

Paul ([00:00:02](#)):

Ladies and gentlemen, angry Americans around the country and around the world, welcome to Los Angeles. I come to you live from the hallowed and relatively new and very fancy studios of Crooked Media. We have a very, very special, timely, important, inspiring, interesting guest. The great and powerful Jamil Smith.

Jamil Smith ([00:00:25](#)):

What's up? How are you doing?

Paul ([00:00:27](#)):

I'm good, I'm good.

Jamil Smith ([00:00:28](#)):

Welcome to LA, bro.

Paul ([00:00:29](#)):

Thank you, dude. You're not from here originally?

Jamil Smith ([00:00:32](#)):

Hell no. I don't know if I should actually be welcoming you here.

Paul ([00:00:36](#)):

No, but I appreciate the fact that you did. Thank you.

Jamil Smith ([00:00:39](#)):

I'm a Clevelander transplanted here. Born and raised Clevelander, but I've been out here long enough, I think, that I can maybe be on the welcome committee.

Paul ([00:00:48](#)):

Don't you find that people who are not from here welcome people who are not from here more often?

Jamil Smith ([00:00:53](#)):

I think there's enough people. There's so many people who aren't from here that live here. It's actually rare that you run into a born and raised Angeleno. There's a lot of us transplants, especially a lot of us Clevelanders out here.

Paul ([00:01:08](#)):

Yeah. I want to talk about Cleveland. I want to talk about a lot of things, but first of all I'm going to ask you the question that I ask of all our guests, because we are here in California. Jamil Smith, what is your drink of choice?

Jamil Smith ([00:01:19](#)):

Red Stripe, sir. Brewed in Jamaica. Yes. First of all, I love a good Jamaican beer. First of all, it's got a nice little spice to it. It comes in a particularly unique bottle, and it's something that, when I was first starting to get a taste for beer, just really appealed to me.

Paul ([00:01:41](#)):

Absolutely. Well, salud. Thank you.

Jamil Smith ([00:01:43](#)):

Thank you, sir.

Paul ([00:01:44](#)):

Great choice.

Jamil Smith ([00:01:45](#)):

It's a fact that it's brewed by black folks.

Paul ([00:01:48](#)):

Yes.

Jamil Smith ([00:01:48](#)):

Not a bad thing.

Paul ([00:01:49](#)):

No. I don't know if anybody on the show to date has chosen a beer, and that's an excellent choice. Of all the beers, I feel like Red Stripe is a fucking home run. The bottle is amazing, the inspiration that it brings, the taste. If you've ever had a Red Stripe in Jamaica, it just compounds the experience and makes it that much more memorable. You're right about the bottle. The bottle is unique. It feels old school. It also feels uniquely throw-able.

Jamil Smith ([00:02:18](#)):

Doesn't it make you feel like you're on a beach though? A little bit?

Paul ([00:02:21](#)):

It does. It does. It does, but I love that choice, and we're going to drink some Red Stripe here while we have a conversation about all the amazing and interesting and wild and weird shit that's going on in the world. We come to you today, fresh out of New Hampshire, fresh out of Iowa, fresh out of the State of the Union, fresh out of the Oscars, fresh out of the Super Bowl. These are all things that you're uniquely positioned to talk about. You sit at this really unique intersection between politics and race and culture and sports.

Jamil Smith ([00:02:48](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:02:49](#)):

It's a great time to be you.

Jamil Smith ([00:02:51](#)):

Not too bad. Not too bad, and not a bad town to be in, for sure.

Paul ([00:02:55](#)):

Let's start with last night. We're coming to you recording on Wednesday. This will drop on Thursday. New Hampshire is over. We actually have a conclusion unlike in Iowa.

Jamil Smith ([00:03:08](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:03:08](#)):

What are your top line takeaways, Jamil?

Jamil Smith ([00:03:10](#)):

First things first. Bernie Sanders. Let's start with who actually won as opposed to talking about what big nights the second and third place people did have. I think the cable news networks were, I think, a little too obsessed with that. Let's talk about who actually won. Bernie Sanders, I think, is showing signs of being the only candidate who is actually able to form a working coalition. Younger people. Not just younger people, but a diverse coalition of younger people that, I think ... People say that you can't win races with younger voters ages 18 to 25. Well, he's turning out people, frankly, in diverse crowds in Iowa and New Hampshire, which frankly you don't really see. He's bringing in folks maybe who have been disenchanted previously by the political process. I'm interested to see where this goes going forward in Nevada and in South Carolina, for sure. Can that appeal be translated into states that are considerably more diverse and offer different challenges?

Paul ([00:04:21](#)):

I want to go through a lot of the candidates with you and get your unique perspective on all of them, but I also want to talk about the intersection of class and race and diversity, which I think is one of the most under-reported, misunderstood, and just an area that lacks focus in understanding our politics in part, because I feel like white people especially don't know how to talk about it, or are uncomfortable talking about it.

Jamil Smith ([00:04:46](#)):

Right.

Paul ([00:04:48](#)):

Despite all the efforts for diversity, a lot of the media narratives are still driven by white people, and driven from outside of places like Iowa and outside of places like New Hampshire, but the intersection around Bernie Sanders is particularly fascinating. Let me ask you, what is it about ... Why do young people of color, why are they interested in Bernie Sanders?

Jamil Smith ([00:05:12](#)):

I talked to younger people of color that are intrigued by Bernie Sanders. They see a person who is driven to attack problems that inherently disadvantage people of color, without using that term, black, Hispanic, indigenous people more acutely than they do other Americans in general. Here's a guy who has plans that are going to attack these disproportionate, discriminatory issues. I guess you could say more to the point than, say, when Elizabeth Warren or any of these other moderate candidates.

Jamil Smith ([00:06:03](#)):

They see a guy who's really going to solve the problem. They don't care what package it comes in. They don't care if it's socialist or how it's branded, they see a guy who's actually going to work with them to solve the problem. I see a little bit of a problem with that thinking. You have a guy who has branded himself as a democratic socialist. He's going to have to work with or get through a campaign. How, then, are other Americans going to take and understand Bernie Sanders? Republicans are inevitably, if he becomes the nominee, going to brand him as a communist.

Paul ([00:06:52](#)):

Right.

Jamil Smith ([00:06:52](#)):

They're just going to.

Paul ([00:06:53](#)):

Right, right, right.

Jamil Smith ([00:06:54](#)):

They need to have a plan for how they're going to get him through to the presidency. What is the plan? I have yet to understand it. How are they going to pay for the 'Medicare for All' plan? We don't yet really have the explanation for that.

Jamil Smith ([00:07:13](#)):

There are things about his campaign that trouble me. The class versus race analysis. There are things that trouble me about that. Frankly, there are things that he has come forward on. He speaks very passionately about the need to eliminate racism in our society, about the need to eliminate misogyny. I believe Bernie when he says these things, because he's done the work as an activist. Listen, we don't need to have me be convinced on these things, but what I need to see from him are the embrace of race-conscious policy in the way that I think he's done with class.

Jamil Smith ([00:08:04](#)):

I just want to make sure that we understand that you can walk and chew gum at the same time. You can, in fact, put forward a policy that ... If you put forward policy that addresses class, yes, inevitably that is going to have an effect on, certainly, black and Hispanic folks, maybe disproportionately, but I need him to incorporate that directly into the policy. I just need it to be a little bit more explicit.

Paul ([00:08:40](#)):

Okay. Can I ask you to drill down on something that I think I hear from a lot of folks. Do you trust him? He's 78 years old.

Jamil Smith ([00:08:51](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul ([00:08:53](#)):

He's an old dude and he's operating in a very, very dynamic environment, and on a very basic level ... I've got plenty of criticisms about Bernie Sanders. I've worked alongside Bernie Sanders, I've worked against Bernie Sanders, and at times he is an ideologue.

Jamil Smith ([00:09:08](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:09:08](#)):

You can argue that he's so principled, he's always been the same way, or you can argue that he doesn't move and that's why more things don't get done.

Jamil Smith ([00:09:15](#)):

Right.

Paul ([00:09:16](#)):

When he was the chairman of the Senate on Veterans Affairs Committee, he packed everything into Omnibus bills and said, "You've got to vote for the whole thing or nothing." Oftentimes, Republicans would just say "no", and they'd vote against it and we'd have nothing.

Jamil Smith ([00:09:26](#)):

Right.

Paul ([00:09:28](#)):

That's one component, is the practical component of it, but he's an old guy who seems to be hanging. He's got a lot of great surrogates who are very dynamic, who understand the media environment. I feel like he's a slip away from a Biden moment, and I wonder if other folks are worried about that. If he wasn't Bernie Sanders and someone told you, "I got this profile of a guy. He's from Vermont, he's 78 years old, he's white, this is what he stands for." I don't know how many people would trust him not to screw it up.

Jamil Smith ([00:09:59](#)):

Here's a couple of things-

Paul ([00:10:00](#)):

You know what I mean?

Jamil Smith ([00:10:01](#)):

Yeah. No, I understand that. I've never met Bernie Sanders. I've never had a conversation with Bernie Sanders. It's tough for me to answer that question on an empirical level. Here's a couple of things I am concerned about with Bernie Sanders.

Jamil Smith ([00:10:20](#)):

Number one is with regards to his health. He's 78 years old. He's had an incident with his health during this campaign, and we still don't know nearly enough about his health. He won't release his health records. Most recently, as recently as this week, we've had inquiries about his health, and there's still cagey about releasing his health records. Why won't you release your health records? Just do it.

Paul ([00:10:51](#)):

Yeah, and that's a core issue, because he wants to contrast himself with the dishonest Donald Trump, who he's going to say is a guy you can't trust, he's the most disastrous president in history. But also when you look across the landscape, Jamil, you got Biden's late seventies, Trump's late seventies, Sanders is late seventies, Warren is close, Pelosi is close. If you picked five people in their late seventies, early eighties, the likelihood that all five of them would live one year is low. One of them is probably going to get sick or potentially die. That's a statistical reality.

Paul ([00:11:25](#)):

When you talk about Bernie in particular, a guy who's flying around all the time, who's got tremendous pressure, the physical demands of being on a campaign are very high. I think his age is an issue, but even more so it's the issue of transparency, and it seems like he's holding himself to a lower standard here and than he wants to hold other people too.

Jamil Smith ([00:11:41](#)):

Yeah. I wouldn't necessarily group Warren in there with them. I think she's about 70 or 71. If you see her on a stage, she's bouncing around like she's 20 years younger than that.

Paul ([00:11:50](#)):

Sure, but plenty of 70-year-olds have heart attacks out of the blue who run marathons all the time.

Jamil Smith ([00:11:53](#)):

Yeah, people our age.

Paul ([00:11:55](#)):

It could happen. It could happen. Yeah, yeah.

Jamil Smith ([00:11:57](#)):

That's true, but to me it's less about Sanders' age and the fact that he's had a recent incident that is telling me that, "Hey, we need to see your health records." There's that, but also his recent statement that he didn't truly understand the seriousness, and I'm paraphrasing here, of systemic racism until he ran for president. Think about-

Paul ([00:12:22](#)):

That's what I'm talking about. That's what I'm talking about.

Jamil Smith ([00:12:25](#)):

Think about how long he's been in office. Think about how long he's been in politics. The most troubling thing about that statement to me is, you didn't understand it until you ran for president?

Paul ([00:12:36](#)):

Yeah.

Jamil Smith ([00:12:37](#)):

It took you running for president to grasp the seriousness of this? What about running for president made you grasp that?

Paul ([00:12:44](#)):

Yeah. Does he become for people, we keep saying young people, and if people of color is not an appropriate or accurate term and there's a better way to phrase it, please help me-

Jamil Smith ([00:12:54](#)):

I just like to be more specific, because with people of color, I think there's some people, I know certainly within our business, don't like that term, so I just want to be more specific in terms of speaking about those communities, because all of them have different needs and specific interests. It's not about necessarily using the term. What I want to say is, I think you have with Sanders ... he's not the only one, for me, that I've got real concerns about. I've got real concerns about-

Paul ([00:13:30](#)):

Can we stay on him for a second though, because I want to ask you this.

Jamil Smith ([00:13:32](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Paul ([00:13:34](#)):

The wide varieties of people that we're talking about, whether it's young people or Hispanics, are a lot of people looking at him in the same way evangelicals looked at Trump, in that they said, "You know what? He's not exactly who we want, but he's what we got, and I think he's going to stand up for what I believe in, so I'm going to pull the lever for him." It seems to me like a parallel, and also similarly, I've been looking for an opportunity to focus on Sanders on this podcast, and I think this is the time. There's also a point of what he and Andrew Yang both bring, to especially young people, which is promising you free shit.

Paul ([00:14:09](#)):

Andrew Yang is smart. He leads with, "I'm going to get everybody 1000 bucks or 2000 bucks." When George W. Bush got elected, he gave everybody an immediate tax rebate. Bernie Sanders is saying, "I'm going to give you free college. I'm going to erase all your debt." If you're a new voter, regardless of what your gender or ethnic breakdown is, that is something that may bring you in the fold. It may bring you

forward if you say, "Hey, I'm going to make college free." That brings me into the tent. It gets me engaged. He sounds like a guy who I can talk to, but on some levels, Bernie Sanders is selling bullshit. We know it. Those of us who've worked in politics, I think, really do believe that somebody's got to call out Bernie Sanders for selling the impossible dream. Some of this is unrealistic.

Paul ([00:14:48](#)):

This week, the VA, it just announced they're delaying the implementation of the electronic record keeping system at the VA. That is a system that they've been trying to reform since the early 2000s. I stood at a press conference with Barack Obama in 2009, and he stood up and said, "We're going to fix it." Every president says this dream that they're going to make the VA amazing. They're going to make it wonderful, everybody's going to get a free puppy, the electronic record keeping is going to be like walking into an Apple store. Everybody says it, but nobody ever checks the receipts. Nobody ever comes back and holds Barack Obama accountable now in 2020, for the fact that that was 11 years ago. They've been talking about fighting the bureaucracy of the VA longer than we've actually been fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Paul ([00:15:31](#)):

You're an expert on culture. You worked in football, you've worked in many different medias, you write for Rolling Stone. You sit at a lot of different intersections. Is there a part of this that's just salesmanship?

Jamil Smith ([00:15:44](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, most are the son of a veteran who recently navigate the VA's bureaucracy himself. I see how ridiculous that is to say to veterans, "Hey, we're going to fix this," It's going to make it sound like it's easy. It's almost offensive.

Paul ([00:16:04](#)):

Isn't it equally offensive for Sanders to say he's going to get rid of everybody's college debt?

Jamil Smith ([00:16:08](#)):

Well, yeah. Here's the thing. I think that it's something to shoot for, but you've got to explain how you're going to do it.

Paul ([00:16:15](#)):

Right.

Jamil Smith ([00:16:19](#)):

I don't like when Amy Klobuchar says that, "Hey, I think this is unrealistic and we shouldn't even try." That I don't like. I don't want to hear a politician tell me, "No, this is going to be too hard and we shouldn't even try. Let's just shoot for something that's easier to do." Don't be a politician and tell me that. Tell me what's realistic. I don't want to hear that. I want to hear somebody tell me you're going to shoot high, and then I want you to have a plan for how you're going to do it, but then I also want you to have a plan for, "Okay, if it fails, here's what we're going to try to do next."

Paul ([00:16:56](#)):



Right.

Jamil Smith ([00:16:58](#)):

That's what I'm hiring you to do. I want to hire you to have plan A, plan B, and plan C. What I'm hearing from Bernie Sanders is that he has plan A, and what's next?

Paul ([00:17:10](#)):

On a very basic level, the criticism about whether or not Bernie Sanders can win versus Trump, I think, is very important. You have written about many of the candidates, and you've also written about some of the candidates that you say, "Even if they can win, it's not enough to nominate them, because there are bigger issues."

Jamil Smith ([00:17:28](#)):

Yes.

Paul ([00:17:29](#)):

Michael Bloomberg. You've written a piece about Michael Bloomberg. You've been very critical of Michael Bloomberg. I think the argument now as Biden falls and Sanders ascends, and you got Sanders and you got Warren on one side, and then you got Klobuchar, Buttigieg and Biden.

Jamil Smith ([00:17:45](#)):

Yes.

Paul ([00:17:46](#)):

I don't think I'm missing anybody. Yang is out now. Deval Patrick is out now. A lot of people are falling quickly, so you're going to have a choice to make within the Democratic party of either Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders or Buttigieg and likely Biden.

Jamil Smith ([00:17:59](#)):

Naming Klobuchar [inaudible 00:18:01].

Paul ([00:18:01](#)):

Amy Klobuchar. Who knows how that'll shake out. They're disparate tribes on the battlefield. If this is Game of Thrones, then you got the dragon that is Bloomberg, and he comes flying in, and I use Bloomberg ... The dragon example is good, because in my view, Democrats are shitting on Bloomberg for a lot of the wrong reasons. If you're in a fight, you want a dragon, and if you don't get the dragon, you know what happens? The white walkers will take the dragon, and everybody who says Bloomberg should be out of this, independent of his electability, I welcome his resources as someone who isn't independent, who says, "I'm looking at the landscape and all I want to do is be Trump." Because I think Trump is worse than everything. I think the white walkers are the worst thing there can possibly be, and anybody who can be an ally to me against the white walkers is an advantage.

Paul ([00:18:47](#)):

The other example I would give is nukes. Nobody wants nukes, but we don't want the North Koreans to have our nukes. Sometimes you have nukes, in part, as a deterrent. I look at Bloomberg on this battlefield as a guy who can bring resources, who can bring guns to the most important fight of our time. How do you see it?

Jamil Smith ([00:19:07](#)):

Here's how-

Paul ([00:19:07](#)):

Please, and talk about your thoughts please on Bloomberg, because your voice has been really important in this discussion as he continues to ascend. He's third in the national polls now.

Jamil Smith ([00:19:16](#)):

Here's how Michael Bloomberg would have been most useful in all of this. Michael Bloomberg who is wealthy, by the way, I think in a way that I don't think most people quite understand. Michael Bloomberg has around \$58 billion. Just try to wrap your mind around what that is, if you're listening. That is like several trips around the earth more than Trump. This is a guy that's wealthy beyond all kinds of conception.

Jamil Smith ([00:19:58](#)):

Here's how he would've been useful. He would've been useful if he hadn't run for president and used his money to help fund campaigns, not simply of other people running for president, but help felons in Florida gain their right to vote through amendment four. Those folks in Florida have to pay their fines by law. It was ruled. They have to pay firings that they owe on their judgements in order to regain their right to vote. Essentially, it's really a de facto poll tax. Whether it was a mistake written into the law or it's a bad judgment, they have to pay what's owed on their judgments in order to regain their right to vote, even though amendment four was passed overwhelmingly by the people of Florida. Bipartisan.

Paul ([00:20:57](#)):

Yeah, but he's got enough money to do both, Jamil.

Jamil Smith ([00:20:59](#)):

I know.

Paul ([00:20:59](#)):

If he goes down and focuses on that, that's great. I think it's important. I don't mean to dismiss it-

Jamil Smith ([00:21:06](#)):

But here's the problem. If he does both, it looks like it's doing it for him, because if he pays it, he looks ... He's running for president.

Paul ([00:21:17](#)):

I understand where you're coming from.

Jamil Smith ([00:21:18](#)):

He's paying it. He's like, "Hey guys, I did this, and I'm expecting you, basically, to vote for me." You can't really do that as a candidate.

Paul ([00:21:26](#)):

You're a journalist, and you've been obviously advocating for many of the positions on the political left. Are you a Democrat, or how do you identify yourself?

Jamil Smith ([00:21:34](#)):

Look, I have in the past registered as a Democrat when I lived in New York, because I needed to vote in the primary.

Paul ([00:21:41](#)):

Right, right.

Jamil Smith ([00:21:43](#)):

I don't look at myself as a Democrat per se. When people ask me like, "Oh, do you have a candidate in the race?" My answer always is, "I'm not rooting for any of these people. My job as a journalist is to push these people to be better.

Paul ([00:21:59](#)):

Right, right.

Jamil Smith ([00:22:01](#)):

And I've told them, most of them, to their faces. I've had either on the record or off the record sessions with ...

Paul ([00:22:08](#)):

Most of them.

Jamil Smith ([00:22:09](#)):

No, I wouldn't say most of them. I can tell you: Warren, Buttigieg, Harris, Booker, just off the top of my head, and I've told every one of them to their faces, "Look, I'm not rooting for you. My job is to push you to be a better candidate in whatever way that that manifests itself." I would tell every one of them to their faces the same thing. My estimation is I would speak to any candidate running for anything, probably except Trump, because I don't waste my time with people who would lie to me.

Paul ([00:22:46](#)):

I want to come back to that, because the reason I ask is that there is this massive ripping apart of the Democratic Party that's happening right now. You're a thought leader. You're in a place where you can influence the discussion, you can get people to think about things differently. You can galvanize support. People read your column and they think differently about someone like Bloomberg, and maybe they take their money or their time and go elsewhere, but there's a part of this that has a strategic element that I feel like the Democrats, and I'm using that broadly, are missing. There are a lot of things people

would like Bloomberg to do. You know what he could also do? Is sit home and do nothing, and I think that is a serious risk.

Paul ([00:23:23](#)):

For a long time, the writers had people like Sheldon Adelson. They've had billionaires that have created Fox News and massive machines, and what I think Bloomberg is doing is building a machine. He is building a machine, and now that we come out of New Hampshire, you see which machines matter. Buttigieg built a machine. It's a small machine that's rising. Maybe he's Tesla, but it's coming and it's growing, and we'll see how far it goes. Whether or not they can create the solution to all combustion vehicles or not, we'll see.

Paul ([00:23:54](#)):

Then you got Bernie who's like, "I don't know, what, Toyota or something?" He just keeps churning and chugging out, but you've got Bloomberg who's coming in and offering to hand multiple vehicle lines to whoever is picked. I think the reality is that he won't get the nomination, but he will influence the nomination, and it may end up being Sanders or ... Let's say it's Sanders or Biden or Buttigieg, any of the three, and he has thousands of people.

Paul ([00:24:22](#)):

He hired 2000 people, I think, in the last month. People who now have retirement accounts and have good pay and health benefits, and they're sure they can be in the fight until December. He's got his own army, and he is going to hand that to somebody, and let them drive, because they're going to be the candidate. At the same time, he's going to do some asymmetric warfare on the side and the dragon might go higher or it might go lower, and maybe he'll bring another dragon in.

Paul ([00:24:48](#)):

Why does this strategic imperative, in my view, get lost? Is that part of the primary process? Is it like people want him to be better? I get that, but at the same time, the stakes are so fucking high. If Trump wins, all the issues you care about are gone. All the issues-

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Paul ([00:25:03](#)):

If Trump wins, all the issues you care about are gone. All the issues that so many people in the Democratic Party care about, are gone. They're not even on the table. They're going backwards.

Paul ([00:25:08](#)):

So, to some extent, I've been very critical of the Democrats eating their own. And this feels like a moment where, the Democrats are continuing to eat their own, and continuing to spend resources on each other and a lot of ink in places, instead of focusing on how to coalesce in whatever way possible around the common enemy.

Jamil Smith ([00:25:25](#)):

I think there's two problems that are existing right now. One is that, I think too many people are getting wrapped up in this cult of personality around their particular candidates.

Paul ([00:25:34](#)):

Yeah.

Jamil Smith ([00:25:34](#)):

I think people are getting so wrapped up in, "Hey, I really love my particular guy or lady that I'm really invested in." And I think for certain candidates, it's been a healthier thing than others. I think the Warren folks, you've seen in polls, they are very willing, if Warren goes by the wayside, they are very willing to hop on with someone else. And I think that's, frankly, a reflection of the mentality of the candidate.

Jamil Smith ([00:26:04](#)):

You've seen in the recent Time interview, with Charlotte Alter. She says, "Look, I am more focused on getting my policies accomplished, my policies put into reality, than me being elected President. If Pete Buttigieg or Bernie Sanders were elected, and they adopted my policies and got them done, hey, I'm great. That's cool. Great." I don't see Bernie Sanders, Pete Buttigieg, saying the same things. I need to hear them saying that. I need to hear it.

Paul ([00:26:41](#)):

So, I hear you on that.

Jamil Smith ([00:26:42](#)):

You know what I mean? Or Mike Bloomberg, frankly, saying that.

Paul ([00:26:45](#)):

Yeah, Mike Bloomberg's, again, I appreciate the resources that he brings to the fight. I think Bloomberg, like everyone else, is flawed. I think your point about the cult of personality, Jamil, is really important because everybody loved Andrew Yang.

Jamil Smith ([00:26:59](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:26:59](#)):

Not everybody's going to vote for him. Andrew Yang's gone. Andrew Yang was rocking. He was on every news show. But you need a machine. You need a successful business. You can't just have ... There's plenty of people who are like, "This is a really cool t-shirt." Great. And then that brand is out of business, because it's not a sustainable business model.

Paul ([00:27:15](#)):

So I think that's what we're seeing with Andrew Yang. Where Andrew Yang is going to be something, he's going to be around. I hope he runs for mayor of New York. I think he's going to have a long career. But keeping a ground game, keeping ads up, keeping people on payroll, paying for health benefits, is expensive and hard. So you got to have a machine. And I think that's what we're seeing now. The machines are starting, the wheels are coming off on some of them, and they just fall right off the map. And others are chugging along, and some of them are going to need a fuel injection. We'll see what happens to Biden in South Carolina. We'll see what happens in Nevada. And this could change pretty quickly.

Paul ([00:27:46](#)):

But there's the old saying that Democrats fall in love and Republicans fall in line. While we're talking about all this, Trump is just stacking money up. He's stacking money, he's stacking surrogates, he's stacking ground game. And the fight is coming.

Paul ([00:28:03](#)):

Is there a point where the Democrats get together? And when you say that, I want to ask you this, I don't think Bernie is going to do it. I think Bernie is going to push all the way through, maybe through the convention. And you see it more and more. There's a resistance, that if Bernie loses, I don't think Bernie's people are going to be as cool with this as everybody else is. That's my assessment, and seeing the friction flying at me on Twitter and everywhere else, I don't think that his people are just going to say, "Okay, great. Biden," or "Okay, great. Buttigieg." Because he is an ideologue, and he is not willing to compromise his ideals, which is respectable on some levels, but not practical on another.

Jamil Smith ([00:28:36](#)):

Yeah. What concerns me, and it gets to my second point, what concerns me is that folks are not really keeping their eye on the prize. And that is because too many folks do not have skin in the game, or they don't think that they have skin in the game. Trump's presidency, okay, I think, is a really interesting social experiment. I think it is actually acquainted all of America, to varying levels, with the experience of marginalized people.

Jamil Smith ([00:29:16](#)):

Now, in this election even, actually, a lot of folks are getting the experience of having to be pragmatic about their vote. This is the experience that black voters have every single election. Every election, we have to do this. We have to be pragmatic about our vote. We often have to vote for who we are either forced to vote for, or are left with, our best, worst choice, as we often are put. And a lot of folks who are not black are now faced with this decision. And so welcome to it. This is what it feels like.

Jamil Smith ([00:29:55](#)):

Living in America under Trump is a bottle of stress and anxiety that acquaints you, I think, at a very small level, with what it is like to be a marginalized minority, to use a word that I actually hate, but I think people understand it better, a marginalized minority in this country.

Paul ([00:30:23](#)):

Yeah.

Jamil Smith ([00:30:24](#)):

Welcome to it. I think that people need to take that experience into the ballot box with them, remember what it's like to feel that way, and understand how much it sucks. And remember how much you hate feeling like that. Remember how distasteful, and painful, and scary it is. And understand that there are those of who have felt that way every single day of our lives. And there's some of us, and I say this as a black person who grew up in the suburbs, more privileged than a lot of other black people, who are suffering a lot more than I am today. You need to understand that there are folks who are going to suffer a lot more if this man is reelected. You need to get over yourself and realize that voting is a selfless act. You need to realize that it is not about you. It's not about your candidate. It is not about who you fall in love with, or your particular movement. It is about making a choice to put this country on one path or the other. Period.

Jamil Smith ([00:31:40](#)):

And look, I put it at the end of my column yesterday. A primary is about making a decision about a nominee. This is what a primary is for. You are trying to decide who is going to be best for representing your party, and who is going to best govern as president. That is another thing we need to also, with regards to Sanders, that I'm concerned about. Whether or not he's going to be a good governor.

Paul ([00:32:04](#)):

Yeah.

Jamil Smith ([00:32:04](#)):

Okay. Just a quick note on that. But I need to really stress to folks that this is a choice. We are the HR for this country. Okay. This is a job search. It's not much deeper than that. It's not about the soul of our nation or any of that other bullshit. It's a job search. We are hiring someone for a job. Look at it like that. Period. End of story.

Paul ([00:32:41](#)):

Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. Now, we drink. This is why it helps to have liquor on the show.

Jamil Smith ([00:32:48](#)):

You ain't lying.

Paul ([00:32:49](#)):

You actually weren't going to do the beer.

Jamil Smith ([00:32:50](#)):

On cue.

Paul ([00:32:51](#)):

You were like, you know I got to drive afterwards.

Jamil Smith ([00:32:53](#)):

No, I'm over here, Mr. Responsible.

Paul ([00:32:54](#)):

I said, "We're going to get into some stuff. So we're going to need to have a drink from time to time." Because that's where real political conversations happen, is with a beer, or with a drink, or not in a cable news box, right?

Jamil Smith ([00:33:05](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:33:06](#)):

And that's one of the many reasons why I was happy to have you come on this show. Because look, war and conflict is not an issue you can jam into a two minute soundbite, and I've been trying to do it for decades. And race isn't either, and you've been on that front as well.

Jamil Smith ([00:33:23](#)):

And neither is gender.

Paul ([00:33:24](#)):

Yeah. So much of it.

Jamil Smith ([00:33:24](#)):

Which I wrote about in this essay in this book that just came out, Believe me, How Trusting Women Can Change the World. This anthology I just had an essay in with Jessica Valenti and Jacqueline Freedman, who are the editors. An essay in it called, She Can't Breathe, which is, of course, a play on words from Eric Garner's final words, which is about black women-

Paul ([00:33:50](#)):

For folks who may not know the reference, when he was choked out by the police, he said, "I can't breathe."

Jamil Smith ([00:33:54](#)):

Exactly. Of course, [Anu Bakwhadi 00:33:58] who founded Swan, has an essay in the book. The books really just full of essays, women and men, Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley has an essay in the book as well. It's all really just about ending rape, man. It's some heavy stuff, but it's worth taking a look at.

Paul ([00:34:18](#)):

Jamil, when you think about the last exchange we had, where you talked about, "We're picking a person for a job," at the end of the day, you're a student of history, you're a student of culture. Who do you think is the best person to beat Trump?

Jamil Smith ([00:34:34](#)):

It's tough to-

Paul ([00:34:34](#)):

All the other stuff aside. We're just talking ... You used to cover football.

Jamil Smith ([00:34:37](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:34:37](#)):

Right? And I want to get into that, of course. We got to talk football.

Jamil Smith ([00:34:40](#)):

Oh, we got to talk football.

Paul ([00:34:41](#)):

But you used to cover football. You used to write about football. This is the Super Bowl. I don't know who you picked in the game with The Chief versus the Niners, but this is a game. You got to make a pick. Who do you think is the best quarterback to go up against ... This is not even, I don't want to disrespect the New England Patriots, which you're going up against here, but this is the monster, and you've got to give the ball to somebody. And you care deeply, on a personal level. You care deeply, on a moral level. Who's the quarterback you're throwing in there?

Jamil Smith ([00:35:11](#)):

It's funny that you mentioned the Patriots, because I'm picking the person that represents a part of New England. It's Elizabeth Warren. I mean, to me, she is not only-

Paul ([00:35:21](#)):

You think she can win?

Jamil Smith ([00:35:22](#)):

Yeah, I think she can win.

Paul ([00:35:24](#)):

Even now, where the questions are, she and Biden may fall out in the next couple of weeks.

Jamil Smith ([00:35:27](#)):

I mean, first of all, the column I wrote today, we're talking on Tuesday, everyone needs to slow the hell down. I mean, we've had two contests in two small states that are more than 90% white. Whole swaths of this country that have, pretty much, most of the black, and indigenous, and Hispanic and Latino, and Asian folks have not had a chance to even vote yet. They haven't even had a chance to meet these people.



Paul ([00:36:01](#)):

Yeah. But do we have to slow-

Jamil Smith ([00:36:02](#)):

Slow the hell down, man.

Paul ([00:36:04](#)):

Can we afford to slow down when candidates are dropping out, and we obviously-

Jamil Smith ([00:36:09](#)):

Sure. I wish Andrew Yang hadn't dropped out. I wish Kamala Harris hadn't dropped out.

Paul ([00:36:12](#)):

Yeah. How do they balance that though? Because we're saying, "Hey, don't drop out."

Jamil Smith ([00:36:15](#)):

We need a new system.

Paul ([00:36:16](#)):

But they have to pay the bills, right?

Jamil Smith ([00:36:17](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:36:17](#)):

And that's the question, is like, the system is broken.

Jamil Smith ([00:36:19](#)):

The system is broken.

Paul ([00:36:21](#)):

Iowa should not be first. New Hampshire should not be up front. But in the mean time, they are.

Jamil Smith ([00:36:26](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:36:26](#)):

So the question I have, with Elizabeth Warren and Bernie, if Elizabeth Warren was moderate Elizabeth Warren, which sometimes you hear, there was a point early in the campaign where she sounded a lot more populist, she sounded a lot more moderate. And then she, I think, has weaved a little bit and gone a little bit toward Bernie. So where does she sit in the landscape, I don't know.

Paul ([00:36:43](#)):

I will tell you that the moderates, in my view, and the progressives are more ... The moderates are more likely to rally around Warren than they are around Sanders. If the Democrats pick Sanders, that party is going to get ripped apart.

Jamil Smith ([00:36:54](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:36:55](#)):

If they don't pick Sanders, it's probably also going to get ripped apart?

Jamil Smith (00:36:58):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul (00:36:58):

So I feel like, between the Progressives, Warren has a better chance to unite the tribes. But I don't know, man. I don't know if she's going to get Moderate Republicans. I don't know if she's going to get people in the middle. I don't know if she's going to get Independents.

Paul (00:37:10):

I think she's going to get the Democrats. She'll bring energy. She's incredibly dynamic. I think she's the fastest learner of all the candidates. She learns so quickly on anything that's happening and is able to spit it out. But to our point earlier, it doesn't look like she can build a machine. The machine is out of gas, or it's close to it. Right?

Jamil Smith (00:37:26):

Yeah. I mean, obviously, it seems like there's money issues.

Paul (00:37:30):

Yeah.

Jamil Smith (00:37:30):

I mean, I saw them, they were pulling ads in the next two states, in Nevada and South Carolina. That's obviously an issue. So listen, I can't speak to the mechanics of the campaign. I'm speaking to the candidate, and whether or not she would be able to take on Trump, if she were the nominee. And whether or not she would govern well as president. To me, I think she'd be the best person. I think that I would be the most confident in her abilities to get the job done.

Paul (00:38:12):

Having been around almost all of them, and I've been in rooms and been in meetings with most of them, I would trust Elizabeth Warren, much more so, to run the government.

Jamil Smith (00:38:21):

Yes.

Paul (00:38:21):

To be an executive. To get shit done. She's shown she could do that.

Jamil Smith (00:38:25):

Yeah.

Paul (00:38:25):

The consumer protection board was not a thing, she built it, she drove it, she ran it. She was a great advocate. In many ways ... And we both spent a lot of time in New York City. In New York City, you have the public advocate, which is kind of like the hell raiser in chief. You advocate for people in the same way I have, and you have, in our careers, and in our lives. And that's where De Blasio came from. It's where a lot of folks have come from. She was kind of a public advocate for the country. And now she's able, I think, to effectively transition into an executive role, much more so than the other progressive, or the much more progressive, in Bernie Sanders.

Paul (00:38:58):

So I think that does give, at least me, a feeling that if she had her hands on the wheel, she could handle it.

Jamil Smith ([00:39:03](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:39:04](#)):

I don't have that kind of confidence in Bernie Sanders. I saw him struggle to run the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. All the talk about bringing people together, he couldn't do it in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. And on a very important point, I brought this up in previous podcasts, when it came down to it, he went in the room to negotiate his positions, and he lost.

Paul ([00:39:20](#)):

When he went in to do the bill for veterans, after Phoenix. He went into the room with John McCain, and John McCain got the biggest expansion of privatization of the VA in history. Bernie gave away his own farm. He opened the door. He allowed them to prioritize the VA, and he lost. And a senior Republican Senator told me, "We sent in John McCain because we know he'd win. We knew he'd win. We knew he'd beat Bernie, and he could get Bernie. And that we would walk out with the win." And they walked out with the win. So that's what worries me about Bernie.

Jamil Smith ([00:39:50](#)):

Wow.

Paul ([00:39:50](#)):

But let's take a bigger step back. This is Angry Americans.

Jamil Smith ([00:39:54](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:39:55](#)):

And a lot of folks have had a lot to say about the title of this show. And a lot of people, I've said this before, if I was going to do some polling around the demographics of voters, there's only one kind of people that have consistently had a problem with the name, and it tends to be liberal white men.

Jamil Smith ([00:40:15](#)):

Oh, imagine that.

Paul ([00:40:16](#)):

Because they're kind of uncomfortable with their own anger. "I don't know if I'm allowed to be angry. What do we do with that?" And then some moderate older ... But everybody else is angry.

Jamil Smith ([00:40:24](#)):

I bet they're mad The Joker lost Best Picture too.

Paul ([00:40:26](#)):

Maybe, but everybody is angry. But in particular, I think everybody has a right to be angry. And communities of color, in particular, I think, have a right to be angry. And hopefully, we can all turn that anger into positive impact. That's a theme of this show. But it is a very important time, I think, to understand anger.

Jamil Smith ([00:40:48](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:40:49](#)):

Because Trump understands it. And he's channeled it, in a lot of ways. And that's what Bernie does. Bernie's channeling anger, and in a lot of ways. But you are an incredible guest for this moment in time. Jamil Smith, what makes you angry?

Jamil Smith ([00:41:07](#)):

What makes me angry are people who pimp anger. People who take anger and channel it for their own profit. That's what makes me angry. And I think, I've seen that ... I think people who do that make our world cynical. They exploit our processes and mechanics. They're the people who clog up the works.

Jamil Smith ([00:41:46](#)):

Because look, we got enough wrong with America. We got enough holes in the boat, as I like to say. Trump is a guy who, not only knows how to exploit anger, but he knows where the holes in the vote are, and he knows how to create more holes. He got into office, and he knows where the holes in the boat are. It's like he knew where every hole in America's boat was. And rather than working to plug the holes, like a responsible president.

Jamil Smith ([00:42:18](#)):

No American president is going to be able to plug every hole. You mentioned Obama, with the VA, GITMO. He's going to try. And there's going to be people working against him, trying to prevent him from plugging those holes. But he's going to try to plug as many holes as he can because that's what actual public servants do.

Jamil Smith ([00:42:47](#)):

This guy is out here with a power drill, trying to create more holes, and inviting other of his friends from overseas to help him make more holes, and trying to help him sink the boat even further.

Paul ([00:43:05](#)):

Thank you for that.

Jamil Smith ([00:43:06](#)):

That, to me, I mean ... People are like, "Oh he's a Russian agent." I don't care where he's an agent from. The guy is an enemy of the state. Period. And you have someone in office who is working against the interests of the United States. And every day we go without, the people who are running to replace him, not repeating that ad nauseum, I don't understand it, for the life of me.

Jamil Smith ([00:43:41](#)):

You have the guy in office basically complaining that his criminal conspiracy buddy is getting too harsh a sentence. He goes and complains loudly about that to the DOJ. And his lackey running the DOJ goes and gives him a lighter sentence.

Jamil Smith ([00:44:03](#)):

Not that long ago, people were having conniption fit about Bill Clinton and Loretta Lynch on a plane. And now this happens and everyone's just going home and watching SportsCenter and acting like nothing's wrong. That, to me, is a sign that the cynicism has bled so deeply into our culture, and beneath our skins, that I just, frankly, don't know how we fix that. And I think, that's how he wins this election.

Jamil Smith ([00:44:42](#)):

I mean, look, there's going to be voter suppression and all kinds of things that work against the Democrats. But it's less about who they pick, but it's more about the cultural issues that they're never going to be able to fix before November.

Paul ([00:44:57](#)):

Thank you for that.

Jamil Smith ([00:44:58](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:45:00](#)):

You mentioned SportsCenter.

Jamil Smith ([00:45:02](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Paul ([00:45:02](#)):

We talked about Russian agents, but there's a different kind of free agent that I want to talk to you about.

Jamil Smith ([00:45:10](#)):

Uh oh.

Paul ([00:45:10](#)):

Because he has picked these holes in the boat to focus on. And for a long time, one of them was football, and the NFL, and Kaepernick. And we just finished a Super Bowl where Kaepernick's former team was in the game, and hardly talked about it, nobody talked about it. Kaepernick was maybe one of the most, let's see, effective lightning rods, in a lot of different ways. And something that Trump hit on a lot. He hit on a lot because he knew it was a hole that he could open up.

Jamil Smith ([00:45:42](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:45:42](#)):

He can open that hole deeper. But here we sit, your background was working at NFL films. Didn't you work on Hard Knocks?

Jamil Smith ([00:45:50](#)):

A little bit.

Paul ([00:45:51](#)):

Yeah.

Jamil Smith ([00:45:51](#)):

Yeah, I was an associate producer.

Paul ([00:45:53](#)):

One of the best shows anywhere. But what are your thoughts on, now, where we sit on this? We've covered a lot of stuff, the most political Super Bowl we've ever seen, with the ads and the pregame interview with Hannity. But we didn't really unpack the Kaepernick thing. I hate to even call it that. But all of the stuff around it. Here we sit later, where are we? And what are your reflections on the Super

Bowl and this moment from a cultural standpoint? And I also want to ask you, because it's somewhat related, in my view, Kobe's passing is a massive cultural moment.

Jamil Smith (00:46:30):

Yeah.

Paul (00:46:30):

And I want to get your thoughts on that. But maybe, Kaepernick and football first.

Jamil Smith (00:46:34):

Yeah, I'll get to Kaepernick first. So, yeah. Obviously, I mean, he was pretty well erased by the NFL. I did see, they replayed his Super Bowl that he played against Baltimore. I mean, people seem to forget, the last time that the 49ers were in the Super Bowl, Kaepernick was the quarterback.

Paul (00:46:51):

Oh, yeah. I was at that game. I was at that game in New Orleans. The light lights went out. I kept saying, "You have Frank Gore, give him the fucking ball. You're on the four yard line."

Jamil Smith (00:46:59):

And people forget, I argue, that if the lights hadn't gone out, San Francisco probably wins the game.

Paul (00:47:04):

Yeah, if they had given the ball to Frank Gore, they definitely would've won the game.

Jamil Smith (00:47:07):

Well-

Paul (00:47:08):

And ironically, they end up losing the Super Bowl again for not running the ball.

Jamil Smith (00:47:11):

I mean, you're kind of blaming Kaepernick for losing the game.

Paul (00:47:12):

No, I'm not. I'm blaming the coaching staff.

Jamil Smith (00:47:15):

No, that's true.

Paul (00:47:16):

Right?

Jamil Smith (00:47:16):

That's true.

Paul (00:47:16):

Because you're on the four yard line, you got Frank Gore. Kaepernick was still in, what, second, third year at the time.

Jamil Smith (00:47:22):

Yeah.

Paul (00:47:22):

Questioning whether or not he was going to be better than Russell Wilson or not. There was always a debate about who ... Right?

Jamil Smith ([00:47:27](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:47:27](#)):

Now, Russell Wilson is a perennial pro bowler. Yeah. But, sorry, go ahead.

Jamil Smith ([00:47:31](#)):

Just missed the throw. But, yeah. So Kaepernick's the quarterback in the last time the 49ers go. And then they go again, and what's happened? Well, the NFL's, Inspire Change, brand, they're little social justice label, they have a six part mini series featuring Nate Boyer, the Green Beret veteran, who was Kaepernick's teammate, who was the white guy who inspired, basically directed Kaepernick to, instead of sitting on the bench during the Anthem, to instead take a knee. So Nate was hired, I guess, to host a six part mini series.

Jamil Smith ([00:48:14](#)):

Now, no shade to Nate. God bless him. But, I mean, that-

Paul ([00:48:19](#)):

Everybody loves veterans, man.

Jamil Smith ([00:48:20](#)):

Right.

Paul ([00:48:21](#)):

It's the perfect political tool. I say it all the time. Babies, puppies and vets. You don't want people to talk about Kaepernick, find a vet. Again, no shade on Nate, but I also argue that Nate gave him bad advice. I don't know what made Nate the arbiter of all things political activism. But if Kaepernick had come to me, I wouldn't have told him to kneel. I would've said, "We can come up with some more creative shit than that. And some stuff that might not divide your base."

Jamil Smith ([00:48:43](#)):

And also, if he had just stayed on the bench, maybe it wouldn't have been as big a deal.

Paul ([00:48:48](#)):

Yeah, or he could've taken a knee on the first play of the game.

Jamil Smith ([00:48:51](#)):

Right.

Paul ([00:48:51](#)):

I mean, again, I'm not one to ... I think the movement is important. The issues are important. But it's not lost on the fact that Kaepernick says he chose it because, you said, "Directed."

Jamil Smith ([00:49:01](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:49:02](#)):

Your choice of words was that Nate Boyer directed him?

Jamil Smith ([00:49:05](#)):

Well, I mean, he recommended to Kap that he take a knee.

Paul ([00:49:10](#)):

Yeah.

Jamil Smith ([00:49:10](#)):

It wasn't that he told him to do it. But the point is that he recommended that he take the knee.

Paul ([00:49:16](#)):

Right.

Jamil Smith ([00:49:17](#)):

And the point is, is that the NFL, instead of mentioning Kaepernick's name, even once, or even showing some clips of the former game. I mean, I watched the whole game. They didn't show any clips of the past game. How ridiculous is that? They didn't even show any clips of the last game that the 49ers were in.

Jamil Smith ([00:49:38](#)):

And instead of that, they have a six part mini series with the guy who told Kap that taking a knee was a good idea. I mean, come one guys.

Paul ([00:49:49](#)):

Yeah. They erased him. They erased Kaepernick.

Jamil Smith ([00:49:50](#)):

I mean, at some point, you're blackballing a player from the league. At some point, you just got to own it. Just own it. Just saying, "We're blackballing the guy-

PART 2 OF 3 ENDS [00:50:04]

Paul ([00:50:03](#)):

Right.

Jamil Smith ([00:50:03](#)):

Just own it. Just say, "We're blackballing the guy for protesting for his civil rights, and we're doing it because we're scared of our white racist fans." Just own it man.

Paul ([00:50:14](#)):

And the white racist president, right? Like they erased Kaepernick from-

Jamil Smith ([00:50:18](#)):

Well, yeah, I'm grouping Trump in with the white racist-

Paul ([00:50:20](#)):

Yeah, but especially him because if there was an election between the NFL and Trump, right, like Trump was kicking his ass. I met with Roger Goodell during that time period. He actually invited me in to talk about the polling we'd around, oh yeah, we'll do a whole new separate podcast on that, but they said we're trying to understand what veterans think and what's really going on here. And unfortunately the way they had been getting data, it was like the equivalent of like going into Iowa and finding one dude outside of pancake house and saying, "Hey, what do Iowans think about X?" That's basically what the NFL did with Nate Boyer, right? There wasn't any extensive polling. They didn't do a strategic process.



They didn't bring in Colin Powell and Admiral Mullen and cultural experts like you or me or anyone else, right? Like it just kind of ran away and Trump saw it and Trump just kept pounding it and pounding it and pounding it.

Paul ([00:51:06](#)):

And the NFL really didn't have a strategy. Like they really didn't know what to do except to try to ignore him, but ignoring Trump doesn't really work. So I think he beat them up pretty good. And then what they did was kept keep their head down and hoped that he'd pick another target. And that's what he did. Like then he picked AOC and then he picked Nancy Pelosi and then he had an MP there, plenty of other things, but he's always got that card he can pull back, but he won. Nobody kneels in the NFL anymore, like it didn't happen in the Superbowl. There wasn't a single player that I saw kneeling, right? So you could argue at least on that battle space politically Trump won.

Jamil Smith ([00:51:43](#)):

I mean, here's the thing, they did donate hundreds of thousands of dollars to social justice causes. A billion dollar market cap, so that's like, I'm not, believe me, I'm not on the side of the thing arguing that they won. There are players who arguably elicited some concessions from the league out of this. It's not like they got nothing. But-

Paul ([00:52:09](#)):

They sure didn't get much. It was like-

Jamil Smith ([00:52:11](#)):

They didn't get enough.

Paul ([00:52:11](#)):

It's like sending Bernie Sanders in to negotiate.

Jamil Smith ([00:52:16](#)):

I thought I was going to be the Bernie critic on this show.

Paul ([00:52:18](#)):

No man, I haven't gotten started yet on Bernie, but we're going through some heavy stuff, but I also want every guest that we have on this show to me always an inspiring, important indoor, iconic American. I think you have been on the forefront of many of the most important issues of our time, right? We first met I think when you were producer for Rachel.

Jamil Smith ([00:52:38](#)):

Yeah, for Rachel Maddow.

Paul ([00:52:39](#)):

That was back a decade ago now.

Jamil Smith ([00:52:41](#)):

Literally. Oh my God. Literally 2010, I started in summer of 2010 as a producer for Rachel Maddow show.

Paul ([00:52:46](#)):

And you've been a producer, you've been a writer, you've been front of camera, you've been back of camera. So you've been in the mix for 20 years, right? I mean, at least. So I want to ask you what's that like for you personally, right? Because I think part of what I want to do in this show is help people understand the people they think they know. Megan McCain was on last episode and people felt like

they actually understood her in a way they didn't before. They said that about Tulsi, they said about Mayor Pete Buttigieg, about a lot of the guests we've had on the show, because I want it to be a conversation, not just an interview. But it's got to be kind of surreal for you, man.

Jamil Smith ([00:53:23](#)):

I mean it's surreal, I just did a television hit and every single time I do them, it feels awkward because I was behind the camera producing for so long that every single time I'm asked to do one of those things it just feels strange. I think that there's a point where I'm asked for either my opinion or to talk about things where I know that I feel like I'm volunteering my opinion and it's a learned opinion about something where I feel like it's valuable and I do this because I feel like I have something to contribute and that's always why I wanted to do this. And it's why I was writing for the Maddow blog while I was producing for her. I was trying to wet my whistle a little bit I guess you could say with regards to this. But I just always was, I was always learning at her feet the entire time.

Jamil Smith ([00:54:25](#)):

I mean, I always carry the maxim that Rachel preached while I was her producer with me every single day, which is increase the amount of useful information in the world. That's what she taught. And I think about that every single day. And if I'm not doing that with my work, with being on air with a tweet, even. Look, I have fun with tweets or an Instagram post or something, look you can't take everything so seriously, but overall you got to be increasing the amount of useful information in the world, especially in your professional capacity. And I take this seriously. I just do, man. I worked too hard to get to where I'm at. I'm a kid from Cleveland man who had no connections. In New York City I started as a floater at a talent agency out of college.

Jamil Smith ([00:55:28](#)):

And William Morris was like four years of inter media I guess you could say graduate school in media, entertainment graduate school. I learned at the feet of talent agents in all kinds of different fields. I met some amazing, incredible people, but all of them, I'd say for the most part were doing things I just didn't want to do. And I still value a lot of those people. One of them is who I was answering his phones 20 years ago is now my agent.

Paul ([00:56:03](#)):

That's cool. So the guy whose desk you worked on is now your agent?

Jamil Smith ([00:56:06](#)):

Yeah.

Paul ([00:56:07](#)):

That's cool.

Jamil Smith ([00:56:07](#)):

Yeah. And I'm just in terms of like talking about things come in full circle. A lot of that knowledge that I gained in that time period I still use today and I feel like just tell people all the time especially if they're coming up, they're young, look, you may have a lot of passions. I thought about being a filmmaker, I wanted or journalism was always a calling, but so was making films, so was writing, there's so many different things, I just wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I felt like I was being pulled in so many different directions. And I figured, at just one point, I just said, "The hell with it man I'm just going to do all of them." And I'm just going to do one of the, maybe sometimes I was doing one at a time or just kind of, I was HBO learning sports production, and CNN I was learning news production, NFL films I was kind of doing a little bit of all of them, MSNBC, kind of a little bit of all of them.

Jamil Smith ([00:57:15](#)):

But eventually got to a point when I was working for Melissa Harris-Perry for three years doing this amazing, incredible news product that frankly, I just, there's just, I don't think there's ever been a show on television like it and there hasn't been one since. I'm still so proud of what we did with that, but it came a point in time Melissa and I sat down in her office, where I told her I got to move on and she knew. And I started taking steps to move on and I had to write full time. And that was that. And I went on The New Republic and I've been writing full time ever since.

Paul ([00:58:06](#)):

And you write a lot like I think you did two pieces or three pieces-

Jamil Smith ([00:58:11](#)):

Two pieces in the last day, two days.

Paul ([00:58:12](#)):

I'm just like holy shit, I can't even keep up with how much you're writing, which is important because I think you are carrying forward that message that Rachel brings out that I think whether you agree with her politics or not, no matter where you come from, you can appreciate that there is a part of her that wants to be the instructor to the country, the professor. You had a time when you need more information and now you can see all of her students going on to do great things. But I want to, Jamil, I'll go back to a question that I ask of all guests. You mentioned growing up in Cleveland, when you were growing up in Cleveland or if it was somewhere else, what was your first car?

Jamil Smith ([00:58:44](#)):

I was born and raised in Cleveland, grew up mostly in a suburb called Shaker Heights, which people read the wonderful book, Little Fires Everywhere. That's where I grew up. My first car, I actually didn't get until I moved, I lived in New York for about seven years after college and I moved to Philly to take the NFL films job. It was the very first day was August 31st of '04 I got to Philly and quickly, very quickly got to a Honda dealership and picked up a blue 2004 Honda Civic LX. And that was the first car I ever owned. And next day I drove it to NFL films for my first day and walked in and Steve Sabol was the very first person I saw as I walked in. I'm wearing a tie, like I am now, and that is not really how you do it at NFL films. And he playfully, God rest his soul, made fun of me for wearing a tie. But the fun story about the car is that my very first day at NFL films, I got a flat tire coming out of the parking lot.

Paul ([00:59:59](#)):

What color was the car? You said it was a blue, what kind of blue?

Jamil Smith ([01:00:03](#)):

It was kind of like a coral blue, like an electric blue and I had it for about eight years.

Paul ([01:00:12](#)):

And Steve Sabol was an icon, right? I mean, anybody who grew up in the last generation watching NFL films, the great storytelling of Steve Sabol, right? I mean he built a lot of the NFL brand that we know, right? Did you learn anything else? Did you learn anything from working near him or around him that was valuable?

Jamil Smith ([01:00:34](#)):

Well, Steve Sabol, by the way, who was just now inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. And will be, I'm sorry, he was just chosen to be into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He'll be inducted later this year. Steve was with apologies to Rachel, was very close in this standing, the best boss I've ever had. He

was extraordinarily kind but demanding in a way that you knew his standards but he was never going to make you feel as if you had failed him in a way that you could never recover. I never felt like I had ever disappointed him in a way that ever made me feel lesser in his eyes. He always made me feel like I was as equal on the team as the top producers in the building, guys who'd been in there 30 years. Guys who were, you'd seen in footage from old Super Bowls, which made me feel great.

Jamil Smith ([01:01:57](#)):

I'll tell you one quick Steve Sabol story aside from, actually two quick ones. One is when I first brought my dad in the building to take him around on a tour. My dad who introduced me to the game was at the 1964 championship game at age 18 to see Jim Brown play and was just had his eyes bugged out the entire time walking around the building. I take him around, meet Steve Sabol. Steve welcomes him into his office and starts talking about what a great writer I am. And my dad is just bursting with pride and still talks about it to this day.

Paul ([01:02:37](#)):

That's awesome.

Jamil Smith ([01:02:37](#)):

But my big Steve Sabol memory is, every team, every one of the 32 teams in the NFL gets their own highlight film. And it's the only thing that teams get their final cut on. And so my first highlight film that I ever cut was for the then St. Louis Rams in '05. Then they had hired a new coach Scott Linehan. And so it was like a new coach, new approach film. So I'd go down to St. Louis, filmed a rookie camp where we'd put a wire on Linehan. So we had some footage of Linehan directing rookie camp. And then I had done an interview with him. So we had some good material for the film because the team, obviously they'd hired a new coach, they hadn't done that well the previous season. So we had to feel some time. And I made the film and we'd had the final cut of the film and I put it on a mini DV and I'd had the tape and was about to put it on Steve's desk and he happened to be in his office.

Jamil Smith ([01:03:37](#)):

And knock on the door, I say, "Steve I have my highlight film here. I would love if you'd just take a look at it, give me some notes whenever you get a chance." And I was prepared to just leave it on his desk and he said, "Well, what are you doing?" I thought he was asking me like, what was I doing, like leaving it on there. He said, "No, what are you doing right now?" "Well, I'm not busy." He said, "Well, let's go watch it." So he comes to my office. Steve's office, by the ways, is this cavernous place. He comes to my office, my little cubby hole and we sit there and we watch the movie, a half an hour highlight film. Just me and Steve Sabol. And he gives me some great constructive notes. He really liked the film and it made me feel 10 feet tall. And that's the kind of guy Steve Sabol was.

Paul ([01:04:29](#)):

That's a great story.

Jamil Smith ([01:04:31](#)):

And so I miss him every day. He passed away in 2012 and I went to see him. I was already living in New York. I left to join MSNBC and he gave me amazing encouraging hug before I left NFL films and he actually wrote Rachel a great note. She had written him an encouraging note when he got sick and she wrote him and he wrote back and she gave me the note. And I have it framed in my house.

Paul ([01:05:14](#)):

Wow. You grew up a Cleveland Browns fan.

Jamil Smith ([01:05:19](#)):

Yeah. That's a bad life choice.

Paul ([01:05:23](#)):

We've had a lot of sad issues we've covered so far in this show but hopefully once they can turn into inspiration. What the hell is going to happen with the Browns man? Like what's your take on the Browns?

Jamil Smith ([01:05:34](#)):

I say this with trepidation.

Paul ([01:05:35](#)):

They're like the Democrats. Like they always find a way to screw it up. Like it really is-

Jamil Smith ([01:05:41](#)):

Dare I say this with trepidation?

Paul ([01:05:44](#)):

Please.

Jamil Smith ([01:05:44](#)):

I'm actually encouraged. This guy Stefanski, Penn grad by the way, thumbs up for that, fellow Penn guy. I'm encouraged by the fact that they seem to be all business. I'm very thankful that they got rid of Freddie Kitchens, thank God. They had the good sense to, look, knowing it's John Dorsey personally, but it seemed like he was picking a fantasy team, not like an actual NFL team that was working together. So I'm encouraged to see how they actually construct the roster going forward. I don't know, man. People were like, "Oh, they're one piece away." I don't know.

Paul ([01:06:27](#)):

Is Baker, we talked earlier about quarterbacks as candidates, right? Is Baker the real deal? Can you build a franchise, and not just be a good player, but can he be, Eli just retired, right? Now who knows what's going to happen to Rivers and others, these iconic quarterbacks that programs were built around, right? And there's a difference between being a good player and being a guy you can build a program around. Like is Baker that guy?

Jamil Smith ([01:06:53](#)):

I mean he's saying the right stuff now coming out of the humiliating season that they just had. He's got to put it on the field. The whole team for me, like as a fan. Look, I mean, they're about to get new uniforms, thank God. Terrible, terrible. I mean, who puts the name of your city on the front of the uniform? I know the Jets just did it and that was a mistake.

Paul ([01:07:15](#)):

I like it, man.

Jamil Smith ([01:07:16](#)):

They're horrible. They got to go back. Look, I'm a traditionalist. You got to just go back to the old ones and just put the stripes on the sleeves and just-

Paul ([01:07:26](#)):

We can do a whole show on uniforms. I think we can go through all of them. So the Browns occasionally bring you some happiness.

Jamil Smith ([01:07:32](#)):

Occasionally bring me some happiness. Same with the Indians, the Cavaliers they got, I think they're good for me for about a good 10 years. Thanks for the championship. Thank you Cavs.

Paul ([01:07:42](#)):

That's said, you can run with that forever, right?

Jamil Smith ([01:07:44](#)):

Thank God.

Paul ([01:07:45](#)):

Well they do bring you occasional happiness and this is Angry America. So I won't ask you the question I ask of all my other guests as we wrap up and they may kick us out of this really beautiful crooked media studios. And again thanks to Tommy and forever I'll love it and those guys for letting us squat in this amazing, this is much better than the closet I sometimes record my podcast in, but when you come to New York we'll have you in the car club. But Jamil Smith, what makes you happy?

Jamil Smith ([01:08:08](#)):

What makes me happy? Oh gosh. A lot of things make me happy. I think right now I'm enjoying, right now I'm actually enjoying, I've learned to meditate recently and that is brought me unexpected peace and honestly, people are like, oh, meditation. I've been always kind of proponent and that, I mean, trust me, man, it's been really, really helpful. So that's been, being able to take some time and isolate. I'd say maybe about 20 minutes in the morning, 20 minutes in the afternoon or evening to just, more or less take vacation from the world. I just went to Japan for 11 days solo trip. That really made me happy being able to explore this amazing country, this environment. For the first time in my life, I wasn't in a place that was mostly Eurocentric. Being able to challenge myself with the language that I wasn't familiar with, to learn of all this amazing culture and food and see these amazing, friendly folks who welcome me despite all of my awkward attempts to navigate myself around their country. I really, really, really enjoyed myself there. So thinking back to that trip and meditation, I guess you could say a tie for my top happiness or ranking.

Paul ([01:09:48](#)):

That's good stuff man. We all need a little more meditation nowadays.

Jamil Smith ([01:09:50](#)):

Yes and travel.

Paul ([01:09:51](#)):

And travel, we could all use a little more of that too and hopefully if we have a new president, travel will be a bit more enjoyable for the rest of us here in America.

Jamil Smith ([01:09:58](#)):

Yeah, and less permanent.

Paul ([01:10:00](#)):

But you have travel ahead and I am exceptionally grateful that you took the time to come in here and join me in Los Angeles while we're here. We're going to shoot a live show with Henry Rollins coming up and this is a kind of a makeshift episode of Angry Americans, but we have the beer, it is great that we continue to enjoy. I gave a six pack to the people around here. Tommy Vietor's dog was running around

earlier, so you guys would love to see the outtakes of this. But we do have gifts. So mercy is going to, Mercy you got that?

Jamil Smith ([01:10:31](#)):

Wonderful.

Paul ([01:10:31](#)):

Thank you.

Jamil Smith ([01:10:32](#)):

Oh man.

Paul ([01:10:35](#)):

It's got three phases. Okay, so I'll give you the less sexy stuff first.

Jamil Smith ([01:10:40](#)):

All right.

Paul ([01:10:40](#)):

If you open that up, you got some merchandise from Angry Americans made by the veterans of Oscar and Mike. Not quite Cleveland, but they're in Chicago and so you can wear those anywhere you like.

Jamil Smith ([01:10:52](#)):

It's a large, thankfully I've lost weight.

Paul ([01:10:54](#)):

We can change the sizes. I think we can get, we don't have any Cleveland Browns colors, but that's-

Jamil Smith ([01:11:00](#)):

Thankfully.

Paul ([01:11:00](#)):

Some of the red and black. I hope you enjoy that. And then this is another part of our every show.

Jamil Smith ([01:11:05](#)):

Easter time.

Paul ([01:11:06](#)):

Easter is coming again. So now peeps is coming back around. But this is a question we ask of all our guests. You have three colors in there, Jamil.

Jamil Smith ([01:11:12](#)):

Yes.

Paul ([01:11:13](#)):

I think you do.

Jamil Smith ([01:11:14](#)):

Yeah, I got pink, I got yellow and I have blue.

Paul ([01:11:16](#)):

Right. So which color would you select and why?

Jamil Smith ([01:11:20](#)):

Blue, my favorite blue. Blue is one of my favorite colors.

Paul ([01:11:24](#)):

Just because you love it and it's your car, the blue car.

Jamil Smith ([01:11:26](#)):

I had the blue car. I mean it's not, purple is my favorite color period. It's definitely tops. I mean pink would probably be the second, but I mean if this is strawberry, if this pink means this is strawberry, then I would go with that.

Paul ([01:11:43](#)):

I think they all pretty much taste the same. But there is, this is breaking news for folks who listen to the show. There is jalapeno flavored peeps, which is either wonderful or disgusting. Probably more the latter. But there are new flavors of peeps that are being rolled out, we may have to do a special show on this. And you know what else is kind of fucked up?

Jamil Smith ([01:12:00](#)):

What's that?

Paul ([01:12:00](#)):

Peeps is not a sponsor of this show. Like I don't think anybody does more to promote Peeps in America than me and this show, right? So we just do this because it's such an American thing. We started around Easter it's just gone all the way. Everybody answers the question and now it's a thing.

Jamil Smith ([01:12:16](#)):

So it keeps us definitely like an Easter thing, like solid Easter.

Paul ([01:12:19](#)):

Right? Yeah. Well now it's coming back around. All right. And also solid is giving you an American whiskey. So this was selected especially for you and it is, I want you to check that out.

Jamil Smith ([01:12:30](#)):

Oh this is right. This is a home run. Single malt, oh love it.

Paul ([01:12:34](#)):

Okay. And it's made in Texas I believe. But the part of it, it's Balcones, it's a Texas single malt, it is a reserve bottle, it's really cool. And part of it is independent character and I think that you've been, it's also got a hammer on the front of it and a star and some of the cool shit that like you I know are a comic book fan also. So it's kind of got some like awesome superpower related points to it. But you've been out there banging away, you've been out there making an impact from a really independent viewpoint. You have been bringing that information and I think you've been really courageous man. Like as a friend, I've known you for a long time now and as an activist, like it's hard to navigate being an activist and an advocate in the media. I think you've done a really well.

Jamil Smith ([01:13:18](#)):

Thank you.

Paul ([01:13:19](#)):

You've advocated for so many communities, people, issues that don't have a voice. You've been that voice for them and I know that there are going to be folks that look up to you in the same way you Sabol and Maddow and others. They're coming. And you've really, I think cracked a seal for many of those



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important voices that are coming into media and dude, the journey from where you started to now, you handed me your card and you're Rolling Stone. That's got to be pretty fucking cool to hand somebody a Rolling Stone card.

Jamil Smith ([01:13:48](#)):

I mean it has not gotten old.

Paul ([01:13:50](#)):

Yeah. But I appreciate you and I'm so grateful that you came here at this moment in time to have a discussion with us.

Jamil Smith ([01:13:57](#)):

Thank you brother.

Paul ([01:13:58](#)):

And for joining us on Angry Americans.

Jamil Smith ([01:14:00](#)):

Well, let me say also, man, it is also wonderful to see all the things that you're doing in the world. Keep your head high, man.

Paul ([01:14:08](#)):

Thank you, sir. Ladies and gentlemen, the great Jamil Smith live from Crooked Media's really nice headquarters with leather couches and dogs and they didn't have beer, so we brought the beer. But live from Crooked Media headquarters in Los Angeles this is Angry Americans with the great and powerful Jamil Smith.

Jamil Smith ([01:14:24](#)):

Get yourself some good tacos while you're here.

Paul ([01:14:25](#)):

Yes.

PART 3 OF 3 ENDS [01:14:30]