

Recall This Book: Episode Eleven (June 15, 2019)

Xenophobia and Ethno-Nationalism, 1973 to today, with Quinn Slobodian

- Quinn Slobodian: It's kind of like a *woke particularism* of its own kind, because it's saying this attempt to make all the world cookie-cutter the same is bound to fail and will only backfire. So in the slogan of the far-right now, "a place for every race." Everyone has their own tradition, there just shouldn't be this sort of crossing of the boundaries that keep us all in the containers where we flourish.
- John Plotz: From Brandeis University welcome to Recall this Book, making sense of contemporary problems by looking back at books that shaped the world we inherited. And perhaps never so insidiously and benevolently as the ones we're going to be looking at today. To my left non-malevolent benevolent anthropologist and Latin Americanist Elizabeth Ferry, non-malevolent, also benevolent.
- Elizabeth Ferry: Militaristic according to [crosstalk 00:00:52].
- John Plotz: I am John Plotz, not very insidious, non-eminent Victorianist, and we're your hosts today. So strong words, *malevolent* and *insidious*, so why? Because our topic today is the anti-immigrant xenophobia that now circulates on the political right. Two of our chosen texts from 1973 and 1974 turned out to have a far-reaching impact in encouraging the libertarian fright to evolve or devolve towards a closed border policy as regards human movement. So in order to have this conversation we're joined today by Wellesley College professor Quinn Slobodian. Quinn, hi thanks for coming.
- Quinn Slobodian: Hi.
- John Plotz: Quinn is a historian of modern German and international history with a focus on North, South politics, social movements and the intellectual history of neoliberalism. He's the author of many great articles and collection and a pair of books, but I came to his work, as I bet many people, many of our listeners, did through his really brilliant book from last year, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*.
- John Plotz: Quinn, we are huge admirers of your work in general, but we asked you here today to talk about this question of texts from the past that help us understand some of the strains of xenophobia we've got today. So, can you tell us about the book you brought with you?
- Quinn Slobodian: Sure.
- John Plotz: Show-and-tell moment.

Quinn Slobodian: I'm glad to say that I don't have a paper copy of it and don't intend to buy one, so this is a version downloaded from the internet of a book called *The Camp of the Saints* by the French author Jean Raspail. It is the idea that came to me because novels don't come up that often in the readings that I do of kind of right wing, libertarian political theory, or neoliberal constitutionalists political theory.

Quinn Slobodian: They don't sort of root their arguments in novels as much as actually I would like. They do make reference to theology, they do make reference occasionally to art and certainly classical philosophy, but novels don't come up that often. However, this one does come up, *The Camp of the Saints*, and it doesn't just come up for them.

Quinn Slobodian: It was published in 1973 and the scene that it sets is some combination of young missionary left-wing French white do-gooders and a kind of inchoate, pre-rational id-driven mass of non-white humans, almost humans, sub-humans in India have hatched this plan to form what ends up being called the "Last Chance Armada," which is two large rusting steamers setting sail from around Calcutta and heading towards Europe with a ragtag flotilla of rafts and dinghies and whatnot attached to the back. Amounting to this city of about a million people.

Quinn Slobodian: The drama of the novel is the fact that the West feels paralyzed by its inability to do what the author clearly thinks is the right thing, which is just to turn away this mass of diseased and starving people out of their own self-interest. Instead, the West has this monkey of liberal guilt and supposedly post-colonial angst on its back, which leads country after country to think that at least they need to make some kind of a pretense of welcoming this coming flotilla, the coming armada. Ultimately the armada ends up landing, setting alight in the south of France. What ensues is basically what actually Rod Dreher, the conservative columnist, would call in 2015 "the suicide of the Christian West." Whereby the white French people essentially come running with open arms and are promptly slaughtered and raped and expropriated. The country of France is taken over then by this advanced guard of brown people-

John Plotz: Hey Quinn, can I just jump in here? Because it's, I mean it's very, I almost feel like we should have had a trigger warning, just even to hear the plot summary. It's very heavy stuff. But that pattern that you're describing here obviously in 2019 it's all too familiar, that kind of rhetoric. That notion that anybody crossing any border, including the U.S.'s southern border is somehow part of the trail of quote rapists and murderers.

Quinn Slobodian: Right.

John Plotz: That notion of what I think Raspail calls it the *anti-world* at one point.

Quinn Slobodian: Yes.

John Plotz: Can you set the scene for 1973, which I associate with free love, and the shadow of 1968 and stuff like that. Was it pretty normal on the Right in Europe for books like that to be published in the '70s? Or does this stand out even then?

Quinn Slobodian: I think it does stand out. I mean part of the reason why it's become so iconic or canonical for the far-right is that it did sort of anticipate moral panics and kind of hysterias that would come later. I mean it's notable that the wave of the Vietnamese boat people refugee crisis hadn't hit yet. That wouldn't hit until-

John Plotz: That's like '78 or something.

Quinn Slobodian: Yeah, and that would in fact end of triggering some of the very things that Raspail describes. High profile, leftist, intellectuals like Sartre and [Raymond] Aron and [Michel] Foucault coming out in favor of refugees. What you had at that time was, it wasn't really a time of panic about mass immigration because there actually wasn't a great deal of mass immigration. Unless you set aside the migrations from within the French empire from French South Africa and French West Africa.

Quinn Slobodian: Those weren't new, those had been happening all through the 1960s. So it was peculiar to hit upon this idea of sort of the invasion of brown people into Europe. It was in that sense a kind of a leap of fantasy for him, which I don't think he was, he wasn't narrating or tearing things from the headlines to come up with this plot.

John Plotz: Yeah, can I maybe read a quote that I wanted to ask you about?

Quinn Slobodian: Sure, yes.

John Plotz: It also seems to be some 1789 language, in other words there's a line, the human race the good thing that we've learned from this raft is that "the human race no longer formed one great fraternal whole, as the popes, philosophers, intellectuals, politicians and priests of the West have been claiming." So that notion *no more fraternity* was interesting to me because I think of that as like one of those core claims of Frenchness.

Quinn Slobodian: Absolutely. I mean so this is why it's kind of a text of the New rRight, I think, in the sense of the *nouvelle droite*, because it is a rejection of universalism. But in favor of it's kind of like a *woke particularism* of its own kind because it's saying this attempt to make all the world cookie-cutter the same, through processes of westernization, Americanization, modernization is bound to fail and will only backfire. So, in the slogan of the far-right now, "a place for every race." Everyone has their own tradition, there just shouldn't be this sort of crossing of the boundaries that keep us all in the containers where we flourish.

John Plotz: Yeah, can I just underline that phrase *a woke particularism*? I mean that's great because I do feel that's so much of what we're struggling with right now is that

question of particularism and all the different varieties of identity politics. Which we wish to make minute distinctions about, but we need to be able to recognize commonalities as well.

Elizabeth Ferry: Sometimes not so minute.

John Plotz: Yeah, there are non-minute distinctions too, but the phrase *woke particularism* I do think covers that notion of “peoples in their place.” So Quinn, I want to follow up on, I want to make sure that the way I introduced you was correct. I said that the thing about this text that interesting is that it had this effect on sort of shaping far-right, like right libertarian thinking. Help us understand the alliance, the unholy bedfellow-ness there of exclusionary politics around migration coupled with libertarian economic policy.

Quinn Slobodian: Well, right, so it's been a popular book, not only certainly for right-wing libertarians, just for right-wing people of all kinds. A relatively mainstream example in the United States is Patrick Buchanan who cites it in I think all of his books from the 1990s. All of which have titles that recall kind of the same like *The Immigrant Invasion*, *The Third World Arrival...*, *Population Decline*, *Suicide of the West*, *The Death of the West*.

Quinn Slobodian: He cites Raspail and its subsequent reception, it's praised by people at the *National Review*, and the *Wall Street Journal* as being this prescient prophecy of demographic decline. It does get used in that way as an outright piece of propaganda for nativists exclusionary politics, which don't always, and in fact often don't run libertarian in the sense that they then lead into calls for an enhanced welfare state for the right kind of white people, pro-natalist policies and encouraging higher birth rates and so-on.

John Plotz: Right, so in other words there's a consistent right-wing protectionist nativism or something in which borders are just borders. This kind of hatred is totally justifiable and logical because it goes along with that sort of segmentation of the world.

Quinn Slobodian: Right, exactly, and because you see these particularist demographic communities as bearers of a specific cultural traditions and memories, and sort of forms of self-narration that need to be preserved and will be diluted if a new population comes in then it's all quite logical.

Quinn Slobodian: But the libertarian thing is kind of the twist and that was the surprising part for me. The main person to mention there is Murray Rothbard, who's an extremely well know libertarian. He's considered the father of what's called anarcho-capitalism, which is a very extreme form of libertarianism. In the sense that they don't believe in just a small state, or a very tightly contained state, but no state at all. So the argument is you can replace all state functions. You won't have taxes, you will replace otherwise state functions through contracted private services.

Quinn Slobodian: Whether it's private security forces, third party arbitration, sounds like there will be a lot of law in this world, but it isn't law mediated by the state. The same way that trans-national private law is mediated between corporations. It doesn't necessarily always go through governments.

John Plotz: Yeah, I read a lot of 1970s and 80s science fiction, and you can see that all the time because they're constantly thinking about who's going to run the asteroid belt. The answer is "a bunch of dirty miners" who get together and execute people because that's what they do because they're justice.

Quinn Slobodian: Right, exactly, and who will compensate for the loss of the cargo? Well they'll turn it over to this insurance company, or that insurance company. You don't need a state to actually have insurance companies.

John Plotz: Yeah, yeah.

Quinn Slobodian: So insurance companies also take on an increased role. One of the many ways that I think these right-wing libertarians-

Elizabeth Ferry: and crypto-currency?

Quinn Slobodian: Right, exactly, I mean some kind of scarce-commodity based currency that cannot be manipulated by public authorities in the way of fiat money, which they all see as really the beginning of the end of civilization as we know it--

John Plotz: Oh my god the Dune books are all about insurance companies running the world because that's true. The monarchies are meaningless. It's the Space Guild and there is some insurance scheme. That's really interesting--and those are the 70s too, aren't they?

Quinn Slobodian: Yeah.

John Plotz: Yeah, huh, wow.

Quinn Slobodian: Yeah, I'm sure the list goes on. I can only assume, but with Rothbard, so the traditional libertarian position is I think is best put by someone in an Q & A at some conference I was watching online recently. Saying "we're like astronauts, we see the world from a million miles away, we don't see borders, we don't see states, we just see like territory, and we don't see humans. But if we got closer we'd just see humans, and you also can't see of course borders from the sky."

John Plotz: Oh my god, it's the blue marble as libertarian fantasy.

Quinn Slobodian: Oh absolutely, so the normal position is no borders because how do you have borders if you don't have states? Well the right-wing libertarians have solved that one, and their model is basically the covenant community, or the gated community in other words. People come together and they sign some sort of a

binding document about decision-making and shared responsibilities. Then that territory becomes beholden only to their law and there's no higher authority.

Quinn Slobodian: They start sort of theorizing this in the 1970s, but then really more into the 1980s and '90s. The thing that really gets them talking about what is closed borders libertarianism is this increased concern about South/North immigration. And it's an extension of the 1960s backlash against desegregation in the sense that they use the same term that what immigration is, is actually forced integration. Because you then have to confront these people who you have no choice in having around you, but they're on your roads, they're in your public schools, they're in your parks. That's an incursion on your personal liberty, right there.

Elizabeth Ferry: So your covenant did not include those people, right?

Quinn Slobodian: Exactly, so if-

Elizabeth Ferry: That was not [inaudible 00:14:54].

Quinn Slobodian: Right, exactly, so-

John Plotz: So, this maybe getting a little bit too in the weeds, but isn't there a [John] Lockean history in this debate between a *tacit consent* versus *explicit consent*? In other words someone who takes up citizenship in a country is explicitly consenting, but then there's this whole other social structure of just the things that we tacitly buy into.

Quinn Slobodian: Yeah, I mean it's all a kind of expansion of the question of whether the social contract is meant literally or figuratively, right? I mean because most of the time it is figurative, but their argument is really that it is possible now to make it literal, and you should be able to have what Rothbard calls "nations by consent." That consent might not be abstract if you create a new nation, either through secession or settlement of an otherwise unsettled territory.

Quinn Slobodian: So it's in the '90s this is happening across the Right, is that the end of the Cold War means the common enemy of the communists is gone, and the new enemy really becomes the non-white immigrant. A lot of the conservative magazines pivot quite hard in that direction. From *Chronicles* on the one hand to the kind of organ of the paleo-conservatives, to which Rothbard is aligned. And *The National Review* itself, in the 90s, takes up immigration much more aggressively than before.

John Plotz: So post 1989, so in other words, the book comes out in '73, and the other article we're going to talk about I think is from '74. So 16 years later-

Quinn Slobodian: Oh yeah.

John Plotz: There's, okay.

Quinn Slobodian: And it's republished and then made available for example on the website of *American Renaissance*, which is the central White Nationalists' organ. So it becomes, as someone on *American Renaissance* reviewed it, the 1984 of our times. This thing that was written awhile ago, but only now can we see how it's accurate its vision of the future was.

John Plotz: So this is all, maybe this is a good time to pivot because so far we've been thinking about this, we haven't talked about Mr. Raspail personally still alive.

Quinn Slobodian: That's okay.

John Plotz: Feel free to visit him, but that makes this seem, you can see the Euro side of this, but of course actually there's an American side of it as well—that I think Elizabeth you were going to talk about.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah well, so as you were saying John, just around the same time the thing I wanted to bring in was an article by the economist and ecologist, I guess, Garrett Hardin, which is called “Living on a Lifeboat.” I kind of see this as the sort of domesticated or sort of legitimate reasonable sounding version of the argument.

Quinn Slobodian: The biologized version of the argument.

Elizabeth Ferry: Biologized version and reasonable people, meaning men, can agree.

John Plotz: He's a Professor of human ecology in Santa Barbara, I think, in 1974 when he publishes it.

Elizabeth Ferry: That sounds about right, he's trained in Chicago, and he's most famous for an argument in an article called “Tragedy of the Commons.” Which is arguing that because the Commons is not seen to be the property of any particular person or group there's no incentive to take care of it. Then there's a sort of gradual generalized degradation of it.

Elizabeth Ferry: This is kind of not a surprising, and this argument, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” is extremely widespread, and I think in many circles not particularly called into question. Sort of taken as a self-evident thing, even though plenty of people have pushed back against it. Maybe most famously the economist Elinor Ostrom who [talks about how all the ways](#) in which in fact the Commons is regulated through different kinds of corporate groups like states or unions.

Elizabeth Ferry: There's a famous ethnography called *Lobster Gangs of Maine* about how the “commons” of lobster fishing is in fact managed quite well. I wanted to start maybe by just reading this metaphor that sort of encapsulates the argument. So he says “metaphorically each rich nation amounts to a lifeboat full of

comparatively rich people. The poor of the world are in other much more crowded lifeboats. Continuously, so to speak, the poor fall out of their lifeboats and swim for awhile in the water outside, hoping to be admitted to a rich lifeboat. Or in some other way to benefit from the 'goodies' on board. What should the passengers on a rich lifeboat do? This is the central problem of the ethics of a lifeboat."

Elizabeth Ferry: He, like Raspail, although in a more sort of reasonable version, reasonable-sounding version, is sort of placing a lot of the responsibility for kind of environmental and political degradation at the hands of people who believe that they're doing the right thing, right? Who are taking the idealistic view, he sort of equates them with Christians or Marxists at one point.

John Plotz: Doesn't he actually, he makes a sort of pointedly, I mean I might be misremembering the article, but doesn't he make a pointedly anti-racist side to his argument where he says look, set the abilities and the contributions of the people at zero, like say they're all the same. Nonetheless, we don't want them in our lifeboat.

Quinn Slobodian: Yeah it's a carrying capacity argument, ecology argument. It's says basically we are these other organisms.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, there isn't going to be enough to go around and therefore we are going to need to make choices, and liberals are not willing to make those choices because they succumb to these idealistic arguments, right?

Quinn Slobodian: Mm-hmm (affirmative), and it's, I mean it's contemporaneous with of course like the Club of Rome "Limits to Growth" report, right? But rather than scaling it up to the world to say "what changes do we need to make given these limits?" his point is the world doesn't exist as an active political category. There's no world government, so we need to think of others only at the level of the nation, and when you do that zero-sumness comes back with a vengeance.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, and there's no sense of the sort of system within which these different lifeboats are operating.

Quinn Slobodian: Yeah. Well it's like there's no effective form of collective decision making.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right.

Quinn Slobodian: He has this snide thing about the UN, the UN is only there insofar as governments give it the impression of making decisions, but the moment-

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, and it has no power because it decided not to have power.

Quinn Slobodian: Right, or the states decided not to give it power.

Elizabeth Ferry: Or the states decided not to give it power, right.

John Plotz: So that's like the opening is the dueling metaphors of spaceship or raft. So the point is if there was a spaceship there would be a captain.

Quinn Slobodian: There'd be a captain, right, or at least a crew

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, I think I might push back on the idea that it's exactly an anti-racist argument, as much as an avoiding-

Quinn Slobodian: Non-racist.

Elizabeth Ferry: Non-racist, yes.

John Plotz: Yeah, non-racist, and I didn't even mean structurally non-racist. I just meant putatively. Whereas the Raspail argument, I just think it's worth noting how much he doubles down on his racism. Because even the stench and the squalor of the raft in the Raspail novel, which you would think is an effect of like being on a raft, becomes instead an attribute of like the people who are stinky and dirty.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, and there's this kind of horrible luxuriating in the *race-ness* in *Camp of the Saints*, right? Whereas in the Hardin, not surprisingly as an economist, he's basically sort of saying let difference equal, be null. He's sort of we're going to write a formula in which that is written out.

John Plotz: Well it sort of raises the interesting question of whether race blindness actually matters within these arguments. If you can make the same argument without resorting to the racial rhetoric, is the racial rhetoric, I mean this might be a question about the Raspail: Whether the racial rhetoric is an instrument is an integral part, or it's just window dressing.

Elizabeth Ferry: Well I think it matters because it makes it more palatable to frame it in these terms.

Quinn Slobodian: For Hardin.

Elizabeth Ferry: For Hardin, yeah.

John Plotz: Yeah, but Raspail actually clearly struck a note as well by going to the other directions.

Quinn Slobodian: But I think that-

Elizabeth Ferry: But it's easy to see, or it's easy for many people, certainly not for everyone, but it's easy for many people to see that Raspail is outside of the pale for many. Whereas Hardin in many circles seems perfectly reasonable.

John Plotz: But, so Quinn are you saying that these are sort of rhetorical and stylistic differences, and this in a way we could turn this question to what the Republican party is acting like nowadays, right? Because there are lots of Hardin-type people in the Republican party, like there are people that are going to seek out that respectable, scientific center. Clearly there are inflamers also, like people who love the idea of-

Quinn Slobodian: Yeah, the Steve Kings, and-

John Plotz: Yeah, and not just Steve King, but also as you said, Bannon, like people who work by inflaming the-

Quinn Slobodian: Sensibilities-

John Plotz: The sensibilities of the left. So are those merely rhetorical differences between a fundamentally unified right-wing ideology that has a kind of rational, political, non-racial tinge on one side, and a totally openly racist tinge on the other side? Or are those actually two different ways of looking at the world that just happen to be traveling in the same Maserati together?

Quinn Slobodian: Well I mean I think it gets tricky if you think about climate change too seriously, and this might be a good chance to sort of segue into the third book we hope to talk about. Because sure it can seem small-hearted and kind of unethical at some level to take on Hardin's lifeboat ethics, but there must be at least some way in which he's right. I mean in the sense that we are dealing with a situation of limited, not just limited resources, it's actually much worse than that, rapidly transforming planet that will change the terrain around us.

Quinn Slobodian: So, in that sense, the difference that you're describing John, between sort of an overtly racialized or a culturally coded form of right-wing rhetoric versus the at least formerly non-racist forms of economic right-wing rhetoric do become quite consequential. Because it's the question then of who you're selecting as the criterion of selection for the lifeboat in a way. I mean I don't think it's that farfetched-

John Plotz: Well, but is that true, I mean just to understand, I hear what you're saying about the conservative conservatism, I remember that from the first George Bush.

Quinn Slobodian: Paul Ryan, too.

John Plotz: I totally accept that existence of that, but just to stick with the lifeboat metaphor for a minute. I mean okay fine it has these environmentalists and "population bomb" roots, but just as I think you were saying Elizabeth, the selection of the lifeboat as nation as unit of analysis. That by itself, there's nothing environmentalist about that. That's just a way of justifying segregation basically, balkanization.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right.

Quinn Slobodian: Sure, but I mean insofar as any solution to, or not even solution to, any sort of mitigating approach to the coming climate catastrophe will have to sort of choose the scale at which it operates, I think. Whether or not that, you know it's the question of kind of communitarianism. What is the size of the vessel that makes sense, not as, like is there a way of thinking about the lifeboat metaphor, is there something between Spaceship Earth and Lifeboat Nation that could actually be operationable as like a non-reactionary politics?

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, then there's sort of on the one hand this sense of a zero sum, which is the ethics of the lifeboat, but then what are the principles of redistribution according to which the game gets played?

Quinn Slobodian: Yeah, exactly.

Elizabeth Ferry: That seems like the difference-

John Plotz: And it's too bad we didn't choose as our third text this other amazing film, Quinn, that you sent me, which we can put a link to. This film *Libra* from the late 1970s, which is a libertarian fantasy about escaping to a satellite basically, where it's not a zero-sum game. I had a t-shirt when I was a kid that said "The meek shall inherit the earth and the rest of us shall escape to the stars."

Quinn Slobodian: Oh really?

Elizabeth Ferry: So, before we go to our third text I wanted to maybe shift it a little bit to talk about water and boats and demand. I mean clearly there's some geographic relevancy to these kinds of metaphors of the lifeboat and the armada in the third text. You know that the lifeboat and the rising seas is picked up, but I think that those do other kinds of work in that text too, so I'm just curious what you guys think about that.

Quinn Slobodian: Well I mean at a basic level I think it's a perfect segue to the third book.

John Plotz: It is, I agree.

Quinn Slobodian: But ironically *The Camp of the Saints* might offer us a bit of a way out in the flotilla, in the armada, right? I mean because what is that but a collection of tethered-together lifeboats, but one that then produces its own collectively, and its own kind of integrity somehow. Again, to sort of flip the script on Raspail, if this is actually true, it's an extraordinary vindication of kind of vanguard politics, right?

Quinn Slobodian: I mean how is it exactly that a million people end up taking over France, a country of dozen of millions? Because a million people showed up in Germany in 2015, and the result was not the total transformation of the fabric of Germany.

So that vision of many small lifeboats sort of acting as one might be something that might be slightly adaptable.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, the other sort of quiet metaphor that I felt like, especially in *Camp of the Saints*, but I think it's there in the others is the "middle passage" and the slave ships. Especially in those descriptions of the bodies being all packed in together. It reminded me, I mean I don't know if it's at all consciously in Raspail's mind, but reminded me a lot of those diagrams of the slave ships. And this whole sort of what kinds of movements of different kinds of people across the globe have been going on.

Quinn Slobodian: Yeah, and the historical sociologist, Jason Moore, he's recently titled something *Slave Ship Earth*, so that is something that people have also played with.

John Plotz: Wow, that's fascinating.

Quinn Slobodian: *Play* is not the right word for it.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, and another group of anthropologists has talked about the planet as a plantation economy.

Quinn Slobodian: Right.

John Plotz: Yeah, so this is a great segue actually to the John Lanchester. So, John Lanchester, I hope I'm saying his name right, he's kind of like the English Tom Wolfe of the 2010s. He's a journalist who probably became best known for a satirical novel about neoliberalism called *Capital*. Now, he just came out, just a couple of months ago, with this novel *The Wall*. There's a premise that an island nation, which is explicitly not Britain, if you call it *Schmitain*, you know.

Elizabeth Ferry: That has many pubs.

John Plotz: Seems to have many pubs, and the weather is always extremely gray.

Quinn Slobodian: There's a lot of tea being drunk.

John Plotz: Yes, there's a lot of tea.

Quinn Slobodian: A lot of biscuits.

John Plotz: There is a lot of tea, yeah. At one point they make a joke about anti-aphrodisiacs, and someone says "yeah it's called tea." So, it's an island that is surrounded it's entire border with a wall. I think this is exactly to the point that we've been talking about. The wall is in response to two different things. It's in response to environmental disaster, so climate change, rising seas, and also heat elsewhere. And also the immigration that is a consequence of that.

John Plotz: So it's like a flood of people imagined almost as like part of that natural flood. Then in the face of that it's a very kind of stripped-down dystopian account in which every title has a capital letter associated with it. So people have to go and guard against the Others with a capital O. To do that they become Defenders with a capital D.

Elizabeth Ferry: And the climate change is the Change with a capital C.

John Plotz: And then there's the change, and then the wall. It is in fact, so "10000 kilometers of Wall, a defender for every 200 meters, 50000 defenders on duty at any time, another 50000 on the other shift. So 100000 on duty day in, day out. The only things that can happen are bad things, so you want nothing to happen." So it's like your job is to guard stasis, in order to guard stasis the entire youth of the country is standing at the edges.

John Plotz: Then the thing they're not doing while they're standing there is also with a capital letter, B. They're not breeding, because basically not only do you want to keep other people from coming in, but nobody in the country feels like having children any more either.

Elizabeth Ferry: And yet there's a demographic problem, right?

John Plotz: Yep.

Quinn Slobodian: For that reason there's a demographic problem.

John Plotz: Yep.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, right, which is, I mean it seems like the obvious solution.

John Plotz: Right, and then the final point being (which goes to this issue of whether this is a non-racist, or a racialized account) which is you're not supposed to let anyone in, but if you do let someone in each person who comes in, one of the defenders is thrown out.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, so it's an explicit-

John Plotz: It's an explicitly zero-sum lifeboat.

Quinn Slobodian: And the other who gets in is themselves not executed or expelled out, but they're given a chip, and then made one of the Help, which is this sort of-

John Plotz: Yeah, with a capital H.

Quinn Slobodian: A fluid domestic service class, which you can take on willfully as long as you feed and house them at any given point.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, and who are the property of the state.

Quinn Slobodian: Right, and the race thing is, Elizabeth and I were talking about this before. It really is I think the most interesting part of the book, the more I think about it. Because I think that the flood--refugee parallel is kind of forced. I mean this is something that people who study this point out. Is that this assumed direct relation between climate change and displacement, is actually overdrawn.

Quinn Slobodian: In the sense that there's as much likelihood of people being locked into the place that they're in as there is of them being pushed out of it. Because it takes resources to travel. You can't move if you have nothing. It's much more likely that you die in place than you get to where you're going.

John Plotz: So can I say that totally makes sense to me, but the way I understood the overlay of those two types of terror, like the climate change threatening our borders, and the human capital flood was more like an account of the *cognitive panic* that you might undergo as you saw it. I mean if you just think about, we haven't really touched on this issue of why it is that people have flocked to far right ideologies lately.

John Plotz: Clearly people find themselves in kind of cognitive duress where they start believing irrational things. And I think things that in retrospect they will understand to have been irrational, but nonetheless, it can take hold.

Quinn Slobodian: Right, that's where the generational story is interesting in *The Wall* too. Because it seems like the main characters that we have who have grown up after the change, by the way I think that's almost definitely borrowed directly from the East Germany/West Germany case. Because when the wall fell it was still referred to as *die Wende*, the change. So in this case the change leads to the erection of the wall.

John Plotz: Interesting.

Quinn Slobodian: But they don't seem to have any of the argument there about why they should be so afraid of the others, except just that they are. I mean like you're saying, it's just like a reflexive thing, but it makes you wonder. Is the generation before supposed to have been persuaded by some kind of welfare state, overburdening-type explanation? If so you don't really see much of a trace of it, right? It's all just naturalized.

Elizabeth Ferry: Or and it's really interactional, right? You're afraid of the Others because you know the Others will immediately kill you because they will have to.

Quinn Slobodian: Right, and if you let them in then you will be yourself expelled.

Elizabeth Ferry: Then you will be expelled, right.

John Plotz: Yeah, so now the thing I thought was going to come in to the novel more, but it certainly exists in a parallel to *The Camp of the Saints*, is that question of the traitors in our midst. Like the sympathizers, the people who are willing to let the others in. Do you guys have a thought about that? I mean the kind of presence/non-presence of that as a plot device?

Quinn Slobodian: Well that was actually the sentence that I pulled out from *the Camp of the Saints* to share was this very Colonel, this proud last Western man says at some point, "in war the real enemy is always behind the lines." Because it does seem to unite all three of these that in the end it's a question of betrayal from within. And the threat of like the Fifth Column, or the kind of insidiousness of an idea among your own. Rather than the embodied threat of people from outside.

Elizabeth Ferry: And maybe even inside yourself, right? Your own humanitarian impulses are going to be your undoing.

Quinn Slobodian: Right, need to be policed.

John Plotz: This is a great time to pivot to our Recallable Books, so if you don't believe in your future at least you can take some solace in the past. So we conclude with recommendations basically for further reading on the topic that we have raised today. And as with the books we discussed there will be links to those on our website along with other materials for folks who want to explore this topic further. So, Quinn, as our guest, do you want to start us off?

Quinn Slobodian: Sure, well this book actually hasn't quite come out yet.

John Plotz: Okay great.

Quinn Slobodian: It will be out in the next couple of months.

John Plotz: So it is from the future.

Quinn Slobodian: It is from the future. The title of the book is *Mutant Neoliberalism*, and it's an edited volume edited by William Callison and Zachary Manfredi. They published on Fordham University Press, and it gathers some really interesting writing, including Melinda Cooper writing about the anti-austerity of the far-right. So this is the difference between the kind of libertarians of AFD, and then the kind of welfare chauvinists of the *Front National*.

Quinn Slobodian: Etienne Balibar who's been an extraordinary writer on the idea of Europe for many years. Wendy Brown has a chapter in there, a couple of other people do, and I think it's the best. It will be the best collection so far to kind of account for 2016 as something other than the just "the jungle growing back" as kind of the beltway punditocracy would like us to understand it.

John Plotz: That sounds great, Elizabeth?

- Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, so mine actually picks up on the last bit of our discussion, and it's by Douglas Holmes. It's an ethnography of central bankers and monetarism of central bankers. It's called *Economy of Words*, that's sort of about how, really about a particular kind of move away from gold. And the central banks' kind of the thing that was thought to be the main job of central banks, which was to take care of gold as a kind of safeguard of a nation among other kinds of things that you describe so well, In favor of a kind of sort of performative economic space, semiotic function of controlling the money supply through things like quantitative easing and other kinds of techniques. The book is centrally focused on that, but I think that tension between the sort of economy of words and the economy of something that supposedly comes from outside of the world of words is really central to what we've been talking about.
- Quinn Slobodian: Mm-hmm (affirmative), it's what Paul Volker called the mystique of central banking. You needed to speak in such a way that it was gnomic enough that people could read other things than what you intended.
- Elizabeth Ferry: So I'm doing a project on gold and I had an interlocutor say "we've moved from a gold standard to a PHD standard, and who's to say which one is better?"
- John Plotz: I picked up a different strand of our discussion, so I went back, I was just sort of brooding on 73 and 74 and the question of governmentality back then. So I went the other direction towards science fiction, as I often do, and I picked up Ursula Le Guin's 1974 book *The Dispossessed an Ambiguous Utopia*. Actually it connects in many ways to what we're talking about today. Especially in that question of how you constitute governmentality while still distrusting the state, because it's sort of an open secret that Le Guin is, among other things, trying to work out some kind of anarchist politics.
- John Plotz: I sometimes think of what she does as a sort of *solitary solidarity*. So she wants people to be on their own, and yet nonetheless want to live and coexist with one another. So she takes the tradition of sort of utopian democratic socialism, which just asserts people will just love one another—and it's kind of a dark gray version of that because she thinks you can live in a world of privation and limited resources, where you're going to have to struggle with one another, But she thinks there are mechanisms for getting there that are not nation or state bound mechanisms.
- John Plotz: It's a really interesting novel. Like *Camp of the Saints* it's kind of strange as a novel, but I think it's just a thoughtful exploration of what it would mean to want out of liberalism and not be sure how you get *connective tissue* without it.
- John Plotz: All right, well Quinn thank you so much, and we'll just say that *Recall This Book* is hosted by John Plotz and Elizabeth Ferry. Sound editing is by Claire Ogden, website and social media by Matthew Schratz, and if you liked this episode you might want to check out our discussion of women and politics with [Manduhai Buyandelger. And the one about addiction and happiness and dependency with Gina Turrigiano--Not because I'm saying right-wing politics is addiction, it's just

an interesting connection. Further episodes coming up include a conversation with the Chinese science fiction writer Cixin Liu, another one with Zadie Smith. I want to say future Nobel laureate Zadie Smith. Also, with the poet David Ferry and biologist EO Wilson.

John Plotz:

Finally, if you enjoyed today's show please be sure to tweet about us, mention the show on Facebook, or write a review and rate us on iTunes, stitcher or wherever you get your podcasts. Thank you very much for listening.