

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Osamah Khalil

JVN: Hey, curious people, I'm Jonathan Van Ness and welcome to Getting Curious. We are in the middle of what seems to be an endless cluster fuck of our existence, but we are finding our way together. We continue to learn, we continue to grow. Um but you cannot turn on the news, social media or be aware of the world around us, and not realize that there is an incredible amount of war and violence that surrounds us. I need to understand more about U.S. wars and more about the history of U.S. wars. Um I also want to understand more about um how the press and how wars and how public perception of leaders leads to more public policy intervention. It kind of that like, when you can look back 50 years and see some of the things that happened, you can see if some of those fears were right or not. So I'm really curious about the United States and our history of being consistently at war. Um I'm also really curious about Vietnam because I really, I've only ever learned about Agent Orange on this podcast years ago. Um and I really didn't get to learn that much about like the politics of the war. I want to find out about that. And I also just want to find out about like America's never ending being at war...that's our series. It's with Dr. Osamah F. Khalil who's an incredible author. And we thought we were going to be able to get from like Vietnam to now in one episode; full disclosure that did not happen, we basically got from like the '40s to 1980 in this episode. Um we answered a lot of those questions that I just said, but also we didn't answer a lot of questions. So I got to get from 1980 still to 2024. But this was like one of the most scintillating conversations I've had in a fucking long time. The chemistry was off the charts. I love this guy. He's really interesting. I learned so much; I'm really down with his work. Uh so let's find out about like why we're always at war uh starting with Vietnam, but we're going to get all the way through to today. Plus we'll probably go back further in history because we actually did that too. So it's gonna be like a several part series. Um okay with that being said, Dr. Osamah Khalil is a historian of U.S. Foreign Relations and chair of the International Relations Program at Syracuse University. He's a frequent media commentator and contributor for outlets such as the Los Angeles Times, NPR, USA Today, PBS News Hour. Love them. The Hill, also love them. And Al Jazeera. Oh my God, I love them too. His new book, *A World of Enemies: America's Wars at Home and Abroad From Kennedy to Biden* is out now. Dr. Khalil, welcome to Getting Curious. And how are you?

Osamah Khalil: Good, Jonathan. Thanks so much for having me.

JVN: The United States was found or like was like the U.S. as, as we commonly know, like, I think was like 1776 and then that was like the Revolutionary War and then we had like the war of 1812, that was only like 40 years later. Then there was the Civil War, which was like '61, that was like another 40 years. Then you had like World War One, which was 1919. But I feel like there was another war in there too even before. But let's just round of the big ones: 1919. Then 30 years later you got World War, well, like 20 something years later, got World War Two, which is like '41 to '45—1941 to 45. Then you've got Vietnam, which was like, when was Vietnam again?

Osamah Khalil: So that's a great question because Vietnam: when do you want to start the clock? But if you want to, you can start the clock in '65. But the reality is the United States was involved in Vietnam back to the '40s.

JVN: Really?

Osamah Khalil: Yes! Oh, yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

JVN: Because it was that part of the Pacific Theater or whatever like was Vietnam going on in the Pacific Theater of World War Two?

Osamah Khalil: What we were doing in Vietnam in World War Two was this was we were supporting what we, what became the Vietnamese insurgents led by Ho Chi Minh against the Japanese, right? So we actually had the precursor to the CIA—what's known as the OSS—was actually providing weapons to Ho Chi Minh and General Giap and he wasn't General Giap then. But the what become known as the Viet Minh and then later the, the the leadership of North Vietnam, all of them were involved in anti-Japanese insurgency that the U.S. backed. And one of the things that happens, Jonathan is they believe, you know, the war is going to end and the U.S. is going to support them. In fact, Ho Chi Minh, when he gives his declaration of independence, deliberately cites the U.S. declaration of independence and the French declaration of the rights of man. And he's trying to send a message: we want to be independent. We wanna have relations with you. And in fact, he's going to, he's going to send a letter to President Truman that says, you know, lays out exactly what Vietnam is looking for. We're looking for independence, we want to be a member of the of, of the Society of Nations.

JVN: So Vietnam, what was going on there just to go into the Vietnam a little bit more, what was going on there before the French took it over? Like, when did the French colonize Vietnam?

Osamah Khalil: Right so they're gonna colonize it in the mid 19th century, right?

JVN: So 1850s...

Osamah Khalil: And so one of the things is, and it's so it's part of their broader and in fact, they're, they're running all over the place, right? So you have them in, in what they would call their Indochina colony this mad and it's huge, right? So there's part of it's what's now present day Vietnam, but includes other aspects: Laos, Cambodia, they're also expanding into North Africa between the 1830's up through the 1850's. So, you know, it's part of this broader expansion of the French Empire, much like you're seeing the British Empire is also expanding in roughly the same, the same time. You know, Vietnam has its own history, both of, you know, anti-colonial resistance against the Chinese. It has its own history of expansionism. So when the French come in, it, it creates this, it really, it's kind of a shock to the system, right? Because it, it challenges the old order. Uh and the French do what, what, you know, all the European imperial powers and the and same thing with the United States, they're gonna, they're gonna try and impose their civilizing mission, right? So they're gonna create several different structures. One will be, we're gonna have our own colonial elite, you will be, you'll become Catholic, you will learn French, right? And we're gonna basically, this is going to become, it's gonna become the richest colony, but it's also a source for things like rubber, rice et cetera. So the whole economy is now gonna be geared towards supporting France, right?

Uh and that's gonna go, but it doesn't mean that, that there isn't resistance against it. There is. In fact, you know, the man who will become Ho Chi Minh, you know, flees France. I mean, he's this fascinating figure, right? He's, he's trained as a school teacher, he flees France, joins a merchant marine sails around the world teaches himself English, you know, uh and what's fascinating for him is by the time you mentioned World War One when we get to World War One and this idea and this is one of the things that, you know, you never seen the

World War One movies is how much the British and the French, for example, are reliant on labor and, and military officials from the colonies, right? And that'll include the Indochina colonies. So they will bring in a bunch of laborers to work in the factories in France. They will bring in fighters. Um they will bring them from North Africa who have, they have no rights. None at all, right. Uh but here they are in France while the war is going on and it's part of the post war peace conference, so this is the the famous Paris Peace conference that's going to be the, you know, the end to all wars as, as President Woodrow Wilson is going to talk about it. Uh there's going to be at this conference, a number of nationalist movements will come and travel to Paris to make their claim for independence. And what's interesting about Ho Chi Minh is, is he will write a letter at that point to President Wilson and, and the Secretary of State at the time, and so he's not asking for independence yet.

All he wants and what he will say in this letter that's never answered is all we want is a seat in the French Parliament. We just want representation. We want what you know essentially why the French and American revolutions were founded. We want the same thing, we just want representation. And then of course, when that is ignored, the man who will become Ho Chi Minh, that's, you know, the, the the name that is adopted uh will will travel to Moscow. The Bolshevik revolution has just happened and he's going to say Western liberalism is dead. There's no hope for western liberalism. This is just a disguise for imperialism; will travel to Moscow and will become a communist.

JVN: So wait, so 1850's, the French come into Vietnam. Vietnam is like, fuck me, France takes over and that just continues and so France is running Vietnam from 1850s until 1941?

Osamah Khalil: 1954 really. That's, that's where this is going to end. I mean, you're going to have the World War Two intervention, right? You're gonna have Japan come in for a years, then the French will come back in. One, is that gonna happen is when the United States gets involved so President Roosevelt is gonna talk about, ok, what do we do with all these colonial territories? And we have to give them independence. And so he wants to dissolve the French Empire after the war, he wants to dissolve the British Empire after the war. And this is part of, you know, much of this; what, what's the, there's gonna be this, this great document that we've forgotten all about, right? It's called the Atlantic Charter and this is where, you know, Roosevelt is gonna release this in August of '41 with then British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. And they're going to promise self-determination for, you know, for all colonial people that we are going to, this is going to be the great outcome of the war. Now, this is the second time it's been promised, it was promised by Wilson effectively in World War one. It's not achieved. They're gonna promise it again after after World War Two during during World War Two. And it won't be achieved again. But for Ho Chi Minh and for others, they are going to remember this promise. So, you know, when he's writing Harry Truman, you know, Roosevelt's dead, he writes to President Truman and he reminds him, the Atlantic Charter said this, the founding convention of the United Nations says this and we, you know, we, we have earned our right to be in the place among the, the place of nations, right?

So of course, one of the things that Truman is gonna say is because we have a bigger problem now, which is the emerging Cold War. And Truman is gonna say, we see French colonialism as a way to contain communism and contain, contain communism in Southeast Asia. Uh and the same thing with British and the British Empire as well. So, the French Empire and the British Empire are gonna help us contain, contain communism rather than,

you know, uh instigate its, its spread. So uh the French will, will come back in, we'll send forces back into South Vietnam—what's now South Vietnam—and then we'll have the beginning of a nine year effectively war between what are known as the Vietminh led by Ho Chi Minh and the French forces. Uh and that'll culminate in the, what's known as the 1954 Geneva Accords which divides Vietnam between North and South. And then what, you know, one of the other caveats there again to make this even more complicated: so the United States will attend that peace conference, the what's the Geneva Peace Conference but won't sign the Accords and therefore it's not a party to it. And so instead what the U.S. is gonna do is start beginning to build up South Vietnam as you know, they want to make it this kind of model, uh anti-communist bulwark, right. Here's what we're gonna do. We are going to create this model that's going to uh you know, uh contain North Vietnam's communism. Now, now, here's the other key factor I think most people don't realize: as part of the, the 54 Geneva Accord, it's not just that the United States doesn't sign it. There's supposed to be an election.

So they're supposed to hold an election and determine whether or not Vietnam will be unified. And that election is never held. And so this is part and we talk about those different revelations that come out. One of the things is the way Vietnam is sold to the American public uh that we are, we're fighting for democracy. Well, it turns out South Vietnam is not a democracy. It turns out that the United States was against uh holding elections for unification because they feared that Ho Chi Minh and the communists would win; that the United States had been funding both the French war and then a massive amount of aid to prop up the regime in South Vietnam. And that the United States largely instigated a war with the North, right. So doing everything from the late '50s, from Black Ops operation, sabotage, assassination, whatever they could do to destabilize North Vietnam. And at the same time, build up South Vietnam and particularly its military forces. You know, by, by the time we get to 1960 the, and '61 of the Kennedy presidency, the army of South Vietnam is almost 250,000 strong. Uh and, and North Vietnam is looking at this and thinking they've got a huge army, they've got all this American weapon. North South Vietnam is, is from in the 1950's into the Kennedy presidency is the single largest recipient of U.S. aid in the world. I mean, that's so it's literally become an American colony.

JVN: So the North Vietnamese is that like Ho Chi Minh and like the more like the people who are like from Vietnam and then who's in the South?

Osamah Khalil: Right so the south is, so what's interesting here is, is what this is where it's gonna get really interesting and complicated, right? Because the insurgency against the French is both nor in Northern Northerners and Southerners, right? So what's gonna happen is when the Geneva Court comes in, those who are originally from the North are gonna, are gonna stay in the North and then those who are from the South have a tough call to make, which is, do we stay in the South? We're from here, right? Or do we go North? And so there's gonna be a decision made and this, this is actually going to come down from, from Ho and the rest of the leadership, which is if you're going to stay in the South, you cannot launch an insurgency. We're gonna wait for the Geneva Accords to get implemented. We're gonna have our election and then we're gonna win our election and basically take over. So what happens is you have this really tense period, '54, '55, '56 where those are, those in the South have stayed, they're staying at home, they have effectively demobilized. They're waiting for the elections which never come. And then by the end of the '50s, they're being actively repressed by the government that's backed by the US, led by a man named Ngô

Đình Diệm, right. So President Diệm is going to be the guy who basically leads Vietnam as he's referred to, he's our miracle man in Vietnam, right? And so Diệm is gonna lead South Vietnam and then start to repress those former communists or nationalists; anybody, what effectively happens is he's literally going to pass a law that outlaws any opposition to him.

JVN: So that is all really brewing in Vietnam. You have Ho Chi Minh, who's the lead of North Vietnam, Vietnam. This Diệm guy comes in and he effectively like, he's put himself next to the power of the U.S. money and he's like depressing all the ability of anyone to organize in South Vietnam that wanted to like raise up against the French. And so that, and then what was the deal with the election that never happened? So like they were promised an election but then the U.S., like, didn't let them have an election?

Osamah Khalil: Exactly. And then...

JVN: Because they thought that the North was gonna win?

Osamah Khalil: They knew, they knew that Ho Chi Minh was gonna win. And so instead what happens is, and that's where, you know, Ho basically, they, they start to realize, ok, it's not happening. We're not gonna have the selection. So what do we do?

JVN: Osamah, I'm so fucking into this. I gotta get a Snickers bar. I'm gonna have a fucking bite of my I I I'm fucking, I'm literally never, I'm, I'm learning. So just once I gotta go Snickers... You had mentioned earlier that like all this information had come out that like the election never happened and they'd send all this money. And like when does that information come out? Does that come out like during Watergate or before Watergate? Like was that Jane Fonda's like famous picture? Like when does it really come out in the United States like how fucked up it had been in Vietnam?

Osamah Khalil: So these are great questions. So one, so let me, let me take it on, on two levels. So one of the things that happens is LBJ is gonna come in. Now keep in mind, LBJ had been basically kept on the side by Kennedy, right? Had not really been involved in foreign foreign policy making at all. He keeps Kennedy's cabinet, in particular Secretary of State Secretary of Defense, the only one who leaves is Bobby, the attorney general. And almost immediately one of his first announcements is we're going to continue Kennedy's policies and I will not lose in Vietnam point blank like he completely personalizes it. And within a month, he is told how bad the situation is in Vietnam, right? That it, it is completely coming apart. So Diệm had been assassinated about less than a month before Kennedy and one of the things that they had been told was with Diệm removed, we will have a better chance of winning the war, defeating the insurgency and a more stable South Vietnam. And then it turns out, oh, that's not true at all, right. It turns out that these generals that we've been banking on that they're corrupt, that they're ineffective and they're fighting each other for power. Great. Ok. So what we're going to start to see is Johnson is going to start with his advisers really very early in '64 and from '64 through the election, he's going to make a decision: basically we're going to war. He won't announce it, but it'll be, we'll, we'll see deliberate policies being discussed and implemented through '64 through the election up until the election in '64. Most Americans don't realize this: Vietnam was really popular up until '67, '68, '69. That's when it shifts when the draft really kicks in, right. Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So this is, it's popular because it's somebody else's fighting.

JVN: So then we officially go to war like from like we declared war. Did, did we declare war in Vietnam?

Osamah Khalil: We never declared war, we never declared war. In August of '64, so remember we're only a few months before the election. Ok. There's going to be an incident, there's two incidents off the coast of Vietnam; what becomes known as the Gulf of Tonkin incident, right? The United States is gonna claim in early August that it was attacked twice by North Vietnamese speedboats, right? Um the first incident, the United States is going to swear up and down that it happened. The second incident, it will reluctantly admit much later, nothing happened. But it's that second incident that's gonna lead to President Johnson is gonna come on American TV, so he's going to say that American destroyers were attacked, right? He's actually gonna come to my institution, Syracuse University, give a commencement address and talk about why we had to launch airstrikes against this unprovoked aggression by North Vietnam. Here's what he's not telling the American public: The U.S. is literally running Black Ops operations, they're literally doing sabotage operations. Those those, what are now Navy seals are hopping into dinghies, racing back to the American Destroyers that are just in just outside of territorial waters, right? And keep in mind what the Destroyers were doing were doing this kind of cat and mouse game. They'd go into Vietnamese territorial waters and then turn back come out, you know. So the Vietnamese speedboats had been chasing these special forces—this combination of special forces—who had just launched these sabotage operations and the U.S. is gonna claim we were fired on, that's the first incident. The second incident, it appears it was completely made up, right. Nevertheless, we're gonna launch airstrikes and that's gonna, and then Congress is gonna give what's known as the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which is effectively a blank slate for the President to respond to this unprovoked aggression and to support our airline South feet. Now we'll never declare war, but Johnson is gonna take that Gulf the Gulf of Tonkin resolution and use it effectively as a rubber stamp to do what he wants in Vietnam.

JVN: And so then in '67 or '68 when the, so then, so then enough like volunteer service people die and they need new...

Osamah Khalil: We don't switch to a volunteer army until '69,'70. This is one of the things that, you know, Johnson's gonna begin and then Nixon will implement; there's a draft. The problem is like how many people are called up. So one of these you're gonna get is by '65,'66 we start going from 15,000 a month to 25, 40,000 a month. But it's completely politicized, right? So this is one of the things where Johnson, to your point, that the intersection between Johnson's war on war on you know, war on poverty, his great society and Vietnam are all connected. And the Civil Rights Act because there's one of these things, there's gonna be this trade off that some historians will argue Johnson's gonna make this trade off, particularly with conservative Southern Democrats. I need you to support civil rights. I'm one of you. I'm a southerner, right. I'm from Texas. I need you to support it and I will and I will give you what you want in Vietnam, right? You want a firmer stance on Vietnam? This is the trade off. So there's some historians who would argue we see this compact, right? Very visibly, this domestic politics to foreign policy compact. What's gonna happen is, is that once Johnson starts to announce that that increase in the draft and who gets impacted? Predominantly low income whites, Blacks, Hispanics, why? Remember the draft board is all regional? So you know, if, if my, my mom or dad is on the regional draft board because you know, I'm from an educated family, I'm whatever, I'm a pillar of the community, I'm not gonna get drafted and I have options. I'm gonna go to college. I get a college deferment. There are other deferments you can get. So who's gonna get, who's gonna be sent? It's gonna be the lower income kids.

JVN: Or bone spurs or whatever. Who was that bone spurs fucker. Wasn't that Trump?

Osamah Khalil: You had, you had Cheney who claimed what was Cheney's? Uh it was, it was Trump bone spurs; I'm trying to remember. I'm trying to remember how Cheney got out of it. Cheney, Cheney has that great line. You know, I had better things to do than go to Vietnam. Really? Ok. You know, and then, you know, you had Bush who had his own, you know, Bush was able to join the National Guard .

JVN: So prior to 1970 it was like the draft wasn't volunteer. Like everyone could anyone get drafted unless you knew someone who knew someone and then there was like deferments. But then in 1970 it became totally volunteer?

Osamah Khalil: We start to move towards it. But in between you had the lottery. So they had what they ended up calling the lottery. So yeah, you know, so, so the the fold out into the '70s with the, with the draft, right? With, with the, with the volunteer army folds out post, Vietnam in a sense, late Vietnam post and in between you had the lottery. So the lottery was supposed to fix all these issues with the, with, you know, the unfairness of the draft and this is Johnson trying to appease his base because what's happening is and this is going to bubble up by '67,'68: the civil rights movement, yu have a predominant number of African Americans who are being sent to fight and they're being put in some of the most dangerous positions, right? And all that racial discord you see playing out on the streets in America is playing out inside units. You have mixed units. So you have all these issues and, and you have soldiers and sailors who are coming home, veterans who are at risk of being lynched in the South. And in fact, that's exactly what happens. It's one of the reasons why one of the leading youth organizations SNCC led by a young John Lewis is gonna come out and finally break with Johnson over Vietnam because Civil Rights Act, civil rights activists including MLK are gonna talk about what do we do here? We have a friend in the White House for the first time. You know, the Civil Rights Act has, has, has given us most of what we want, but we still have other things and great society programs are planning are, are promising more. Do we break with him over Vietnam? You know, how can we allow this to go on? And so when MLK finally breaks with, with Johnson. He is gonna be, you know, heavily targeted in the press, New York Times, Washington Post, all the people who had been, you know...

JVN: You ungrateful, ungrateful...

Osamah Khalil: You're ungrateful. And how dare you talk about foreign policy? How dare you, this is not stay in your lane, you know, stay in your lane, MLK. So and in fact, what he's gonna do is he's just, he's actually getting more and more actually actually outspoken on it before his assassination. So you can see that, you know, these rifts that are emerging. So when you ask about, you know, when did people start to find out? So there's, you know, much of these are revelations that start to come out, people starting to investigate. But then the rise of the campus anti-war movement and the larger anti-war movement that really kicks in.

JVN: Wasn't like all the protest in the Democratic convention in '68 about Vietnam.

Osamah Khalil: Oh, yeah, it's huge. That's huge. It's, it's mostly about Vietnam but everything else: systemic racism. You know, you think about it, you know, MLK is assassinated, Bobby Kennedy is assassinated, the war is going on. But '67 is going to be one of these great years, right? Because you have the summer of love, right? That's combined with the long hot summer of riots in Newark, you know what we call rebellions or

riots: Newark, Detroit. And you have at the end, you know, by, by, by October, November, you have the first major march on the Pentagon. Now, keep in mind the march in the Pentagon is only 100, it's 100,000. It's huge, right? And it's just gonna get bigger. So imagine it's only 100,000 in '67. And that's the biggest anti-war protest at the moment. And then within the next year it's gonna be 10 times as big. And then it's just gonna continue, especially by '70 when you get to the, the Kent, the Kent State killings and the Jackson State killings; 20% of U.S. colleges are gonna shut down.

JVN: And that was when anti-Vietnam protesters got killed at like peaceful on campus demonstrations, right by police?

Osamah Khalil: By National Guard, by National Guard are gonna open fire.

JVN: National Guard. And so they got called so the National Guard gets called into these campuses by Nixon?

Osamah Khalil: By Nixon and then by the, by the what will happen is it's the local governor who brings them in. And so you have these kind of jittery, you know, you have these jittery National Guard who are jittery National Guardsmen who are now, you know, oh, well, they were throwing stuff at us, they were doing it and they, they start opening fire.

JVN: Was there similarity between the Democratic electorate in '68 and now? Like there were some people so pissed off about Vietnam and everything that happened in the universities that the young vote just didn't turn out and that's ultimately how Nixon was able to win?

Osamah Khalil: What happens is, what we now know, is that after Kennedy's assassinated, LBJ starts to maybe second guess: should I run? Should I not run? And what he's hoping for is exactly what you're describing a split convention. So they're gonna come to the convention. Humphrey won't win on the first ballot, right? And after the first ballot, the Democratic Party leaders will come to him and say, President Johnson, you're the only one who can unite us and save us: we want you to come back.

JVN: And little and little do those democrats know like the culture wars that would be coming? You, I'm obsessed with you and I can't even stand it. I haven't had this much fun in you. So who who pulls the people out of Vietnam? Does Nixon finally say like, fuck, I fucked this up like we gotta end that?

Osamah Khalil: Nixon, Nixon is finally, it finally comes to a head with Nixon, right? So this is where, so by '73 you know, after repeated attempts at repeated escalations, Nixon and this is one of these the uh implications, things that we'll copy later: Vietnamization, right? So it's a policy that that LBJ first flirts with and then Nixon's gonna bring in which is the the South Vietnamese forces are gonna play a greater role in fighting. So we're gonna increase the size of South Vietnamese forces. At the same time, we are gonna, we're gonna start to down uh downgrade the number of American forces that are actually engaged in operation. So it's gonna come to a head over there by '68, '69, '70, '71 by '73 we have a peace treaty, right? But it's with, keep in mind there's more American deaths after '68 than before '68, right? And you have large spasms of violence and the rupture in American society, you could argue '69, '70, '71 is huge. Part of this comes back to the question you asked me about the revelations, the big huge revelation that will come out will be the Pentagon papers that'll be leaked in '71.

And that's where we see again how we started this conversation back to the '40s. How long has the United States been involved in Vietnam? What the hell are we doing? You know, and this comes some of this goes back to our, our previous discussion: how often are Americans paying attention to foreign policy, right? They're not! How, you know what Americans were paying attention to Vietnam or Indo French Indochina in 1945 like two people, you know who? Really and, and, and I'm not being facetious. So what happens is, is you get a consensus that develops particularly in the foreign among the foreign policy elite, about this is our policy and this is why we have this policy, right? The American public inherits that, you know, they, they find out about it in snippets on the news. If and you remember '45, '50, '60 we're still talking about where do most Americans get their news from? Newspapers, radio, there's no TV, right? It's not, you know, and even then think about what world, I mean, think about the world news, you grew up with; you know, 30 minutes, really 22 with commercials and of that, how much does international get? And, and you know, so, so for the American public, when we talk about manufacturing consent among the American public: they're already at a disadvantage about understanding the issue by the time it's gonna, so the Pentagon papers is going to reveal this long drawn, you know, this long history of American involvement dating to the '40s. And that's the whole goal. How this starts is LBJ Kennedy and LBJ 's Secretary of Defense is gonna initiate this study and he's gonna keep it secret from LBJ. And what he wants to know is the following: How did we get into this? What mistakes were made? What ultimates were available? And it's just gonna be this huge multi volume study that will end up getting leaked by Daniel Ellsberg, right? Um and here...

JVN: So then like Nixon's like shitting his pants after that because he's like, "Oh my God, everyone's gonna figure it out." And so then he was like, I got like attack my little opponent and then Watergate happens and then that explodes.

Osamah Khalil: What's amazing is so what's so if, if I can just, if I can interject because yes and no, right. So one of things Ellsberg reveals later is and so Ellsberg, what's, what's great about Ellsberg is this: he comes out of the belly of the beast, really, right. So he had worked with McNamara; Kissinger had been on his dissertation committee at Harvard. They know who he is. He has a top level security clearance, right? And they know he has these papers, he reveals later closer to his death, that he had a whole other set of documents. That's what freaked Nixon out, right? Because remember the thing about the Pentagon papers is it's a historical study. What, what Nixon could have done was said, listen, the study actually ends in '67. Not on my watch, that was LBJ, right. I'm trying to end this policy. Yeah, go ahead publish this crap. Apparently what Nixon and Kissinger were really worried about was he had a bunch of top secret documents—you won't talk about this until much later—related to U.S. nuclear strategy. And he was threatening to release those; that was kind of his, you know, so nevertheless, you're absolutely right. What Kissinger, what Nixon says is, oh, no, no, it's typical Nixon, we've got to destroy my enemy right. Now keep in mind here's another connection between LBJ and Nixon: LBJ taking us back to '66, '67, '68 is upset about the rising anti-war movement. And he says again, like the Kerner Commission, I need somebody to tell me who's involved in this. I'm pretty sure it's the Soviets and he's gonna task the CIA and the NSA with spying on the anti-war movement. And what's gonna begin there will then...so this is when we talk about these origins of domestic surveillance, right? Uh that, that project is gonna be taken by CIA counterintelligence. Nixon is gonna find out about it and just expand it dramatically. He's gonna start spying on his enemies, members of his cabinet members of his National Security Council, the press, remember who's Nixon's enemies? Like pretty much anybody who's ever said anything bad about him.

JVN: So then, so then in '76 he loses to Carter because he pardons Nixon and Carter like, but then, so this is what I just wrote down. So then Carter largely wasn't a lot of what brought him down was like the hostage crisis in Iran. And, and then I wrote down earlier that like the USA Iran thing with Truman, which was like, wasn't Truman wasn't Iran like Truman's pet project and then like making it more like westernized. But then they had their whole revolution in '79. And then that's when they became like the same Ayatollah that's still running them now where they were like, where they went from being like American ally to like, fuck you America, we're going into our other ways, honey. So, isn't that so, isn't it true that like part of that like hostage crisis and like the revolution in Iran didn't Reagan kind of successfully, didn't that really weaken Carter?

Osamah Khalil: Oh it absolutely weakens Carter. So, so you know where, where Iran, I mean, where, where, where Iran becomes this kind of like, you know, the Cold War ally is under Ike. So Ike is responsible for the coup that brings the Shah back into power and they turn him into this U.S. Cold War ally, right. Um, Kennedy has a more tense relationship with the Shah; LBJ fully embraces the Shah. He knew him in the '50's as when he was Senate majority leader. You know, we want and, and for LBJ, what's important? The Shah supports the US and Vietnam you supports in Vietnam, you're, you're LBJ's best friend, right? Um, by the time and, and Nixon and so, but by the time one of, you know, you have this interesting thing for, for, for Carter. The U.S. economy is in recession, if not bordering on a depression, right? Um and so, you know, Carter's gonna inherit this, he's gonna inherit skyrocketing oil prices. Some of that's gonna start before '73. The Arab what's known as the Arab oil embargo in '73,'74. So you're gonna see oil prices start ratcheting up in the '69, '70, '71 and then go through the roof. So Carter, Carter is gonna inherit much of this mess, right? And he's gonna inherit a number of problems around the world including Iran, which is gonna basically, you know, collapse on his watch. Um what's interesting is Carter has his own domestic issues that are also limiting him, right? Uh and, and in a sense, we, we focus a lot on the Iran hostage crisis because it is, it is true that that really does weaken him. Um would he have won in '80 without it? Unclear. He was already, you know, he has mixed polling even going into the '80 election, even with everything going on in Iran. Um, he doesn't run a great campaign. He's, he's hurt by, you know, he's hurt by Kennedy who's running against him within his own party. Imagine, right?

JVN: Yeah I've read a lot about that; that whole Democratic, like, challenge and, like, how he wouldn't, like, hold his hand up and, like, Kennedy, like, rebuffed his hand and then it made him seem like an even bigger asshole and he like fell off that bus and was like, that guy can't even walk off a bus.

Osamah Khalil: I mean this is, you know, it's kind of, it's this really interesting dynamic, but it ties back into that idea that I mentioned earlier, this idea of America in decline, right? And, you know, Carter...

JVN: And Reagan really successfully ran on that, like, really made it seem like because like queers and like, you know, and like the solar panels on the roof of the White House like that really Republican and like that Anita Bryant was like huge then, like, they really ran well on like a that pendulum swing to the right, in that election.

Osamah Khalil: Keep in mind, you know, Carter comes in and so, and, and here's what it's gonna get interesting. So when you talk about the pendulum swing to the right, it includes members of his own party who break with him. So these are the neo-conservatives, right?

So, keep in mind we talked a little bit about the '72 election. You know McGovern is abandoned by the, the national security wing of the Democratic Party; the guys who the, the men and women who will become, you know, the neo-conservatives. So it's why Nixon wins in a landslide, right? Even with, even though you know that there's already been the break at the Watergate Hotel, but it's not an issue in the '72 election. It's gonna be quickly become an issue by '73 to '74, right? When Carter comes in, one of the things he benefits from is this idea that he's an outsider. You know, to your point, Ford is really hurt by pardoning Nixon; the economy is not doing great. He also remember Ford also, you know, Ford was a jock, right? We think of Carter a certain way: Carter was a, he was a submarine or he, he was a lieutenant commander on a, on a nuclear submarine, right? These guys all have like, they're, they're really kind of macho, you know, macho guys and, but they're both seen as kind of bumbling, you know, bumbling idiots in the '70's. I mean, you, you may remember the uh I think I'm a little older than you, Jonathan, probably by, probably by a lot. You may remember the Dan Aykroyd impression of, of Carter or Chevy Chase and Chevy Chase has an impression of Ford as the bumbling stumbling, you know, so that was like SNL in the '70's, right.

And, and how they kind of mocked these, these two individuals who, um, you know, really had their really had, you know, very different personas as, as, you know, when they became President. Nevertheless, what ends up happening with Carter is he's seen and he's labeled with kind of an incompetent label both domestically around issues, like what's really hurting him is energy prices. So it's not, you know, by, by 1980 we have another spike in oil prices. It's not just the hostage crisis, but a spike in oil prices again related to the Iranian revolution and then the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. And so Carter is really, he's hamstrung by the economy. He's got this hostage crisis. He appears incompetent, he appears to be a scold on top of it. He went from being kind of this breath of fresh air, right? And when he comes in in '76, '77 to kind of now being this scold in the White House with, you know, turn your thermostat down, put your, you know, start wearing sweaters, uh lecturing Americans about a crisis of confidence. That's kind of the perception that that Dems especially national security Dems will target him with and they will break for Reagan as well. So, you know, Carter has a real tough time uh with a broader appeal on '80 that he didn't have in '76. Reagan is a tougher candidate in a way and, and he completely targets him on foreign policy and domestic. I'm sorry, I kind of got, I kind of got sidetracked there.

JVN: Production team: hold on to your tits for this. Uh Osamah in real time, I'm gonna ask you for a part two because we only made it to 1980. I have to piss my pants. I have a date in six minutes. There's no fucking way in hell we could possibly get from 19 fucking 80 to now. And, and you...

Osamah Khalil: And, and we have to talk about Reagan. We have to talk about Reagan. We have to talk about Reagan.

JVN: Yeah. And, and you, unfortunately, my dear sir, you just were one of the best guests, I mean, all our guests are amazing, but like all you got all the, you got all this information that I need. And so I, I literally didn't even get through my first segment. Like we have to get through, we have to get to current state. We have to get to future: team, team, we're going to have to do a second part on this. But I mean, ultimately, I came here to ask you, you know, like, why are we always at war? Um I really didn't even get there yet. This was more just like history vibes. So because I, we might even need a part three, honey. It's gonna be like,

because what do all these things have in common? You know, we're gonna have to do Osamah for part two, we're gonna have to go like fucking fast paced: 1980 to 2024 fast, fast. And then we got to look at like the commonalities and then we got to tease out like, because one thing that you mentioned that I'm really curious about for our part two, actually, I'm gonna do my wind up with you. Typically, we would do our like, did we learn the thing? I would do this on my own later, but we're going to do this now. Because really what I'm curious about now is like, well, really 1980 to 2024; I'm also curious about what do, like, what does, like the military industrial complex like, how big is that? Like, who is that? Like, who is that in the U.S.? Like who gets that money? Like, what, who are those families? Like, what interest? And then, because I come from a broadcasting family and, and we just did an episode about journalism. I'm not sure if it's out yet in the, in our grand programming scheme. But one thing that's come up a lot is like how the press covered these presidents and whether it's getting covered, you know, in traditional press in, you know, '60's, '70's, '80's or current press, you know, that's more digital and, you know, just more, it's new or new we're still, but it's, you know, also been around for a minute now. It just can, it really has...

So it's like, what's the relationship of like public perception, who turns out to vote, what that means for our domestic policy and our foreign policy. And then also just like the idea that like, I mean, there is a way that both establishment Republicans and Democrats can come together to really stymie American progress. Um so I'm really curious about '80 to '24 and, and, and also the connections between like, like the layers around, like the relationships between like establishment Republican Democrats. You have like the Southern Democrats, like there's just been so much back and forth and also even Trump is often, he will say the Democrats XYZ, but he's talking about the Democrats from like the 1800's. There was like that flip, you know, so it's like, so it's like, I I'm curious about that. I'm curious about just like all the American political history. I know that, you know the answer to these things that we can do that more. Um but it's like '80 to '24 and then, and then kind of like administrations or parties who have had to clean up someone else's mess because what you also mentioned earlier was that to give Trump credit for was like, he did decide to pull out of Afghanistan and make the peace deal with the um with the Taliban. But then ultimately that happened under Biden's watch and he got like roundly fucking, you know, dry, fisted up the ass for it and like, you know, hardcore panned for following through with that.

Osamah Khalil: He doesn't stick the landing, he doesn't stick the landing. The same thing they criticized Obama with over, over Iraq. This is, yeah, it's, it is standard, it is standard. You can make 100 military mistakes and yet we'll still keep doing airstrikes, et cetera. You make one mistake on X and the same thing with the war on drugs, we could, we could talk about this, you know, we, we talk about, oh yeah..

JVN: War on Drugs it's gonna be in our part 2!!

Osamah Khalil: Ok because you could talk about, we can have decades of failed policies but Oregon, you know, has six months of a, a decriminalization policy that's having trouble. And it's like, oh, well, we can never do this again, right. No, absolutely.

JVN: Oh my God, I've been seeing the news about that. I've been seeing the news about that. So Osamah I'm basically like, when I say I, I don't know if I've, I just like, love you so much. It like it, it actually like it, it's physically hurting my gay heart. I'm trying to write and think about, I really do think that we did our, our wind up or our round down together and we're going to have to come back together for a part too. It's not our fault. This hasn't

happened for a long time on Getting Curious. We love you so much Osamah Khalil and please come back. Will you accept my proposal of an, of an episode two with us?

Osamah Khalil: Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. We have to talk about Reagan, we have to talk about Reagan and Miami Vice!

JVN: We got to figure out when part two and potentially part three is going to be. So, stick around for that. Make sure you're following our socials. Uh We'll keep you updated, but I loved this episode. We hope you loved it too and get his book because this guy is really fucking interesting. So anyway, we'll see you next time on Getting Curious. Love you. Bye. You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise and the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. And honey, there's more where that came from. You can follow us on Instagram @curiouswithjvn. We are doing the most over there and it is so much fun. You can catch us here every Wednesday and also make sure to tune in every Monday for Pretty Curious! Still can't get enough? Subscribe to Extra Curious on Apple podcasts for commercial free listening and our subscription only show, Ask JVN, where we're talking sex relationships and so much more. Our theme music is Freak by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our engineer is Nathanael McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Chris McClure, Julia Melfi and Allison Weiss with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie and Chad Hall.