

#1554 Destroying Education and Democracy for Fun and Profit

Intro 4-19-23

[00:00:00]

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: Welcome to this episode of the Award-Winning *Best of the Left* podcast in which we shall take a look at the history and present of the interconnected movements to privatize education and dismantle democracy.

Clips today are from *Have you Heard?*; *Teach Me, Teacher*; *The New Abnormal*; WBUR; *The Human Restoration Project*; *Is This Democracy*; *CounterSpin*; and a *TEDx Talk* by Dr. Ricardo Rosa; with an additional members-only clip from *Vice News*.

Segrenomics: The Long History of Cashing In On Unequal Education - Have You Heard - Air Date 1-3-18

NOLIWE ROOKS: From Reconstruction, where you had people saying, let's have poor people and rural people only do vocational education up through the twenties and thirties where there were these Rosenwald schools, which there's a whole story about how people sing the praises of how much Rosenwald did, and those schools were a godsend. But it's really the burden for financing them and building them and putting the curriculum together was on these poor communities who had to give every single cent that they [00:01:00] had to get some kind of education, through the 1950s where *Brown v Board*, the former slaveholding states put so much effort and money and time and creative thinking into figuring out how not to integrate schools, how they would close entire school districts instead of thinking about how to integrate, up through the seventies, where we all know about the struggles that the country had with busing, which fundamentally was about we do not want our schools integrated. And you had people like Joe Biden and others who would go so far as to say, we will forbid any school districts who want to integrate their schools from using federal funds to put gasoline in buses in order to achieve that.

Like really, if we had put all of that energy and time into the one thing that we know works, where would we be as a country, as opposed to continually [00:02:00] seeming to fight these same battles about how do we educate poor people in this nation?

JENNIFER BERKSHIRE - HOST, HAVE YOU HEARD: Rooks also noticed another remarkably consistent phenomenon across the decades: wherever black communities were pushing for access to education, white philanthropists and business groups were right there too. And their interest? Let's just say that it wasn't always selfless.

NOLIWE ROOKS: When I wrote this book is that the thing I often tell people, I kept backing up just a little bit to figure out when there was a period where all of this wasn't intertwined, well-meaning white people, philanthropists, black communities, education, like when they weren't so tightly intertwined. I kept backing up and going, well, maybe it's the eighties, maybe it's the seventies. Let's look at the sixties. And I literally backed all the way up to Reconstruction, to the 19th century, to the beginning of taxpayer-supported compulsory education.

So even at the sort of beginning of public education, you had the same constituencies. [00:03:00] You had struggling black communities and poor white communities. You had wealthy philanthropists who was gonna actually benefit them to do some things, and you had business folks who needed workers and wanted to increase their bottom line.

JENNIFER BERKSHIRE - HOST, HAVE YOU HEARD: It wasn't just the intertwining of philanthropy and business that Rooks recognized in this history. Again and again, there was the search for experimental forms of education that always ended up putting the burden back on the same communities that were denied education in the first place.

NOLIWE ROOKS: People even then came up with these experimental forms of education that still managed to put the burden on the working class communities, on the people who had been denied education. Because they were coming up with these idiosyncratic forms of education. So at that time, what they decided is all these different groups, from the philanthropists to the business leaders to the state legislatures, they all decided that the best thing was gonna be if they could take [00:04:00] the money that was allocated for the education of the newly free black people, and, the South being the South and the South trying to reinstitute Jim Crow or reinstitute white supremacy, the idea that

the whole region of the country was really organized along the idea of black inferiority and white supremacy.

So you had the legislatures all trying to figure out how to not have to pay for black students to be educated and to put that burden solely on black communities. Then you had businesses who wanted to have workers, so they were supportive of certain forms of education. So they believed in vocational education and they said, okay, we'll get behind efforts to educate poor black people and poor white people if it's gonna benefit our business interests. Vocational education, how to make people make bricks or be servants or be nurses, like different kinds of services, and that could aid in business.

JENNIFER BERKSHIRE - HOST, HAVE YOU HEARD: Do actual [00:05:00] education historians know this history?

JACK SCNIEDER - HOST, HAVE YOU HEARD: Because American education is decentralized, there couldn't really be robust federal involvement in terms of creating more equitable education for African Americans. It was power largely devolved to states and local government, which engaged in highly varying practices. Philanthropists, many times with good intentions but acting out of a very particular worldview, which often was divorced from any real experience in the communities that they sought to help, brought a set of troubling assumptions and beliefs with them in their work.

And then the private sector of course, has always been motivated primarily by the pursuit of profit, which brings its own set of complications.

I think worth noting here is the fact that communities [00:06:00] have always sought to promote education for themselves. And this was no less true in African American communities. And there's a good body of research that illustrates just how successful some of those communities were at promoting really fantastic schools with extremely limited resources. And what they wanted primarily was equality of resources so that they could continue doing for themselves what they were already trying to do.

That unfortunately has rarely been the case. We have rarely seen governmental, non-governmental, private sector actors empowering people at the grassroots level to take action on their own parts to help themselves.

And I would just add that there's an interesting historical absence there, which we have never really seen.

But beyond that, even today, we [00:07:00] still see these three sectors -- the governmental sector, the non-governmental sector, and the private sector -- acting in fairly expected ways in public education. And in many cases, not entirely different ways than we might have seen 50, 100, 150 years ago.

Democracy and Public Education: A Future in Peril - Have You Heard - Air Date 8-12-21

DEREK BLACK: It is the case that if you look back at our founding, that ultimately two of the major pillars of our constitutional democracy are voting and education. The idea being, that it had to be intelligent voting. Otherwise this system they had devised wouldn't work. If you look at today, we see the attacks on voting and education. It seems to me as being an attempt to splinter two of the fundamental principles of our democracy. Splinter them such that what we are doing is replacing a system in which the common good is found through all of us in a collective process. In a complex, in a collective education system, and replacing that type of system with one in which [00:08:00] market forces and wealth will set the political agenda. Splintering a democracy which has foundations to produce common good, and I think moving towards another that is more about markets and wealth.

JENNIFER BERKSHIRE - HOST, HAVE YOU HEARD: Derek argues that the efforts to roll back democracy and privatize schools are especially intense in places where voters of color hold increasing sway.

DEREK BLACK: Maybe there's just a fear of too much democracy going on here. If you fear democracy then you fear public education, and you fear the right to vote. Those are two things that have to be stopped. You got — you might go one step further and say, does everyone fear too much democracy? Is that all of America?

I think we can narrow that. You begin to look at where these pieces of legislation occur, what you see is that the fear of democracy exists where there are more people of color. I think the best example of seeing those forces come together; both the race history, education, and voting is in [00:09:00] North Carolina following the last recession. Where low income students became the majority in public schools, President Obama had won twice in that state.

The new legislature issued what was — what Reverend Barber called "a war on poor people." That meant two big things; gerrymandering by race, the voting districts to suppress African American votes, making it harder for African Americans to vote, and cutting education. Expanding privatization as much as any other state in the nation during that time. Unfortunately, this is a story of maybe: wealth, race, education, and voting all coming together a perfect storm.

JENNIFER BERKSHIRE - HOST, HAVE YOU HEARD: What we're seeing now is actually an old story because voting and education have been connected since the nation's founding. Imperfect, though it was, and the inverse is true as well.

Attacks on public education have always been part of an effort to undermine democracy.

DEREK BLACK: [00:10:00] I think what we had to understand was there was a vision of voting and education being linked and part of democracy. If you look across the arc of American history, what you will see is that each time that access to voting expanded, so did access to education and vice versa.

If you look in the aftermath of the Civil War — an immediate aftermath, there's two enormous phenomenon. It extends primarily to African Americans who had been legally barred, but also to poor whites in the South. It was the case that they said, "If democracy's gonna work in this place that's had a bunch of oligarchs running the system, we have to have public schools and we have to have more access the ballot. If we're gonna have access to ballot, we can't have people who aren't educated."

We see that happen there. By the same token, when the so-called redeemers come into power at the end of Reconstruction they say, "We don't want democracy, so what must we do?" Now everyone knows the story of segregation generally, and they know voting generally, but they don't always appreciate [00:11:00] how closely linked those two things were.

That African Americans actually believe that if — long as the public school doors were open, they would still get access to the ballot. So part — because literacy tests is that we can't overcome. So part of the agenda was to restrict education access to stop African Americans from being able to overcome.

Fast forward the *Brown v. Board of Education*, where does the NAACP LDF begin in trying to reopen the democracy that had been disclosed? They start with public schools, and then they move to the voter rounds. At least at those

three or four major points in history, what we see is that those two things; voting and access to education, have never been separate.

That's why in my book I emphasize that; you have to understand that an attack on public education has always been a central part of the attack on democracy itself. It's not like they're just going after teachers, or public education budgets [00:12:00] for its own sake. It is part of a larger agenda as Jennifer was referencing earlier.

JENNIFER BERKSHIRE - HOST, HAVE YOU HEARD: Now, of course, Derek wasn't the only historian on hand. Our own Jack Schneider also makes the case that there's a reason that efforts to undermine democracy, and dismantle public education have so often gone hand in hand.

JACK SCNIEDER - HOST, HAVE YOU HEARD: My answer to this would be very similar to Derek's, except I would emphasize the piece about denying education — an equal education to those who you would like to deny equal membership too.

That those two things really do go hand in hand. So the positive version of this story is that if you want a Democratic republic, you need to have public education. It can't be left to chance that people need to be prepared to play an equal role in our society. Of course, education does this other thing, it raises people's expectations. It gives them a greater sense of themselves and their [00:13:00] possibilities. It reaffirms the dignity and value of their lives.

So if what you want is to curtail democracy, then you need to curtail education. We can see that there's a logic here. The logic is that educated people will not only be prepared to participate as equal citizens in society, but they'll also demand equal membership.

This is one of the things that concerns us so much today. We are, of course, all advocates of public education. So we would be outraged by these efforts to dismantle public education, even if that's all they were about. Of course, they're about something much bigger than that. It's about limiting opportunities, and it's about limiting equal membership in our society.

As Derek alluded to earlier, it's often because people of color are making demands for equal membership. It's because economically marginalized people are making demands for equal [00:14:00] membership. So these things have always gone hand in hand, and they continue to go hand in hand.

The Hidden Agenda of Privatization with Jessica Piper (pt.1) - Teach Me, Teacher - Air Date 10-31-21

JACOB CHASTAIN - HOST, TEACH ME, TEACHER: There are textbooks that frame the entire American story around a positive light about how people were mistreated, right? They frame westward expansion in the context of people needing more room for slaves, and things like that. Ignoring the fact that what slavery was, and how it stayed, and what it did to generations. Ignoring the slaughtering of Native Americans, and everything else that's gone into this.

When we start politicizing facts, and this has been the case of what's happened in politics over the last several years. It becomes — people start using these terms like, [00:15:00] "We don't want anti-American education, we want American education. We want to — we don't want to make our kids hate our country."

There's so many things that are — those are gaslighting terms. To say that that teaching facts is anti-American, and to understand the fact that this country was founded on bloodshed, and it was.

There's a lot of great stuff — I love reading about how this country was formed and the ideas that field into it. I can do that and understand the negative aspects of this country without becoming anti-American, hating democracy, etc.

In terms for you, when you're having these conversations, do you feel, do you sense, do you listen, do you hear the fact that — I feel like we're in a term war. [00:16:00] On the left there — it's always been the left has always been like — they always say the left is like the Orwellian side, it's the double speak, it's the changing of terms. I feel like this is just something that is infusing the attack on education, is just the manipulation of what terms actually mean. Do you see that?

JESSICA PIPER: Absolutely, when someone — when it came up in Texas, you guys are in a world of hurt down there with the legislation that I've been seeing coming through. Even talking about taking away Martin Luther King Jr. From the curriculum. Which is wild because as far as a sanitized Civil Rights leader, what we've done to him is pretty sanitary, to take that away is just crazy.

You know, there's a quote by James Baldwin and he talks about the fact that; I love America, which is why I reserve the right to criticize her. That's how I feel too. When I told you I [00:17:00] graduated without any knowledge, I went to college and I learned this stuff. I never once thought, I hate America. That never occurred to me. What occurred to me is: I don't know half the crap that's happened, and I feel like I need to know that to be a good citizen.

Your listeners probably don't know that I'm white, but I am very white, and I teach in a very white area. 98% of my students are white. I've taught in this fashion. I have never had a child say, "I'm embarrassed to be white." You hear conservatives say that, you'll hear — let's just talk about that for just a minute. This isn't new, this has come around many times, and because I do teach American Lit, maybe we can all think back to *The Crucible*.

The Crucible was — when you remember, you think it was about the Salem Witch trials. It was not, it was about the Red Scare during the 1950s. It was Arthur Miller talking about what it was like to live through this time. As politicians, as teachers, as [00:18:00] professors, as people just living their life being attacked and being called communist. That's what the play was about so this isn't new, this comes up all the time

You can go back to the sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties, and you will see people saying that teachers are unAmerican, or indoctrinating children. That word indoctrination is hilarious because if you think that any of us can indoctrinate a child, you have absolutely never been in a classroom with 30 kids ever. It doesn't happen.

Then the CRT movement is strange. When it happened here in Missouri I called one of the lawmakers who was sponsoring the bill. His legislative aid answered and I said, "Hey, I'm a teacher. This is not happening." He says it is happening, and kept referring to critical race theory. I said, "Hey, can you — what is critical race theory? Because I don't even know what you're talking about." He didn't know, and he [00:19:00] asked me to Google it. I was like, "You wrote a bill and you don't know what it is. I'm a teacher who teaches social justice and I don't know what it is. So how could this be going on?"

So then a light clicks on, this isn't about CRT. Then you start looking at what they're actually talking about. They get parents and folks riled up about something that isn't happening. Then the talk starts moving towards scholarships for private schools, charter schools. Then you have people outright just saying that this movement is really about privatization. I think that your listeners, and everyone who has heard this argument, really needs to understand

that this is a grift. It's folks looking to privatize schools, and they're using this this boogeyman CRT to get [00:20:00] people to turn their head while they pick their pocket.

If you'll look at the people who are showing up to schools, they're very organized. It's not grassroots. There's a group in Missouri called Missouri Prosper. They are backed by lots of money that some we can trace, some we cannot, but it's not a parent group. They're showing up to local board of education meetings and having drop down fits. They're not even local folks. I think everyone really needs to open their eyes and understand it's not about CRT, it's about privatization.

Betsy DeVos Is Still Making Moves to Destroy Public Schools - The New Abnormal - Air Date 4-1-23

RANDI WEINGARTEN: If you ask a parent, do you want to support public schools, or do you want more choice? The last polling we've seen: 80 to 20 split, they want to support public schools. So the key is, and that's the campaign, is the campaign for Common Sense Solutions. It's the campaign to make every public school a place where parents want to send their kids, [00:21:00] educators want to work, and kids thrive. And what we know from all of our lived experience and from the teachers and the bus drivers and the school staff, is that if we do these four things -- expand community schools, so we have wraparound services and extended learning opportunities, and schools become hubs of community. Expand them! Have 25,000 of them instead of 2,500 of them them right now.

The second is, let's make learning fun! Let's make sure that kids enjoy it, work with their hands, do teamwork, do experiential learning. And in the places we do that, like in career tech ed, we have a 94% graduation rate and 72% of kids go to college.

Then let's actually deal with issues like, you know, making sure we recruit and retain enough teachers in a diversified teaching course. And the last thing is, as they're trying to divide, we gotta deepen the [00:22:00] relationship between parents and educators, and let's work on that.

So what I've tried to come up with, based upon everything I see in America right now, in schools right now, and what I see in terms of research and

common sense, is how we're gonna overcome the mental health crisis and how we're gonna overcome learning loss and, more importantly, how we actually help kids -- kids and their families be prepared for life, career, college and citizenship.

So I'm trying to say this is not ideological, and frankly, no one on the right has attacked the four strategies that I push forward this week. Cause they're unimpeachable. So let's do them at scale. Let's actually break through this ideological log jam and focus on kids and families.

DANIELLE MOODIE - HOST, THE NEW ABNORMAL: Everything that you laid out, Randi, it makes sense. I have long said, I don't [00:23:00] understand why schools can't be the community hubs. I don't understand why we can't bring the resources that communities need and put them in our public schools -- whether it be doctors visits and regular dental visits in all of these things that families actually need in order to thrive -- have them be at their public school.

But then we look at and we see news like what has come out this week as well, which is around the former Secretary of Education under Donald Trump, Betsy DeVos. We find that their whole desire is around the expansion of private schools, the destruction of public schools, as a way to privatize and monetize education, to create, in my humble opinion -- I won't put words in your mouth -- a permanent underclass, working class, and create a caste system without calling it that in America. Can you speak to the latest news of [00:24:00] a Betsy DeVos-backed group deciding now to support the campaign of the Republican running in Chicago for mayor?

RANDI WEINGARTEN: Yes, I can. And Danielle, think about what Betsy DeVos is all about. She's not about helping all kids learn. Whatever the end result is, from Jefferson to Franklin to King, there is a sense in America that the reason we have universal public schooling is that we believe in all of our children. And DeVos was the first Secretary of Education who, even though that was her sworn duty, refused to do that.

So what they're about is they are about basically vouchers and privatization. And one of her acolytes, Christopher Rufo, put it bluntly last year, and I quote him, "to get to universal school choice, you really [00:25:00] need to operate from a premise of universal public school distrust."

So this is what DeVos does, this is what she does. They starve public schools of the funds they need to succeed. They then criticize them for their shortcomings.

They erode the trust in public schools by stoking fear and division. And then they replace public schools with private, religious, online, and home schools.

So the point here is that once she was giving this money to Vallas, and Vallas accepted it, then that's all you need to know about Paul Vallas. That this is not about a guy who's running to help everyone in Chicago. This is about someone who wants to balkanize and atomize and frankly, that's been his history. Ask anybody who worked with him in New Orleans, or who worked with him in Chicago, or who [00:26:00] worked with him in Philly. It was all about division, division, division. And frankly, that's how he's running right now: a fear campaign in Chicago, creating this kind of division, now paid for by people like the richest former people who lived in Illinois, people like Ricketts, people like Rounder, who now are all in Florida, they're all funding Dallas's campaign. And people like Betsy DeVos.

So she's not happy with trying to have undermined education in Michigan. She's one of the least popular people, by the way, in Michigan. She's not happy with trying to sidle up to DeSantis and undermine public schools. In Florida, they just passed \$4 billion of vouchers. What do you think that's gonna do for schools in Florida? She wants to now try to undermine the opportunity of [00:27:00] every single child in Chicago and Paul Vallas, instead of rejecting that money, took that money.

The Surprising History Behind Charter Schools - WBUR - Air Date 11-4-16

MAX LARKIN - HOST, WBUR: Teachers unions are among the fiercest critics of charter schools, and that should come as no surprise. Charters mostly hire non-union teachers, and they take funding from unionized district schools. What is surprising is that the very idea of charter schools began in part with the union leader.

Al Shanker was the longtime radical head of the American Federation of Teachers, and in 1988, he was maybe the most important champion of the charter idea. In fact, he was the first person to use the words "charter schools" in a national newspaper.

So what changed? To understand that we have to go back to the 1980s, when a panic was spreading about the state of American education. A 1983 report called "A Nation at Risk" argued that America itself was being [00:28:00] eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity.

RONALD REAGAN: Look at the record. Federal spending on education soared eightfold in the last 20 years, rising much faster than inflation. But during the same period, scholastic aptitude test scores went down, down, and down. The classroom...

MAX LARKIN - HOST, WBUR: President Ronald Reagan blamed the professional bureaucracy of education, and in part Al Shanker did too. For decades, as a teacher and activist, he had complained about the burden of bureaucratic interference.

ALBERT SHANKER: Now that word professional is becoming to be more and more of a dirty word for teachers. It is a word with which the administrator uses when he turns around anything which he doesn't like the teacher is doing, he says, you are not being professional. Be good. Be obedient.

MAX LARKIN - HOST, WBUR: But Reagan wanted to fix things with privatization, school vouchers, school prayer, even [00:29:00] dismantling the federal Department of Education.

Shanker had a different vision. He just returned from a trip to Germany where he visited an experimental school run by teachers. They wrote the curriculum, they chose their own roles and their own students, and test scores went up.

RICHARD KAHLENBERG: I think he was prompted by the idea that teachers who had lots of great ideas didn't necessarily have the opportunity to implement them. And so he wanted to provide a vehicle for teachers to be able to experiment.

MAX LARKIN - HOST, WBUR: Shanker imagined hundreds, even thousands of these small learning communities spread throughout the country. And to name them, he borrowed from an obscure school administrator and professor named Ray Budde: education by charter. Shanker liked the phrase. He thought it evoked explorers out to discover new [00:30:00] worlds. So he used it, and the phrase made its first appearance in print in one of Shanker's weekly pieces in the New York Times. Charter schools.

But already there was a problem. From the beginning, it wasn't clear just how charters were supposed to work. Were they partners or competitors? Woven into the fabric of public education, or just paid for by public funds? Shanker promoted charters as safe spaces for educational innovation, inside the existing system, and very definitely unionized.

But even Shanker could see the charters would also compete with the traditional model, and many in the business world focused on that competition as a way to disrupt the enormous bureaucracy of education. And that split made its way into law from the very beginning, like the 1993 bill that introduced charter schools to Massachusetts.

Half of that bill says that new schools will allow teachers to [00:31:00] experiment. The other half says they'll enforce competition and accountability.

As states began to pass their own ed reform laws, Shanker watched as that competitive view of charter schools won out. In the end, he walked away from his own idea. By 1993, he dismissed charter schools as a "mechanical gimmick." And that was the beginning of the fight that continues today.

The Segrenomics of American Education w/ Dr. Noliwe Rooks - Human Restoration Project - Air Date 2-11-23

NOLIWE ROOKS: From those earliest moments, where the expansion of multiracial democracy spread into this idea that all children; poor children, Black children, the children of slaves, that the state had a responsibility to collect taxes and make education possible for them, that should be a triumphant kind of moment. A triumphant kind of story where we are as a [00:32:00] nation really living, I think, the ideals that we have. The rhetoric that we express in the Constitution and elsewhere about who we are.

As I researched that moment what became clear was, the same forces that I was identifying in the 21st century: the philanthropist, businesses, and corporations, crafted an education specifically for poor White people that looked nothing like the education that was for poor Black people.

Poor Black people, newly free Black people, were supposed to be trained in the trades. They were supposed to be taught vocational kinds of skills. There was none of the... "Let your mind soar, become an artist, become a..." It was, can you make bricks? Let's teach you how to farm with technical specificity. This kind [00:33:00] of education, depending on segregation; it depended on having Black people, poor people, and Indigenous people live in areas of the country or in places where it was just them. Then the prescriptions for what you do, and what you teach them, and how you pay for it were very similar. Something different entirely was happening for wealthy people and White people.

That's a really long way of coming around to say; it became clear at every decade that I looked at, from 1877 at the end of the Reconstruction period up through 2015 which then was the present that I was writing in, that there had never been a deep disruption of segregation as a fundamental, and key feature, of education for certain folks, and as a money making [00:34:00] and business and marketing opportunity for a whole other group of people.

That was something that I hadn't seen before, I hadn't seen anybody talk about it. I didn't think about segregation as part of a business plan, as an educational ideology. These business plans for companies, which at the time, was things like Teach for America and the rise of charter schools. I hadn't thought about how much money they were making. How dependent they were on poverty, and the segregation of racial and economic poverty, people who were poor, and or Black, or Indigenous.

They had to be those things in order for them to make money, in order for these businesses to make money. They were failed business plans in the absence of segregation. So I just started to wonder, is it the reason that we have this [00:35:00] intractable problem? This thing that we keep saying we're trying to solve.

We keep coming up with ways to deal with how racially specific educational achievement is and educational access. Is part of the reason it's so hard to solve is there's simply too much money to be made in having people be segregated, and offering to educate them outside of the public education system that many people pay a lot of money in taxes to keep going?

The War on Public Education Is Escalating – with Jennifer Berkshire - Is This Democracy - Air Date 3-16-23

THOMAS ZIMMER - HOST, IS THIS DEMOCRACY:

I just wanna make sure that everyone understands why that is a sort of wealth transfer. Because, basically, the public is giving parents money. They're giving them a voucher. I don't know how much that is per kid. It probably depends on where you are, probably. What are we talking about? In terms of like monetary value that you get there, as a parent.

JENNIFER BERKSHIRE: We're already venturing into the weeds here, because some states [00:36:00] treat this as just what you described.

This is like a straight up voucher. Which is — that's a vision that dates back to Milton Friedman. The real dream right now is what's called an education savings account. That's the idea that some percentage of what your state spends to educate kids. What's been interesting about watching this latest round unfold is that these — we're talking about a lot of money,

Here's a key, it's never enough money to pay for the full private school tuition. This actually serves another nifty purpose; which is to start to get parents to think about K-12, the way they think about college. That you're gonna get some assistance, but it's not gonna be enough. So you're gonna pick up the rest of the tab yourself.

This is [00:37:00] another way that these programs benefit the more affluent, because the original recipients of vouchers under — say the Milwaukee plan, or the DC Opportunity Scholarships, the understanding was that they were too poor to afford private school tuition on their own.

THOMAS ZIMMER - HOST, IS THIS DEMOCRACY: So in practice, this is subsidizing people who are mostly already sending their kids to private schools, and now all of a sudden they basically get a subsidy from the state, right?

That this is what's actually happening here?

JENNIFER BERKSHIRE: That's exactly what's happening. So we — as little oversight as there is for these programs, we do have that data. We can see that, in Arizona, it's something like 80% of the people who are claiming their new universal voucher never had kids who attended public school.

New Hampshire, it's 75%. What gets complicated about this is that states [00:38:00] have figured out very creative ways to subsidize parents private school tuition. This is because we used to have this thing called the separation between church and state. I know we're gonna get to that a little bit later on. In order to get around that, there were a number of states that would basically use tax credits so that wealthy individuals and corporations could donate to what they called a "scholarship fund". In those cases, you're literally seeing states rewrite their tax codes in order to benefit the most wealthy residents.

That's why these — I think people would be really — at a time when people are so conscious of inequality, I wish they would pay a little more attention to what's happening on the school privatization front.

THOMAS ZIMMER - HOST, IS THIS DEMOCRACY: This could be read superficially, right? The way we've talked about the wealth [00:39:00] distribution upwards dimension of this.

You could read this superficially as all the culture war stuff, that's just a distraction. They don't really mean that. It's actually just — this is just wealthy people trying to figure out ways not to share their wealth. It's about the money, it's plutocracy, that sort of thing. That's probably not an adequate understanding — an adequate way to understand what's going on here because you already tied it into that broader attempt to roll back the post 1960s Civil Rights order.

There — that is not just about the money. It's not just about — it is absolutely also about wealth distribution upwards, but I think we need to be — we need to make sure that it's not an either/or. It is about the money, but it is also about these social and cultural issues because, again; undermining public education serves both causes. I think that is [00:40:00] where if — from the perspective of the right, they're like, "Wait, what are you talking about? It's either about the money or about the sort of culture war stuff"

It's both, that's the beauty of this. Public education is, from the rights perspective, a threat to traditional hierarchies of wealth. That's where the resource redistribution comes in. It's also a threat to traditional hierarchies of race, gender, and religion because it can be potentially empowering through civics education. Then people start asking questions about the traditional status quo, and they are aggressively opposed to any attempt at leveling hierarchies — of race, gender, religion, but also wealth. Again, that's why — that's the quote "beauty" of this — the game that they're playing. They get both, is that a fair way to think about this kind of stuff?

JENNIFER BERKSHIRE: So you are spot on really, we need to think about who is in this particular [00:41:00] coalition. What are their goals? So one big part of this coalition is the Libertarian right, for whom the effort to privatize schools goes back to Milton Friedman. So they saw an enormous opportunity, first with the pandemic. We mentioned at the end of our book that within minutes after school shut down, the Heritage Foundation came out with this faux official report; instructing states to immediately begin restructuring their school funding systems so that money would go directly to parents. They would fund students, not systems. Basically they had all of these right wing libertarian

ideas on the shelf, and they saw the pandemic as an opportunity to begin to get states to enact those.

Then an even bigger opportunity came along, and that was the culture war. So [00:42:00] they have really leaned in hard to culture war stuff, and that's weird. They — I don't think that a lot of the old heritage, school choice, true believers really believe — they're typing these ridiculous reports about how — woke in schools, and they're — I think that it is very cynical.

Then you have the kind of illiberal right, which is happy to be in coalition with the Libertarians. Even though, as I often point out, if you visit — say Orbán's Hungary, there is no school choice in Hungary, because your real authoritarian move is to drive your program through the state controlled schools.

Diane Ravitch on Pandemic School Privatization - CounterSpin - Air Date 5-22-20

DIANE RAVITCH: In my book, *Slaying Goliath*, I refer to Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, all these tech titans, [00:43:00] Wall Street and on, as disruptors. They have lots of ideas about how to reinvent and reimagine American education. It always involves privatization. It always attacks public control, and democratic control, of schools. It very frequently involves technology, because what they're interested in is cutting the cost of education. The most expensive aspect of public education is teachers.

From a different point of view, the most important part of education is teachers. I think that we've learned during this pandemic that sitting in front of a screen is not the same as being in a classroom with a human being.

JANINE JACKSON - HOST, COUNTERSPIN: Yeah. This reform that, as you note, was always about privatization and folks will know standardized tests, teaching to tests, evaluating teachers and schools based on those tests. It was also, or has been, marketed as being in particular good [00:44:00] for poor kids, for Black and Brown kids, saving them from what we're always told were "failing schools."

You can see something appealing about standardization. It seems to say, "you can't keep this black kid out, or you can't keep this poor kid out, because a 95

on the test is a 95 on the test.” It doesn’t work that way, it hasn’t worked that way.

DIANE RAVITCH: No, it hasn’t worked. It’s actually been a tremendous failure. The effort to standardize people always fails, because we’re all very different. We all have different things we’re interested in, different abilities to be cultivated, different passions, and a good teacher knows how to bring out the best in all kids. A machine is simply a machine.

I don’t think — if you look back over the past decade where these so-called reformers have been promoting standardized testing and using tests for everything, to evaluate teachers. Having "common core standards", where everybody in [00:45:00] the country is allegedly learning the same thing at the same minute. We haven’t seen any change whatsoever, if we look at test scores. The scores have been flat on the only measures we have that are outside the manipulation of politicians. That is, we have a national test called the NAEP National Assessment of Educational Progress. The scores on the NAEP, since we’ve had common core, and since we’ve been trying to standardize everybody and everything, have been completely flat. So we’ve managed to standardize flatness and mediocrity, and it’s been a disaster.

We’ve also seen, and I think this may be one of the most troubling aspects of this era, a dramatic decline in the number of people wanting to become teachers. The enrollments in teacher education programs, whether they’re graduate programs or professional programs, even undergraduate programs, have simply collapsed. Many institutions have lost a third to 40% or even more of their prospective students. This is [00:46:00] because we’ve been through an era of saying that education can be standardized and turned into a mechanical thing, and that teachers are test proctors rather than teachers.

Teachers want to see the faces of the children. They want to see that they’re having an impact, they want to be able to encourage children face to face. They want to speak to those kids who need extra help, and give them that extra help. Unfortunately, computers can’t do that.

This is the great irony of Bill Gates. He’s got more money than almost anyone in the world. He can do whatever he wants to do, and there are no consequences, and there’s no accountability for his failures.

He’s—from what I gather, I’m not in the public health field—I hear that he’s done good things in public health. He has done horrible things in education. Everything he has undertaken in education has been intrusive. It’s been a

failure. It has discouraged teachers. It's actually hurt the kids that he intends to help. It's done nothing to improve the lot of very poor kids, and it has advanced the narrative of [00:47:00] privatization.

You have to understand that for 20 years and more, really since 1983 when Reagan was president, there has been this narrative that our public schools are failing. Something dramatic needs to happen, throw something at the wall.

I frequently ask people, "If our public schools are failing, how did we get to be the most powerful nation in the world?" The war on the public schools continues, only now it's considered reinvention; it's called reform, but there's nothing reform about it, it's simply disruption.

Racism-High-Stakes Disaster Education | Dr. Ricardo Rosa - TEDxCCSU - Air Date 11-24-15

DR. RICARDO ROSA: With the advent, with the introduction of high stakes testing, family dynamics are being colonized even more, to the point where I am now, as a parent, becoming the homework police. I have to monitor these homework assignments that my children are bringing home that are totally mindless and all about test prep.

Not only that, I get letters from the school every now and then telling me to make sure [00:48:00] that my child gets a good night's sleep because he has a test in the morning, or make sure that you feed your child a good breakfast, there's a test coming up -- as if I don't already do those things. Now Gabor Maté, who's a brilliant medical doctor in Canada, looks at the effects of post-industrial capitalism on family dynamics, and he concludes that even the brain chemistry of children is changing because no longer do we have a situation where we have parents in the home that are non-stressed, emotionally attuned, ready to connect with children. Even when we are present, we are really not present. Our brains are scattered. We're not connecting with them on the level that we should.

About 3 million children in this country are on ADHD medication,[00:49:00] about half a million children in this country are on very heavy anti-psychotic drugs. A new report shows us that nearly half of American adolescents can actually be classified for some type of mental disorder. Now think about that.

On top of that, the situation for students of color, particularly immigrant students, are more horrific, because schools are de-culturalizing institutions. As Angela Valenzuela has pointed out, schools practice what is called "subtractive schooling." They erase the native language that students bring from wherever they're coming from. And so not only do you have a situation where kids are not able to connect with adults, causing all types of behavioral issues, you have a situation with a very vehicle that would cause you to connect to [00:50:00] adults, the language, is being erased.

So you have the older generation speaking one language and kids, very often, not responding, not being able to speak.

What does high stakes testing have to do with racism? Well, first of all, high stakes testing is certainly about racism because you have to look at its history. Its history will connect it to racism. And the effects that it's having in the world is also connected to racism.

So let's begin with history. High stakes testing came about in the early 19 hundreds out of a movement called eugenics. Now eugenics, back in the day, 19 hundreds, was a science. It was considered a science. I went to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, a lot of eugenicists did their work out of Madison. It was considered a science back in the day. Lewis Terman, the very first educational psychologist was a eugenicist.[00:51:00] And he was the first advocate of high stakes testing in schools -- tests that are not sort of culturally congruent with many groups. Leta Stetter Hollingworth was the founder of what's called Gifted and Talented Education. She was a eugenicist. And the majority of students today in gifted and talented education are not students of color. They're going to be middle class, upper middle class white students. It's a class issue as well. That's one history. The history of eugenics.

In 1955, Milton Friedman wrote a book called *Capitalism and Freedom*, and in that book he tried to argue that what we need to do with public schools is totally privatize them. We don't need public schools. We need to privatize them. Now that call came about right about the time that civil rights activists -- a little not too far off -- civil rights activists began to [00:52:00] argue that schools need to address racial inequality. And it was during that time that folks began to see the connection between high stakes testing and the further drive of educational privatization. We can use these test scores to really privatize the entire system. Not only that, we can use these test scores to dispossess people so as to benefit others. That's the history of high stakes testing.

Now, some of y'all might say, well, that's the history, that's in the past; [we're] in the present now. Well, to that I would argue, how many of you would try to understand what is going on currently between the United States and Cuba without looking back in history to take a look at those policy formations way back? You can't understand it. Just like you cannot understand anything in education today without historicizing it, without looking at the history, without looking at the roots of where these things come from.

That's the history.[00:53:00]

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS:

The Secret Power of Homeschoolers - VICE NEWS - Air Date 10-12-22

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: So this is Generation Joshua. It was founded by the HSLDA as the youth division to train the future Christian leaders of America. This week they've set up a political simulation. These teenagers, who are pretty much all homeschoolers, are practicing how to run the different branches of government through the State Department, the Department of Defense, and we're gonna go check out one of their strategy sessions.

JOEL GREWE: I just wanted to show some introductions around here real quick. Can I interrupt for a second? Quick thing, press secretary for Intelligence is here. The CIA — who's in charge of the CIA now? Fair enough. You do realize the FBI's watching you? Now you do. Then we have the Defense Intelligence Agency, and we have the National Security Agency.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Joel Grewe, who was homeschooled and now homeschools his three kids, heads up the whole operation. Generation Joshua has local chapters across the country, and runs small intensive leadership camps like this throughout the year.

JOEL GREWE: If someone set this up and the end result was people [00:54:00] died, it's no longer arson it's murder. That's — at least I think so. Prosecution can tell you more, does that escalate the punishment?

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: So how many kids are here this week?

JOEL GREWE: About a hundred, give or take. Usually we'll have a couple hundred come through over the course of the summer.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: How many camps are you running like this during the year?

JOEL GREWE: Normally three or four. We've had about 30,000 kids come through the whole program over the course of last 15 or so years.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: What's in here?

JOEL GREWE: This is defense. Come on in. Hey, how you doing?

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Those are — they're country's missiles?

JOEL GREWE: Not missiles, but ballistic launch capacity.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Oh, and you have the nuclear launch code?

JOEL GREWE: Oh, absolutely. Are you kidding?

Generation Joshua, at least in part, was designed to make sure that each generation of homeschool students understood the basic skills for political activism, policy, governance, how it works, how they can get involved. Partly it was originally done to say, "Hey, here is how we defend those hard fought freedoms."

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Why [00:55:00] is it so important for homeschoolers specifically to do a program?

JOEL GREWE: I think it comes back to that idea of freedom, but that freedom is constantly being attempted to be eroded in different ways. Generation Joshua says, "here's — at least in part, here's how freedom is kept and won and held and defended. Here's how you, as a citizen, make your voice heard no matter what you go and do."

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Why is that aligned with the right? The GOP, and the more Republican side?

JOEL GREWE: I don't think — for example, for us, we would say that we are not partisan, but we are principled. Of the two political parties, the GOP has been traditionally more favorable to homeschool freedom.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Generation Joshua's simulation has all the trappings of a real government, even a campaign for the presidency.

JOEL GREWE: All right guys. We're gonna go ahead and play the first campaign ad.

AMBER O'NEAL JOHNSTON: In the halls of Congress, protecting our veterans, defending the unborn lives, and standing up for American businesses. We are gonna continue to fight for [00:56:00] the rights of the unborn, the president and vice president.

MARK ROOSE: As I was running for president, my motto, my campaign slogan was to refine the homeland. Essentially to fix our education system, make sure that our kids are being taught good things, that it can help our country grow and be a stronger country altogether.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: What do people say about education here? What are the big topics?

MARK ROOSE: Big topics are the idea that curriculum would be decided by the government at the top for every single school. I saw a lot of bills and a lot of people arguing that we should have parents be able to decide and vote on which curricula were being taught in the specific school in their district.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Like what kinds of things?

MARK ROOSE: Things like critical race theory. Things like the 1619 Project. Just the idea that in a lot of schools across America, even middle schools and sometimes elementary schools, there's graphic or sexual content that's discussed. I think that's something that a lot of people should get fired up about, and we should definitely take care of.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: These talking points are almost verbatim what you'd hear from today's GOP, [00:57:00] and that's the point. Part of Generation Joshua is about bringing what kids learn here into the real world. Every election cycle the organization picks politicians who support its mission, almost exclusively Republicans and deploys homeschoolers to help them win.

JOEL GREWE: What we do is we'll say, "Hey, let's look at races that are swing." Right? Where a handful of people can come in and they can invest their time. The advantage to us, on a practical level, is that we were able to advance and encourage pro freedom, pro family, pro homeschooling candidates.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Does this make this group a political secret weapon for some of these campaigns?

JOEL GREWE: I don't think it's a secret, but it is effective and it is different. They tend to work pretty hard when they do it. All of that makes them very — had to have a high impact. The campaigns recognize that.

AMBER O'NEAL JOHNSTON: I'm gonna go ahead and get started, start with Bibles, the Bible. Brooks, do [00:58:00] you wanna pray for us this morning? Fax would you like pray for us?

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Amber Johnston is a homeschool mom of four, and started a co-op for Black homeschoolers six years ago. Since the pandemic started, it swelled to 260 kids.

AMBER O'NEAL JOHNSTON: Amen. Amen. Thank you.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: Black families are one of home schooling's fastest growing segments. In the last two years their numbers rose by 500%, but they don't always see themselves represented among the movements major players.

What do you hear on the main stage of homeschooling that's alienating to families like you and the ones that you work with?

AMBER O'NEAL JOHNSTON: Anytime you say the word Black or if you write about something needing to be inclusive. They're like, "Oh, nope. Here they are coming over here being woke, all that critical race theory stuff. I'm just like, I just want my kids to have some books with Black people in them.

The people that are giving us the hardest time, on paper, if you were to write down the description of them, [00:59:00] aside from being White, you would also be often describing me. I have to remember that a lot of families started homeschooling way back when to get away from people like me.

In biblical stories, the artists typically make people look like what? They typically make people look like themselves. ... Oftentimes Black artists do depict the biblical stories as Black people.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: We've seen homeschooling really rise since the start of the pandemic, and a lot of black families are sticking with it at higher rates. Why do you think that's happening?

AMBER O'NEAL JOHNSTON: There was a feeling of seeing that maybe we hadn't come as far as some of us thought we had. A fear of not wanting to put my child in an environment where, now I see, what people really do think of them. The thought that someone would look [01:00:00] at my children and feel that they're less than, it's crushing.

I felt like if there was a way to avoid that, a way that I could protect them for as long as possible, then that's what I wanted to do. I think that's what I heard from other parents.

Okay, so we're gonna go ahead and get started guys. The history curriculum centers the experiences of people of color in the United States and American history. It's gonna be Black, Indigenous, and some also Latina/Latino.

I had already been homeschooling for years when COVID hit, but this is what other parents were telling me. They were like, I can't do it, I can't take them back. It was almost like a desperation.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: When you outline what's appealing to you about homeschooling, on paper, it's exactly the same as what someone who might be on the complete right wing end of the spectrum is also saying.

AMBER O'NEAL JOHNSTON: The system is broken. Now the issue is we don't agree on how to fix it, but we [01:01:00] actually all agree that it's broken. It's similar to homeschooling. Whenever there's a threat in any particular state to their right to homeschool, you will see us come together. We're not gonna stay together, but we will band up because we all desperately need our right to homeschool.

MEENA DUERSON- HOST, VICE NEWS: What is your relationship as a homeschooler with the H S L D A?

AMBER O'NEAL JOHNSTON: My family is a member of the group. Which basically means; if there was a knock at the door, or some type of challenge to our ability to homeschool, you can call them and they'll represent you free of charge.

Then that's the nuanced aspect of being in homeschool world. The people that you have to work with in order to maintain what you hold dear, are also the people who crush you.

Summary 4-19-23

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: We've just heard clips today; starting with Have You Heard in the first two clips, addressing the long history of white philanthropists not doing a great job of fixing the problems with segregated schools, and the ties between education and [01:02:00] democracy?

Teach Me, Teacher described critical race theory as the new Red Scare being used as a smoke screen for privatization. The New Abnormal explained how culture war issues are used to push privatization. W B U R told the history and origin of charter schools. The Human Restoration Project highlighted how the privatization of schools has always been a business model that depends on continued poverty.

Is This Democracy explained that voucher programs redistribute wealth upward. CounterSpin spoke with Diane Ravich about those who disrupt public education only to make things worse. Dr. Ricardo Rosa in his TEDx Talk explained why it's important to understand the history of the problems we have with our education system.

That's what everybody heard. Members also heard a bonus clip from Vice News, giving a glimpse into the world of homeschooling and its strong ties with the conservative movement, and Republican party.

To hear that and have all of our [01:03:00] bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive. Sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information. Now we'll hear from you.

Thanks for the Rowling episode - VoicedMailer Roland

VOICEDMAILER ROLAND: Just a quick thank you for the valuable Rowling episode.

The witch hunt podcast left me oddly confused, with a creeping feeling Rowling is enjoying being at the heart of controversy and playing all sides. With the podcast spread so widely across so many weeks I couldn't get my head around what was going on.

In one episode, you cleared it all up for me and more, while explaining why the witch hunt was a very odd and disturbing listen.

Many many thanks, a really valuable edition of *Best of the Left*.

Regarding Puberty Blockers - VoicedMailer J

VOICEDMAILER J: Hi Jay, thanks for the great podcast!

Regarding puberty blockers: My daughter had a rough start in life. She had to spend quite some time in hospital. When she was five years old it was clear that her growth was still lagging behind considerably due to the things that she had needed hospital care for. So she was put on growth hormones, [01:04:00] with tremendous success!

Part of the growth hormone treatment is a monitoring for signs of puberty. This is because the growth hormone treatment has the paradoxical side effect of shortening the time span of the total growth, and cut short the growth cycle.

So when the first signs of puberty manifest themselves, puberty blockers are applied alongside the growth hormone. This is a very common procedure, there is nothing experimental about it. The puberty blockers were applied for two and a half years, which is kind of average, or expected, or usual, whichever way you want to put it.

After that, puberty was allowed to set in and she has developed into a wonderful young woman of normal height. Nothing about this treatment was experimental.

It's all mapped out, with stats and guidelines, and cut-off points. The children's endocrinologist applies this treatment to a number of children every year. I hope this information helps some people understand that puberty blockers are not mysterious at all. It's a well understood treatment and it has contributed significantly to our lifetime happiness.

Thoughts on the J.K. Rowling episode - VoicedMailer Boris

VOICEDMAILER BORIS: Hi Jay, this is Boris.

I feel bad that my first message to you is critical while I have missed so [01:05:00] many opportunities to shower you with praise on the dozens of great podcasts and hours of nuanced debate. I hope you see it as a sign that I care about your podcast and this topic and want to learn about my own blind spots. Anyway, here's my short and oversimplified opinion on the Nuremberg trial episode:

Yes, I get it, and I agree, smart, famous rich white people with a huge following should be held to higher standards than representatives of oppressed minorities. I agree that JK Rowling is being disingenuous when she claims she is just asking questions. Her accusations of fascism, even if they are a tit for tat response in an out-of-control discussion, are wrong and irresponsible.

Still, I think you are fighting the wrong enemy. Rowling maintains non-trans women are different from trans women and any new regulations should take into account concerns of all parties. We don't know what she really thinks but these statements are not particularly extreme and not an existential threat. I live in a country, Belgium, with one of the oldest pro LGBTQ traditions and strongest legal protections. [01:06:00] Her opinions would be considered mainstream here and not cause any uproar even if she had some public function. I would dare to say her statements are considered moderate, at worst, anywhere but some parts of post-2020 urban US.

It also seems the podcast does some of the things you accuse Rowling of. The selection of speakers was polarizing and the show's title was shocking and deliberately framing. You accuse her of focusing on the statistically insignificant problem of violence by trans women on children while their oppression is ignored. I agree that is unfair, but, at the same time, you do not seem to respond to Rowling's concern of domestic violence or online harassment against women in general in this podcast, which are certainly huge

problems. On the whole, I missed empathy towards someone that was a victim of both and has cognitive biases like everyone. I am shocked at the viciousness of the debate - there's no room for discussion, you're either a Nazi or a pedophile - when their worldview is not radically different. Or am I missing something?

I have always enjoyed the show and your thoughtful, [01:07:00] unconventional viewpoints and learned a lot about, for instance, institutional racism, which is rife in my country yet poorly understood. So, just like Rowling's fans, I feel somewhat betrayed.

All the best and keep up the good work.

Something to add to the JK Rowling episode - VoicedMailer Daniel

VOICEDMAILER DANIEL: Hi Jay!

I loved the latest episode of *Best of the Left* which looked at some of the arguments of the nominally feminist section of the anti-trans movement. On the specific topic of classification as the first stage of the development of genocide, I have something to contribute.

A while ago, I developed a presentation designed to stimulate thought and discussion on how societies do classify people on the basis of sex, in contrast to how societies should make such classifications. My hope is that this presentation can help people realize that a sharp and rigid binary classification of sex on the basis of biology, or any set of objective observations, is both logically inconsistent and very harmful.

In the core of the presentation, I try very hard to construct a technique to classify every person into exactly one of only two sexes, and every attempt fails either for reasons of [01:08:00] incompleteness or inaccuracy, or both.

I know that a visual slideshow like this isn't something that can be incorporated into the audio medium of podcasting in a straightforward way, but I thought *Best of the Left* listeners might be interested in using this presentation anyway. If you'd like to share it with them somehow.

Final comments on responses to the trans rights and authoritarianism episode

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record or text us a message at 2 0 2 9 9 9 3 9 9 1, or send us an email to jay@bestoftheleft.com. Thanks to everyone who wrote in response to the recent episode on the debate between the Trans Rights Movement, and the feminists who generally oppose that movement.

Regarding Daniel's presentation, I'm going to include a link to that in the notes, in the voicemail section so you can find it there. In short, it demonstrates how effectively every aspect of what we think of as sex characteristics, all fall into two overlapping distribution bell curves. Rather than there being a recognizable [01:09:00] binary, even if there's variation within each side of the binary, the fact is that on a whole variety of metrics the distribution curve for men, and the separate curve for women, end up blending into each other in the middle.

As Daniel pointed out, once you see that those two curves constantly blend into one another, it becomes basically inescapable that trying to impose a strict binary on something that clearly isn't is simply illogical.

Then lastly, I wanted to reply to Boris, who felt a bit betrayed by that episode. I found this criticism very interesting. Basically, he just wishes that I did a different episode on a different thesis. I wanted to do a show about creeping fascism, and he wanted more focus spent addressing the concerns of anti-trans feminists. I don't mean to speculate too wildly here. I actually wonder if Boris's experience of living in Belgium, where he says they have a very long [01:10:00] and strong history of LGBTQ protections, has actually made it easier for him to brush off the concern of creeping fascism.

To me, coming from the US and a Trump-ified Republican party context, his response sounded a bit blase. Brushing off the dangers of fascism, sort of saying, "yeah, they're not great, but how are you gonna make the trains run on time?" It's like a legitimate question, but frankly it's not the concern I think is the most urgent right now.

If you're coming from a context like Belgium, and the fear of fascism is so far from your mind that you might think, "yuck, come on, let's get on to the next set of questions." Depending on your context, that might be perfectly legitimate. That's just not the context a lot of people around the world are coming from.

Something I said over and over again while making that episode was that; it would be great if I could cover everything and do it well, but that's just not possible. So I stuck with my thesis and didn't let myself [01:11:00] stray into too many side notes. Of which there are many legitimate angles to cover, right?

This topic is deep and wide and broad, and there are lots of things that we could talk about. Boris clearly wished that I had gone into more of those. I would just encourage anyone who had similar thoughts to reorient your perspective a bit. Take the episode for what it was meant to be rather than all of the things it didn't address, because of course there were a ton of things that it didn't address. I think that I tried to make a very specific point and worked extremely hard to do it well.

For me, I wanted to analyze the theoretical debate and political reality of authoritarianism, as it relates to the trans community, and the absolutely fascinating phenomenon of the Bizarro World effect that was described again and again in the show. So that's what I did. Maybe some other time I will dive into the weeds of legitimate questions [01:12:00] that need to be ironed out about trans rights. To be honest, it's more likely that we will get around to that after the threat of fascism has subsided a bit.

As always, keep the comments coming in. You can leave us a voicemail or a text message to our number 2 0 2 9 9 9 3 9 9 1 or email me to Jay@bestoftheleft.com.

That is gonna be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show, and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Transcriptionist Trio, Ken, Brian and La Wendy for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together.

Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show co-hosting. Thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support, through our Patreon, or from right inside the Apple Podcast app.

Membership is how you get instant access to our incredibly [01:13:00] good and often funny bonus episodes. In addition to there being extra content, no ads, and chapter markers in all of our regular episodes, all through your regular podcast player. You can join the discussion on our Discord community, there's a link to join in the show notes.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC. My name is Jay!, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to you twice weekly. Thanks entirely to the members and donor to the show from bestoftheleft.com.