too henpecked by the cultural capitals. And so yeah, Lewis, not surprisingly, in 1940-41, was actually a card-carrying member of the America First Committee, which opposed US involvement in the Second World War. And this is despite the fact that he had been a longtime crusader for racial justice. In fact, he was outraged when the German government wanted to actually reprint one of his novels in the '30s. He told them his name was actually Sinclair Levenson or something like that —

WOODS: (laughing).

KAUFFMAN: — and they backed off. But yeah, Lewis was a great figure, and he was, like you said, a lot of people in the book — Gore Vidal or Edward Abbey or William Fulbright, he — Alice Roosevelt Longworth — he was an iconoclast. He was idiosyncratic. He was an American original, which is to say he was an original American. You couldn't fit him in a box. There'd be no place for him on MSNBC or Fox. He's not red or blue. And who is?

WOODS: Yeah, who is indeed? I mean, anybody who is is so boring and awful you can't possibly tolerate them. And it reminds me of one of my favorite lines from your Rally for the Republic speech: you know, if Ron Paul were to be heard in such and such context, they would probably beat him over the head with rolled up copies of Mitt Romney speeches, or what's even worse, they'd make him listen to Mitt Romney speeches. I just loved that.

All right, you've got this chapter, "The Merchants of Death of Sunset Boulevard," and in there, North Dakota Senator Nye, referring to the movies, says, "They have become the most gigantic engines of propaganda in existence to rouse the war fever in America and plunge this nation to her destruction." Now, that is a stunning quotation from a US senator, but what I'm curious about is, of course today the movies have gotten a little more subtle sometimes. It's not quite so obviously hitting you over the head. But it's not that much more subtle, so I'm curious to know how do you think the movies have changed in this regard particularly, with regard to the military and adventurism and stuff like that. I mean, haven't we seen some critical movies these days?

KAUFFMAN: I guess we have, sure. We have stuff like *Black Hawk Down* or my own film, *Copperhead*. *Platoon*. But I don't know. My theory is it's almost impossible to make an antiwar film, because there's something in each of us that stirs to the drumbeat. And you know, you see this back before the Civil War, you know, when you had a lot of New Englanders who were philosophically pacifists, especially a lot of the — there were a lot of pacifist abolitionists whom I greatly admire. But once the war starts, the blood lust stirs, and then they want to go trample out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.

Well, today, like, in movies, yeah, you can claim it's an antiwar movie, but once you see men in battle, it's almost impossible not to put yourself in their place, as we do when we sit in the movie theater. So I always thought Dorothy Day, Henry Thoreau, Gandhi, you know, they could go into *Full Metal Jacket* and by the end they'd want to be napalming a Vietnamese baby. It's impossible to make an antiwar film, and so yeah, these movies all — and these movies are usually made of course with the cooperation of the US military. And they almost always end up — I mean, it's one thing to respect military men, as I do. I mean, I do think that — but it's tough to separate sometimes the people from their mission, and so I think that, you know, it's — I don't know.

Militarism, martialism has become a kind of secular religion, and it's dispiriting, that the default position of most Americans used to be antiwar. There's a tremendous antimilitarist heritage in this country, as you know, going all the way back to the Revolution. But that was lost I think in the second half of the 20th century, with the Cold War especially, and even know while we have — well, I'll leave it there.

WOODS: Well, I want to ask you something that might be a little tricky for you to answer. I've got a lot of questions that'd be easy for you, but I think this one's a little —

KAUFFMAN: Throw me softballs, Tom, geez.

WOODS: (laughing) Oh, I'm the king of the softballs.

KAUFFMAN: Tee it up, baby (laughing).

WOODS: No, this one's a bit of a screwball, because you know, my own thought has evolved on this over the years. I started off as, in 1990 I was entering college, and I supported the Persian Gulf War that year because, well, that's just what you did. I got *National Review* in the mail, and that's what you did. And then as time went on I modified that. But I find — look, I'm upset primarily at the war-makers, at the people — because the average person was not sitting around saying I'm terrified of Saddam Hussein. We all know that. Nobody in his right mind was worried about Saddam Hussein, so I don't blame the average American for that. But at some point you have to — there has to be some moral culpability. Like, I've gotten to the point where I look at somebody from the military, and frankly, I'm skeptical. I don't say, oh, this is an honorable profession that you're in. Not these days, it's not. At what point does even Bill Kauffman say, look, pal, at some point maybe there was some merit in saying I'm defending the country, but at this point, unless you're just not reading anything, there's no justification for doing this?

KAUFFMAN: I completely understand what you're saying, and I'm largely sympathetic. But I have a couple friends who are in the military, and they're really honorable guys, and so —

WOODS: Yeah, see, that's what complicates it for me.

KAUFFMAN: I can't take that last step, you know?

WOODS: Right.

KAUFFMAN: But I know what you're saying. And in fact now I see Christian parents who are proud of their children joining the armed services, and I know these kids — these kids often join — I mean, sometimes it's for mercenary reasons or they want college aid or something, but a lot of times it's because they love their country. And their country, they think of the people who live — you know, their neighbors and their family and their country. And that's an honorable motive. But the problem is, especially, say, if we get President Hillary Clinton, is that these kids are going to be participating in acts of mass slaughter against people whose governments refuse to kowtow to, say, US dictates on transgender bathroom policy. And it's — yeah. At some point I think people have to discourage their kids from joining the military. I mean, I would certainly — I've been at that point long ago.

WOODS: Okay.

KAUFFMAN: But yeah, especially with a President Clinton, not that a President Trump would be much better, but —

WOODS: Yeah, I'm with you. I'm with you. All right, let's get to what is evoked in people's minds when the see the title "*America First*," what comes out in people's minds. "America First" of course recalls — and this is why Trump got in trouble for using the term — recalls the America First Committee —

KAUFFMAN: Right.

WOODS: — of the Second World War. Now I mean, these are the most — I would say *the* most demonized antiwar people, maybe in all of human history? I don't know if they're —

KAUFFMAN: (laughing)

WOODS: I'm being serious. I can't think of anybody. So give us the other side of the story. There are a lot of people who don't know that JFK — you know, it can boast people like JFK, Gerald Ford, the most milquetoast person in the history of the world. So many important people belonged to it.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah, absolutely. The [inaudible] gets back a little bit further, but the funny thing is as far as I can tell, the first thing "America first" was used as a political slogan was in 1916. It was one of the slogans of Woodrow Wilson, along with "He kept us out of war." And of course after Wilson was reelected in 1916, he plunges us into war. But "America first" was commonly used in the 1920s by everyone from conservatives like Warren Harding to progressives like Hiram Johnson, and it simply meant we should not go abroad in search of dragons to slay; we should tend to our own constitutional republic rather than venturing abroad.

And as you say, this brings us up to 1940-41. The America First Committee was born in September 1940 at Yale Law School. Its founders included Kingman Brewster, later president of Yale; Robert B. Stewart, Jr., who was the heir the Quaker Oats family and

who later served as US ambassador to Norway; Sargent Shriver, later head of the Peace Corps, Kennedy in-law, McGovern's running mate in '72; Potter Stewart, who was a Supreme Court justice. You know, it had 800 — either 800- or 850,000 members depending on the source, so it was by far the largest antiwar group in American history. Under its banner, speakers ranged from Norman Thomas, the head of the Socialist Party, long time leader of Socialists in America, to Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Teddy Roosevelt's daughter. There was an American Legion contingent: Hamilton Fish, a longtime congressman was one of the founders of the American Legion. Hanford MacNider, who was the National Committee Chairman of the American Legion. Its financial base, it was not, like, all funded by George Soros or Bill Gates. I mean, its financial base was broad; it was mostly Midwestern manufacturers. Sterling Morton of Morton Salt, J. Hormel of the Hormel meatpacking, the Quaker Oats people.

It was as American as apple pie and Bob Dylan and tax revolts and, you know, Geronimo. It was deeply died in the American grain, and it spoke for the overwhelming number of Americans. Even into the fall of 1941, opinion polls showed that 80% of Americans were opposed to armed intervention in the European war. Now, if you ask are you in favor of aid short of war, then it's closer to 50/50 or a slight majority opposed to aid short of war. In political disputes, one side sometimes demonizes, vilifies the other side. The FDR administration and some of FDR's worst hatchet men like Harold Ickes would call the America Firsters pro-Nazi in the way that people in the Gulf Wars called those of us who were against the war in Iraq pro-Hussein or pro-Saddam.

And usually, like, after a war, like after the First World War, there's this stepping back and reconsidering and thinking, geez, we kind of lost our heads, and in fact, these people who were against the First World War, like Gene Debs, you know, they were really wronged, they should be released from prison, they were in the American tradition of dissent. I think that happened after Vietnam, though that was messier.

After the Second World War, that didn't happen. We went right into a cold war, where we had a new enemy, the Soviet Union, and the slanders stuck. And the thing is while these people were still alive, while people who lived through it were still alive, the slanders weren't as effective. I mean, if you look at the careers I just mentioned of the founders of the committee, they all had fantastic careers according to the standards of the American establishment. I mean, people who had worked with them, they knew the America First Committee was fine; it was a middle American antiwar group. But those people have almost all died out now, and so it's, you know, "when the legend becomes fact print the legend," so you have these smears by these ahistorical slanderers. It's remarkable. Yeah, you just mentioned JFK. JFK was not active in it, but he sent the committee, I think it was a check for $100, saying what you people are doing is essential and vital.

WOODS: Yeah.

KAUFFMAN: (laughing) You know? It's remarkable, the mendacity of the anti-America First assault. And yeah, and Trump actually picked it up kind of by mistake. The funny thing is when Pat Buchanan had written his book *A Republic, Not an Empire* in 1999, he was put through the ringer. It was kind of a noninterventionist reinterpretation of American foreign diplomatic history, and he suggested maybe we should have stayed

out of that war, taking the same side as, you know, JFK and Sargent Shriver and those people, and the usual smears are thrown at him. One of the guys who smeared him was Donald Trump, actually (laughing).

WOODS: Yeah, I remember.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah, who was a contender for — I don't know if he was a contender or a stalking horse in the Reform Party nomination race of 2000, and Trump, I forget the exact — he said something like, oh, he's a Hitler lover, or some idiotic —

WOODS: Yeah, he's a "Hitler lover and anti-Semite." Yeah.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah. And so Trump — and then you fast forward, what, 17 years; I think it was March or so of 2016. Trump's being interviewed by *The New York Times*, and he's laying out his platform as it were. And one of the reporters said it sounds like you're "America first." And then his response was something like, well, look, I'm not an isolationist, but yeah, America first; that sounds good. So I mean, it was not really a historically conscious adoption of this term on Trump's part (laughing).

WOODS: Right.

KAUFFMAN: But he's shown that it's not toxic. I mean, the last — you know, Buchanan used the phrase, and before Buchanan, actually, Doug Wilder, who was the first black governor of Virginia, a really substantial guy, and he was going to run for president in the 1992 Democratic primaries. In 1991 he announced his candidacy or that he's considering a candidacy, and his slogan was "Put America first." Let's try to stay out of wars and let's, I don't know, repave roads or whatever. And he was very strongly lectured by *The New York Times* editorialists that you can never use this phrase.

WOODS: Yeah.

KAUFFMAN: Well, the one good thing Trump has done is that he detoxified the phrase. I mean, he used it, and you know, people respond to it, because as you say — look, the average guy in Butte, Montana or Anniston, Alabama or Oklahoma City is not sitting around aching to intervene in Syria, you know? I mean, he thinks — what I commonly hear around here — I live in rural America — is, look, I don't care what's going on there; why don't we stay out and tend to our own business? I think that message has tremendous popular appeal, and to the extent that Trump taps into it, which is partial, it really resounds, I think.

WOODS: Well also, what's the alternative to America first? America seventh? America thirteenth? I mean, I think you should turn it around that way and say, well, what number would you like me to assign to America to make you happy and I'll do it. I mean, that would be a great Trump response —

KAUFFMAN: It would be.

WOODS: — but unfortunately —

KAUFFMAN: It would be; it would be.

WOODS: Yeah, unfortunately he won't do that. All right, let's move on to — actually, you know what? Let's say something about the merits of the case just briefly, because there's a paragraph in your book — and doggone it, I can't find it right now — in which you say, look, maybe the strategy of America First would have been a disaster; maybe it would have been great; maybe Stalin and Hitler would have exhausted each other and we would have saved ourselves a whole lot of trouble and tragedy. But what we did get was obviously 50 million deaths and we got half of Europe handed over to Stalin and all this. Is that just so obviously the best conceivable outcome? So 50 million deaths was the best we could have done, and if you're complaining about that there's something wrong with you? You're saying, you know, maybe that's not a reasonable position to hold.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah. What's wrong with looking at alternatives? Absolutely, yeah, you're right. I forget the exact line, but yeah, look at what happened. Six million Jews murdered. Tens of millions of Russians and Poles and Japanese murdered. Half a million Americans murdered. The hypertrophying this enormous growth of the American state in the Second World War. You get unprecedented uprooting of the population. Yeah, half of Europe was handed over to Stalin. Why is it verboten to consider alternatives? It's bizarre.

WOODS: Let's fast forward. I want to talk about something that you yourself were involved in the 1990s. Now, it's funny you were with *The American Enterprise* for a while at the American Enterprise Institute, and I don't know how you got away with that, Bill. It must just be everybody loves you, because —

KAUFFMAN: Well, no, actually I had a good buddy of mine — I worked for Senator Moynihan —

WOODS: Yeah.

KAUFFMAN: — in the 1980s, and a good buddy of mine was named editor in chief of the American Enterprise Institute in the mid '90s, and they said, hey, you want to be an associate editor. Sure. I was there for probably a dozen years. I mean, I was offsite of course. I was living up here. And I got to do a lot of great interviews, with everyone from Shelby Foote to Joe Paterno. So you know, I sort of enjoyed my time there. But you're right; a lot of people thought it was incongruous, and it was, but I don't really fit in — the thing is, I don't really fit anywhere, so I figured hey, if —

WOODS: Yeah, but Bill, for you — I mean, you were against the Reagan Doctrine in the 1980s. Now, that's not fitting (laughing).

KAUFFMAN: (laughing) Yes, I was.

WOODS: You don't fit (laughing).

KAUFFMAN: (laughing) Yeah, yeah, that's right. I was accused of being pro-Sandinista; I remember that, yeah.

WOODS: It helps that you don't have an abrasive personality and people like you, because otherwise you would have been out on your ear, I personally think. All right, anyway, let's get to the 1990s, because when I first met you I was in my early 20s. It was the early '90s; it was at the John Randolph Club meeting.

KAUFFMAN: Mm hmm.

WOODS: Now, you won't remember this, but to me as the youngest guy in the room, everybody was a celebrity, and I just thought this was the greatest experience of my life. I had so much fun at this thing. And this is the period that some libertarians like Murray Rothbard and Lew Rockwell get criticized for: how dare you reach out to the Right? Like it's never wrong to reach out to the Left. That's never wrong. But reaching out to the Right, that is forbidden to certain kinds of libertarians.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah, and the Right were I think pretty much the guy at *Chronicles* and the Rockford Institute, which were Kirkian conservatives.

WOODS: Yeah, and they were great people. I mean, okay, I've had my issues with Tom Fleming. Who hasn't by this point? But they were people I learned so much from. They saved me from neoconservatism. Those people, reading that magazine. I read that magazine because Rothbard made a fleeting reference to it in one speech, so I thought, oh, if he's reading it maybe I should read it. And then I was immediately captivated by it.

KAUFFMAN: Oh yeah, for a period of about, I don't know, five, six years, I think it was the most exciting magazine out there.

WOODS: So can you just share some recollections about those post-Cold War years and what was going on ideologically?

KAUFFMAN: Post-Cold War? Yeah, that was an interesting period, because if you'll recall, William F. Buckley said — I think maybe he wrote it in the mid-late '50s — that conservatives have to accept the existence of this enormous, militarized, semi-totalitarian state because of the existence of the Soviet Union, which he said was a world historical evil empire. Now, if somehow by some miracle the Soviet Union should disappear or be pulverized into smithereens, as some *National Review* editors desired, we could return to being what Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan's UN ambassador, later calls a "normal country."

Well, all of a sudden the Soviet Union peacefully dissolves. Remarkable. And it opened up — all of a sudden new paths were opened. You know, roads not taken — all of a sudden the roadblocks were removed. There were all kinds of new possibilities. It was really a heady time. I compare it in some ways to the '30s or the early years of the Depression, which, awful as they were, nevertheless all kinds of new and interesting philosophical and ideological avenues opened up. And it was very fruitful.

And I think the same thing was true in the early 1990s. I mean, the tragedy on the American Right is that almost the only guy who really did sit down and rethink everything was Pat Buchanan. I was never a fan of Pat — I mean, I always thought he

was a great — he had a great style; he was very punchy, but I thought, eh, you know, sort of this authoritarian Catholic who likes Joe McCarthy and General Franco — I'm Catholic, by the way, so I guess I can say that. Although I guess we can always rip on Catholics —

WOODS: We can always — yeah, it doesn't matter who you are.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah, they're not a protected class.

WOODS: (laughing) That's right.

KAUFFMAN: But anyway, Buchanan was the one guy who, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, all of a sudden this extreme Cold War era, this fixture in the Reagan administration who detente, who wanted to overthrow the Sandinistas and all this kind of thing. He sits back, he thinks, he ponders, he reconsiders, and he becomes, you know, for the next 25 years, really one of the most impressive spokesmen for peace in the country. By the early '90s he's saying, look, we should withdraw all our troops from Europe, we should maybe withdraw from NATO, we should not go to war against Iraq in '91, we should downsize the military substantially and cut the military budget. But unfortunately very few people in the establishment Right had the integrity and honesty of Buchanan.

But you know, you mentioned the Randolph Society. There was discussion like that there. There was Murray Rothbard, one of the great leading lights of libertarianism, was involved. Tom Fleming and the guys from *Chronicles*. And you know, it was fruitful and exciting. And it didn't last, but you know, for that period of the 1990s I think was a really interesting time in our political history, and it's not coincidental that in this book, which is being reprinted now after 21 years, the last third or so of the book, maybe the last fourth, is about what I think is the most interesting political race, presidential race of our time, until possibly 2016. And that was 1992, where you had three unorthodox figures who in different ways embodied aspects of the America First tradition: Ross Perot, Pat Buchanan, and Jerry Brown. We haven't had an election like that since. Unfortunately we ended up in the general with George Herbert Walker Bush and Bill Clinton, but —

WOODS: Right, right. Well, you know, when you say that what we might call the paleo thing didn't last in terms of an alliance between the libertarians and the old right sort of people, at the same time I think to myself I personally gained a lot from it.

KAUFFMAN: Oh sure.

WOODS: My own horizons were broadened because I got to know you; I got to know Paul Gottfried, whom I'm still glad to talk to; Clyde Wilson. His very last PhD student is a guy named Brion McClanahan, who is very prolific, who's doing great work, has his own podcast. I have him on here a lot. So I got to meet a lot of people I wouldn't have known otherwise, so in terms of my own selfish point of view it was a big smashing success, but —

KAUFFMAN: Oh, it was a tremendously seminal event and period for a lot of people, and I think that the ripples and ramifications are, you know, salutary ripples and ratifications. Good things are going to extend for a long time.

WOODS: All right, now listen, I've got to let you go in a minute. I don't want to keep you too long, even though of course I do want to keep you too long. But I said that we can't not discuss Trump, because he is the elephant in the room. But I refuse to take your wonderful book and just turn it into a conversation about Trump, because your book deserves more. But you can't not comment. I mean, we did talk about his kind of accidental use of the term, but where do you think he falls in this world of Sinclair Lewis and E.E. Cummings and John T. Flynn?

KAUFFMAN: Yeah, culturally he's not there at all. Politically — actually, I draw a parallel in the book between him and William Randolph Hearst, the press baron, media baron, actually from the early 20th century all the way up till the mid 20th century, who was later subject to the great cinematic slander chop, *Citizen Kane*, by Orson Welles. But Hearst was an interesting figure. He's often regarded as this jingo idiot, who in 1898 helped gin up the Spanish-American War. But in the First and Second World Wars he actually in his papers opposed these wars — certainly not on pacifist grounds. He was not a pacifist. He believed in kind of heavily armed neutrality, and I think there's a Trump parallel there.

In fact, let me actually read from the book, from the epilogue. I should mention that I wrote a new preface and epilogue for this book, which was published in '95. This is a line from Hearst: "We want big Americans in a big America, guarded by a big navy, fearing nobody, bullying nobody, insulted by nobody, and sitting in peace and honor, ringed with our hundred ships of battle, ready and able to face the world in the just struggle." I mean, to me that sounds very Trumpian. All this "bigness" nonsense, and since I'm an advocate of a little America I would be on exactly the opposite side. But he wants this huge army, well armed, the most beautifully funded army in the world, as Trump has said, and yet he's not going to use it, except I assume in extreme provocation.

So I mean, there is a strain in the America First Committee — the war people — there was, as I mentioned, Hanford MacNider, head of the American Legion. I mean, there were military people who wanted a big military buildup at the time but nonintervention in foreign wars, just to guard our coastlines. And now Trump obviously goes well beyond our coastlines, and there are great inconsistencies, but he fits at the margins maybe. He's not really part of the America First tradition, but he's an interesting figure, and we do have to give him his due. I mean, destroying the Bush family? What greater prize could he have given us?

WOODS: Yeah, sometimes I feel like I'm all alone pointing out this merit of his.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah.

WOODS: I mean, I must have disliked the Bush family a lot more than some of my listeners. I don't know what else to say here, but to me that is a glorious thing.

KAUFFMAN: Right, and interestingly, like Ron Paul back in 2008, Trump in 2016 went before an audience of South Carolina Republicans —

WOODS: Right.

KAUFFMAN: — and denounced the Iraq War. Trump said that Bush lied us into it. I mean, there are good things about Trump. He's a really perplexing figure, and I always vote third party so I'm not going to vote for him anyway, but he's an interesting figure. He does have the merit of being hated by many of the worst people in American life, although it's always a mistake to think "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," you know? I think this is a mistake that led some of the vestigial people in the old right to embrace Joe McCarthy when they shouldn't have. And McCarthy, after all, was elected to the Senate in Republican primary, defeating Bob La Follette, Jr., who actually was an isolationist America Firster. McCarthy ran as the internationalist, which everyone forgets.

And then in the Vietnam War, I think that conservatives — I mean, this was a war plotted, strategized by the best and brightest of great society liberalism, and yet they saw that, hey, this is going bad, and the conservatives, who really didn't have any part in beginning the war, they're so turned off by the new left and all these hippies won't cut their hair and blah, blah, blah, that they end up holding the bag and adopting it because the enemy of their enemy was their friend. So that's always a bad strategy, I think, but I admit that it's tempting when you see this unprecedented media assault on Trump.

WOODS: Yeah, it is absolutely incredible. It really is. See, my view is that a lot of people who like Trump, who are, let's say, friends of ours who like Trump, I think they're seeing in him what they wish were there. I think they're seeing in him somebody with the intellect of a Pat Buchanan, with the knowledge of history of a Pat Buchanan, with a sense of the significance of this moment. Whereas Trump is basically saying, hey, I'm going to come in here and we're going to clean house and we're going to get things together, and to help me do that I've got Rudy Giuliani, Chris Christie, Newt Gingrich, and Ben Carson. Well, obviously he thinks the country's doing pretty well if that's all we need to do. So come on now, people. He is not the guy you think he is. I mean, I used to think he might be that guy, and then when I see who he surrounds himself with it just gets more depressing all the time.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah, yeah, but again, to draw the parallel with the '92 election, I mean, there is a sense in which he's kind of an amalgam of Buchanan and Perot, but he lacks Buchanan's intellectual acuity and humaneness, and he lacks Perot's boy scout patriotism. He's an interesting figure, and what's really interesting is is Trump an anomaly or is he a harbinger? Perot it turns out was pretty much an anomaly. Trump, we'll see.

WOODS: Yeah, and I think that was partly because Perot was so — I mean, I wouldn't say Trump is ideological, but he hammers home on his ideas. Whereas Perot, the thing you walked away with was he bought a 30-minute infomercial where he showed us some charts, and he's got a combination of tax increases and budget cuts and — forget it. Trump is just making clear it's immigration, it's trade, and it's foreign policy — I mean, you can't possibly miss his message He hammers you over the head with it in

these simple, easy to remember sound bites that — Perot had a couple of sound bites, but other than that he came across as wonkish and kind of an oddball, whereas Trump has this alpha male persona, and I think it makes his message resonate more effectively. So I don't think he's an anomaly. I think this is going to be a presence in American politics, probably for a long time to go, in the same way I think Bernie Sanders is likely to be a kind of a presence for a long time to come.

KAUFFMAN: Yeah well, I mean, the good thing if Trumpism and Sanderism do have legs is that it's going to stretch and extend I think the very narrow boundaries of acceptable opinion that we've had for the last couple of decades.

WOODS: Well, you're —

KAUFFMAN: It opens up possibilities. But then, you know, Tom, I'm just a cockeyed optimist, Tom.

WOODS: (laughing) But you know, I think we have some decent reason for it these days. But anyway, listen, I strongly — I'm telling you, you guys, there's probably five people in the world whose writing, nonfiction writers, whom I just devour and whose writing skills I truly envy, and Bill Kauffman is in that small group. If you have not read a Bill Kauffman book, *America First* is a great place to start doing it, because you're going to love it. You're going to write to me and thank me, and I'm linking to this book on the show notes page. This is Episode 737, so TomWoods.com/737 will have a nice link where you can go and grab this book. Of course you can go order it, as Bill would prefer, go to your local bookseller and order it. But if you can't do that because you've got to have the book now, then he'll look the other way and hold his nose while you order it from Amazon. So I don't want to speak for you, Bill, but that's my instinct.

KAUFFMAN: Well, I appreciate your kind words, Tom.

WOODS: Thanks again for being here, and I hope you start re-releasing a lot more of your books just so I can get you back on the show more often.

KAUFFMAN: Well, I would love to. Always enjoy chatting with you, man.