THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

WHY DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITIES FLIPPED FOR TRUMP (AND MIGHT DO SO AGAIN)

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P R O C E D I N G S

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews.

Why did so many traditionally blue communities break for Donald Trump in 2016? Will they do so again in 2020? And, will they become Republican strongholds? On this episode of the Brookings Cafeteria, Bill Finan, Director of the Brookings Institution Press, interviews two authors of a new Brookings book that addresses these and other questions.

Stephanie Muravchik is a historian and an Associate Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. John Shields is Associate Professor of Government at Claremont McKenna College. And, they are the coauthors of *Trump's Democrats*, a book in which Muravchik and Shields document living in three blue communities that flipped to Trump in 2016, and finding that these voters still like the Democratic party, but it's not the party many of this book's readers will recognize.

Also, on today's show, a look at the hospitality industry and its workers during the coronavirus pandemic, how they are impacted, and what can be done, with Tracy Haddden Loh, a Fellow with the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking at the Brookings Institution.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter at @policypodcasts to get information about and links to all our shows, including Dollar and Sense, the Brookings trade podcast; The Current; and our Events podcast. First up, here's Tracy Hadden Loh with the Metro Lens on hospitality workers during COVID-19.

HADDEN LOH: I'm Tracy Hadden Loh with the Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking at the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program. Since the beginning of the

coronavirus pandemic, there's been a paradox that has jumbled many individual and public sector response efforts. The paradox is that the same qualities that make some jobs, places, and behaviors more risky at the present moment are also essential to recovery.

For example, repeated loud declarations that cities are over, totally ignore the extremely powerful economic and social forces of agglomeration and clustering that create markets, sustain culture, provide specialized care, and network people to create power. These forces are real and make a competitive difference, even if some jobs are mostly okay to do via telework.

No sector of the economy makes this more obvious than leisure and hospitality. A real vacation cannot occur via Zoom. The hospitality sector relies on group social environments and in-person interaction. So, as the pandemic in the U.S. has morphed from a temporary break from normal into a drawn-out struggle to make it, no industry has been more impacted than leisure and hospitality.

This sector includes some really big players. The biggest 1 percent of hospitality businesses, like global hotel chains, make up 39 percent of the sector's employment. That said, 99 percent of leisure and hospitality businesses are small, like local arts venues and independent restaurants and bars. And, these small businesses still make up the majority of hospitality employment, 61 percent.

These business owners and workers are mostly women and people of color. They own 64 percent of accommodation and food services businesses. And, almost a quarter of hospitality workers are Hispanic or Latino, though they make up less than 18 percent of the U.S. population.

These businesses and workers have been seriously disrupted by pandemic-related shutdowns. The pain has not been spread evenly around the country. Places that are travel destinations and local governments that depend on tourism and events for revenue are taking a

hard hit. But, so far, the federal government response to balance that out has been majorly inadequate.

Just a handful of U.S. metros are highly exposed in the hospital sector. Beach communities, like Atlantic City, Ocean City, Myrtle Beach, and Maui have over a quart of their workforce in the sector, as does Las Vegas. But, of the 121 U.S. counties that have more than a fifth of their workforce in hospitality, 89 are actually in rural areas. This is places like the upper peninsula of Michigan and the western counties that surround national parks, like Yosemite and Arches. These rural areas have few alternative employment options.

This pandemic isn't easy for anybody, but if we want to come out with a functioning economy, we need to understand that the impacts are far worse for some than others. There are people, businesses, and places struggling, not because they are weak but because the time when we'll need their strength in our recovery has not yet come. We'll recover faster and stronger if we have a set of policies to carry us all through the next 2 years that includes everyone.

We can think about this in three parts. First, workers. The priority is to stabilize people's incomes and protect their health and safety in order to make it to the other side of the pandemic and keep the heartbeat of the economy going. That means Congress must act to continue expanded unemployment insurance, to keep people in their homes and their basic needs met.

Also, OSHA, states, and local governments should update standards for real workplace safety as people do go back to work with clear accountability, and Congress should provide funding for hazard pay. We also need congressional action to mandate health insurance and paid sick leave. Wishing is not going to isolate and treat workers who contract COVID-19.

The hardest part to hear is that for people out of work we need to plan now for the reality that a lot of these jobs are coming back. Policymakers, educators, and employers need to work

together to redesign pathways for career mobility.

Second, businesses. The Paycheck Protection Program has expired, but the pandemic is still ongoing. So, Congress needs to expand PPP relief, including to businesses that have already received one PPP loan. This is the only way to relieve pressure to reopen faster than is safe.

Both the PPP and similar state and local programs should prioritize addressing racial and geographic inequities in PPP administration so far. There's a lot of need and resources are finite. So, one way to get the most bang for the relief buck is to organize small businesses into corridor cohorts, through access to grants and technical assistance in order to boost the impact.

Third, and finally, places. We need community scale solutions, because these individual and sectoral impacts compound each other in places where the impact is concentrated. And, the good news is there is no shortage of actionable ideas for localities to implement.

We have specific proposals around housing, commercial real estate, digital equity, transportation, and more. If Congress doesn't do anything to further extend relief to those most impacted by the pandemic, they're setting up a much slower recovery, like decades instead of months or years, especially in rural communities and specific metropolitan areas.

You can read our overview outlining a three-part roadmap for recovery, with links to actionable ideas and data resources, at Brookings.edu/metro.

DEWS: And, now, here's Brookings Institution Press Director Bill Finan with Stephanie Muravchik and Jon Shields, authors of *Trump's Democrats*.

FINAN: Thank you, Fred. Stephanie and John, good to talk to you again.

MURAVCHIK: Nice to talk to you.

FINAN: *Trump's Democrats*—that's your new book—it answers this question that a lot of us have on our minds—have had on our minds since 2016, and have on our minds again here

in August of 2020. Why did some longtime Democratic voters, even those who had voted twice for Obama, vote for Trump?

You both went in search of an answer to that question, and you became political anthropologists. I've only known one other political scientist who did this, and he did work in the Middle East. And, you did this incredible thing. You went out and lived among the people who voted for Trump. Seems to me you're both ethnographers and journalists. And, you went to three places and lived there for a period of time—Ottumwa, Iowa; Elliott County, Kentucky; and Johnston, Rhode Island. How did you come to choose those three localities?

SHIELDS: One thing that I think has not been paid enough attention to is that a lot of the communities that voted for Obama and then flipped and voted for Trump have been loyal to the Democratic Party for a very long time. So, they're not merely places that voted for Obama and flipped. They're places that have voted regularly for Democrats going way back.

Many had not voted for a Republican presidential candidate since the eighties. Many others had not done so since the seventies. A handful of these place had not voted for a Republican candidate since prior to the New Deal. And, one community, one in which we studied—Elliott County—had never voted for a Republican since the county was formed back in the 19th century.

FINAN: I was just going to say—it said something about my prejudice, that you actually found a Democratic county in Kentucky.

SHIELDS: Right. It is sort of the last one. In fact, Elliott County is the whitest community that voted for Barack Obama. So, it is an outlier in many ways in Kentucky and where custom-built to talking about the Reagan Democrats and the Nixon Democrats, but the Trump Democrats are much more interesting.

In '72, Nixon won in a landslide, Reagan won in a landslide in 1984, but Trump lost the popular vote. There was no landslide in 2016.

FINAN: Right.

SHIELDS: And, yet he managed to win some of the most loyal Democratic communities in the country. So, this was a real puzzle to us, and we felt like, yeah, we needed to be anthropologists of a sort. We felt like we could learn things by living in these communities and absorbing the local culture. And, maybe Steph will say something about our method there and why we decided to do it.

MURAVCHIK: Well, we had questions, of course, but what we wanted to do was let our experiences guide the questions that we asked. So, we went in and we got to know voters, we got to know all kinds of people there, spent time interviewing people in sort of formal structured interviews, but also really wanted to—I think the method has been called soak and poke—so, we spent a lot of --

FINAN: What was it, again? Soak and poke?

MURAVCHIK: Soak and poke is that's the Fenno way of referring to just spending time not only on—in structured interviews but additionally hanging out in coffee shops, hanging out in diners, going to some bars, going to church services and talking to congregations, going to meetings of local city councils, town councils, county meetings, and so forth, and also more civic things—hanging out at the rec center in Rhode Island or a group of amateur dulcimer musicians and their practice sessions in Kentucky. That kind of thing, so that we could have a chance to be with people both one on one but also in groups, watching people interact with each other and how they were talking about politics to each other as well, just observing those kinds of interactions.

And, one thing that we had thought about is that when people do surveys and so forth, it's based on whatever theories they're bringing in, and those are the questions that they're going to ask voters. But, there's such a gulf in the country. There's such a cultural divide that it makes it hard to ask the questions to sort of understand people on their own terms. And, that was really what we were trying to educate ourselves about, to learn about when we were there.

FINAN: These are communities that you had never been to before, either, right? These were entirely new.

SHIELDS: Yeah. I mean, not only had we not been to these communities, we really hadn't spent time in any communities like them. So, they were pretty exotic and foreign to us, and that meant that we were often surprised by what we found, Bill, you know. They were not places that we were familiar with.

FINAN: One of the amazing things about this book is that you go in, you don't know these communities, and yet you have managed to find people who open up to you and talk to you, and you ask the right kinds of questions, too. And, what's reflected back are people who are very human and very alive and very real, too, which is not your typical political ethnography when you're reading that kind of thing.

SHIELDS: And, it wasn't always easy. I mean, this was not easy in all cases to get their trust. I mean, Stephanie did the case in Elliott, and maybe you want to speak to those challenges there. I mean, it took Steph a while to really get the trust of Appalachians who are very distrustful of outsiders.

MURAVCHIK: I think John's experience in Ottumwa and Rhode Island—we did the Rhode Island case (Inaudible) together. It was more similar in that we were able to first meet some local leaders and journalists and they helped introduce us to people, and also just hanging

out at coffee shops we got to meet people. And, once people understood what we were up to, often they felt like, oh, yes, I'm glad someone's here to listen to what I think about the country.

But, in Kentucky it was quite different. The voters there really had an experience of feeling that they had a history with outsiders coming in and misrepresenting them to the larger country. So, they felt like for a long time there have been outside do-gooders, journalists, scholars who come in and say, well, look at the funny hillbillies. And, that was not even a word that was in my vocabulary, but it was sure in their vocabulary. Look at the funny hillbillies. They're so strange and backwards, and they do these exotic things, and we're going to tell the rest of the country about them and mock them. And, so they were quite concerned, I think quite legitimately concerned about my presence at first.

And, so, there was a couple of people who let me get to know them a little bit, and as I did then they began to trust me and sort of vouch for me. And, one thing that I found really helpful was, after my first couple weeks there, was I brought our then 8-year-old son along with me. He's our youngest. And, I brought him partly to humanize me in the eyes of the people that I was talking to, that they could see me be just a mom. And, of course, he's very charming. And, so, sometimes he would engage people, and then I could engage them.

And, so, bit by bit I was able to get the trust of some critical people in the community who then vouched for me. And, in the end, still, there were people who really kept a distance and never lost their suspicion of what I was going to do and concerned that I would be disrespectful when I represented them to a broader audience.

But, enough people felt that that was not my goal, believed me when I said that is not my goal, that we were able to get actually quite a lot of people to talk.

SHIELDS: And, just for the record, Bill, we don't normally use our children in such

instrumental ways. You know that.

FINAN: One thing that really came through in the book is that the people you talked to weren't like specimens stuck on a board that you were observing and evaluating, as I said earlier, that very much we're all human beings. And, that's one of the great strengths of the book.

I know you went into this to look at individuals to understand the communities at as granular a level as you could, but, what you came out of it, though, with some generalizations to try to understand exactly what it is that has happened here, that we have this phenomena called Trump's Democrats.

And, one of the first themes that I see in the book and that you mentioned is that, first, Trump is not a political outsider to these folks. They recognize him in their community. You say these communities are Trumpian in a sense, those supporters. What do you mean by that?

MURAVCHIK: Trump seemed like a real aberration to us, but what we quickly learned was that in all three of these places he resembles local leaders that are very popular. All three places had histories of very powerful, long-serving, popular local level leaders that were Trumpian in many ways. They were grandiose, they were combative, they're thin-skinned, they're nepotistic, and that they pursue a kind of politics that is very transactional. It's not an ideological politics whatsoever. It's really based on that these political leaders are going to look out for, in very concrete ways, their supporters, and they expect back perfect loyalty.

And, so, this exchange of concrete goods, sometimes very small, sometimes larger, like a job, help with a speeding ticket or with some legal difficulty or something like that, or even just a ride, that these local level leaders help their supporters. And, in exchange, they really expect these local supporters to support them, to be loyal to them for the long haul, that this is an ongoing mutual relationship. And, in that sense, Trump must have seemed very familiar to

leaders that they already knew very well and very much liked.

SHIELDS: And, one reason that's true, Bill, is that these places have a long history of being dominated by political machines and political bosses. And, it's faded in some of the communities, but even in places like Ottumwa where it was weakest, that boss tradition, that machine tradition, still lives on in the memories and political imaginations of its citizens there, especially a lot of the old-timers.

And, it's a tradition that we forget about, and we forget about it partly because it's long been dead in major metropolitan cities. It's been gone from even the city of Chicago where it persisted the longest since the 1970s. But, this tradition had a longer life. It continued in some of these more remote Democratic hamlets, partly because there are fewer opponents and enemies who took umbrage and didn't like it.

So, Trump is not merely another Republican businessperson turned boss. Right? He's not like Mitt Romney. He's not like Meg Whitman. Trump's persona is really one that resembles not the bosses of corporate America but the bosses that once ruled Democratic political machines.

So, one of the interesting things and strange things about being in these places is we felt like it was a kind of window into the old Democratic Party in a funny way. Right? It was sort of a window into the party as it used to exist and we've sort of forgotten about, because, again, we've exterminated it from the places progressives tend to live these days.

FINAN: Right. There's this transactional politics that's just taken as a given. Seems to me like these are communities, too, where the use of the term quid pro quo isn't looked at as a negative either. Something else to bring out, too, is that these communities all have what you call an honor culture, and Trump exemplifies that or has elements of that as his political behavior.

MURAVCHIK: So, honor cultures are common pretty much in every time and place and

every society that we could think about with the exception perhaps of professional and academic circles. It's a kind of culture in which people, especially men, feel that it's imperative that they defend a reputation for toughness and that they absolutely cannot tolerate any sort of insult—not any sort of assault but any sort of insult, even, and that it must be met with a kind of counterpunch.

In all three of the places, there is a very strong lingering honor culture that you can see at just local levels. So, for instance, in Rhode Island where there's a very kind of macho honor culture that underlies a lot of their interactions, there were some older gentlemen at the coffee shop that got into a discussion about Trump and got into an argument about it, and it almost came to blows. They were like, let's go out to the parking lot, we're going to solve it out in the parking lot. And, fortunately, some other guys—these are all a bunch of retirees—intervened and were able to defuse the situation.

But, that way of solving conflict but also of, well, you insulted the person that I like and so forth and now I'm going to respond is not just acceptable but expected, both in Ottumwa and Rhode Island. There's a version of it as well in Kentucky. It's less macho. It tends to be very polite, and it has kind of a southern inflection down there but the same basic idea.

SHIELDS: And, it shapes the political class and the culture in these places. So, going back to Johnston, which we should mention is a very Italian-American town, one of the most Italian-American communities in the country, the mayor there, Joe Polisena, is very faithful to the honor culture.

And, we sat down with Joe and he told us, he said, look, I'm a street fighter when it comes to politics. And, he said, look, you can't be nice to people when they're taking shots at you. And, we said, well, why not? Why can't you take Michelle Obama's advice? When they go

low, we go high. Why can't you follow the First Lady's leadership style? He said, no, you can't do that, because they'll just roll over you. It'll show that you're weak.

So, there's not an alternative leadership style that works in an honor culture. If you don't defend your social reputation for toughness, you'll be roughed up. And, this is very much Trump. Trump divides the whole world into strong people and weak people, and, for Trump, you have to be strong all the time, you know. You can never apologize. You can never do any sort of course correction. You can never do anything that suggests any kind of weakness.

It suggests to us that there's really different political norms that govern our national politics that are quite different from the ones that govern these local communities. Trump was often rightly criticized for violating the norms of our politics for really expanding the zone of acceptable behavior. And, we think that's a great danger and a great problem. But, what those critics haven't recognized is that he didn't exactly violate the norms of our politics exactly, right. He violated the norms of our national politics.

In local places politics looks quite different. Political norms are quite different, and this is really important to help us understand why some democratic communities have such a different sense of Trump. In the college town we live in, Trump's behavior, his relentless counterpunching, his machismo, his tough-guy act—we read it, often, as a sign that he's got some disordered mind. He's hopelessly thin-skinned. He suffers from toxic masculinity, the term one hears a lot these days.

But, in the communities we visited, his behavior's totally normal. There's nothing aberrant about it. There's nothing weird about it. That's just how one should behave, because one needs to respect the honor culture if one wants to be successful.

FINAN: So, one of those national political themes that Trump used, too, is America First.

You know, it was interesting to me how that's transformed itself at the local level, too, that people heard that and then, as you say in your book, they hear Ottumwa First, they hear Elliott County First. Can you talk a little bit about that?

MURAVCHIK: Yeah. I think one thing that we found really interesting, that before there ever was Trump on the national political scene, or at least as a serious contender on the national political scene, the people in the communities that we talked to were thinking about their own communities this way.

So, we discovered in Johnston, Rhode Island they had long had a slogan Johnston First. And, we discovered in Ottumwa that there were no Toyotas and Hondas on the road. And, in fact, it's very difficult to buy a Toyota or a Honda in Ottumwa, Iowa. You have to go to Des Moines to get that. I think now they have a new dealership that sells them.

But, there was an organizer. He had bought a Kia and he couldn't park it anywhere near his work, because if people saw that, they would immediately call him out for it. What are you doing buying this foreign car? This was a town very much shaped by the United Auto Workers and so forth.

And, even in Kentucky sometimes the older people in Kentucky would talk about foreigners. And, by foreigners they mean people from Ohio. Like, they would mean like other Whites from Ohio who might retire and try to buy, let's say, a cabin in their area. Sometimes they would even mean other White Appalachians from a few counties over that would come into their county for some reason, and they might be called foreigners, usually by the older people there.

So, the stress on America First that Trump put really resonated with these people, we think, because their nationalism is a kind of localism writ large. It's grounded in their local identities. And, these places are places where the people we talked to have their primary political

allegiance to is to their hometown, to their county, that really shaped the way the appeal an America First type language had for them.

SHIELDS: Yeah, we were struck by the fact, Bill, that their political identities are really shaped by the local political boundaries. For them, local political boundaries are not just lines on a map, they really constitute in some sense their civic identifies, right, because they have a deep loyalty to the town that they live in. And, sometimes we saw this in all kinds of ways.

I mean, in Kentucky, for example, there was a scandal because there was a job that was offered—it was a good job in the local school district that was offered to someone from a neighboring county. And, that was seen as inappropriate, because that job should go to a local, because there's a sense that local tax dollars and goods and jobs should go to people who are really part of the community and not outsiders who live in a neighboring county.

Likewise, in Johnston they recently built a new recreation center that they're very proud of. I think it's got the only public indoor basketball court in Rhode Island, and so it's popular. It attracts citizens from neighboring communities. But, when the courts get really crowded, the director of the recreation center makes sure that the citizens of Johnston aren't pushed off the court.

So, if you're from Cranston or North Providence, you've got to wait your turn, because, again, it's a sort of a Johnson First ethos there. And, that means at the recreation center they have to check IDs to see where you're from, and it becomes almost like a border checkpoint, in a way.

So, there are these very intense place-based loyalties. And, I do think America First is a kind of extension of that local ethos to the national level. I think their very strong place-based identities also helps us solve a puzzle that emerges in a lot of the research on Trump voting.

Obviously, there's been tons of interesting, good scholarship that's been written on the

2016 election, and that literature has produced a puzzling paradox. On the one hand, it's found that studies that use community level data—so, studies that look at places rather than individuals have found that places that—counties especially—that have really been struggling that have various kinds of economic problems and social problems went overwhelmingly for Trump. So, that's one body of work.

But, then there's a lot of, of course, voting behavior data, survey-based data, that's looked at individuals, not counties, and it finds only a kind of weaker relationship or a very uneven relationship between economic distress and one's personal problems and Trump voting.

Some scholars have said, look, we should pay attention to the individual level voting studies, right. After all, people vote, places don't, counties don't vote. We have a very different read of this. Because people have such strong place-based identities, because they care so much about the welfare of Ottumwa and Johnston and Elliott, and those places are really struggling, it's not surprising to us that they voted for Trump, even if they themselves weren't personally out of work or struggling, that they care about the welfare of those places.

FINAN: That was one of the most startling insights for me, too, because I read those studies, too. The individual Trump voter usually had a higher average income, right. So, how could this be? Because, they don't seem to have these difficulties when you aggregated it into the community. And, I think that's an important component of this book and helps us better understand what happened in 2016 and what, again, might happen in 2020.

But, one of the questions that came up to me in reading it is that so many of the themes that you mentioned can also be found in large urban cities—the party boss, the loyalty, the love of neighborhood. So, why isn't Philadelphia,—which is right next door to me—Detroit, or Baltimore voting Trump?

SHIELDS: It's a good question. Well, one of the things we tried to do is show that this isn't just a rural phenomenon, actually, and there's been a lot made of rural consciousness and its importance by some political scientists. We both think that work is interesting. We found some evidence of that in our work. I think the rural-urban distinction is actually overdrawn. Because, you're right, there are working-class enclaves, especially in larger cities that have these very intense place-based loyalties.

There's a wonderful ethnography that came out before Trump, written about a White working-class neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. And, she found a lot of the same kinds of things we found. People like to buy American cars. They have some intense localism. There's a kind of deep insularity and provincialism. Or, in our case, right, we studied Johnston, which is a suburb of Rhode Island, part of the big metropolitan center.

So, I think there are these neighborhoods in places, Bill. I think that as cities have gentrified, there's fewer of them. But, I do think that's true that there are these enclaves inside of metropolitan areas that are very intensely devoted to a sense of place.

There's lots of people in our class, college-educated people, who really like living in Brookline, Massachusetts, and they're neighborly and they're involved in community associations, and one might say they're good localists in some ways. But, it's different. They're often people who would be happy to leave that place for some other bougie place like it, right, and be able to sort of create community there. They don't have the sense that that's the only place they can really live out their identity to the fullest or where they'll really be at home, right.

A person from Brookline will be happy moving to Brooklyn and would be happy moving to Old Town Alexandria. They're going to be equally at home in all those places. A Johnstonian isn't going to be at home in Ottumwa, and an Ottumwan isn't going to be at home in Elliott.

Those are all foreign places and different places.

I also think, of course, we're looking at White votes here. And, I think if you look at Latinos or African Americans, you might find similar kinds of allegiances to neighborhood. And, they didn't vote for Trump for other reasons, but obviously there are some class-based parallels across race there, which I think are important.

FINAN: I'm glad that you brought that in, because you discuss that in the book, too, like honor cultures. You see that in some African American communities. It's been teased out before. But, you don't see this wholesale turn toward Trump there.

MURAVCHIK: I think, for obvious reasons, Trump's appeal is much greater among White voters than non-White voters. But, there still, even so, I think because of these shared cultural elements, this honor culture attachment to localism, you do get some surprising bleed over.

In other words, he has made some inroads among some Black and Latino voters, and most famously, of course, is Kanye West. Kanye West said of Trump he's my brother, he's dragon energy. And, it's not just that Kanye West is a very colorful character, it's also that he identified it. He's dragon energy. He gets that sense of shared commitment to this vision of masculinity.

So, I think that even though obviously Trump's appeal is going to be limited among voters of color, there is some inroads, and it may well be precisely because of what White working-class people share culturally with Black and Latino working-class people. And, so there is, I believe, more than one out of four Latino voters cast a vote for Trump. And, it may well have been things like that that made him feel familiar or appealing.

SHIELDS: Just to add to this quickly, I mean, the ideal male in a lot of hip-hop music is

somewhat Trumpian. That person is brazen and tough, has a lot of machismo. And, so, it's not so surprising in some ways that one of America's greatest hip-hop artists would find some real kinship in Donald Trump.

FINAN: We're talking today near the end of August. Joe Biden is the Democratic Party's presidential candidate. Has the party and Biden made moves that could bring Ottumwa, Elliott County, and Johnston City back into the Democratic Party camp?

SHIELDS: Yeah, it's a hard question for us to answer in some ways. We'll give you some of our best guess, Bill. I mean, our honest answer is we don't know the extent to which these folks can be folded back in. One thing that's happened is, since 2016 they're watching a lot more Fox News, and they like Fox because it's the network where they think Trump gets a fair shake. Even if Trump doesn't think that of Fox News, they tend to.

So, one of the questions on our mind is, to what degree are they becoming not just more loyal to Trump since 2016 but more loyal to the Republican Party? On the other hand, I do think that there's an opportunity to appeal to them. They're not Tea Party libertarians, for one. There's a kind of communitarian streak to them.

The places we visited, they really honor local taxpayers. When we first drove up to the Johnston municipal building, there were some signs out front—the best parking spaces were reserved for taxpayers. So, taxpayers have sort of local honor in these places, because they make regular sacrifices for the community.

So, these aren't sort of dyed-in-the-wool libertarians. They're not anti-government in some philosophical way. And, that makes sense, right. Traditionally, they've been Democrats. Ottumwa's a very pro-union town. Elliott County has depended for decades on largesse and help from the federal government to sustain its tobacco crops and its coal industry. So, I think in

many ways these are folks who should like the Democratic Party. And, I think the good news is they're not mere racists.

One of the things we try to do in the book is to show that their White identity isn't their only identity or maybe even their most important social identity. They also have thick class-based identities, and they have strong place-based identities. And, so, the Democratic Party might just need to practice a sort of different kind of identity politics in some ways to appeal to these voters. And, if they have a more three-dimensional view of them it'll be a lot easier.

I think if they're just read as mere racists, it's too easy to write them off as irredeemable deplorables. And, there is some of that mood right now in the country among progressives. There's a tendency to write people, even in their own circles, out of a sort of circle of decency. So, we would encourage them not to do that. These people are more complicated than they might seem.

MURAVCHIK: Yeah, I mean, I think one thing that the Democrats could choose to respond to or to speak to that they didn't is the class-based identities. And, so, for instance, the choice of Kamala Harris is probably not one that will thrill the people that we spoke to.

One thing that was interesting to us was listening to the other kinds of politicians that they liked when we would always say so is there any other people on the national stage that appeals to you, or the local stage. And, these tended to be places where they're Bernie-supporter places over Hilary Clinton in the 2016 Democratic primaries. And, particularly that was true of Rhode Island and Kentucky, of Elliott County and Johnston.

And, when we asked people why they liked Bernie Sanders, they're not talking about policies. They liked his style. They felt like he has a kind of unbuttoned style that seemed authentic and sincere to them in the way that Trump does, reminiscent of the way Trump does.

And, one thing they really didn't like about Hilary Clinton was her professionalism. Observers that I heard tended to focus more on her gender, saying, well, these Democrats—voters were uncomfortable with a woman in power. But, we didn't see a lot of evidence for that.

What they were uncomfortable with her sort of class standing. And, there was one guy in Rhode Island who was talking to us. He said, you know, when Hilary Clinton talks to me, it's like she's talking to me from up here, and he lifted his hand up over his head, and this implication that she was sort of speaking down.

And, so, Kamala Harris in some ways is also very much a product of—even though she has a remarkable personal story—she has a similar kind of professional style, and I think that style isn't as appealing to the voters as a kind of more working-class style, even if it is only a style, you know. Obviously, Trump is not a working-class person, but he does things that feel culturally familiar to the people that we talk to.

SHIELDS: The challenge, though, is that while they should be mindful of the class signals they send, they also don't want to embrace the Trumpian honor culture, either, because it's so --

FINAN: Mm-hmm.

SHIELDS:—corrosive to our national deliberative nor And, there's sort of a tough walk. They have to walk here, right, between not sounding like a button-down person of the professional class on the one hand, but also then on the other not being a Trumpian, right, and that's a tough rope to walk.

We also think that the Democrats have to also think beyond 2020 and ask themselves a sort of more existential question, which is, what kind of party do they want to be? There's lots of ways to win the next election. They might win it simply because of COVID and racial tensions

and other kinds of political events that seem to be harming Trump's popularity at the moment as well as his handling of them, obviously.

There's lots of ways to win the next election. They might get a lot of suburban Republicans and independents who tip Pennsylvania and some of these other places for Biden and Harris. But, they still have to ask themselves the basic existential question, which is, what sort of party do they want to be, and where pointedly do they want to be a part of the working class?

Do they want to be a broad-based party of the working class, that is, a working-class party that assembles Blacks, Latinos, and Whites in a coalition? Do they in some sense want to rebuild the New Deal coalition, which has been crumbling for decades? Do they want to embark on that project? And, if they do, if the answer's yes, they've got to think well beyond this election, because that's a big mountain to climb.

FINAN: Your final comments here, I think, helped reveal how rich your book is, because when I received your manuscript I was like—I immediately started reading it. Because, for me, Trump had been reduced to caricatures, right.

SHIELDS: Mm-hmm.

FINAN: And, your book goes a long way to stripping away the caricature and putting three dimensions to these people in trying to understand them. And, as you point out, too, that 40 percent of the electorate makes up those people with shared attributes that voted for Trump. So, we need to realize who they are and listen to them and not just dismiss them. The book is *Trump's Democrats*. Thanks, Stephanie and John. You've written a great book, one of the major contributions to our understanding of what happened in 2016, what might happen in 2020, also. So, thank you for coming by to talk today.

SHIELDS: Thank you, Bill. We appreciate it.

MURAVCHIK: Thank you very much.

DEWS: You can find *Trump's Democrats*, published by the Brookings Institution Press, wherever you like to find books.

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