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Justin Bullock:

Welcome back to another episode of Bush School Uncorked. I'm here with my co-host Greg Gause. Nice to have Greg.

Greg Gause:

Hi everybody.

Justin Bullock:

And we have a guest who we'll get to momentarily. Actually we'll go ahead and introduce our guest.

Greg Gause:

Well, we should say that once again, we are being hosted by our friends.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, yeah. You wouldn't let me get there would you?

Greg Gause:

At Downtown Uncorked.

Justin Bullock:

In Historic Downtown Bryan.

Greg Gause:

In Historic Downtown Bryan. That's very good.

Justin Bullock:

My students have started making this joke at me in class.

Greg Gause:

About Historic Downtown Bryan?

Justin Bullock:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Greg Gause:

Well, for an entire season of the podcast you forgot it.

Justin Bullock:

I know.

Greg Gause:

And I had to remind you every single time.

Justin Bullock:

My capstone was reminding me today where we were and they were like, "Isn't it Historic Downtown Bryan, Dr. Bullock?"

Greg Gause:

There you are.

Justin Bullock:

So our joke caught on and I'm pretty proud of it. All right. We have our guest today, Professor Jonathan Coopersmith. Thanks for being back with us.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

It is a pleasure to be in Historic Downtown Bryan.

Greg Gause:

Well and Professor Coopersmith is in the department of History, so it's very appropriate that we're in Historic Downtown Bryan.

Justin Bullock:

Oh, history, historic. Ooh. Those words seem kind of similar, to me. They must have some overlap.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yes, and that will be on the final.

Justin Bullock:

So we took a two week break. We had recorded a couple of weeks in a row, had a little bit of a break.

Greg Gause:

You were down at the border.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, so just give you a little update on that. Faith and I did travel down to Brownsville, and then over to Matamoros. I traveled over to Matamoros, another former-

Greg Gause:

Faith isn't allowed to leave the country?

Justin Bullock:

Faith does not have a passport.

Greg Gause:

You're a Bush School student and you don't have a passport, Faith?

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Justin Bullock:

Shame on her. But she did have-

Greg Gause:

You march right down to the Study Abroad office at Texas A&M University and get yourself a passport.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And you can get one there.

Greg Gause:

Yeah.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

It's faster than going to the post office.

Greg Gause:

Right. Faster than going to the post office.

Faith:

Didn't know that.

Justin Bullock:

Learned something already.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Hold on. Another question.

Justin Bullock:

Go ahead.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Have you ever been to the Manny Rosenthal Meat Technology Center?

Faith:

No.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Do you have any idea what I'm talking about?

Faith:

I do but I have not been.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Okay. All right. The number of my students who don't know about the Manny Rosenthal Meat Technology Center is astounding.

Justin Bullock:

Well, do tell. I don't think I knew.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Okay. If you're an omnivore or if you're a carnivore, you should go visit the Manny Rosenthal Fightin' Aggie Class of '46 Meat Technology center. We are an ag school.

Greg Gause:

It's in our name.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

It's in our name, and a lot of ag schools, a lot of land grants, they have undergraduates studying ag in various form, often involving cows, and a lot of places have undergraduates doing research or studying dairy cows, so what do you do with all the surplus that they generate? You turn it into ice cream.

Justin Bullock:

Oh, really?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yep. So if you go to Penn State or you go to Cornell, or you go to Washington state, you will find a store on campus that sells really excellent ice cream. My wife, who grew up near Cornell, said when we moved down here, "I'm going to an ag school. They'll have beautiful landscaping, they'll have ice cream, they'll sell cheese, which is what Cornell does." And she came down here and found out that we are a meat based school, not dairy, so we sell surplus undergraduate meat.

Justin Bullock:

Interesting.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Including world class beef jerky, but also if you go to the... we sell a wide range of meat.

Greg Gause:

You can get a lot of different cuts.

Justin Bullock:

That's really interesting.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Lot of different cuts, different animals. They're very busy during home football games, those old Ags coming back.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah. Want the jerky.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yeah. No, not just the jerky, but all kinds of other stuff too.

Greg Gause:

No, you can get a New York strip there. You can get a tenderloin there. You can get ribs.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

You can get large quantities of cow. But they often sell lamb.

Justin Bullock:

Who knew? Very nice.

Greg Gause:

No ice cream, though.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Well, they do have a little cooler that sells Blue Bell.

Greg Gause:

But it's not the local.

Justin Bullock:

It's not the same. It's not the same.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

With all due respect to Blue Bell.

Greg Gause:

My former institution, the University of Vermont, which was also the State Agriculture College of Vermont, also had a dairy bar. You could go and get ice cream, and while I was there, unfortunately, it shut down. But my wife who grew up in Vermont would wax nostalgic about her trips into Burlington to go to the UVM dairy bar and get the ice cream that was made on campus by the ag students.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Next time you're in Madison go to the dairy bar there.

Justin Bullock:

All right. This wins the award for most random sidebar, but I really like it.

Greg Gause:

Yeah.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah. So Faith and I partnered up with a former Bush School student.

Greg Gause:

This all started with Faith not having a passport.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, I know. Yeah. We've adequately shamed her. Get your passport.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And she didn't know that she could get her passport-

Greg Gause:

On campus.

Justin Bullock:

Well, another former Bush student, Mary Lu Hare, did have her passport. She's been down to the refugee encampment in Matamoros, which is as a consequence of MPP, where asylum seekers that show up at the border are then sent-

Greg Gause:

What's MPP?

Justin Bullock:

It's the Migrant Protocol Protection.

Greg Gause:

So this is where the migrants have to apply for asylum not in the United States, but in Mexico at the border.

Justin Bullock:

Yep. And then they wait there for their-

Greg Gause:

Their processing.

Justin Bullock:

Their processing. Usually their first hearing is no sooner than six months, and it usually takes multiple hearings. There's some other things coming out of Human Rights Watch about some of the conditions, and some of the misleading with those cases, and what they put the asylum seekers through as far as the case process. But we went... we're doing a short series, a couple episodes for the podcast on asylum

seeking in the U.S., and which we wanted to go down there and see firsthand what this looked like. We had the opportunity with World Central Kitchen and Team Brownsville to help serve dinners for a couple nights.

Justin Bullock:

World Central Kitchen was an organization I wasn't aware of, but they prepare fresh, healthy meals every day for a hot dinner for the refugees, the asylum seekers, seven days a week. And then Team Brownsville partners with them, and we actually carried the food across the border in carts, and then delivered it in a tent that's set up there.

Greg Gause:

What were the border officials... did they facilitate that? Was there any hostility?

Justin Bullock:

So with the border officials themselves, they have a process, and the team knows what the process is going to be, so there's certain rules of what you can and can't bring, and how much of what you can and can't bring. So they let them bring all the coolers and all the food. There's no... they just kind of open it. They do check all the boxes every time you come through. But there are certain items that there are rules on that then they are sticklers about. For example, bringing in tents is for tax purposes under-

Jonathan Coopersmith:

So these are the Mexican border officials?

Justin Bullock:

This is the Mexican border officials.

Greg Gause:

How about the U.S. border officials?

Justin Bullock:

The U.S. border officials on the way back into the country just check your passport. They ask if you brought anything in from Mexico, and they let you go their way. We didn't get any hassling on the bridge coming back, going, from either sets of the border patrol folks. They seemed to get what's going on and are, in general, neutral to it. They're not harassing the World Central Kitchen people.

Greg Gause:

That's good. That's good.

Justin Bullock:

So it made it easy to get over there. The encampment's actually guarded at parts of the day by the military. There's a fence around about 3/4 of it, and then we would serve about a thousand hot meals each night.

Greg Gause:

Wow.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

A thousand?

Justin Bullock:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Wow.

Justin Bullock:

And then Sunday morning, they have a school. Right now it's only once a week, although they're moving towards every day. They're going to hire some full time teachers in mid-March. But right now the Team Brownsville people provide what they call escuela on Sunday mornings. They have four little tents. My estimate was between 150 to 200 children, probably closer to 150, show up, some of their parents. They do some basic activities with them. Yoga is one of them. It really depends on what groups are there, but they have a professor from UT Kingsville that helps run some basic kind of arts and crafts and using that to learn some language skills.

Greg Gause:

UT Kingsville or A&M Kingsville?

Justin Bullock:

A&M Kingsville. Yeah. I said UT. Take our credit.

Greg Gause:

Please, let's take our credit. Let's take our credit. That's A&M Kingsville.

Justin Bullock:

So A&M is playing a role down there. We were down there. So we'll have more on that where Faith's actually going to do her first interview. She's going to interview me about the process. We're going to be talking with folks-

Greg Gause:

I think she has to get a passport to do that.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Or some beef jerky.

Justin Bullock:

Or some beef jerky. So we're bringing that to you soon. We're going to talk to the team we were down there with, and also be reaching out to some immigration experts, and some background just on the general numbers and the asylum seeking process. What are the laws? What is it from a policy

standpoint? And also maybe talk to some other people in the valley to get their firsthand experience. So we did that.

Greg Gause:

And I was in London in Oxford having a good time.

Justin Bullock:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Greg Gause:

So we couldn't have a podcast.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

So you didn't... Were you hit by the bad weather there?

Greg Gause:

I was there for a little bit of the bad weather, didn't affect my trip at all, had a lovely time in London. The weather was beautiful, went up to Oxford. The first wave of the storms hit but not too bad. I went to a conference in London and had a talk at Oxford, not doing nearly the kind of good work you're doing at the border, but I had a very nice time.

Justin Bullock:

Very good. Very good. It was a-

Greg Gause:

And while we were gone.

Justin Bullock:

And while we were gone, yeah, some things happened.

Greg Gause:

Some things happened.

Justin Bullock:

Some things happened today. We've had a couple of primaries since last. It looks like the Democratic situation's a bit different than it was two weeks ago.

Greg Gause:

I think so.

Justin Bullock:

At least by observation.

Greg Gause:

I think so.

Justin Bullock:

So we have out results from Iowa now-

Greg Gause:

Finally.

Justin Bullock:

-which I think that they were coming in just a little bit. I think-

Greg Gause:

Maybe this will be the dagger that finally kills the Iowa caucuses, which would be fabulous.

Justin Bullock:

Why can't they just do primaries like the rest?

Greg Gause:

Yeah, why?

Justin Bullock:

And Buttigieg, I think, took the most delegates by one, like 26 to 25, I think, with Bernie Sanders coming in second.

Greg Gause:

I mean, in essence, Iowa was a tie. And in essence, New Hampshire was a tie.

Justin Bullock:

And who has had negative consequences as result of those ties?

Greg Gause:

I would say Elizabeth Warren has basically... The big question was who would take the progressive lane in this primary, and it was between Sanders and Warren, and it looks like Sanders has it. Who knows? People can come back, as we'll talk about our next dead man walking, but it does look like the Warren campaign is in bad shape.

Justin Bullock:

And as well the Biden campaign.

Greg Gause:

I think Joe Biden is a dead man walking. I'm surprised it was so quick, but the fact that he came in fourth in Iowa and fifth in New Hampshire, below 10%, no delegates. I mean, that's, for the former Vice President of the United States-

Justin Bullock:

Not a good sign.

Greg Gause:

That's not a good sign.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

That puts him in Andrew Yang territory, who is running for the first time.

Greg Gause:

Right.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And had the best slogan of any candidate "Math, Make America Think Harder."

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, so it seems like it's being shook up.

Greg Gause:

We'll see Nevada. I mean, Sanders is polling pretty well in Nevada, but the Culinary Workers of America, the largest union in Nevada, heavily Latino, Latina union, has not endorsed a candidate but basically said that they don't like Bernie's Medicare for All, because their union has gotten them a really nice healthcare deal, and they don't want to lose that. So I'll be interested to see if Bernie can sustain his momentum in Nevada. It'll also be really interesting to see if Buttigieg and Klobuchar can do anything, or Warren for that matter, in a more diverse state. And then we're on to South Carolina, which has to be Joe Biden's... it's got to be his firewall. If he cannot win the South Carolina primary, where African Americans form a majority of the Democratic primary voters, then I think that his candidacy is over.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And even if he does win?

Greg Gause:

I think if he wins in South Carolina, he goes on. But if he doesn't win... and we've also had Mayor Bloomberg get in.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, so that's-

Greg Gause:

Now we have Mayor Pete and Mayor Mike.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah. And Mayor Bloomberg through a lot of reasons, but some people would say through lots of excessive ad spending-

Greg Gause:

\$300 million so far is what he spent on his campaign, and we're not even at Super Tuesday.

Justin Bullock:

And so he, by national polls now, is in second, also in the odds markets, right behind Bernie Sanders in terms of national polling. And for a little bit he was kind of treated with lightweight gloves from the other contenders, and from people just kind of investigating his past. But all this has kind of changed in the last couple days, where some of his conversations resemble more of a... How was it put when it was for Trump? Locker room talk?

Greg Gause:

Locker room talk, yeah.

Justin Bullock:

About some comments about a variety of groups of people, so it's going to be interesting to see how the left responds-

Greg Gause:

Well, specifically women and racial minorities.

Justin Bullock:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Greg Gause:

And he has the stop and frisk from his time as mayor of New York. As opposed to Donald Trump, Michael Bloomberg actually ran the largest city in America for three terms, and by many accounts, one can argue about them, did a pretty good job. He also as opposed to Trump is a real billionaire who actually built his own business. Michael Bloomberg is a substantial character, and a serious person, I think. And whether he is in the zeitgeist of the Democratic party right now, I think is an open question. But I don't dismiss him at all. I think he's a really serious person and would be a very credible, and is a very credible presidential candidate.

Greg Gause:

And the fact that he's willing to spend a billion dollars of his own money, which would be a small fraction of his actual wealth-

Jonathan Coopersmith:

2%.

Greg Gause:

2% of his wealth. He's worth \$50 billion.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And he's also said he will, regardless of whether the nomination or not, he will continue to support the Democratic party with his spending.

Greg Gause:

Right. Spend his money to defeat President Trump.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And he's also come up with some of the best barbs against Trump so far. What's interesting is that there's another billionaire running in the Democratic nomination, Steyer, who hasn't attracted that attention in part because-

Greg Gause:

He's a member of the 1%, both in terms of his income and in terms of his votes.

Justin Bullock:

Oh, man. Burn. Yeah, he doesn't seem to have caught on and gotten any real traction in national polls or in the conversation.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

No, but again the same you could say for Patrick Deval, you can say for so many of these other. Some of them are, like Steve Bullock of Montana, really impressive résumé, done good things.

Greg Gause:

Government of Montana, a red state Democrat winning in a red state.

Justin Bullock:

Must be that last name. That's going to be my takeaway.

Greg Gause:

There is that.

Justin Bullock:

We just must not like that Bullock name.

Greg Gause:

There is that.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

The Bullock, that and also deciding to run his campaign out of Montana, which is actually good for the local economy, not so much for his campaign.

Greg Gause:

Maybe not getting the absolute top flight political operatives to come out to Montana.

Justin Bullock:

That's not going to be their first place of residence, I don't think, for work. All right, well I think that captures that...anything else on the current events anybody else wants to touch on?

Greg Gause:

No, I think it's time to segue.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Before segue should note that the early voting has started in Texas.

Greg Gause:

That's true. Early voting started today, Tuesday, February the 18th.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And for the first time in many years, if ever, Texas may play a say in who's going to be nominated for the Democratic nomination, that is, our votes could actually play a major role.

Greg Gause:

I don't know. I think in 2016 the fact that Hillary carried the Texas primary actually helped her quite a bit against Bernie.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Okay.

Greg Gause:

But yeah.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yeah, and it's kind of-

Greg Gause:

I mean, Super Tuesday is... I mean, things are up in the air, and Super Tuesday will be very important.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Any thoughts as to whether by the end of Super Tuesday, or by the end of March, there'll be a nominee, or will the Democrats manage to combine in usual form to keep on fighting till the convention and then after that?

Justin Bullock:

Well, my hypothesis will be that it'll split between the moderate and the left wing. It'd still be represented in the two current front runners, and that could go through March. Bernie Sanders's vision of the world and Mike Bloomberg's are different enough where they might keep duking it out. Maybe Bloomberg concedes for the better of the Democratic party if it's clear that Bernie has a serious lead at that point, but I suspect a vote will still be split among the further liberal wing and the moderate wing, and that will carry on a little bit longer.

Greg Gause:

So every political pundit has dreamed of a brokered convention. The last time an American nominating convention went beyond the first ballot was? Anybody know?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

1920?

Greg Gause:

1952.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

'52 would be Democratic.

Greg Gause:

1952, the Democratic convention nominated Adlai Stevenson, I think, on the second or third ballot. We have, ever since 1952, we've had first ballot nominees. I think we're going to have a first ballot nominee this time. I take your point that after Super Tuesday we might still have a contest, because the Democratic rules are that there's no winner take all primaries. Republican side, as we remember in 2016, as you got further in the process, they were winner take all primaries. The Democrats don't have winner take all primaries. You get 15% of the vote or more, you get delegates.

Greg Gause:

So it might be harder to get to the magic 50% of the delegates number. It might take longer. Look, if Bernie Sanders wins the Texas primary and wins the California primary, I think you'd have a hard time denying him the nomination as you go ahead. But we'll see if he wins the Texas and California primaries.

Justin Bullock:

How about you? Prediction?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

No. I'll put it this way. Lots of possibilities. To me, the real key is percentage of people voting. What's the voter turnout going to be? Are we going to get more people than we did in 2016? Because if I remember correctly, the voting in Iowa, number of people... sorry, caucusing in Iowa-

Greg Gause:

Was down.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Was down. But in New Hampshire it was up a little bit.

Greg Gause:

It was up a little bit, but it's... New Hampshire's a funny primary, because it's a nonpartisan primary. You can go in and take the Republican or the Democratic ballot. And since there was no Republican race to speak of, you might've had people who in 2016, you had the Republican and the Democratic race, and so they were more evenly split. Bernie Sanders's theory of the case is he wins by mobilizing new voters into the system. At least on the early evidence, it's questionable.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

We'll find out.

Justin Bullock:

We will find out, and it'll be... we're taking a two week break between now and the next recording. March 3rd is when we'll be back, so we'll have some more things to talk about then.

Greg Gause:

Well, March 3rd is Super Tuesday.

Justin Bullock:

Maybe we should record later in the evening.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Later in the evening.

Justin Bullock:

Or on Wednesday or something, and see. Can't be Wednesday.

Greg Gause:

Well, we'll see.

Justin Bullock:

We'll see. We'll come up with something. Or we can just make all kinds of predictions on Tuesday that then are shown-

Greg Gause:

And then you and I can do a quick hot takes on Wednesday.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, we could. That'd be a great idea. Okay. So, let's turn our attention to our guest. We've talked with Professor Coopersmith before about technologies, and his own specialty, if I mischaracterize it you can-

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Okay.

Justin Bullock:

-you definitely correct me, but it is, in general, from the CV, so I'll hold it against you if it's completely wrong.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

All right.

Justin Bullock:

But as a historian, one of his primary interests is technology. And I've also been doing some work recently on the impact of technology for governance. How different technological tools, in particular AI, has different types of impact on how we govern people. What types of tools we use, what does that mean for outcomes like effectiveness, efficiency, equity? We also are now, with AI and machine learning, worried about privacy and accountability and fairness, and a lot of things that a technological tool is kind of disrupting society. So I was interested, as setting the conversation, from a historian's perspective, what different things does technology do or has it done over time to impact social aspects?

Justin Bullock:

Is it in general a democratizing force? Like we were having a little bit of a conversation earlier, does it increase wealth? Does it destabilize society? Are there some specific examples we could use as guidance to help us navigate this terrain? But I'm mostly interested in a big picture view of what do we know about how, as technology disrupts society, in what biased ways does it do that?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Okay. One of the founders of the field, Mel Kranzberg, had this pithy phrase, "Technology is neither good nor bad, nor is it neutral." Which is either absolute nonsense or you're thinking, well yeah, it's right. Because one of the reasons historians make really bad politicians is instead of giving answers in absolutes and in black and whites, our natural response is to say it's complicated.

Justin Bullock:

International affairs experts might fit in that general category too.

Greg Gause:

Yeah, but we also tend to come down on one side.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

They come down on one side or the other, and they've got data sets, and they've got formulas.

Justin Bullock:

Don't accuse Greg of those things.

Greg Gause:

I'm innumerate. I do cases.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yeah. So he's old school. There are a couple trends in history of technology over the last few decades. The big one is that we moved from economics of scarcity to economics of abundance.

Justin Bullock:

Has anyone told the economists?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

They couldn't quantify it that well, so it doesn't exist.

Justin Bullock:

Scarcity, I think, is one of their cherished sacred words.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

It is a... Yeah. There can never be enough beef jerky to go around.

Justin Bullock:

Or passports. Sorry.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Those can be expanded. One of the bigger is that with, what's it? Economics of abundance, one of the challenges is how do you get people to consume more? How many T-shirts do you really need to live? But another is the democratizing of a lot of technology, which also leads to de-skilling in the sense of-

Greg Gause:

De-skilling?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

De-skilling. In the sense... Okay, I'll give you an example. Your car probably comes with an automatic transmission, which means that you don't need to have the skill set to develop the skills to drive, to switch-

Greg Gause:

To shift.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

-and get the [inaudible 00:25:49] clutch.

Justin Bullock:

GPS is another classic one in mental maps.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Mental maps, physical maps. Who needs to remember where to go? I'll just follow this. Or the fact that I grew up taking photographs with a film camera. I would develop my black and white photos. It took a certain amount of skill and a bit of pride, in that I could do what a lot of people couldn't. And now it's point and shoot for video. So on the one hand, I don't need those skills, but I never really made my living as a photographer. If I was... Where's the business of a photographer? It's mostly gone. On the other hand, I can take thousands of pictures, and I can put them on Facebook, and I can do that.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

In some ways, that's really neat. That's the democratization of creating memories and doing that. It also means in a more negative way, before if you wanted to fake a photograph or fake a video, you really needed the resources of a state. And now you want to generate a deepfake, you want to show a picture of, oh gosh, Barack Obama and Nancy Pelosi with the head honcho of Iran and Iraq plotting anti-American activity, we can make that for you too.

Greg Gause:

It helps if you have a state behind you.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

It helps if you have a state behind you, but one of the neat aspects of democracy, we've got all of these websites that you can learn about this stuff, and you can communicate through back channels. So yeah, technology good, technology bad, same technology. What we've often seen with the internet, we're seeing with AI now. A lot of enthusiasm. "Wow, look at all the neat stuff we can do with this," and then finding out that, oh, bad guys can do bad stuff too. And I think they can do it better in some ways.

Justin Bullock:

So on that, recently as I've told you, I've been reading Shoshana Zuboff's Surveillance Capitalism. Just so you know I'm working my way there. But as Americans we often think about surveillance issues with other countries and the way they surveil their people. So what's in the news today or yesterday was some released records of all the information that Chinese officials at the local level collect on citizens to feed into a rating. So this is troubling for some reasons that we should talk about. The thing that is missed in the American narrative, one, is we're surveilled a lot as well, so it's not like we're free from this. It's not the same level as it is in china, but it's not like... we're still not free from those things.

Justin Bullock:

But the real driver in the U.S. is the capitalism actors that are in this domain. So Shoshana Zuboff has this idea of surveillance capitalism, and it's the idea of moving from industrial capitalism to surveillance capitalism and the basic profit-making model is to take away more and more behavioral surplus from the consumer. The way they do this is collect of your-

Greg Gause:

Behavioral surplus. That's a little Marxist. Could you explain what that means?

Justin Bullock:

Yeah. So it's the additional benefit that you get from interacting with a product, is the basic takeaway. So I'll give you an example, the example from Google that I was getting to. Let's say that you search for a term on Google. Google can then use that search term to improve their search results to you. That's something that you inherently agreed to with the search engine. That's a direct consequence of you interacting with that search engine. You get some other benefits from using that. It's free. You get to use that website to jump to another website, to jump to another website. So then what Google has been able to do is create a user profile for you, that then they track your behavior online across WhatsApp and across Instagram and across other platforms.

Justin Bullock:

And while you're typing in your search term, they also look at where your mouse has rolled over for how long, for where it shows up on the screen.

Greg Gause:

So why's that a surplus?

Justin Bullock:

It's something that isn't intended inherently necessarily for the producer to take advantage of.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

So it's following your normal activities and monetizing them, because it's selling that information to advertisers. And the reason you're able to use Google for free is that Google is providing you with that service. You're providing it with data about yourself that it then sells to other people.

Greg Gause:

Right. If you're not paying for it, you're not the customer. You're the product.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And it's not just Google. It's any group that has cookies on you, and you have no say in that whatsoever, what they do with that whatsoever.

Justin Bullock:

Yes, and it started with... Google is sort of the first mover in this domain. Then Facebook. Now it's spread to lots of different types of companies, and now internet service providers like Verizon, for example, collect the same types of data and then package your behavior and sell it to advertisers. There's a couple of points about this. One is this idea of implied consent. Greg, you and I were actually talking about this yesterday evening about no one reads the terms of agreements. But they have kind of said, "Okay, well, since you clicked yes, you have automatically agreed to all these terms, even if you don't understand them, even if it would take weeks to read all of them that you have to interact with. Because you checked that box, then we have all these legal rights over you."

Jonathan Coopersmith:

By the way, if you say no, you don't get on.

Justin Bullock:

Exactly. You don't get on, and often what they've found out, what the regulators have found out, is even when you opt out of these things, you still can't really opt out. They're still gathering your data. They're still selling it across different platforms. So in this way, surveillance and AI and machine learning is being used not from a central government actor, but from the private sector to also kind of manipulate your behavior in some ways. So you were talking about AI.

Greg Gause:

To manipulate your behavior or just to monetize knowledge of your behavior?

Justin Bullock:

The piece in which it gets manipulative is that the data is sold to partners that you're not aware of often, and then those partners target advertise you on Facebook. So that's what makes it a little bit different, and they know enough about you to know how to target specifically to you, which is different than what advertisers have ever been able to do in the past.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

There was a classic case a few years ago of a father complaining to Target that "Why are you sending my daughter ads about pregnancy products?" And it turns out that she was indeed pregnant.

Greg Gause:

And she had probably Googled something.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And she had Googled something and the... Oh, and Target said, "Okay, based on our data pools, she's looking for this. She needs that. She's pregnant. Let's send her ads."

Justin Bullock:

So you talked about democratizing, de-skilling. What other types of things can we take away from just general trends from technological change?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

It's harder for mere mortals to fix the technology that's part of their daily lives. You see this in automobiles is a quintessential example. You could play around with a carburetor. I used to be able to change my oil. Now I still can, but my elbow or my arms are not flexible enough to reach underneath there. The automobiles are much more reliable than they used to be. So you've got... it doesn't matter that much if I can't fix it. But in that sense, you're seeing a little bit of a move away from, oh, I can own this, I understand this technology, I can fix it, in part having to do with the complexity.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

How do you fix a circuit board? How do you figure out what's wrong in this [inaudible 00:35:07] Part of it dealing with dropping costs. Machines that are made not to be repaired because it's cheaper to just buy a new one than it is to fix it.

Greg Gause:

So technology drives specialization.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Right.

Greg Gause:

You used to be able to fix your own car. Now you can't.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Right. Yeah. And by the way, that also means that you cannot... the people who can fix the car... and there's a right to repair movement out there saying that companies should sell you the manuals to fix your products, to understand it. With a number of technologies you actually don't own the technology, per se. You're just renting it. But if you Google right to repair, especially farmers or other people whose livelihood depends on their machines working at that specific time.

Greg Gause:

Can't wait for three days to get it fixed.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yeah.

Justin Bullock:

So what are some of the trends? We've hit on some of them. De-skilling as one, and repairs as another. What are some of the general impacts we see to labor outcomes? Is this raising everyone's income overall? Is it widening inequality? Is it replacing entire sectors? That's the fear you hear about with AI. There's not going to be any truck drivers in 2035. How do you see how at least some of the recent changes impact labor, skilled labor and otherwise?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Okay. Technology's been throwing people out of jobs for literally centuries.

Greg Gause:

How many blacksmiths do you see working in town these days?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Now historically 80%, 90% of a population was rural, trying to raise enough food. Excuse me. Trying to raise enough food for another 10% to 15% able to live in cities and to think. Now in the U.S. 3% of our population are farmers. So we've had this for a long... People have been losing jobs due to technology and social organization for a long time. And the economists will say correctly that overall they found new jobs, they found better jobs, and... But the historians say, yes, they have found new jobs, but there's often a gap of time between losing your old job and finding your new job. And you may have to move.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

1990 Michigan loses a couple hundred thousand automobile workers when Detroit implodes. A lot of them moved down to Texas. One of the reasons the industrial revolution in the 19th century was so nonviolent, and there was violence, but in Britain, is that you had the escape valve of immigration for millions of people who couldn't find a job fleeing to the United States, fleeing to South America. What's going to happen to industrialized countries now, where is there going to be an escape valve for those people?

Greg Gause:

Right now though, the enormous population movements seem to be driven not by technological change, but by political and social disruption and chaos.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Between countries one of the major changes in last decade or two has been the huge shift in China of hundreds of millions of people moving from rural to urban areas. That's probably the largest sustained anti-poverty shift in the last... in millennia, just in terms of number of people in a short time.

Greg Gause:

The number of cities in china that are bigger than New York City, that are bigger than our biggest city, I mean, you would think three, four. I don't know how many. But in Wuhan province where the coronavirus began, the major city, I forget its name, that's like seven or 10 million people. It's enormous.

Justin Bullock:

There's quite a number of cities that have over 20 million people.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And the number of just over one million is just incredible.

Justin Bullock:

In our thriving metropolis of Bryan-College Station, we have about 150,000, maybe 200,000.

Greg Gause:

Oh, in Bryan-College Station?

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, maybe 200,000.

Greg Gause:

I think in the county 300,000 maybe.

Justin Bullock:

But not in either city.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And that's after major growth.

Greg Gause:

Right, right, right.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

When you talk about people living in poverty, one of the challenges is definitions of poverty are changing as the society becomes more affluent. Back in one of the debates federal policy in 1960s is, did being poor mean you could own a telephone, or rent a telephone? What's the minimum amount of technology that you need to survive today? You can argue it's access to internet. It's a cell phone. By the way, there's still... U.S. is better than a lot of other countries, but there's still major geographic inequities in spreads of technology. The number of Americans that do not have access to broadband, about over 10% of the U.S. population, mostly in rural areas.

Justin Bullock:

Wow.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

So if you want to talk about a left behind part of the population. Today, one of the definitions of technologically inferior is not having broadband.

Greg Gause:

So does technological change drive inequality?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yes and no. I think it drives-

Justin Bullock:

That's a historian answer.

Greg Gause:

There we go.

Justin Bullock:

Everyone heard it, right?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yeah, I'm sorry.

Justin Bullock:

It's complex.

Greg Gause:

It you were an economist it would be on the one hand, on the other hand.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

On the other hand, yeah. Very true. On the one hand, no. Oh, my God. I'm an economist! Oh, great. I'm going to be disowned by my family.

Greg Gause:

Disowned from historians.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

You have greater abundance than ever possible. But we're more conscious of inequity also thanks to communication technologies. And in some ways the gap is larger. If you look at the first class cabins on the titanic, or first class shipping there, and compare them with middle class America today, you say we live better. But then you get Vladimir Putin's airplane with the gold plated toilets. Maybe that's the link between Trump and Putin.

Greg Gause:

The gold plated toilets?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

The gold plated toilets.

Greg Gause:

Entirely possible.

Justin Bullock:

There's a lot there.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

That could explain.

Justin Bullock:

Gold plated toilets.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Some of the pictures of Putin's plane. Yeah.

Justin Bullock:

Not going to say it. Just continue on so I won't have to say it.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

All right. Okay. All right. But if you really want impressive toilets, Japanese heated toilets.

Justin Bullock:

I've experienced this in my last trip to Tokyo. They are phenomenal.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

They are phenomenal.

Justin Bullock:

Makes me wonder why we don't have them everywhere.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Well, part of the reason is that in Japan energy is very expensive, so your typical Japanese apartment, most places are not heated. So having that heated toilet seat-

Justin Bullock:

Makes a big deal.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Makes a big deal. And I speak as someone who lived in Tokyo for a year and had a wonderful time and came to appreciate heated toilets and space heaters. Or [inaudible 00:43:59] about heaters. You do have... Again, part of the magic of capitalism... I guess that's more proof I'm not an economist. Do economists say magic of capitalism?

Justin Bullock:

Invisible hand. Invisible hand.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Invisible hand. Is creating difference, creating... How do I get you to buy more T-shirts?

Greg Gause:

Creating demand.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Creating demand. And it's not just more T-shirts, but here's a gold lamé T-shirt to go with your gold toilet for when seeing President Trump or Putin.

Greg Gause:

Nobody needed Chicken McNuggets.

Justin Bullock:

Says you.

Greg Gause:

But now all sorts of people want Chicken McNuggets.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And by the way, that is reshaping American agriculture because McDonald's is such a huge component of that economy.

Justin Bullock:

What comes to my mind is Beanie Babies and Pokémon cards. Those are my...

Greg Gause:

You're going back to your youth.

Justin Bullock:

I'm going back to my youth, yeah. Everybody wanted to pay high dollar for Beanie Babies, Pokémon cards, and Power Rangers action figures.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Now those would be irrational exuberance and fads.

Greg Gause:

One Beanie Baby-

Justin Bullock:

Irrational exuberance.

Greg Gause:

-is fine. But forty, irrational exuberance.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

But a lot of people retired on those Beanie Babies.

Justin Bullock:

So many. Everywhere, everywhere. Almost as many people that are in our audience also retired from Beanie Babies. From the thousands that have joined us.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Virtually.

Justin Bullock:

Virtually. All right, so we've got on the one hand. We keep interrupting you, sorry.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

That's okay.

Greg Gause:

Got to get back to inequality.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Inequality. So if you want to look at absolutes, the number of people living in poverty, the number of the metrics, the Steven Pinker arguments, you've never had it so good. And we are. Just look at how people are dying, what age. And that's a very nice... Looking at how people die is a very good indicator of society. If you've got people dying of cancer in their 70s and 80s and COPD and diabetes, those are tragedies, but it's much better than historically losing 30% of your children the first year or two.

Greg Gause:

The Black Death coming through and wiping out large numbers of your population. We're all up in arms about the coronavirus, right? How many deaths?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

So far?

Greg Gause:

2000, 3000.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Right, but it's the percentage of people that we think are affected, that's the scary part.

Greg Gause:

I don't want to minimize it, but we're not talking about the Spanish Flu of 1918.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Not yet. But we haven't had Super Tuesday yet. If you really want to be scared, it's not the coronavirus, it's the rise of antibiotic resistant bacteria. That's a greater longer term disease.

Greg Gause:

That's the subject for another podcast.

Justin Bullock:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). We could do a whole episode on it.

Greg Gause:

I still want to hear, because I have this sneaking suspicion that technology drives inequality, that technological change, while improving the lives of broad numbers of people, tends to concentrate the economic benefits of that change in the hands of the few, the people, the companies that have been able to capture and monetize that change.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yep.

Justin Bullock:

Yep, I think that's right.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Yeah. Look at who the new billionaires are.

Justin Bullock:

They're not oil magnates.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

They aren't oil magnates. They're people like Michael Bloomberg.

Greg Gause:

Who managed information.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Who managed information, the Bloomberg Journals. Jeff Bezos.

Greg Gause:

Turns your computer into the shop of everything.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Justin Bullock:

Mark Zuckerberg.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Mark Zuckerberg.

Greg Gause:

Still don't understand why, but yes, Mark Zuckerberg.

Justin Bullock:

Behavioral surplus, Greg. That's all you need to remember. Behavioral surplus.

Greg Gause:

I got to keep figuring out what that is.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

You have to buy the book.

Greg Gause:

It is funny that Marxists want you to buy their book. Why don't they give me the book?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Abbie Hoffman. Steal this Book.

Greg Gause:

Steal this Book. That's right.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Before your time.

Justin Bullock:

That is before my time, yeah.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

But I think he made money from that.

Greg Gause:

Yeah, he undoubtedly made money.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

He made money from that too. On the one hand, the profit making is unduly centralized. If you look a lot of the stock market today, a lot of the gains are concentrated in just a few stocks.

Greg Gause:

But is it similar to the railroad barons?

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And U.S. Steel Corporation.

Greg Gause:

U.S. Steel, right. We're basically across the street from the Carnegie Library in Historic Downtown Bryan. Where did Carnegie make his money? Steel industry.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Steel and crushing competition.

Justin Bullock:

The latest technology at the time.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And he scaled up more, and he learned... and it's not just the technology. It's gaining the monopoly or trying to get the monopoly. So a lot of this is not so much technology but how can we organize this in a... what does the political economy allow?

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Greg Gause:

But that's Zuckerberg and that's Google. The first movers. Maybe not the first mover, but the movers-

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Rarely the first movers.

Justin Bullock:

First one to scale up.

Greg Gause:

The ones who can scale up and capture enough of the market that it becomes inevitable that everybody else is going to use that particular technology, that particular portal, and then you become, your company name becomes a verb. Google it.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Which is the ultimate sound of... or Xerox.

Greg Gause:

In the same way I say I Xerox something, we now say I Google something.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And for a lot of the startup companies of the '90s and 2000s, one of their goals was not to have a successful startup and create your own firm, but to become successful enough that you'll be bought out by Google or Microsoft, or by one of the biotech firms.

Justin Bullock:

This is kind of the second wave. The first wave is trying to capture the market in large portions.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Well, not too much capture. Create and capture.

Greg Gause:

Well, to come up with a technological advance. You had to come up with the killer app or the drug.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Or the drug. And you had to come up... One of the keys to Amazon's success is Bezos was able to convince people to keep lending him money and keep investing.

Justin Bullock:

Like 10 years.

Greg Gause:

20. Facebook didn't make any money. Amazon didn't make any money.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Amazon was a billion dollars before its first money appeared. So a lot of these people are not just I've got a good idea, I've got a killer app. It's I'm able to convince enough people to invest in me or to keep financing me until-

Greg Gause:

Until I scale up to the point where I get the advantages of, if not monopoly, at least market control.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Right. Or enough market share that you are a player.

Justin Bullock:

One of the things that economists have taught us is monopolies can take risks and they can take more for themselves. That's why these industries are able in large part to take such large amounts home, which to your point, even if the overall boat, to use that terminology, is lifting, inequality can still be exacerbated.

Greg Gause:

All boats rise, but some boats are rowboats and some of them are yachts.

Justin Bullock:

Some are super, super yachts.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Maybe one of the questions is not why is there a world of yachts and rowboats, but are there enough rowboats and are they adequately fitted? If you've got... One of the sadder aspects of the United States are these free dental caravans that go around the U.S. Let's have dentists offering free care. That's a sign of the rowboats need to be better fitted. Let's go back to FDR's freedom from fear, freedom from want. If you had a society where you did have, okay, people in better health and not having to worry so much about where our next meal or rent is going to come from, maybe they wouldn't care so much about the billionaires. They'd just watch the Kardashians more.

Justin Bullock:

Seems like a... It's not how unequal in some instances. It's what do we do as a society for the most vulnerable and unlucky amongst us.

Greg Gause:

And can you use politics to smooth out some of those inequalities in the interest of social stability and social peace? Maybe not from altruism, but the rich don't want the poor interrupting their dinners.

Justin Bullock:

Well and from a national competitive standpoint. If your citizenry isn't as healthy and as educated as the next one's when those are the variables that matter for society, just from a pure self interested society standpoint, you would want to keep lowest-

Greg Gause:

National power.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah. Well, this was the argument for cafeteria in schools, was making sure people had enough resources, enough nutrients... that's the word I'm looking for... to be able to serve in the war.

Greg Gause:

Well, if you need... You want to have a male population you can draft into the army, they've got to be healthy.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And they need to have their teeth, and they need to have... Yeah, this is where the boy scouts come from. This is where... military needs.

Greg Gause:

The boy scouts might be going to.

Justin Bullock:

They did declare for bankruptcy [crosstalk 00:54:54]

Jonathan Coopersmith:

They did declare for bankruptcy. Yeah, okay.

Greg Gause:

That's a different story.

Justin Bullock:

Let's save that one. That's a sad note to end on. So let's not end there. It's great to have you Jonathan. Thanks again. Having you as a regular guest, it's always interesting to hear your thoughts on things and fun to talk about technology. That gets my brain tickling.

Greg Gause:

Plays into professor Bullock's current technological-

Justin Bullock:

And we worked in some international affairs too. We worked in some international affairs topics a little bit.

Greg Gause:

Of course. It all comes back to international affairs.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And equation free.

Justin Bullock:

And what?

Greg Gause:

No math.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And equation free. No math.

Greg Gause:

No math. I was told there would be no math on the podcast.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

And that's why there's no Andrew Yang as a president from the internet. No math.

Greg Gause:

The Yang gang turned out to be a pretty small gang.

Justin Bullock:

So thanks again to Downtown Uncorked in Historic Downtown Bryan for hosting us yet again and providing a wonderful atmosphere for us. Thanks to those of you who are here in the audience with us this evening. We'll be back with you on March 3rd with lots more interesting topics and a surprise guest. We're going to surprise you in two weeks with who our guest might be.

Greg Gause:

That's right.

Justin Bullock:

Keep things interesting round here.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

Does that mean that you don't know?

Justin Bullock:

It's a surprise.

Greg Gause:

It's a surprise.

Justin Bullock:

It's a surprise whether I know or not.

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Greg Gause:

But it will be someone very interesting. We can assure you that.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

That sounds good.

Justin Bullock:

Thanks so much Johnathan.

Jonathan Coopersmith:

My pleasure.