

Recall This Book 60
Brahmin Left #1
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Matt Karp (AU, JP)

John Plotz: From Brandeis University, welcome to Recall This Book, where we assemble scholars and writers from different disciplines to make sense of contemporary issues, problems, and events. So specifically, welcome today to our summer series on the Brahmin Left. Today, our guest will be Princeton historian and *Jacobin* magazine regular Matthew Karp. I'm John Plotz. And my co-host today is Adaner Usmani, a sociologist currently working on the origins of mass incarceration. You probably heard him discussing that project back in episode 44. And then in episode 51, you likely heard him and me speaking with Thomas Piketty. So hey, Adaner, how's it going?

Adaner Usmani: I'm good, John. Thank you. Thanks for having me.

John Plotz: Dude, we're not having you now. You're co-hosting with me. We're having. So, okay. So that conversation with Piketty, in fact, inspired this series because Piketty, in recent years, has made a thought-provoking and also, often an ire-provoking argument about the ways in which European and American left-wing parties have increasingly drawn their support from an educated and non-working class political base. So he's presented some evidence, which I guess doesn't provoke people's ire, but then he presents interpretation along with it that people do or don't agree with. Do you want to define, based on his charts and figures, what do you think is the nature of the problem that he's identified?

Adaner Usmani: Yeah, sure. I think the problem in a nutshell comes down to the fact that over time, he shows in a series of graphs that the gap between the college educated and the non-college educated, or actually maybe more accurately the gap between those at the top of the educational distribution and

the bottom of the educational distribution has in some ways, flipped in political preferences. So it used to be that those at the top of the educational distribution used to be more right-wing than those at the bottom. And that has actually reversed over the long span of the last several decades in three countries. But that's kind of the banner statistic that anchors his arguments about the Brahmin Left.

John Plotz: Great. And so our way into this—well, I should say we have three ways in because we have three different people we're going to speak to, but I think our objective is to ask how have left-wing parties responded to this both in Europe and America. And I think there's so many different instances of countries that I don't know well that I'd love to hear about as well as the United States. So how have they responded? And then also, someone more optimistically, how might they respond going forward? So with that, Adaner, I'm going to pass the baton to you to tell us about our first guest, the person we're speaking with today.

Adaner Usmani: Thanks, John. Thanks very much. I'm very excited to do this with you. So our guest today, our first guest is Matt Karp who's a historian of the US Civil War era. Matt wrote his first book about the way in which slavery and actually slaveholders in particular shaped US foreign relations before the Civil War. And his current book is about the mass anti-slavery politics in the United States, which, in some ways, he argues actually led or were an important precipitating factor in the Civil War, not just slavery, but also mass anti-slavery. And then that book is also in particular about the Republican Party of the 1850s. But the reason we have Matt on this show is not because of what he's written about the United States in the 1850s, 1860s, 1870s, but what he's written about the US today, what he's written about contemporary developments in American politics. Matt kind of moonlights (or *daylights* maybe) as an observer of American politics and the American left in particular.

And it's in this capacity that John and I wanted to talk to him. I think he's written some of the best things there are to read on the Sanders movement and its attempt to transform the Democratic Party, to push the party to the left. And his recent essay, "The Politics of a Second Gilded Age," which John and I were just discussing before we started recording, raised many of the same questions about the US that Piketty asks about the Brahmin Left in the context he raised. Matt asks them in the context of the United States; Piketty is asking them about the advanced capitalist world in general. Why have class cleavages been disappearing from American electoral politics? Why is partisanship intensifying so dramatically? Should these developments cause us to despair? And if they should, what, if anything, can we do about it, about them? So I'm very excited to hear what he thinks, John.

John Plotz: Yeah. Yeah. Me too. It was great for me to go back and look at his antebellum work because "The Politics of a Second Gilded Age," that article in *Jacobin*, which you and I were both kvelling over, is post-Civil War--where do we get to this partisanship?--but then I realized, with his first book, he's actually really interested in the run-up to that like the 50 years before the Civil War where Southern Democrats were really trying to control foreign policy as a way of enabling slavery worldwide.

Adaner Usmani: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. So one thing I'm interested in hearing his account of is the kind of the various periodizations of American politics in these terms, in terms of the class cleavages or the sort of the class conflict embedded in the party system. Because I think another thing I've heard him often say (and maybe it's in that essay as well, in the *Jacobin* essay) is that there's the Gilded Age, but the Gilded Age is then succeeded by an age of extreme class cleavages, the New Deal era when the Democrats win the American working class and then succeeded by the era we're living in now. So there's something obviously about

these ebbs and flows that I think we'll learn from the past as we look to the future.

John Plotz: Yeah, totally. And in fact, I was wondering when you were making that turn from the Gilded Age to the Progressive era where you were going to put the break, is it the New Deal or the 1930s? Because one of the things I really liked about Piketty is his suggestion that at least in Europe, that transformation towards a more radical materialist class politics that basically to benefit the working class happens earlier even than we would think, happens around World War I.

Adaner Usmani: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

John Plotz: I wonder where the periodization is for him.

Adaner Usmani: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely. I think the US... It's also interesting to me because I'm someone who is often thinking about the ways in which the US is stably different from Europe. That's at the core of my understanding of American mass incarceration as the broader things that make America different from Europe. But then there are also alongside, as you were saying, these parallel trends that are occurring in these places at the same time. So both comparative and historical developments: in some ways, you learn different things by looking at different aspects of change. There is a view, which I know Matt is critical of, but I think we should discuss in some detail that says that the Left really shouldn't worry that much, or the egalitarian left shouldn't worry that much about the Brahmin Left. In fact, it should lean in to its identity as the Brahmin Left, because PMCs [Professional Managerial Class] like you and me, John, we're pretty liberal. We believe in economic redistribution. So what's the problem? And I think Matt has an account of why this is a problem, which we should explore.

John Plotz: Yeah. Well, I liked his... He has a discussion in that wonderful article, which we'll certainly put a link to on the podcast page about the discrepancy in Illinois, is it? That

he's talking about a place where there's a tax measure that does not at all track with... People are willing to vote for Biden, but they're not willing to vote to raise their own taxes basically.

Adaner Usmani: Right. Right. Exactly.

John Plotz: So there's a surface-level affinity that seems to work and then an underlying problem that you can't fund it because people won't pay the taxes.

Adaner Usmani: Yeah. And that reminds me of a book I think that we had once spoken about. I don't know if it was a book that might even have been someone that we thought about speaking to at some point, but the book about the various suburbs of the New England area, *Don't Blame [Us]...* The Lily Geismer book on the transformation of the suburbs.

John Plotz: Oh, right.

Adaner Usmani: About how the party in New England has been remade around these kind of wealthy suburbs full of the professional managerial class, but ultimately, a professional managerial class who relies on the various things that local governments allow you to hoard in the United States for its well-being and stuff.

John Plotz: Yeah. Interesting.

Matthew Karp: Hey, guys.

Adaner Usmani: Hey, Matt.

John Plotz: Hey.

Matthew Karp: How are you?

John Plotz: Good. How are you?

Adaner Usmani: I'm great. How are you doing?

John Plotz: Hey, Matt. I'm John. Nice to meet you.

Matthew Karp: Hi, nice to meet you, John. Hey, good to see you, Adaner.

Adaner Usmani: Hey. So the argument that we found so provocative in the Piketty when we read it, and then a little bit when we spoke to him as well, was that he tracks this change in advanced capitalist politics from an era in which there was a clear class cleavage that distinguished the left from the right to an era now where the class cleavage has substantially eroded and been replaced by different kinds of cleavages and what those cleavages are exactly I think we can discuss. But I suppose the place to start is, do you find that picture persuasive both at the level of advanced capitalist countries in general, but then also in the United States in particular?

Matthew Karp: Yeah, I do. And it's an interesting phenomenon because if you want to do this sort of metahistory of the politics of class or class politics, class-cleavage-based politics in their modern form, arguably, one conclusion, and maybe we're skipping to the end here, but one reasonable conclusion to sort of understand this phenomenon, which I think is really born out in a lot of the data however you define class, by education, by form of occupation. There've been lots of bites at this apple in the US and beyond, even income terms too. It's a clear trajectory from, say the middle of the 20th century to the present. There are a lot of arguments about how to date and how to understand the different inflections of those curves, but that seems like a really clear phenomenon especially in the sort of the North Atlantic world.

But yeah, the metahistory of it is interesting because you could argue that class-cleavage based politics, as we understand them, is a new thing, a distinctive product of industrial society that only really came into being in the middle 19th century. There's Marx's famous line about French peasants being basically a sack of potatoes, distinct from each other, having only local interests, that in a sense, didn't constitute a class at all because of their

disorganization. And this is really vulgar for anyone who does early modern or pre-modern history, because there obviously were forms of things that we would identify as class politics in different ways in those societies. But what we're talking about, class politics in a kind of modern industrialized, even limitedly democratic society really only cohered in the late 19th century in some sense, gained steam in the early 20th century and only became the dominant form of politics in some sense, numerically, in the earlier middle 20th century in the sort of in the West anyway.

And so the fact that it's sort of declining now may suggest that was just a moment in time. And I think we have to at least consider that possibility sort of in the broad view of history or that if it is reconstituted, it will be reconstituted very, very differently. But yeah, I agree with that big description of it. Certainly, it is happening. Workers in manual occupations, workers without college degrees, workers with lower incomes, by all measures, are trending away from the traditional parties of the left in the US as well as in Europe.

Adaner Usmani: Because this now relates to what John and I were discussing a little bit and what John was saying he liked so much about your *Jacobin* essay, which was obviously the periodization that one gets from Piketty, as you were saying, begins in the era of class politics, but there is an earlier era that gives it more of a kind of quadratic shape or like a rise-and-fall kind of feel. Right? I wonder if you could say a little bit about that in the context of the United States, since this essay, "The Politics of a Gilded Age," I understand very much to be doing the same thing, the argument that you just said, that you just argued in the context of advanced capitalist world as a whole.

Matthew Karp: Yeah. The thing about it, obviously it's interesting because I think about what I just said actually almost implies that the

better analogy would be that the future lies almost before the Gilded Age into some other form of politics.

Adaner Usmani: Yeah.

Matthew Karp: But I think the reason why I like the Gilded Age analogy is that class obviously mattered a lot in the sense that I still do think class does matter. I don't think that my read, and we can talk about this, but my read is that even though it matters less and less electorally, I'm not convinced that it doesn't matter politically or even if it doesn't really matter to sort of social identities and social relationships. I think it's really significant.

John Plotz: You don't necessarily identify populism as a solution in any way, but you didn't call it out as a problem. Because I think we're going to talk to at least one person who sort of says *plutocratic populism*, that's the danger here. In other words, that populism in the present era has been successfully captured by the parties of the right. Is that a historical difference where you would say, "Oh yeah, that's true now, but it wasn't true then," or are you actually skeptical that populism is part of the problem right now?

Matthew Karp: Well, I see populism in some ways as an artifact of the situation so that within that Gilded Age system, just to push... I'm really pushing this analogy, putting more weight on it more than it can bear because a lot of my US history friends, most of the smart ones are like, "No, it's so different from the Gilded Age. If you really think about society as a whole, America was mostly agricultural of the 1880s, what are you talking about?" So I know the analogy really falters, but just in these electoral terms, my feeling is yeah, when the two party system or the official political system feels like it has for all of its kind of erratic feints in the direction of the people versus the powerful, which is a continuous feature of American politics.

But it has actually no real space for real redistributive reform or a real challenge to a certain kind of elite rule than

populism. I guess I see it as almost sort of mechanical that it's likely to develop in some form or other. So I would say that's how I would make the analogy that yeah, that in our case, it's emerged on the right in our era, although not exclusively. Bernie Sanders is described, I think not inaccurately, as a left populist—or at least there've been some politicians on the left that have tried, with some success, to capture some of that energy. Less success than the right, for sure, but I would say that it's an artifact of the structure. And so I don't see populism itself as the problem at all. I would see it as closer to a part of the solution, again, not entirely, not a solution on its own terms, but closer to part of a possible solution, if we want to be optimistic.

Adaner Usmani: I want to kind of just quickly pause to contrast the kind of vivid history that you've told to maybe slightly more boring and I think actually inadequate things that a sociologist like myself might say. Which is to say that one way of making sense of these developments is to say, well, what happened is that an industrial working class was born and that industrial working class had the means to organize, organize in trade unions, transform the party and transform policy. But one thing that you said that I think is a challenge to that view is that in fact, the changing class cleavages in the constituencies of these parties, it's partly also a function of the changing policy orientation of the party. So in some ways, yes, the constituency leads to policy changes, but also the policy changes attracts changes in the constituency, right? That's the story of African American voters as you've described it. And that seems to me kind of important and more optimistic than the simple structural story that I would be inclined to tell. And I like that about the story that you've told.

Matthew Karp: Good. I think the structural story is also right, but yeah. Yeah.

Adaner Usmani: They can't both be right.

Matthew Karp: Yeah.

John Plotz: Can I just loop this back to the big question, Adaner, you asked at the beginning about--Sorry to come back to this Matt this Gilded Age avowed, disavowed analogy--the question of whether we're in a post-materialist era in terms of class politics now. Adaner, you have the geometrical image where the symmetrical curve, where what precedes capitalism or what precedes a strong industrial revolution and industrial workforce might look analogous to what follows it. So can we press on that question and ask, if people use the term post-materialist all the time to talk about this notion of a, you call it class decoupling, Matt. You have a wonderful phrase. No, class...

Matthew Karp: Dealignment.

John Plotz: Dealignment. Sorry, class dealignment. Right. So people talk about that as post-materialist. And I'm wondering, is that a useful model to think with? They're not perfectly analogous before and after.

Matthew Karp: Yeah. I guess the point of the analogy and then maybe this takes the historical story forward a little bit, or Adaner, did you want to get in?

Adaner Usmani: Well, maybe I did try and steal, Matt, the post-materialist argument a little bit.

Matthew Karp: Yeah.

Adaner Usmani: So the way I think of the post-materialist argument, and it's an argument that I think I struggle with a little bit is... Struggled with in the sense that I want it to not be true, but I worry that it might be true, which is the view that with modernization, what happens is that people grow richer. One big difference between the Gilded Age and today is that GDP per capita is, I don't know, 10 times what it was then. I have no idea. I'm just making that up, but just much, much higher. And so as people get richer, they tend to care less, the argument goes, about material considerations, and as they care less about--

John Plotz: Adaner, can I interrupt for a second there?

Adaner Usmani: Yeah.

John Plotz: Because inequality now is probably roughly comparable to what it was in the Gilded Age.

Adaner Usmani: Definitely. Yes.

John Plotz: Even though wealth is higher.

Adaner Usmani: Absolutely.

Matthew Karp: But the floor is higher.

John Plotz: The floor is higher.

John Plotz: The ceiling is much higher.

Matthew Karp: Yeah.

Adaner Usmani: Yes. True. But if the extent to which you care about material considerations as a function of your standard of living, your absolute standard of living, so I think the reply might be no, that it has something to do with inequality, as you're saying, John, but let's just say, I think the proponents of this argument would say, it's basically a function of your standard of living. Your standard of living has increased dramatically, and so the weight of non-material considerations in your thinking, in your interests has gone up dramatically. And that's what explains this transformation. I think one of the strong weaknesses of that view is that it can't make sense of the quadratic shape that Matt has talked about. Right? It can't make sense of why politics in an earlier era wasn't even more polarized along class lines than the middle era or something because that's when people were at their poorest. So there's something missing there, but I just wonder, Matt, how you make sense of it and how you would reply.

Matthew Karp: To me, the modernization one, it might be part of the story, no doubt, but I think it's one of the weaker explanations in that it's purely about... That this detachment is purely about the working class today in the Western world is largely content materially. I think there's just too much evidence of the sort of... I think it's possible to get there socially. I hope we do. If GDP just went up, maybe another per capita just tripled, and the floor went up a little bit higher, I think we might. But if you look at the way in which even in our richer society are today, people on the floor exist in such sort of both material precarity and psychological uncertainty and are just a few hundred dollars or a car accident or a medical bill away from bankruptcy and massive life change and housing insecure, food insecure.

There's still a lot of pretty primal needs that aren't being addressed for, say the bottom 50% or arguably more. So I don't think that alone can bear a lot of weight. What I do think though, that there has been this post-material shift like in some ways. So it's clear that the parties of the left have shifted to some extent to... They've lost these constituents and they've made other priorities more significant. So I think some of these other explanations might be stronger for that. I do think that working class disorganization for my money is the number one factor.

Adaner Usmani: Yeah. And that fits nicely, obviously with your analysis of what changed to make the Gilded Age into the New Deal Age. Right? I think it seemed to be principally about the organization of the working class and--

John Plotz: And even organized parties, like the Socialist Party had a foothold in the 20s that probably made a difference.

Matthew Karp: Absolutely. Yeah. In a sense, that was probably a little less the case in America where our parties were always sort of these globules, but certainly, in Europe, that was a big deal, actual member-driven parties with real connections to communities and local organizations. But I think probably that was also true to some extent within inside sort of urban

democratic parties who are much more organized 70 years ago than they are now, connected to membership organizations rather than just kind of NGOs, sort of service-driven rather than membership-driven organizations, which we have today, act for deliver services to an act for working class people rather than are composed of.

John Plotz: So this is probably outside all of our lanes, but then I have heard the argument made--and I think even Piketty makes it--that the presence of the Soviet Union acts as a suction towards the left as well. As long as there's a viable socialist alternative, albeit one with all sorts of problems, which we could rehearse endlessly, but that pre-1989, that served as a driver to make it more important for left parties to basically think about social goods.

Matthew Karp: Eric Nusbaum thinks that too. That's one of his... The Soviet Union's great gift to the West is social democracy. I don't know. I see the value of the argument. In some ways, I'm attracted to it, but I think you also think about how intense the kind of Cold War demagoguery was and how powerful that was in places like the US and how it was utilized against social democratic policy really effectively, even among working class voters that there wasn't... I don't sense that there was a kind of outside of maybe a moment in the 30s in the American case...Yeah. I don't think there really was any kind of working class yearning or horizon even indirectly towards the Soviet Union. If anything, it's negative. Maybe I think in Western Europe--

John Plotz: I was thinking about Italy or West Germany. Yeah.

Matthew Karp: Yeah. Definitely. More complicated there. Although I think arguably, the Cold War repression argument would carry just as much weight as the Soviet model kind of because think about the Italian Communist Party. Was NATO ever really going to let them into power? I don't know. And what effect did that have on Italian politics in subtle ways too, as well as the kind of the threat of the capitalist veto? I think it deformed the social democratic enterprise more than it

helped. This is where Eric and I are on opposite sides of the 1917 case but I respect the argument though.

Adaner Usmani: John, shall we come towards the present?

John Plotz: Yes. Well, okay. Matt, I think this is actually a present question, but I'm going to frame it in terms of something you wrote about the Gilded Age. You have this nice line about one of the ways you define the division. You're talking about how the capitalist class basically managed to stay out of the party divisions and you call it flexibly bi-partisan. And I'm wondering whether that's a category that has purchased for you nowadays as well. In other words, do you see there being a capitalist class that doesn't fit? We're so used to hearing, okay, well, there's the PMC, which is the Brahmin Left, and then there's a kind of Republican ruling class nature undefined. So is...

Matthew Karp: The Merchant Right. Yeah. No, I agree. I think I said this in maybe this article or another article but it's like the Brahmin Left is also kind of becoming the Merchant Left because if you look....Dylan Riley in the New Left Review has done good work on this on kind of mapping the partisan division within the capitalist class and the ways in which some segments of the class do seem... And I think this maps on—I was just glossing in the 19th century, but this maps on to—It's not that there were no partisan dependencies based on region or industry in the Gilded Age. Certainly, there were certain kinds of market talk capitalists that wanted lower tariffs that were voted Democrat, et cetera. Whereas even finance to some extent was very ambidextrous.

Whereas other kinds of industrial producers were high tariff Republicans, et cetera. But I think yeah, the way that I see it today, there's an idea that the left is primarily kind of PMC driven Brahmins. It's really inflected upwards. So there are whole sections of... I think for largely cultural reasons, but there are whole sections of the capitalist ruling class and especially in tech and in entertainment, which is really

significant parts of our economy now that are not even ambidextrous, but I would say are fairly, strongly committed to the Democratic Party right now, and have strong institutional relationships with the Democrats.

And that's not to say that they aren't willing to take a tax cut when it comes to their way. Of course, they are, but I think that they really lean Democrat. Whereas, of course, extractive industries and big retail tend to lean GOP for obvious bottom-line reasons. But then there's a whole swath in the middle, finance, real estate, lots of different kinds of manufacturing depending on where you are and what your trade interests are that are willing to play both sides and work with both party and are not super committed. That's how I would frame it.

John Plotz: Is there internationally an example of a latter day Left party that in a different country is doing this right?

Matthew Karp: The best evidence would be Corbyn 2017 [in the UK] did okay by some measures on some measures of class dealignment. In other ways, not really. In other ways, actually you saw more education polarization, so no. But certainly, Corbyn did better than the other labor parties before and then currently seem to be doing. So that would be like a modicum of evidence based on sort of... If you look at it based on income, there was a bit of a stemming of the tide. I don't think that was... Clearly, he got tripped up over Brexit and then became a total disaster by the most recent election. Continentally, I don't know. I think maybe Adaner knows more. There's some examples of social democratic parties that have kind of tacked right on immigration and stuff and kind of maybe stemmed the tide there, but I don't know if that's really the same strategy we're talking about.

Adaner Usmani: Matt, one thing I heard you say on a... I don't think it was in any of your articles. But in a recent podcast, you were reflecting on the Corbyn, Sanders moments on the left and arguing that though there's a lot, as you were just saying, to be optimistic about, one of the difficulties for the Corbyn

and Sanders left (and then also today, the Squad and the DSA left) one of the difficulties is that these movements within the parties, in the US case, within the shell of the Democratic Party, these movements have sort of been at their most successful in precisely those areas where professional managerial class politics has advanced most fully in some ways, right?

These parties have succeeded at reinvigorating our discourse, our egalitarian discourse. They've succeeded in awakening us to Gilded Age inequalities. But in some sense, they have not at all succeeded in reattaching the party to the working class and fixing the problems in effect that Piketty is writing about, that you have been writing about. And so I suppose I really liked your answer because it actually made me quite optimistic, but I suppose, just to return to a pessimistic note, can you comment on that a little bit as someone who is a very keen observer of those developments?

Matthew Karp: No, absolutely. The Brahmin Left is really the right word because it's not Brahmin liberalism. It is also the left, going back to... I think you could even pick in Piketty's account in the US, thinking about academia, thinking about the kind of core conduits of transmission starting from the 60s and 70s to today and where the left has kind of hitched itself. And there are some analysis like this in the way in which the new left itself played into this, and then even that this sort of Sanders populous moment has actually been kind of almost the parasite on... A kind of very eager, very motivated parasite on this Brahminization of the Democrats altogether.

So Cori Bush wins St. Louis over a machine candidate, but totally loses in North St. Louis in the kind of poor and working-class black communities and wins decisively among non-black gentrifiers in the central and southern parts of the city. Now, so that's a fact. And if you want to go even further and make it more personal. It's like when did

look like that's just the three of us, or me, Matt Karp, who converted to this brand of politics because of Bernie Sanders, frankly, in some ways, who moves me out of a kind of vague bland liberalism into some other form of socialism in a good part. I guess it happened a little earlier, but Bernie Sanders spoke to me. And I'm not the target audience for this project, but I have been the target recipient in a lot of ways.

So yeah. What do we do about that? I guess the argument was really out of humility because I don't think that I have the answer, but I think recognizing it as part of the problem, whereas I don't think... And now speaking very narrowly about sort of Squad era politics. I don't think that AOC and Cori Bush... I wonder, it'd be interesting to talk to sort of their strategists or talk to them off the record about what they... They must know this, but they don't want to admit it. I understand why they wouldn't want to admit it, but what do they think about it? And I think, for us, in the discourse, I think the minimum step is recognizing it and owning it and not trying to say, "No, it was because AOC fired up."

These primary elections, first of all, are very low turnout, if you want to talk about turnout. The elections that brought AOC or Cori Bush to power are very... They're not mass. They're not like a presidential election in any way. They're about, in some ways, they're a testament to a really good organization, but they're not about a "if you build it, they will come" type left populous politics. So I think recognizing that is a first step to saying, "Okay. Well, we've got something going here, but we can't just act as if..." I'm not super involved, but ... DSA tends to regard is this as, "Yeah. But we're winning. We're getting so much momentum. We've got all these city counselors. We've got these state legislators. We've got Congress. We're growing. More room to grow."

And there doesn't seem to be a sufficient concern there about like, "Okay, but how are you growing and what is your

ceiling here?" Because it's really low under the current configuration. And if your aspiration is to be a loud 5% of the American politics, then you can achieve that. That is achievable. And that can shape the discourse and who knows? Maybe even win some concrete rewards, but it's not going to actually achieve any of the ends you profess. So we do need to think harder about it and about how to make that leap and what kind of politics can do that, win in different areas and with different voters.

The one little note of optimism I'll say at the end is it's also not true that Cori Bush got... She didn't get 3% of the vote in North St. Louis. She might've lost to William Lacy Clay, the machine candidate. But the reason why she won actually... A more optimistic account would say is that she got 30 to 40% in those districts, which is not nothing, which probably is younger people, I would guess, although there's no data for this. That there is... It's not that these voters are kind of implacably hostile or totally unmoved by this or that there's no potential to sort of win them to a sort of populous progressive platform. Not at all.

I think, actually, if you look at the issue-type polling, working class and support is very high and it is polarized by class if you pull something like Medicare for all. So it's not that they're hostile to the program or anything like that. But I think when it comes to the sort of granular, or kind of concrete questions of... Well, not really concrete, but with tactics, strategic questions of political style and how to sort of organize a left-wing politics more broadly. We have to be aware of what really has been driving it and the limits of that appeal so far and be concerned with growing it rather than declaring victory.

John Plotz:

All right. I'm going to seize that optimistic note. I think Adaner and I would really like to thank you, Matt. It's very generous of you. And to say that Recall This Book is sponsored by Brandeis and the Mandel Humanity Center. Sound editing is by our newest audio intern, Naomi Cohen,

and website design and social media by Nai Kim, of the English Department. So we're always eager to hear your comment, criticism and thoughts on today's discussion and on this question of the Brahmin Left generally. And we would love it if you would write a review or rate us on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcast. If you enjoyed today's show, you might want to check out episode 44, where we discuss Adaner's work on mass incarceration or episode 51, where we speak with Piketty. And over the coming weeks, tune in for further episodes of our summer series on the Brahmin Left. So from all of us here at Recall This Book, Matt, thank you very, much and thanks to you all for listening.