

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 303 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my cohost, David Feldman. Hello there, David.

David Feldman: Hello. It's good to be back.

Steve Skrovan: Yes. Good to have you back. And man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hi. I just read an editorial by Christianity Today, the magazine started by the late Rev. Billy Graham and they've just come out for the removal of Donald Trump. And they quote from their editorial urging the removal of Clinton 20 years ago. They quoted, "Unsavoury dealings in immoral acts by the president and those close to him have rendered this administration morally unable to lead. Unfortunately, the words that we applied to Mr. Clinton 20 years ago apply almost perfectly to our current president." And they argue that "He should be removed, we believe, not as a matter of partisan loyalties, but loyalty to the creator of the ten commandments." So this is not a small fissure in the environmental area and maybe there'll be more. Maybe the National Council of Churches, which represents Protestant churches of a liberal bent, often leaders in the civil rights movement. Maybe they'll start coming out in rendering some proper moral judgment.

Steve Skrovan: Right. I understand though that Franklin Graham, Billy Graham's son, has pushed back against the magazine that his father founded.

Ralph Nader: Yes, because he's very supportive of Donald Trump. Of the Ten Commandments, the career of Donald Trump has resulted in his violating seven of the Ten Commandments.

Steve Skrovan: [laughter] I don't know; I had Donald down for 12, violating 12 of the Ten Commandments, Ralph. That's when I was keeping score at home. So that was my score. Well, we have another blockbuster show today. First up on the show, we're going to welcome back legendary public interest warrior, Joan Claybrook. She and Ralph go back a long way to the early days, of the auto safety campaigns, to the mid-1960s. I've gotten to know Joan because as president of Public Citizen, she was the one who recruited me to join the board. And let's be clear about this, my being on the board of Public Citizen is nothing like Hunter Biden being on the board of Burisma. I'm not getting 50 large a month. This is a public interest board. This costs me money, but I'm not going to hold it against her because this has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

Joan is an expert in many fields of public interest, but no more so than auto safety and she's going to talk about something that is all the rage in tech circles these days, autonomous automobiles. She's going to help us answer the question Lawrence Olivier asks Dustin Hoffman in *Marathon Man*, is it safe? Next up, we welcome back another old friend, Harvey Wasserman. Harvey's an

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

activist, a teacher, an author, and an environmental champion who created the organization Solartopia, which envisions a fossil fuel and nuclear-free energy system. He has written a new book with the intriguing title, *The People's Spiral of American History: From Deganawidah to Solartopia*. I don't know what some of those words mean but I look forward to getting Harvey's take on that. We look forward to breaking that down with him. And of course, it wouldn't be a *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* if we didn't take a minute in the middle to check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber who will fill us in on the latest mischief making going on in corporate boardrooms around the world. But first, everyone says that the future of transportation is self-driving cars. If so, would it be a safe future? No better person to ask than our first guest, David?

David Feldman: Joan Claybrook is one of the public interest champions of the modern consumer movement. She is one of the co-founders and president emeritus of Public Citizen. During the Carter Administration, Ms. Claybrook headed the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration of the US Department of Transportation. Ms. Claybrook has testified frequently before congressional committees on many public interest issues, but with a particular focus on auto and highway safety. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Joan Claybrook.

Joan Claybrook: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Welcome, Joan. Just before we get into the congressional fight, that is emerging again, last year, the terrible deregulatory autonomous bill was blocked by you and advocates for highway and auto safety and Center for Auto Safety. Tell our listeners the difference between semi-autonomous cars, like semi-autonomous brakes and autonomous, completely autonomous vehicles.

Joan Claybrook: Well, semi-autonomous means that the vehicle does not work totally on its own, but only partially, and totally autonomous means there's no driver; that the vehicle operates totally on its own.

Ralph Nader: And there's already semi-autonomous features on cars, millions of them, right?

Joan Claybrook: Yes, there are. And many of them are very good, such as automatic brakes, which stop the vehicle if you're getting too close to another vehicle. And that's a very important feature that I can discuss a little bit more because it's the auto companies said they would do this voluntarily and they really haven't. And then there are other features like ones that warn you if you're going out of the lane of traffic so that you pull back. So those are very excellent ways of helping the driver do its job. But the totally autonomous vehicle is years away from today.

Ralph Nader: Well, before we get into the vulnerabilities of autonomous vehicles, and they're quite astonishing, autonomous vehicles have been subject to huge media hype. I mean you can't count the pages in *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Detroit News*, and *The Washington Post* hyping this forthcoming revolution in transit. It's going to reduce traffic, deaths and injuries. They say it's going to do all kinds of wonderful things. Although many of the sober commentaries from the auto companies have issued, of late, notes of caution. It's not going to happen that fast. Don't over estimate its capabilities under certain conditions. But last year, both Democrats and Republicans in the House overwhelmingly voted a horrifically bad autonomous car or autonomous

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

vehicle legislation that would have in effect given all kinds of leeway to manufacturers of autonomous cars and went over to the Senate and you were right in the midst of the struggle and at the last minute, it was blocked. Can you describe what kind of legislation this was and how in the world did they get so many Democratic as well as corporate indentured Republican votes?

Joan Claybrook: Well, first of all in the House, it was controlled then by the Republicans and the committee people had very little capacity in the Democratic side to do much of anything. And so they cut a deal—which I thought was a really bad deal—to get a few improvements in the bill. And in exchange, they would support the legislation. And so the legislation went through unanimously through the House and there was one year left in the Congress before it was going to go out and the Senate started to move very quickly to try and get a bill through the Senate. And it came out of committee, but there were some holds as it's called, put on that bill by several really important and brave members of the Senate. And that includes Diane Feinstein and Ed Markey and Blumenthal, Senator Blumenthal from Connecticut.

So that meant that if the bill was to come up on the floor, it would be filibustered. And that was the translation of what a hold does. So there really wasn't time on the schedule for McConnell, Senator McConnell, who's the majority leader, to bring it up. Well, then what happened was that this woman was killed in Arizona in an autonomous Volvo because the driver advocate, the person who is supposed to control the vehicle, was reading a document and not paying attention. And so the vehicle didn't see the woman who was walking with her bicycle on the side of the street and trying to cross the street. And so she was killed. And that set everyone back and that delayed everything for about four or five months, which was helpful in the legislative sense. And then as they moved to try and get it onto another bill, they wanted to amend another bill and put this bill on it to rush it through. The issue is of the Wall came up on the budget documents the budget bill. And the Wall saved autonomous cars because it took up so much time and so much anger that they never could get the bill through. So the Wall saved it; I have to say.

Ralph Nader: Tell our listeners what was in the bill that you found so objectionable?

Joan Claybrook: Well, it had exemptions from safety standards in the hundreds of thousands per manufacturer and it had an advisory committee that essentially would supplant the decision making by the NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), the government agency that regulates the auto industry, by the head of that agency because it was so bureaucratized with this advisory committee made up of mostly industry people. And it didn't have some really important provisions in it like the cyber security standard or electronic standard or a vision test. Obviously, the vision capacity of that Volvo didn't work. And it didn't have the transparency on the data collected that you want to have to make sure that you understand what the vehicle is doing. And so it was really a no-bill bill. It really didn't do much of anything to help. And it also attempted to preempt state and local roles and access to the courts if there was a problem. And the state and local organizations were very upset about this and felt that unless there was a federal standard that protected them, then they would be really harmed by not having any authority in the states and localities to regulate these vehicles.

Ralph Nader: And what about the exemptions? I found that pretty astounding for 2,500 exempt vehicles. Well, what is all that about?

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

Joan Claybrook: Well, the 2,500 is in the current law and so they can actually sell a vehicle, which is exempt from federal safety standards if approved by the agency and use it to test various and sundry aspects of the vehicle.

Ralph Nader: You mean they're allowed to sell 25 up to 2,500 exempt vehicles on the normal highways and roads of America. Does that sound nutty?

Joan Claybrook: Well, it's such a small number that most manufacturers don't use it because it's not financially feasible for them to have that. So that's not the problem. This bill was the problem. The bill would have exempted the broad exemptions from federal motor vehicle safety standards for the tens of thousands of vehicles.

Ralph Nader: And if people are killed in these autonomous vehicle interactions, can the next of kin sue under tort law or is there immunity there too in this crazy bill?

Joan Claybrook: Well, they can sue today, but one of the things that manufacturers are trying to get was immunity as well, so they couldn't be sued. And the trial lawyers reacted very negatively to that and put a lot of pressure on the Congress not to do that.

Ralph Nader: You know, you were listing some of the comments by industry executives themselves, which are pretty cautionary, wouldn't you say? I mean here's the head of Ford just a few months ago, April 9, 2019 or so at the Detroit Economic Club, "You overestimate the arrival of the technology. You underestimate the impact. In this case, we've overestimated the arrival of autonomous vehicles. We're coming in 2021. We'll be ready. But the applications will be narrow, what we call geo-fence because the problem is so complex." And then you have this person who represents Nissan Silicon Valley Research Center and he says, "Show me an autonomous system without a human in the loop and I'll show you a useless system." And then the director of Toyota Research said, "None of us have any idea when full self-driving will happen." That was in the *New York Times* June 20, 2019. So what's going on? There seems to be a rupture between these more sober comments and the ferocious auto industry lobbyists swarming over Congress, which you have been challenging.

Joan Claybrook: It's true. And there are many, many, many experts who have said it's a long journey. It's going to take a long time; that this is a raw beginning. One of the claims is that the Europeans are ahead of us. That's not true. They're being incredibly cautious about moving in this direction. So, autonomous cars have really been hyped. And I think that part of the reason is that some of the companies wanted to retrieve their investments that they've made in this. It's very costly.

Ralph Nader: Speaking of that, have they gotten through any legislation requiring taxpayer subsidies?

Joan Claybrook: Not yet.

Ralph Nader: They're trying?

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

Joan Claybrook: They haven't yet, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if that's the next step or one of the next steps. In fact right now, just to bring it up to date, what's going on is that the auto companies had a fly-in of all their executives about two weeks ago to talk to members of Congress about pushing legislation. And the Republicans have ginned up a new way of drafting legislation that I've never heard of before, which is bicameral/bipartisan. And they say that the senators and the members of the House are not involved in this. It's just the staff that's pushing this. And they're sending around draft language and asking about a hundred organizations that are interested in this, including advocates of highway and auto safety and others consumer groups, to comment.

But the problem is that we see it little piece by little piece and suddenly they're going to pounce and say, well, we got, you know, comments back from all these different organizations and ~~then~~ now we're going to put together a bill, which should have a unanimous support. But the fact is that the individual comments are not supportive of many of the things that they're proposing, and the members are not taking any responsibility for it. And it's all secret, by the way. Everything that is submitted to this core group of staff in the Congress is kept secret. So we don't know what General Motors is saying. We don't know what Volvo is saying. They don't know what we're saying. Although we've publicized ours more than they have. They've kept all theirs secret.

Ralph Nader: Well, compare it to when we started advocating before Congress, Joan, back in the '60s. Congress has become a very deep secret cocoon. I mean they just revealed after secret negotiations, seeing Republican and Democrats, on the budget deal to keep the government open until September that the Democrats gave the Republicans \$1.4 billion for Trump's Wall and said he could divert even more billions from the Defense Department by his own discretion. And that was all done in secret and the budget deal was set, locked in in the last few days and it's over. Well, what are some of the drawbacks so far that the testing people have found about autonomous cars?

Joan Claybrook: Well, first of all, there is no cybersecurity standard required. And as you know, hacking is a fond hobby of a number of people and there's nothing to protect these cars against being hacked. And they're all electronic. So you could be driving down the street and all of a sudden, your vehicle could stop. It could be taken in a different direction, whatever. I mean, you're not even driving. These are truly autonomous cars. They have to have a cyber security standard. And I talked to several experts about this and they said, if you want to have a secure vehicle, don't put any computers in it. Well, of course, this is all computers and they hack into the computer. So it's not like hacking into the computer on your desk. It's hacking into the computer in your car that tells you know where you're driving and how fast you're going to go, whether you're going to stop and all the rest. And there's no electronic standard.

I mean, even the FAA for all of its failings, as we know from the Boeing case, they have an electronic safety standard and there's nothing like that for these vehicles. [It's] not even discussed. There's nothing for a vision test. So you know, we as drivers have to go take a vision test to make sure we can see, but there's no vision test for this vehicle to make sure that it can see. As I mentioned, in the Arizona death, that was because the vehicle did not see the woman who was killed. So there are many, many deficiencies that are just being ignored by the proponents of this legislation.

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

Ralph Nader: One of the reasons the industry, and it's not just the auto industry, they are Google's subsidiary and others are involved too, pushing autonomous cars because they can charge a horrendously higher price in the regular cars now—number one. And number two, what about the situation of, you know, you have storms, you have potholes, you have children running across the street. What kind of moral decision is the computer gonna make if it's either going to hit the children or gonna veer away and save the car? How's the moral judgment there?

Joan Claybrook: Well, there is no moral judgment. It's going to save the car. That's what the manufacturer is going to design it to do. And the other thing that no one is even talking about is the fact that these vehicles cannot operate without major investments in new highways. Highways that have all the white lines are completely in place; all the signage is completely in place. So the vehicle can read and see the signage and the white lines and/or yellow lines, whatever it may be. And so without that, these vehicles are going to be willy-nilly. They're not going to be able to do their job. Even if they work terrific, they couldn't do it. And no one's even discussing the humongous costs--billions and billions and billions of dollars that are required to make it secure for these vehicles to drive.

Ralph Nader: And the Republicans, won't even support highway repair, normal highway repair and bridge repair, not to mention public transit. Do you think the whole debate over autonomous cars is diverting attention from modern public transit, modern mass transit?

Joan Claybrook: Oh, it definitely is. And in fact, it has already had an impact. Even just with, you know, a tester in Lyft and others, there's been a movement away from mass transit, which of course undermines many people who rely on mass transit to get around. They can't afford to buy autonomous or any kind of car. And so these mass transit systems are letting, they're being degraded, and money's not being put into them because it's just poor people now who are going to be using mostly the mass transit. One of the other arguments that they make, the manufacturers of these systems, these vehicles, is that they will help people who are disabled. But the fact is that if you use a wheelchair, you can't get in and out of a car without help and assistance. There's no way. So, it's not really helping the disabled. The only real disabled individuals that it primarily would help is the blind. But, there are many other kinds of disability. So that's one of their major arguments. Oh, we're doing good work because it's going to help the disabled.

Ralph Nader: Then there's the problem: Let's say 5% of the motor vehicles on the road are autonomous fully. How are they going to interact with the 95 other percent of cars with drivers? I mean, drivers want to control their car. And I've often said if you lose the trust of drivers in autonomous cars, you're never going to see autonomous cars. The very specter of some powerful hacking agency hundreds of miles away, underworld or overworld. There'll be able to hack thousands at the same time of the same model with the same computer codes, not to mention that the seller of your autonomous car could move to an upgrade and interfere with the car. Or if you haven't paid your installment loan on time and you're tootling along on the highway, they can basically cut the engine off.

Joan Claybrook: That's right, totally. And in addition to all of those problems, there's privacy issues. There's a failure of consumer information. So people are not really informed about what these vehicles are and what they do. There are safety evaluation reports that need to be done. But

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

there's nothing that is really sufficient in the legislation to have good evaluation and the data, including the reporting requirements, is de minimis. And then the other thing is that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which is responsible for issuing standards and overseeing this, is starving to death. Its budget is about three hundred million maybe for the entire United States for motor vehicle safety. And it's nothing like what they need in terms of expertise and capacity to oversee this, the advent of these new vehicles.

Ralph Nader: Here's the Ryan Chin, co-founder and CEO of Optimist Ride. "I challenge any car company to drive through any complex urban environment without a driver under any weather conditions. We're not there yet as an industry. Even the best systems aren't there yet." That was about a year ago. And then there's John Leonard, vice president for Automated Driving Research at Toyota Research Institute, "Taking me from Cambridge to Logan Airport with no driver in any Boston weather or traffic condition; that might not be in my lifetime." That was reported by *Bloomberg*. Before we ask Steve and David to weigh in here, what is your prediction? Let's say 25 years from now, you think all vehicles will be autonomous? Do you think this industry is going to tail off the way the early electric and turbine cars in 1920 tailed off and never came back?

Joan Claybrook: I think it's going to tail off to some extent. I think that the great asset of some of the more recent electronic systems and developments has been to assist the driver, have a regular driver in the car, but to assist the driver, as I mentioned with the automatic brakes and the rear cameras and the ability to tell you if you're not properly in your lane. That is really where this should go and those should all be developed. They should be experienced with them. Drivers should have that experience with them and then I think an evaluation should be made about whether or not to move any further forward with autonomous systems. But right now, no one, no one in the industry truthfully really thinks that we're anywhere near close than 30 years to getting toward that. I think that the biggest pressure is in the trucking industry where driving very long distances is boring and tiresome and expensive for the truckers, trucking companies. And they're pushing hard to try and get trucks that are autonomous. But even that is really dangerous because those trucks, when they have a crash, just do, unbelievable devastation.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Joan Claybrook, former administrator of the National Highway Safety Agency in the Department of Transportation under President Jimmy Carter. The auto companies called her "The Dragon Lady". That's how tough she was on them. And Joan, if our listeners want to take this further, what websites can you tell them about?

Joan Claybrook: Well, I think that they ought to go to Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety website and they ought to go to the Center for Auto Safety website. Those are two, and then they should go to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration website, which is not as good as it should be because of lack of capacity, but those are the places that that you could probably go with websites.

Ralph Nader: Okay. David, Steve, any comments?

David Feldman: Yeah. I wanted to share one of the great ironies of my life. I went to the Tort Museum, Ralph's museum up in Connecticut, and I rented a car from enterprise. This was two years ago. I was running behind. And I stopped off at the Hungarian pastry shop on the upper West side of Manhattan and come back, the car won't start. And I called AAA and it turns out Enterprise

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

had shut my car off. I finally called them, and they said, oh yeah, you're running late; you never called us. So we just completely shut the engine down. I don't know if they still do that. My question is, I just rented a car and what they do on the passenger side mirror, which is fantastic, is they light up if there's a car in my blind spot. Do we know if that makes for lazier drivers when you go back to a normal car after getting used to some of these assists? Does it create more accidents, make you lazy? [Lots of laughter]

Joan Claybrook: I don't think that anyone's evaluated that, that I know of, but it certainly sounds like it's a possibility.

Steve Skrovan: Joan, what is fascinating to me, which I had never heard argued, is the thing that you brought up about the whole infrastructure issue, about how you would have to retool the highways and the signs. And you know our infrastructure is crumbling as it is. And if that's not done, I mean, I'm thinking about, you know, at the risk of sounding like an old-fuddy-duddy who's against technology, we have enough mishaps with spellcheck for text messages. You know, in this case, the mishaps wouldn't be hilarious, they'd be fatal. And I think that's a huge issue that nobody I know talks to it. They talk about it'll help traffic and as a result will reduce emissions and these seems like very low payoffs for the potential risk.

Joan Claybrook: Yes. Well, I agree. I agree. So I don't think that any autonomous vehicles should be licensed until the highways are fixed. And that's going to be a very long time.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. Good luck with that.

Ralph Nader: As Steve said, a prankster could change a sign from "stop" to "go," whatever. And really mess up the driver.

Steve Skrovan: Signs get graffitied all the time. And it's an incredible chance for mischief.

Joan Claybrook: Right. Oh, totally. But even cyber security is devastating. They could also do just one sign, right?

Ralph Nader: You know, three years ago, there was an article and *Car and Driver* [magazine]; it said self-driving Mercedes-Benzes will prioritize occupant safety over pedestrians. And it says the technology is—I'm quoting, "The technology is new, but the moral conundrum isn't: A self-driving car identifies a group of children running into the road. There is no time to stop. To swerve around them would drive the car into a speeding truck on one side or over a cliff on the other, bringing certain death to anybody inside." Mercedes protects the occupants, sacrifices the children in an autonomous car. That's a decision the algorithms make. Well, this is something to be continued. Thank you very much, Joan Claybrook, former administrator of the National Highway Safety Agency under Jimmy Carter and a never-ending advocate for your safety on the highways as pedestrians, as drivers, as occupants. Thank you very much, Joan.

Joan Claybrook: Thank you. I appreciate being on.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Joan Claybrook. We will link to her work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. We're going to take a one minute break and check in with our corporate

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. And when we come back, we'll welcome back old friend Harvey Wasserman, who has a new take on American history entitled *The People's Spiral of American History*. You're listening to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, back after this.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your Corporate Crime Reporter, Morning Minute for Friday, December 27, 2019. I'm Russell Mokhiber. Twenty-four people have died, and hundreds have been seriously injured from exploding Takata airbags. In 2000, Takata knew about the problem with their ammonium nitrate inflators. They knew they were exploding in their own labs and they covered up the problem. Now people are dying. The man who went to the FBI with the documented evidence of the corporate crime was a Takata engineer and executive, Kevin Fitzgerald. As a result, in February 2017, Takata pled guilty and paid \$1 billion in fines and restitution. Fitzgerald is now out with a tell-all book coauthored with David Schumann called *In Your Face: An Insider's Explosive Account of the Takata Airbag Scandal*. At this moment, Fitzgerald is concerned about General Motors and their refusal to recall the airbags. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Our next guest has been on the show previously to talk to us about the dangers of nuclear power and then about voting machine shenanigans in Ohio during the 2004 presidential election. Now he's back to talk to us about his unique take on American history, David?

David Feldman: Harvey Wasserman is a life-long activist who speaks, writes and organizes widely on energy, the environment, history, drug war, election protection, and grassroots politics. He teaches history and cultural and ethnic diversity at two central Ohio colleges. He hosts the *Solartopia Green Power & Wellness Show* and as the author of many books, including his latest, *The People's Spiral of U.S. History*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Harvey Wasserman.

Harvey Wasserman: Great to be with you. Thanks for having me on.

Ralph Nader: Welcome again, Harvey. Before we get to the scene of nuclear power plants in this country and how they're declining in number and horizon as well as the forthcoming election, and whether the votes are going to be accurately counted, let's talk about your book. This is not your first book. You did a book called *The People's History of the United States* by Harvey Wasserman. Was that the title?

Harvey Wasserman: No, actually, my first book was called *Harvey Wasserman's History of the United States*. It was published after Howard Zinn who wrote *The People's History of the United States* finally wrote an introduction published in 1972. It covered from 1860 to 1920, the Civil War to World War I. This book *The People's Spiral of U.S. History* covers everything from the indigenous right down to the eminent departure of Donald Trump.

Ralph Nader: Well, this is an extremely imaginative book, to put it mildly. It has two blurbs on it. One by Howard Zinn, one of your prior books. He said, "Harvey Wasserman constantly provokes us and educates us, sometimes outrages us, often inspires us. He's always delightfully readable." That's by Howard Zinn who broke new ground with his book, both for adults and there's

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

Vanan Online Services

a version for children called *The People's History of the United States*. And it's used in some schools in some classes and has been widely read and applauded. And then the Professor Eric Foner, who is a historian, just retired from Columbia University, one of the most prolific historians writing in America today; he called your book "lively, engaging, original, zany, psychedelic, feisty, opinionated." So by now our listeners are saying, what kind of book is this? And I want you to tell them what the subtitle is after you repeat the title and explain it.

Harvey Wasserman: Okay. So the subtitle is *From Deganawidah to Solartopia*. Deganawidah was the Iroquois holy man at Haudenosaunee, people in the long house, who were in what's now Upstate New York. And they are the wellspring of American democracy. And none of the histories of the United States except Howard's, and a couple others here and there, give any credit to the indigenous for the rise of American democracy. But in fact, American democracy came straight from the Five Nations of the Iroquois and Deganawidah was their founder of their democracy. The Five Nations, were the the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga and the Seneca, were constantly at war. And Deganawidah came down. He was either a mythological holy man or an actual person. And they formed the Iroquois Confederacy; it was a Congress of the tribes and it is the basis of the American federal government. Very, very few white people, and certainly a tiny handful of American white historians, are willing to acknowledge that. But it was acknowledged most importantly by both Benjamin Franklin and George Washington.

So the premise of this book, Ralph, is that the American nation is derived from a forced union of the indigenous--who were matriarchal, believed in tremendous freedom, human rights, sexual diversity, and oneness with nature--with the incoming Puritans who were male dominated, technologically oriented, authoritarian, extremely harsh and intolerant of diversity. And our nation's history, at least through 1992, is a back and forth interplay between the awakened humanistic energies of our indigenous DNA and the repressive male-dominated, authoritarian DNA of the Puritans. And we go back and forth in six definable cycles. And as a history professor, I use these cycles to make clear how to understand the United States history as an organic whole as does this book.

And there are a lot of diagrams and they are a lot of fun to look at. But the presumption is that the American organism as originally conceived, essentially died in 1992 when Bill Clinton sold the Democratic Party to the corporations and we see stabbing this back and forth interplay and became basically brain dead. The four presidencies, the four Baby Boom presidencies of Clinton, Bush II, Obama, and now Trump are really the end of the empire. The death of American organism has been wrapped up in basically racism and the empire. And the last four presidencies have really been classic instances of imperial decline. And now we have Donald Trump who is really the logical outcome of a corporate imperial decline. I mean, this is corporate capitalism at its very worst. And the question is, Ralph, are we gonna survive it? Donald Trump is perfectly designed to destroy human life on earth. I don't think the human species survive four more years of his horrendous anti-environmental, destructive policies. And that's the dilemma we face. Will the human species survive the end of the spiral of U.S. history?

Ralph Nader: You know, we studied in college the rise and fall of nations, but we never included the U.S. like it wasn't subject to that cycle. [laughter] You quote Oswald Spengler, author of the famous book, *Decline of the West* this way: "Every culture passes through the age phases of the

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

individual. Each has his childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. Its determined phrases which invariably occur.” And in fact, your spiral—people's spiral, the spiral is made up of Infant Empire, 1688-1828; Youthful Destiny, 1828-1896; Bully Manhood, 1896-1932; Full Adulthood 1932-1960; Midlife Crisis from 1960-1976; and Imperial Senility from 1976-1992. So let's come right up to the last three years with the “Trump Dump”. Why do you think the Democrats, who control the House of Representatives, didn't push forward all the other impeachable offenses, some of them kitchen-table issues that give consumers, environmentalists, women's groups, children's groups and minorities a stake in impeachment? Why did they just go with the Ukraine, without getting into the Ukraine issue, because of limitations of time, why do you think they didn't use all the arrows in their quiver, which would have thrown the Republicans in the Senate on the defensive having to defend the indefensible before millions of television viewers?

Harvey Wasserman: Well, because the corporate Democrats are the problem. And this history really starts looking at the rise of the corporate Democrats in 1896 when William Jennings Bryan sold out the Populist Party, which was a semi-socialist party. And then Woodrow Wilson, who I consider, Ralph, to be our very worst president, even at this stage of the game, Woodrow Wilson is worse than Donald Trump because he was a racist and a white supremacist and he crushed the Socialist Party of Eugene V. Debs, who was a great, great labor leader, by physical force and by tearing up the Constitution.

Ralph Nader: And World War I

Harvey Wasserman: Yes. And he got us in World War I completely gratuitously and established the dominion of the two-party corporate system, which is still with us today. I mean, the corporate Democrats today are no different than Wilson and the corporate Democrats that had been assaulting and destroying the Democratic left for about 120 years. And so the Pelosi wing of the Democratic Party is still unwilling to face the core issues that are the root cause of Donald Trump. And you know where everybody's lionizing Nancy Pelosi forgetting that she and her friends, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama put Trump in the White House in the first place. You know, it's very clear that had Barack Obama gotten out of Afghanistan instead of escalating that war, which is the latest in the long series of imperial wars that we've been fighting and really very much in the continuity of white people crushing the indigenous in America, in North America, to begin with, you know; it's continuity there. And Obama did not have the wherewithal to get us out of the business of imperial war. So now we have corporate Democrats who are very much in the tradition of playing it safe and going along with the corporations. I mean it's telling that you got the Democrats on the debate stage arguing about who's taking more corporate money. That's the history of the corporate Democratic Party. Bernie has stood out as always with words to a certain extent. And ironically, Tom Steyer, who finally, if someone on the stage gave the right answers about nuclear power and it took a billionaire, as one of your books said, to do it. But here we have the reason the corporate Democrats won't go after Trump for all the core issues, is that they are a party to it. They didn't make this deal in Ukraine, although it's ironic there that Biden is at the center of it, but the real core issues of democracy, social, and ecological and otherwise in this country have been really victimized by the corporate Democrats. We know what the Republicans are; they're the party of the big corporations. The corporate Democrats have played the game of being representing the people while still being owned and operated by the corporations. And that's been the root problem here in American democracy for the last 120 years.

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

Ralph Nader: Well, you know there's a lot of talk about voter suppression and Trump is deep into that with the Republican Party in key states around the country. They've developed all kinds of ways to obstruct and harass and disqualify and burden voters, most of them minority and poor who would more likely vote Democrat. And you believe that the 2004 election was stolen from Kerry and Edwards by George W. Bush in Ohio. It all came down to Ohio in about 75,000 votes. And you got Congressman John Conyers to hold on unofficial House hearing on it. What do you project for 2020 and in what states? The Congress has just passed funding \$423 million or so for what they call election security. Give us your take on what's going to happen.

Harvey Wasserman: Well, Ralph, I was teaching in Columbus in the midst of the 2004 election and my colleague, Bob Fittrakis, and I watched the election stolen upfront and personal. I mean the guy who owned and operated the voting machines in Columbus, Ohio, was also a co-chair of the Re-elect Bush campaign. And they just flat out stole it a hundred different ways. I mean, they shut down precincts. They stripped the voter rolls of 300,000 voters, which they're doing again all over the country, but especially in the key swing states like Wisconsin, North Carolina, Ohio again; they are taking people off the voter rolls. And of course, it's always people of color and youth--the people suspected of being inclined to vote Democratic. They strip the voter rolls and people show up, even though they've lived in the same home for 30, 40 years and voted in the same precinct. They show up, and in many cases, precincts are gone.

Ralph Nader: Harvey, who was the man who owned their proprietary information in these voting machines? Where were the voting machines stationed? And this man was a big supporter of George W. Bush.

Harvey Wasserman: Yes. His voting machines were all over the state. His name escapes me at the moment, but he's not around anymore and his voting machine company has been swallowed up by a company called E.S. & S [Electric Systems and Software], which now dominates the voting machine markets. I mean, the good news is we have voting machines now where a voter can fill out a paper ballot, slide it into a slot, have it read by a computer, and then produce a ballot image and the ballot images can be counted pretty much flawlessly and we can get a 100% reliable, release 99.9 with reliable, decent reliable outcomes very, very quickly. But this money that the Congress has voted, as they voted money in 2002 for the Help America Vote Act, is being used now to buy machines that are, that are ridiculous, you know, that make it harder to count the vote count.

Throughout our history, Ralph, right from the very start, the ruling elite, the corporate elite in this country has had a stake in preventing people of color and youth in poverty from voting. We had, there were property qualifications and racial restrictions are voting in the United States, right from birth. Gradually, many of these have been peeled away. Women, people of color, young, and 18-year olds have gotten the right to vote, but the ability of the count the vote has been left to the states.

Ralph Nader: You mentioned a paper trail that would provide for accurate recounts in case the machine was fiddled with remotely or not. There are some states still don't have a paper trail, right?

Harvey Wasserman: Exactly. And then so those states can be easily stolen as we saw in Florida 2000 and in, you know, Ohio 2004 and I got to say, Ralph, there's extensive coverage in my history

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

book, *The People's Spiral of U.S. History*, of the 2000 election where the corporate Democrats screamed at you for the last almost 20 years when in fact, the election was stolen flat out by Jeb Bush. The Governor of Florida, who was the brother of the Governor of Texas who was running for president--both of them, sons of the former head of the CIA with perfected election theft throughout the world. I mean, you know, they were—the CIA was steeling right from the late 40s and they finally came back in New Hampshire. And when George H.W. Bush ran for president and stole the primaries from Bob Dole in 2000, I mean there was no doubt in my mind, and I write about this in the book, that even if you had not run in 2000 and if everybody that voted for you had voted for Al Gore, Bush still would have won the election because his brother was going to get him exactly as many votes, 547, in this case, as he needed to become president. It was no doubt about it. And they're still doing the same thing.

Ralph Nader: You think there's going to be shenanigans in Ohio and Florida again?

Harvey Wasserman: Well, they're happening now. That's the point. The election of 2020 is being decided now as these secretaries of state strip hundreds of thousands of voters, even in Wisconsin and North Carolina, where you have Democratic governors and certainly in Ohio. They are stripping the voter rolls right now. They're installing machines that can be easily manipulated with a few keystrokes. You know, ignoring, avoiding like the plague, the machines that allow us to cast, give us the best of both worlds--fill out a hand-marked ballot, slip it into the computer slot, take a visual image and count those images. They are avoiding those machines like the plague. Instead, they're coming up with very complicated computerized voting techniques that will allow them to steal the election. So Ralph, the election of 2020 and the fate of this nation and world as to whether we have Donald Trump again is being decided, as we speak, with the stripping of the voter rolls and the installation of hackable voting machines.

Ralph Nader: And the counteraction that is a massive get-out-the vote movement to get non-voters to vote in key states. Do you favor the Australian system of universal voting as a duty like jury duty?

Harvey Wasserman: I like that. Yes, I would like that. I think that's pretty cool. It goes against the basic idea of freedom and when you're not casting a vote, you're actually expressing an opinion to a certain extent. But the bottom line is this, Ralph, the 2020 election will be decided by one thing, which is how many millennials come out to vote. There are 85 million millennials, bigger than the baby boomers. And of course, the baby boomers are, not necessarily disappearing. So it's whether or not young people vote. That was Obama's magic in 2008 and 2012. We got young people to come out to vote. And young people in this country overwhelmingly oppose Trump and the Republican Party. They're not big fans of the Democrats for good reason. But the fact is, you know, this idea of the middle, the mythological middle, and how you have to play conservative to get those three voters in Pennsylvania who might switch from Trump to Biden, for example, as opposed to a Bernie. That's the myth. The only way that we defeat Donald Trump in 2020 is to A) make sure that the voter rolls and the voting machines are carefully controlled and are fair and give us a fair vote count and B) getting out the millennials. And Joe Biden and the corporate Democrats ain't going to do it. Somebody's got to excite these young people.

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Harvey, we've been talking with Harvey Wasserman, multiple author/teacher of American history. His most recent book is called *The People's Spiral of U.S. History*. He's been a great solar energy advocate. By the way, Harvey, it doesn't restrict freedom if you have a "none-of-the-above" option and a "write-in" option for voters to vote as a legal duty. So that's the way to deal with the civil liberties problem. So let's go to nuclear power. You've long been an advocate of solar energy, when nobody much thought it was feasible technologically or economically. Tell us briefly, because we don't have that much time, what's the scene with nuclear power--the number of plants, how many are shutting down, the costs and your latest article on the last nuclear plant in California, Diablo?

Harvey Wasserman: Well, here, Ralph, we have a magnificent success, in which you've been a great part dating to the critical mass conferences in the early 1970s and we coined the phrase "No Nukes". In 1974, Richard Nixon said there'll be a thousand commercial reactors in the U.S. by the year 2000 and in the year 2000, there were 104. We're down to 96 now. The real challenge is not the idea that new nuclear plants will be built. That's not going to happen. One of the great miracles of the modern era is the incredible rise of wind and solar. I mean, the technological and economic breakthroughs have been spectacular and exceeded all expectations, really, dating back from when we started this safe energy movement.

But the problem we have is there are 96 commercial reactors still operating in the United States and they are incredibly dangerous. They're all more than 30 years old except for one. Anyone of them could cause a Chernobyl at any moment. I highly recommend by the way, that people watch the Chernobyl series that ran. I believe it was on HBO. It's staggering and one of the most frightening things I've ever seen. So here in California, we have two reactors left. They are surrounded by earthquake faults, the Diablo Canyon, San Luis Obispo, and they are generating power at \$500 million a year above market. Pacific Gas and Electric [PG&E] is in bankruptcy, and they have been convicted of a crime; eight crimes actually involving their failure to maintain gas pipes in San Bruno in 2010. They blew up a neighborhood in Sam Bruno, killed eight people, burned down 19 houses. Then they more recently burned down all of Northern California. The horrendous fires killed over 80 people. This company actually has a probation officer and has been convicted of criminal felonies. P.G. & E, people are deciding what to do with it, but they're not talking, you know, it's a big movement here in California to take over P.G. & E by the public, which is absolutely what should happen and break it up so that the municipalities themselves can run the smaller units of P.G. & E as municipal-owned utilities.

The problem is that nobody's talking about Diablo Canyon. These two reactors were opened in the mid-80s. They're more than 30 years old and I wonder how many of your listeners are driving 30 year old automobiles, for God's sake. And Diablo is surrounded by earthquake faults. There are all sorts of problems internally. We can't get the state, with this good liberal Governor, Gavin Newsom, to even inspect these reactors. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission long ago warned that the Diablo Unit One is in brittle. There are cracks; it's in deferred maintenance. I live in L.A. and I am terrified of what could happen at these two reactors. In fact, there was an earthquake, a 7.0, 200 miles away, that if it had been at Diablo Beach where the Diablo is, we'd be talking about radioactive rubble and a cloud passing into L.A, that would just wipe the place out.

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

We have 96 reactors in the United States that are in terrible condition. They're not being maintained. They're obsolete; they're decaying, and we have got to get them shut. The same thing is going on in Ohio, Ralph, where we have two reactors on the lake, Davis-Besse and Perry with terrible safety records. That company, First Energy, is in bankruptcy and they just forced through our gerrymandered and incredibly corrupt legislature in Ohio, a billion-dollar bailout. And here the bailout is we were predicting \$3 billion over a market rate if the Diablo stays open and dangerously prone to a meltdown. You know what I talked about in that my U.S. history a lot is how the corporations that run this country, you know, the corporations are the dominant institution in America. They always talk about the wonders of the free market, and they always do everything they possibly can to destroy the free market. If we were a free market in energy, all 96 of the reactors in the United States would shut tomorrow.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, because it's propped up by taxpayers in all kinds of ways, not the least of which - I call it "government guaranteed corporate capitalism" that subsidies to nuclear power bailouts to nuclear power; you get an old nuclear power plant that should be closed down and they apply for relicensing. And then Governor Cuomo pushed for subsidizing these old nuclear plants in Upstate New York with the taxpayer dollar. And the electricity is far more expensive than it would be with solar energy, solar panels, and wind power. So listen, I want to tell our listeners that there are two wonderful groups. I'm sure you agree, Harvey, Beyond Nuclear and the Nuclear Information Resource Service. You go to their websites, beyondnuclear.org and the other one is nirs.org. These are small groups that are saving the country from even worse potential risk hazard and catastrophe. I have never seen more dedicated people. And they deserve your help at the end of the year by your becoming a supporter. beyondnuclear.org and nirs.org.

Harvey Wasserman: And my website, Ralph, is solartopia.org and you can get the *People's Spiral U.S. History* at solartopia.org.

Ralph Nader: Yes, say that again.

Harvey Wasserman: solartopia.org. That's where my *People's Spiral U.S. History* resides and its division of a green power, which you helped inspire. I mean, we have an alternative vision here. You know, we got coal oil, nukes and gas or King Kong, which we need to get rid of and replace. We have the technology and it's economical; it's job-producing renewables. We're now a four-part cable here: wind, solar, battery storage, and increased efficiency led by LED lighting. We have completely changed the energy picture in this country and in this world in the last 20 years. And we're poised now to be 100% renewable.

Ralph Nader: Yes, and I might add, it would help your goal if the people took over Congress by organizing in every congressional district, less than 1%, reflecting overwhelming support by the way, for wind power and solar. I mean Texas, right-wing Texas, 20% of its electric energy is now wind power. So organize on your senators and representatives. They can turn the whole country around faster than even Harvey Wasserman can talk. And on that note, Harvey Wasserman of solar sanity replacing institutional atomic insanity, we have to conclude the program. Thank you very much, Harvey.

Harvey Wasserman: Ralph, thank you. It's always great to be with you.

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843

[Vanan Online Services](#)

Steven Skrovan: We've been speaking with Harvey Wasserman. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, Joan Claybrook and Harvey Wasserman. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call the Wrap Up. A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel, and for Ralph's weekly column, it's free; Go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steven Skrovan: And Ralph has got yet another new book out written in collaboration with Mark Green entitled *Fake President: Decoding Trump's Gaslighting, Corruption and General Bullsh*t*. We will link to that also. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

David Feldman: Our theme music "Stand Up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you everybody. And *Fake President* has an epilogue written by me on how to communicate with Trump voters. You may want to use it if you want to communicate with some of your neighbors or co-workers. It's a powerful expression of respect for the concerns of Trump voters about how they're betrayed by the Democratic Party over the years and for the need for them to be much more factually empowered. [Music]

[57:29]

[Audio Ends]

Business Email: Support@vananservices.com

Website: www.vananservices.com

Phone Number: 866-221-3843