



WTH do we do about cancel culture? Debating Confederate statues, law and the new mob rules

Episode #61 | July 1, 2020 | Danielle Pletka, Marc Thiessen, and Jonathan Horn

Danielle Pletka: Hi, I'm Danielle Pletka.

Marc Thiessen: I'm Marc Thiessen.

Danielle Pletka: Welcome to our podcast, "What the Hell Is Going On?" Okay, Marc, don't forget the part about subscribers.

Marc Thiessen: Yes, so if you are listening to the podcast for the first time, or even if you're a frequent listener and haven't subscribed yet, we urge you to go on Apple, or wherever you get this podcast, subscribe, rate us and tell your friends.

Danielle Pletka: Good, and now what the hell is going on?

Marc Thiessen: What the hell is going on, Dany. As I look out on the TV every day, I do wonder what the hell is going on, because it's like we are in the midst of the biggest social unrest since the 1960s. First it was the looting, and the fires and burning down buildings, and now we've got mobs going after statues, tearing down not just Confederate memorials, but in San Francisco, they tore down George Washington, and wrapped him in a burning American flag. They're going after Ulysses S. Grant, they're going after Teddy Roosevelt-

Danielle Pletka: Abolitionists in Boston.

Marc Thiessen: Abolitionists, abolitionists in Boston. They want to move the Emancipation Memorial in Washington that was paid for and erected by free slaves.

Danielle Pletka: De Blasio in New York, I don't need to tell you this is stupid, because saying de Blasio-

Marc Thiessen: You just said de Blasio.

Danielle Pletka: Exactly.

Marc Thiessen: Need we say more.

Danielle Pletka: Wants to move Teddy Roosevelt.

- Marc Thiessen: Who by the way, is the president for those, because there seems to be a lot of historical ignorance going on spreading around this day, a pandemic you might even say of historical ignorance. Teddy Roosevelt was the first president to invite in a black man to dine in the White House. There had previously been presidents who had invited black men to meetings in offices, but he actually invited Booker T. Washington to dine with his family, which was considered in the south to be a heresy. And he took heat for it for the rest of his life, and we're going to take down his statue, because it depicts him ... The statue in front of the Natural History Museum, which was started with his trophies that he had collected in his hunting expeditions including across the American plain with Native Americans, and including in Africa with African guides. And the statues depict a Native American and an African guide. Oh my gosh. There's somebody in some sort of tribal outfit in the statue, so therefore we have to take it down.
- Danielle Pletka: Okay, so let's divide this up. Because I think you and I both recognize that there actually is an intelligent argument here, and then there's the mob.
- Marc Thiessen: Yes.
- Danielle Pletka: It is really not unreasonable for us to have a national conversation about why it is that there are so many monuments to the Confederacy around the country. Many of which were put up well after the end of the Civil War. That is a conversation, just speaking for myself, I feel very comfortable with. If you are-
- Marc Thiessen: I think we both agree that many of them should be taken down.
- Danielle Pletka: Exactly. Not of course by ropes and mobs.
- Marc Thiessen: No.
- Danielle Pletka: But by the city.
- Marc Thiessen: By city, by legislation, by vote of the people, I would be perfectly happy and even thrilled if they would rename some of these military bases. I would love to see Fort Bragg become Fort Bradley for Omar Bradley and some of these great heroes. Medal of honor winners, there's lots of people that are worth of naming, but the problem with that is you would then be celebrating the greatness of America if you renamed them for those people and the mob doesn't want to celebrate the greatness of America.
- Danielle Pletka: Well, not everybody is a rampaging idiot. Although, we've discovered there are many more than we realized. But there's a good conversation to be had, so again these confederate statues represent something. As we've both said, this has been a time where first of all, we've had more than enough time to think on any number of challenging topics. When I try to contextualize that within my own history, I grew up here in part, but I didn't come from America. If somebody told me that my father, who was born in Austria, that in Austria where Hitler was born, they wanted to put up a statue to Hitler, I'd say, "You know, no. That's offensive." For those who the highlight of their career was in fact a war to defend slavery, I can understand the perspective of people who find that offensive, and points to them for giving us an opportunity to rethink this.

- Danielle Pletka: The question before us is that slippery slope question.
- Marc Thiessen: Yes, which Donald Trump raised.
- Danielle Pletka: Some years ago.
- Marc Thiessen: A couple years ago. Megan McArdle had a great column in the Washington Post about this-
- Danielle Pletka: We'll [link](#) that for you in the transcript.
- Marc Thiessen: Absolutely, but Megan McArdle, my colleague at the Post had a great column recently where she pointed out that Trump said this, and all the historians came out and said, "That's ridiculous, of course we can make a distinction between Robert E. Lee and George Washington." Apparently, we can't. He's sort of been vindicated.
- Marc Thiessen: Again, I think he's wrong to defend the names of these military bases, and to do it so vigorously, was really off putting to me. "We're never going to change the names of these bases where so many Americans went off to war." I don't think most of those Americans give a-
- Danielle Pletka: Were inspired by the Confederacy.
- Marc Thiessen: Inspired by the Confederacy. No, what they're fighting for were the ideals of the Union and that was forged by Washington and Jefferson and the idea that all men are created equal and we're going to go slay the people who want to enslave us and our friends. I've got no problem with changing those names.
- Danielle Pletka: Exactly. But if you take the problem is where this argument is going. Again, agreeing about the Confederacy, but then putting a full stop after that and saying, taking the morals of today, taking the standards of today and applying them retroactively is insane. History is replete, overflowing with examples of great people from Albert Einstein to Nobel Prize winning authors, to I could go on and on and on, not to speak of political leaders who were anti-Semites, said something anti-black, were hostile to Native Americans, were hostile to some particular grouping or others. Once you start down that road, where do you stop?
- Marc Thiessen: They want to tear them down too. You just saw that they want to tear down ... In London-
- Danielle Pletka: Winston Churchill.
- Marc Thiessen: In London, they want to tear down the statue of Churchill, the man who saved Great Britain, Britain would not exist without Winston Churchill, and they want to take through his history and pick his most unfortunate beliefs that were widely held at the time, if he were alive today I'm sure would not hold.
- Danielle Pletka: My other favorite in that particular bid of ridiculousness is the other person whose removal is being muted Mohandas K. Gandhi. Who was quite a racist, and yet the Mahatma, he really actually contributed a lot towards civil disobedience, towards the independence of India.

- Marc Thiessen: They're rejecting him in more ways than one. You talk about peaceful protest and non-violence. We've given up on that entirely.
- Danielle Pletka: That's the absurdity of this. Because again, we're talking about statues, but why should we just talk about statues. I'll give you an enormously mundane example, Agatha Christie, I used to love Agatha Christie when I was a kid. I read all of her books. Agatha Christie was a woman of her times. She was a casual anti-Semite, made derogatory comments about brown people and black people. Her books are to be found around public libraries the world over. Why should her books be in public libraries? Shouldn't we start removing these books from public libraries?
- Marc Thiessen: We're going to go to the book burnings now.
- Danielle Pletka: Isn't that the logical extension of what I'm talking about?
- Marc Thiessen: Right, of course it is. Where does this come from? What these protestors are after, they're not after the Confederacy, they're not even after just America, they are against Western civilization. They want to tear down Western civilization. Where did this all start? This psychology of going after Western civilization? In the universities.
- Danielle Pletka: Howard Zinn.
- Marc Thiessen: Yeah. It was where, "We're not going to study old white men anymore. We got to throw out all these books, because they're written by white men." I'm sorry, this is the source of the enlightenment, this is the source of all the ideas that yes written by white men, because white men were in power then, but their ideas have spread and led to the creation of a country that truly is built on an idea of the enlightenment that everyone is created equal, and we're not fully there yet.
- Danielle Pletka: No we're not. We can always get better, but there's also a question here of perspective. Americans increasingly we hear people very loudly talking about the disgusting origins of this nation, *The New York Times* has devoted its entire quote 1619 project toward tearing down the notion of what the Revolutionary War stood for, what the creation of the United States of America was about, and turned it into something that is debasing, something that is a terrible tale. And the lack of perspective is simply staggering. Yes, there is racism in our country. Yes, there is bigotry in our country. Yes, we can always get better, because that's what Americans do. But people, you have not gotten out enough if you think we are the worst in the world. There is racism in Africa, there is racism on the Indian subcontinent. India is built on a cast system that is-
- Marc Thiessen: It's like apartheid.
- Danielle Pletka: ... intrinsically racist. All of these countries, but throughout Europe as well have problems with race. The big difference between us and them is we confront our problems, and they don't.
- Marc Thiessen: And we also have a government that was built around a system to move, to make progress away from that and towards greater freedom and greater equality for everybody, and it's been on an inexorable path in that direction for over 200 years. Slavery was always seen in the context of colonialism. It was the fuel for colonialism for expansion exploitation of people all over the world, and the British were involved

with it, but so were the Belgians, and so were the Germans and so were the French and others like that. Now we're going after the anti-colonialists. Now we're going after the founding fathers who inherited slavery as a vestige of British colonialism, and created a country on a principle that said slavery is unacceptable because all men are created equal, and it took us a long time to get to the point where we had to fight a civil war in order to complete that process of including everybody and emancipating everybody, and we're still on a path towards greater equality and greater acceptance, and stamping out racism.

- Marc Thiessen: My pastor has a saying that he talks about when he talks about himself as a sinner and I like it, because it really speaks to me. He says, "I'm not who I want to be, but I'm not who I used to be." And I think as Americans, we're not yet who we want to be, but we're not who we used to be, and we're moving in the right direction. The idea that the founding is something to be attacked.
- Danielle Pletka: To be attacked and to be erased, to be canceled. This is insanity.
- Marc Thiessen: Canceled, there you go, that's it. It's the cancel culture.
- Danielle Pletka: Right, it's now the cancellation of history. So we have a perfect person, because a lot of the conversations have centered around the Confederacy, which are much more legitimate conversations, they center around a man named Robert E. Lee, who those of us who live in Virginia, know extraordinarily well.
- Marc Thiessen: George Washington.
- Danielle Pletka: And George Washington, and we are very lucky to have with us Jonathan Horn, who has written two books. The first, *The Man Who Would Not Be Washington* is a biography of Robert E. Lee, and he has a new book coincidentally and luckily for us called *Washington's End*, which is about the post-presidential life of George Washington that just came out. He was a White House speech writer along with-
- Marc Thiessen: Worked with me in the Bush administration, was one of the president's favorite speech writers, one of the most talented writers, and I knew as soon as we left, when you look at everybody, where they were going to go in life and who was going to be successful, he was clearly going to become a great writer and a great thinker, and he certainly has.
- Danielle Pletka: Enjoy our conversation with Jonathan Horn.
- Marc Thiessen: Jonathan, welcome to the podcast.
- Jonathan Horn: Thanks so much for having me.
- Marc Thiessen: Great. Well, you are the author of two terrific books including *The Man Who Would Not Be Washington*, a biography of Robert E. Lee, which was your previous book. You've noted that we've got this whole controversy over confederate memorials, you noted that Robert E. Lee opposed Confederate memorials. Tell us about that.
- Jonathan Horn: That's true. Robert E. Lee did oppose building Confederate memorials in the years after the Civil War, and the reason we know that is he was asked during these years about various different memorial projects. And he always said, "Now is not the right

time. It might anger the victorious Federals. Or the south was too poor to build memorials." And asked when the right time might be he seemed to hint that the answer was never. In fact, he went so far as to say that he wouldn't even preserve battle fields where the Civil War was fought, and the reason was he believed that countries that hid reminders of sectional strife moved on quicker from actual sectional strife by putting on hiding signs of the war. In fact, he in a sense believed that reminders of the war might bring back the passions that the country had experienced during the war.

- Marc Thiessen: Boy, was that right. If you take a look around America today, that's certainly true.
- Jonathan Horn: Right. Exactly. But he also had another reason. You might say why did he want to put aside that? In a sense he wanted to get things back to how they had been before the war as quickly as possible, and I think that has some contemporary value to us today as we discuss what to do. I think most people would agree we wouldn't be in favor of putting up a memorial to Robert E. Lee, but the question is, what do you do with the memorial that's already standing? And that's the question that's before us today in some sense in terms of why did Robert E. Lee want to hide reminders of the Civil War? Well you really wanted to go back to the way things were before the war as much as possible.
- Marc Thiessen: It's interesting, your book about Lee is called *The Man Who Would Not Be Washington*. He was offered the opportunity to be the commander of the Union forces, wasn't he? So he had one foot in the Union camp before deciding to join the rebels.
- Jonathan Horn: That's right. And so many people on both sides of the Civil War in Richmond, and in Washington D.C. saw Robert E. Lee as a symbolic connection to George Washington. He was the son of George Washington's most famous eulogist, the man who had written the words, "First in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen." And Robert E. Lee had married the daughter of George Washington's adopted son. And on the eve of the Civil War, people saw tremendous value in these connections, and one of the appeals they made to Robert E. Lee when they asked him to take command of the Union army was that the country looks to you as the representative of the Washington family.
- Jonathan Horn: But of course, ultimately Robert E. Lee turned down that command because he said he could not go to war with his native state. And he was told that he had made the greatest mistake of his life.
- Danielle Pletka: And though he was a great general, perhaps one wonders whether he ever looked back and judged whether he had made a mistake. Did he?
- Jonathan Horn: He didn't really look back on it that way, in a sense he convinced himself that there had been no other option in that moment. In fact, as he went forward, he actually altered his beliefs. In the years before the Civil War, he actually believed that secession was illegal, he thought that secession was essentially treason, but as the war progressed, he came to believe that secession was legal, and he believed that the actions of Virginia carried along its citizens including him.
- Jonathan Horn: Now it's also true to note, that some Virginians made other choices. Some Virginians stayed loyal to the Union so other Virginians felt they did have a choice, but as for Lee himself, he felt that he never did have a choice.

- Danielle Pletka: So we have all of these Confederate statues and these monuments to various elements of the Confederacy, we do in fact all over in Virginia where Marc and I both live have Confederate battlefields that are national parks, that the taxpayer administers. We have military bases that are named after Confederates. It's a little bit weird actually, because I think Robert E. Lee's admonition is the one that most warring parties take, which is A, one side won, and one side lost, and B, you tend not to celebrate the loser. It's a little bit funny. What's the provenance of all of this?
- Jonathan Horn: Most of these memorials went up in the years after the war. Many of them started around 1890, and continued in the years after that into 1920 into that time period if you date most of the memorials. And it was a period in which people really were in a sense romanticizing and glorifying the cause of the south, and it's a period of course that we also date the term lost cause to, and that really was of course making the war less about slavery, and more about glorifying the people who fought it.
- Jonathan Horn: And I guess, I think an important point as we think about these memorials is they say more about the people who put them up than they do about the people they show. They show that well after the Civil War Americans continued to glorify the Confederacy, and romanticized the Confederacy. Now of course, that is its own form of history. It says something about the mindset of this country. In some sense, when we say these statues don't really represent history, or they do represent history, well they do represent a history, it's just not necessarily the history that you might think it is when you first look at the statue.
- Danielle Pletka: So you talk about two things, and I have two separate questions for you, one is the lost cause, or for aficionados of "Gone With The Wind," the cause, which didn't just glorify the question of the Confederacy, but also romanticized slavery, and romanticized this notion that some slaves, perhaps not all, but some slaves led these cushy lives, when in fact slavery in and of itself is kind of definitional. That coincided with a period of Jim Crow in American history, should that be troubling to us?
- Jonathan Horn: Well, I think when you look at the statues, I think in some cases, in many cases these statues of course are offensive to us today. I don't think I know anybody who would favor putting up a memorial to the Confederacy today, or a memorial to Robert E. Lee, so in that sense it is troubling to us, but the question is what do you do with a memorial that's already up, that's been standing for more than a century?
- Jonathan Horn: And that's of course a more complicated question, because as I said, it's not you're going to lose Robert E. Lee from the history books, but what you do lose, and what I think is sort of ironic, is you lose something that actually many of the protesters say they want to emphasize, which is that our country continued to romanticize, and glorify the Confederacy years after the Civil War took place.
- Marc Thiessen: Let me play devil's advocate with you because Dany, and I are foreign policy people, so we very often celebrated the toppling of statues. We saw the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein after Iraq was liberated. After the Cold War and the Soviet Union collapsed, they pulled down the Berlin Wall, and they also pulled down the statues of Lennon and Marx and Stalin. Is this-
- Danielle Pletka: We felt really good about that.
- Marc Thiessen: And we felt really good about that. Is this sort of an overdue equivalent of that?

- Jonathan Horn: Well, first of all I would argue that currently, until three weeks ago we were not living under the equivalent of Saddam Hussein, thankfully. And not living under the equivalent of Stalin. We have processes by which if we want to take down these statues, they can be taken down by local governments, and I don't think anyone denies the right of local communities to make these decisions for themselves. That's where the decisions should be made, but the decisions can't be made in this country by mobs, because unlike Iraq, we were not living under a brutal dictator. We have institutions, we have systems, we have mechanisms that we can use to make these decisions in thoughtful ways, and I really do believe that good people can disagree on what to do with these memorials.
- Jonathan Horn: As for myself, as I said, I would like to put them in context, I would like to tell the stories of why the memorials were put up. I think that actually serves the purpose of helping to explain where we are at this moment in history, but I can also see people making the opposite argument, but we can't make any argument, or have any thoughtful discussion as long as mobs are just tearing down the memorials at their own whim.
- Danielle Pletka: You're not going to find any disagreement from me and Marc, and that goes to the most objectionable of these statues. Again, it's a very, very fraught issue though. You've written about history, and of course the prism through which history is viewed changes increasingly quickly. And that at the end of the day is part of the challenge that we face. Sometimes when I'm in Europe, in Italy you can still find some very small towns where there's a statue of Mussolini in the center. And I got to say, even though Mussolini was less terrible than Hitler, yeah, my feeling is it probably shouldn't be there. As you say, I wouldn't go and tear it down myself or enlist my children to do it, but these things do represent a particular perspective. I think the real challenge is where you stop. Where does so okay, Robert E. Lee, we can all agree. What about George Washington? Didn't he own slaves? What do you think?
- Jonathan Horn: Of course George Washington did own slaves, as did many of our founding fathers, and of course a few years ago when we were having this discussion, Donald Trump made the argument that if you started with Robert E. Lee, you would end up with George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and everybody in the country had a good laugh at our president and wrote op-eds explaining the obvious differences between Robert E. Lee and George Washington. Can you draw a distinction between Robert E. Lee and George Washington? Of course you can draw a distinction, and we should draw a distinction. Robert E. Lee made a decision to go to war against the Union that George Washington had forged.
- Jonathan Horn: Now, will we draw that distinction? I'm not so sure. I guess here are three reasons why I'm not so sure. The first reason is that there's been an increasing push by certain historians and *The New York Times* especially to push a narrative that our founding fathers fought the American Revolution for the cause of slavery. And I don't agree with that interpretation at all, and it certainly is not true for George Washington, but it is a growing movement.
- Danielle Pletka: Yeah, *The New York Times*.
- Marc Thiessen: The 1619 project. And the reporter who led that, if you go to her Twitter page, because she's been cheering on the Iconoclast, but it has July 4, 1776 crossed out and 1619 re-imposed over it as the true founding of America.

- Jonathan Horn: Correct, so that's the push to say that people like George Washington fought the revolution for the cause of slavery, and if that sounds familiar, that is what the Confederacy was fighting for. They were fighting to set up a republic dedicated to the cause of securing human bondage. That is not what our founding fathers were fighting for. George Washington believed and hoped for an eventual end to slavery, and he actually favored legislative emancipation. He didn't know how to get there, but he supported it.
- Jonathan Horn: There's also another reason why I'm skeptical that we can draw very good distinctions, and the second reason is because we are at a point where we are increasingly judging figures from the past according to our present value systems. And that is just a very dangerous way to look at the past. And of course, we ourselves won't necessarily be looked upon favorably 60 years from now. It's just very difficult, impossible standard for any historical figure to meet.
- Jonathan Horn: And the third reason why I'm skeptical about lines being drawn is right not we have, as we previously discussed, we have mobs making these decisions for us. It's not really a climate when thoughtful conversation can flourish.
- Marc Thiessen: No, you're absolutely right, and Washington and Jefferson were the ones who created the first government in history built not on race, not on blood in soil, but on an idea, which is that all men are created equal. It was a long evolution to get there, to the point where we largely live that today, but that was without them, there would be no government anywhere around the world that lives up to those principles.
- Marc Thiessen: But what's interesting to me is how quickly the mob has gone from attacking the Confederacy to attacking the Union, because they just tore down a statue of Ulysses S. Grant, the man who defeated the Confederacy. Talk to us about Grant a little bit and his role in ending slavery.
- Jonathan Horn: Right, and this is just really bizarre, especially in the current climate where Grant really has been enjoying a revival, there have been many acclaimed biographies written of Grant in recent years. His reputation has flourished, his presidency, which had been previously looked upon somewhat negatively has been given a new look, and he's been given credit for having fought against the Ku Klux Klan while he was president.
- Marc Thiessen: Using the insurrection act.
- Jonathan Horn: Right, so this, again this just speaks to the fact that in the end, this is ultimately not really about historical distinctions, it's not really about anything besides destroying public property, because it's very difficult to come up with a rationale for tearing down Ulysses S. Grant. It's basically impossible. We have other examples of this happening. We have a statue of an abolitionist that was torn down, there are statues of Abraham Lincoln which are being threatened. In the case of Lincoln it's that he didn't go far enough during his presidency, and of course it's another example and no one can live up to our standards from today. It's very difficult to understand these people unless you understand the times in which they lived.
- Marc Thiessen: You say that it's not about anything but tearing things down, is it possible that it is about something, which is that they're not against the Confederacy, they're against America. These are symbols of America. Is this anti-Americanism, an anti-American mob?

- Jonathan Horn: You know what, I think there's an argument to be made for that, it is tearing down our country. And there's also a great irony here, we were talking about the 1619 project, and what did our founding fathers fight the American Revolution for. Abraham Lincoln believed very strongly that the founding fathers really did believe in those words, all men are created equal, they just didn't know how to get there. They wanted to eventually work toward the eventual emancipation and the extinction of slavery, but they couldn't get there.
- Jonathan Horn: But what *The New York Times* and other institutions have done is essentially ratified the John C. Calhoun theory of American history, which was the founding fathers meant to protect slavery, and wanted to spread slavery. It's very strange to think in some sense, while we're having this discussion about Confederate statues, many of the people leading it are actually taking the same intellectual side as the people who were fighting for the south.
- Danielle Pletka: But you underscore something that is the real common theme here and that is ignorance. I would love to believe that everybody who was pulling down statues was motivated by a fervor, I would even be happier if they were motivated frankly by some knowledge about these individuals. But when they pulled down the statue of Ulysses S. Grant, it was in San Francisco, in Golden Gate Park, they also pulled down a statue of Francis Scott Key who wrote the Star-Spangled Banner and of Saint, how do I pronounce his name? Hunipero or Junipero?
- Marc Thiessen: I'd say Junipero, but it probably was Hunipero at the time.
- Danielle Pletka: Yeah, I don't know, but you know who he is. These are people who are in no way associated-
- Marc Thiessen: And as a Catholic I know that he was canonized by Pope Francis on his trip to the United States in 2015 with Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi in attendance.
- Danielle Pletka: Yeah, I mean let's just underscore, mobs are by their very nature stupid. And you know I frowned. On a podcast you can never see when someone frowns or laughs or kicks Marc, which happens too, but-
- Marc Thiessen: You can just assume she's frowning whenever I'm speaking.
- Danielle Pletka: True. But when Marc said, "Isn't it possible they're against America?" I felt like I was in the middle of a Trump commercial. But the reality is, first of all there's been a ton of flag burning, which is just repugnant, but also in reality I think there is a sense that people are hostile to the very thing that America is intended to stand for and that is the rule of law. The reason we're able to do these things, the reason we're able to stomp from one park to another defacing statues, is because this is a country of laws, and you can't be arbitrarily thrown in prison, and people have taken advantage of that. And wish to create spaces that are devoid of law, devoid of enforcement. Whether it's Chaz in Washington state. And that is a huge problem. It's not just that ignorance, it is that, it is that sense that our laws don't matter.
- Jonathan Horn: I think that's completely right, and I think you hit it really strongly right there, which is it's about the rule of law, and you can't really be having nuanced discussions. I think the three of us could have a very nuanced discussion about how to handle Confederate memorials, and we might be able to come up with some good ideas

for how to either put them in context or to move them or what to do with them. But you can't have that discussion when the basic premise of our country is under attack, which as you said is in fact the rule of law.

- Marc Thiessen: No doubt, and if we had that kind of reason discussion, we might want to ask Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, what do you think of the Robert C. Byrd rooms in the US capitol?
- Danielle Pletka: I got to say, was it you who brought that up? I saw someone bring that up. The only, when I worked there, when you worked there, the only sitting member of the senate who had actually been a member of the Ku Klux Klan was a Democrat.
- Marc Thiessen: A grand cyclops. Grand cyclops was-
- Danielle Pletka: Grand cyclops, was the Democratic majority leader in the Senate, Robert Byrd. And we still have all those room named for him.
- Marc Thiessen: There's 50 statues to Robert Byrd around the country today. Why aren't they tearing those down Jonathan?
- Jonathan Horn: I'm at a total loss, what do you think? But you know, it is interesting, and of course one person who is coming under attack right now is Woodrow Wilson, and-
- Danielle Pletka: I'm okay with that.
- Jonathan Horn: And of course many of the-
- Marc Thiessen: Down with the Treaty of Versailles. Take him down, take him down.
- Jonathan Horn: But of course many of the army bases that we're talking about were actually named during his presidency, and of course Woodrow Wilson could remember as a young boy having seen Robert E. Lee as a very young boy, and he spoke very highly of Lee for the rest of his life. American history is really complicated. It can't be put into really simple soundbites and these are complicated conversations, and they're not conversations that could be had as we keep going back to at a time, we're just indiscriminately tearing things down.
- Danielle Pletka: But everybody's history is complicated. That's the reality. Bottom line is every single country's history is complex, it's not the kind of black and white cartoon book or TikTok video that I think is motivating a lot of people these days.
- Jonathan Horn: That's right. And history is complex. The decision to put up a monument itself is a form of history and that is a complex thing to look back on and to figure out what went into the beginnings of the decision to put up a monument, when was the decision made, who did it, what was the monument intended to say. It's difficult sometimes to figure that out from the space of 100 years or 80 years after these events happened.
- Marc Thiessen: As a historian, let me ask you this, is the problem that we now have a generation of young people that are not reading history, and are getting their history from TikTok and their knowledge from TikTok and from Instagram and from these different

sources, are we entering a historical period, because people just through the advance of technology and the iGeneration are not reading as much?

Jonathan Horn: I think there's definitely a risk of that. Of course I would have every incentive to say read more history.

Marc Thiessen: And read Jonathan's book, by all means, absolutely.

Jonathan Horn: But of course it's also in a sense, I think we can be honest, some of this is also being taught in schools in terms of trying to, the argument that our founding fathers we learned that they held slaves, which is true. And it's a blemish on who they were of course, but we don't learn about what they did to earn those monuments. We don't learn about the systems of government they put in place about the revolution they waged and just how radical those words were, "All men are created equal." At their time. And so we don't get the full appreciation of the good they did, and we just learn about the bad, and that of course is part of this as well.

Marc Thiessen: So you've got a new book out called *Washington's End* and it's fascinating because Washington is probably the most written about president in history, and yet you found that nobody had ever written a history of his post-presidency. Tell us a little bit about the book and why you wrote it.

Jonathan Horn: Right, and it's exactly that. There have been so many books written about George Washington, but what happens when he left the presidency has essentially gone untold. And you may wonder why is that? Well, it's because George Washington did so much earlier in his life, the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, two terms as president, and by the time biographers get through all that, they're out of space, their editors are on the phone saying, "Where's the book?" And the last years of his life always get squeezed out.

Jonathan Horn: But it turns out the last years of his life really were an unexpected chapter. And it took a course he never imagined. He thought he was going to leave the presidency, go back to Mount Vernon and live out the rest of his days essentially as a farmer working on organizing his personal papers. But history had very different plans. Just a little bit more than a year after George Washington left the presidency, he was called back to command the armies of the United States, given the title of Commander and Chief, amid a war scare with France, and found himself in very serious feuds with his immediate successor and his future successors. In fact, basically surrendering power turned out to be far more difficult than George Washington ever imagined.

Marc Thiessen: What is the most interesting story you found about Washington's post-presidency?

Jonathan Horn: Well, I think one of the interesting stories, and there were so many interesting stories, was just how complex and how difficult his relationship with his successors were. He had a serious feud with John Adams about command of this army, and then by the time he died, he was no longer on speaking terms with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe. That's your third, fourth, and fifth presidents of the United States, so when people tell you that our country is so bitterly divided today, look back to the 1790s it was a pretty brutal period.

Marc Thiessen: We got some presidents who aren't on speaking terms today as well.

- Danielle Pletka: Oh, but that's a great story. Everybody, really very much worth the read. Pick up Jonathan's new book, and devote some of your time to actual history.
- Marc Thiessen: Before you tear down his statue and wrap it in a burning American flag.
- Danielle Pletka: Thanks Jonathan for being with us, this is fascinating.
- Jonathan Horn: Thanks so much for having me.
- Marc Thiessen: So Dany, this is the problem with the left, they always go too far. So after the George Floyd killing, instead of saying reform the police, which is something that 90% of Americans support, they say defund the police, which is something a majority of Americans oppose. Now, instead of let's talk about Confederate memorials, which probably most Americans would support a reasoned conversation of this, they say, "Let's go after the Union. Let's attack the Union." It's so self-destructive, but it's also unfortunately it's destructive of our country.
- Danielle Pletka: Well, it is destructive. Look, if you don't think America is a great country, if you don't think that America is the land of the free and the home of the brave, if I may add that, then you are not going to think that America is a force for good in the world. And increasingly you and I see that fight going on, on national security, on foreign policy. "Why should we be going to these countries and telling them how to be when we ourselves cannot put our own house in order?" But I think one of the most important things that we talked about in this conversation is the rewriting of history. Let me step back and say, when I was managing our department I noticed that almost everybody I hired had either been an English major or a history major in college. What were you?
- Marc Thiessen: Political science.
- Danielle Pletka: Oh well, so much for that.
- Marc Thiessen: Explains a lot.
- Danielle Pletka: It does. I was a history major in college, and you learned what history was, and one thing you learned is that totalitarian regimes, bad regimes rewrote history. They told you this didn't happen because of that, it happened because of this. The Soviets were masters of it, but frankly the Nazis did it too. We are now engaged in efforts to rewrite what history was in this country in ways that are hugely detrimental to our future.
- Marc Thiessen: What you're saying is they're totalitarian. In fact, they have a lot in common with all the people around the world that we think are evil ... I mean, if you're looking about tearing down statues as a model for tearing down statues, when I see these statues coming down you know what I think of? I think of the Taliban tearing down the-
- Danielle Pletka: Those two Buddhas.
- Marc Thiessen: Bamyan Buddhas. It's a hatred of modernity, it's a hatred of civilization. It's the same impulse. They wrap it in radical Islamic ideology, these people wrap it in anarchist Marxist ideology. It's the same impulse.

- Danielle Pletka: Well, I mean look, we did talk about the fact that we celebrated when some statues were pulled down, Saddam, Stalin, believe me I'd love to see somebody pull down the statues of Assad father and son in Syria. I think the issue here is that first of all the notion of reasoned and civil debate has gone by the wayside. And people actually are making the argument that now is not the time for reason debate. There's no better time.
- Marc Thiessen: Anytime somebody says now is not the time for reasoned debate, you can just cut them off.
- Danielle Pletka: But the other issue is that education. We've talked about this in the past on the podcast, the habit that Stalin had, there's a wonderful book that was written about this where if you fell out of favor, you got erased from the history books and from the newspapers, and pictures that once contained you just had a weird arm dangling over something. The Communist Chinese engaged in the same practice and cancel culture is that. Rather than looking back, examining understanding our flaws and our mistakes, we are simply trying to erase people, and this is what you find in school history as well is that certain progressive schools including a bunch of private schools around Washington, don't even teach the history that people need to learn anymore, instead they teach these random bits of history that they dragged out in order to affirm some view of society as they think it ought to be shaped.
- Marc Thiessen: Yeah, I agree with you. Well, I'll tell you, there's a controversy now because President Trump wants to have July 4th fireworks at Mount Rushmore for the first time in decades, they haven't had fireworks there in a long time.
- Danielle Pletka: Trust Donald Trump to have a dopey idea.
- Marc Thiessen: Actually, I don't think-
- Danielle Pletka: Of course you don't think it's a dopey idea.
- Marc Thiessen: Dany, in the current context where people are tearing down memorials, I think the idea of doing a fireworks display of Mount Rushmore celebrating the people on that mountainside, and you know what I say to Antifa and to the Left, bring your noose and try and take Mount Rushmore down baby, because that's never coming down.
- Danielle Pletka: You know, well all right. We'll live to fight that another day. I want to end this with a quote that I put up on Twitter this morning because you and I got such a great laugh out of it. We are not the only idiots around. In Germany-
- Marc Thiessen: Speak for yourself.
- Danielle Pletka: Marc is not the only idiot around. In terms of who should be celebrated and shouldn't be celebrated. This is a quote from the Wall Street Journal editorial page today, it's an unsigned editorial. It goes, "In Germany, a different monumental controversy culminated last weekend when a band of Stalinist-Maoists erected a statue of Lenin in Gelsenkirchen." I don't know where that is. "Believed to be the first monument to the revolutionary tyrant in the former West German. Across party alliance of local officials sued to block the statue, but lost because the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany planned to place the statue on private property owned by the party. And they say irony is dead."

- Marc Thiessen: Well Dany, you know they're tearing down the monuments right now, but they haven't proposed yet what to replace them with. I think we might see some Lenin and Marx statues coming up in downtown Washington.
- Danielle Pletka: As long as they're on private property, that's okay. Thanks guys for being with us.
- Marc Thiessen: Thanks for listening.