

Substack's *So What with Chris Cillizza*

06/22/26

36:45 mark

3 minutes and 50 seconds

CHRIS CILLIZZA: It's interesting to me because we focus so much on Trump's hostile takeover of the Republican Party and rightfully so because he has, and he's fundamentally reshaped it.

CHUCK TODD: This is a mirror image [of] what we're saying.

CILLIZZA: But — he — he is —

TODD: This is liberal Tea Party. DSA is the liberal tea party.

CILLIZZA: — I was going to say — his influence on the radicalization of the left and the empowerment of the far left is very real, too. I mean, like, his impact is not limited to the Republican Party.

TODD: By the way, Obama radicalized the far right.

CILLIZZ: Right.

TODD: It was the same thing, right?

CILLIZZA: Right, correct. Yes.

TODD: The far right viewed Obama as some left-winger —

CILLIZZA: Right.

TODD: — when Obama was basically a degree more liberal than Bill Clinton, you know? Like —

CILLIZZA: Temperamentally a moderate, Obama.

TODD: — yeah, very much temperamentally.

CILLIZZA: Probably liberal on policy, but temperamentally a moderate.

TODD: What policy was he that liberal on, Chris? It's one of the biggest —

CILLIZZA: It's because he was black.

TODD: Thank you.

CILLIZZA: Honestly! Like —

TODD: The only reason people think he was liberal is because he's black.

CILLIZZA: — right.

TODD: Like, it's this, he — he — he governed more closely to George W. Bush than — than Donald Trump, you know, has. I mean, it's — so now look, this is the new liberal argument against Barack Obama — right —

CILLIZZA: Yep.

TODD: — which is, oh, he was a failed president because —

CILLIZZA: He was a real liberal. Right.

TODD: — he didn't — he didn't take advantage of — he didn't know how to use power. Like, the big new criticism of — of Obama is he didn't know his power. My — look, I — I found — I did a whole thing this morning about sort of, because I got the question, which is how much just Trump impacts the Obama legacy, right?

CILLIZZA: Mhmm. Yep, yep.

TODD: Can you talk about Obama without talking about Trump? And the answer is no, right. There is some responsibility for Trump that —

CILLIZZA: One leads to the next.

TODD: — that's right.

CILLIZZA: Yes, yes.

TODD: The question is knowing, then what you know now, what would you have done differently? And it all, for me, it goes back to endorsing Hillary Clinton, right? Like, that probably was he —

CILLIZZA: Right. In 2016.

TODD: — yeah, it was probably him not understanding why he got the nomination in 2008 in the first place, right? Endorsing Clinton was the right thing to do personally, because the Clintons helped him in 2012. He owed them there was a quid pro quo. So, what he did personally in playing politics was a pretty savvy move for the — for the — as a leader of the Democratic Party, it was a disastrous move —

CILLIZZA: Yep.

TODD: — it turned out.

CILLIZZA: That's right. I mean, it's led to everything else. It led to the Biden resentment. I mean, obviously it led to Clinton losing, but then it led to Biden resenting it and saying —

TODD: Yeah, yeah.

CILLIZZA: — I'm going back in again, his presidency, his refusal to give it up.

TODD: I mean, there's a lot of forks in the road. So, imagine if — if — if Obama had taken on a different, a younger different running name, Amy Klobuchar, Michael Bennet, Jon Tester —

CILLIZZA: — which they did consider — they did consider, at the end of the second term.

TODD: — yeah, and — look, it's easy to say, boy, they should have done that.

CILLIZZA: But, well, yeah, of course.

TODD: You know, at the time, it didn't seem like a necessity. And it seems like why create extra drama when you don't need to — like, I can't sit here. Yes, I would say, oh, it probably prevents him — not having a heir apparent was a mistake. And you can't be a successful legacy leader if you don't have that — if you didn't have your heir apparent.

CILLIZZA: Correct. because otherwise it's a — it's a — it's a party of one.

TODD: That's right.

CILLIZZA: Right. I mean, it's you, yes — people — I mean, it's Trump. Yes, Trump can build a coalition to win two national elections, but Republicans can't. I mean, it's — it is — I was thinking of that this past week because of the Obama, like, presidential library stuff.

TODD: Oh yeah.

CILLIZZA: And just, you know, that there's, I don't think one exists without the other. I really don't. I don't think you can — we are always reacting to the past, right? Obama exists at least in part because of the Bushes and the Clintons, right?

TODD: Sure.

CILLIZZA: And the response to it. And then Trump exists because of Obama. I mean, I just don't, and like George Floyd in 2020 and, you know, all that stuff, but they're inextricably linked.