

Week Three Report

Jefferson Educational Society

Global Summit XII: Digital Speaker Series

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and JES Staff

What did we learn in Week Three of the three-week summit? Foreign policy, politics, and a unique look at the energy bubbling in smaller American cities.

The speakers – David Ignatius, Christopher Hill, April Ryan , and a finale featuring James Fallows, Deborah Fallows, Steve Ascher, and Jeanne Jordan – capped the 14-event Global Summit XII speaker series. Find a sampling below.

Russia, China and What You Need to Know about America's Greatest Foreign Policy Challenges



Featuring David Ignatius
Aired Monday, May 24

David Ignatius – Washington Post columnist, author of 11 fiction books, and foreign policy expert – explained how he got his start in Western Pennsylvania by covering the steelworker's union for the Wall Street Journal. It was an unlikely pairing after he was educated at Harvard University and Kings College at Cambridge, England – and a perfect fit.

“I fell in love with the news business and the process ... to get outside your own background, listen to people about their lives and jobs, which are different from your own,” he said. He learned his trade and met his wife, Eve (now a Ph.D.), in Western Pennsylvania, so it remains a “special place for me.” So special, it turns out, that Erie plays a role in his latest novel, whose main character is from McKeesport.

Ignatius gives President Joe Biden credit for the formulation of his administration and its aggressive agenda. “My feeling is that Biden had a very strong and choreographed first hundred days. Very tight. Every day seemed to have a theme they wanted to stress.” Two key elements struck him. First, by choosing his longtime top aide Ron Klain as White House chief of staff and other close allies for key positions, he surrounded himself with people he trusted and knew what he wanted. Many top officials of other administrations have competing viewpoints, “but that didn’t happen here,” he said. Secondly, Biden put together a “comfort-level cabinet.” Even people “new to the circle were friends of his or his (late) son, Beau.”

“The question I have,” Ignatius cautioned, “is will this comfort-level Cabinet challenge the president.” This is not Lincoln’s team of rivals – “and you can overdo that, but it is important to have people speak up.”

As Ignatius sees it, Biden spent his early days “undoing the past” more than anything else, unraveling the Trump years. Biden wanted to repair alliances. His “Build Back Better” domestic policy applies to foreign policy too. He sent clear messages to China (Anchorage) and Russia (strong words and some sanctions). “Finally, it’s important for Biden to protect and reinforce key institutions,” Ignatius said. “The military chafed during parts of Trump’s presidency.” The pardoning of a Navy S.E.A.L. was particularly galling, as well as describing intelligence agencies as “the Deep State.”

There is a concern that America is straining domestically “because of the degree of anger in the country, the polarization,” he observed. Above all, “the people who are going to fix that are you and me, so we’re all singing from the same sheet of music.” That is, if it’s going to be fixed.

Two reversals of policy under Biden stick with Ignatius, and “they were done quickly,” he said. “First was the recurring relationship with Europe. NATO is our most enduring military alliance. It is the nuclear umbrella for Europe” and “an enormous commitment. I think that alliance had really frayed.” According to Ignatius, Germany, France and Italy had begun to “worry that the United States wasn’t the country they knew and trusted.” Undoing that was key, and the first foreign visitor the White House – Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga – was a smart move.

Despite those moves, the effects of the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol linger internationally. “People had never imagined that could happen to the ‘Shining City on the Hill,’” the country that boasted about its exceptionalism, Ignatius said. “I find foreign officials saying, ‘if it happened once, will it happen again?’ What’s going to happen in 2024?”

On the other hand, Ignatius thinks Biden’s election has been sobering for the world’s authoritarians. “Kim Jong Un must worry that this affection (under Trump) has vanished,” he said. “The presidents of Turkey (Erdogan) and Brazil (Bolsonaro) similarly felt Trump was a friend and forgiving of their human rights violations ... Kim and Putin must know someone like Trump is not likely to come about again ... that he’s an outlier.”

Ignatius advised that the Trump administration's attempt to "sweet talk the North Koreans out of their nuclear program didn't work. But any quick fix isn't going to happen."

He said he remains concerned what will happen when the U.S. armed forces leave Afghanistan. He suspects the Taliban will take over the country's major cities, then strike the Afghan capital, Kabul. "After we pull out, the Taliban will push for power," he said. "The government will retreat toward Kabul and could face collapse." As he wrote in a recent column, "On Sept. 11, we're going to need strong stomachs and cold hearts because we're going to see a lot of suffering."

Are sanctions enough to protect the free press globally after events like Belarus? "I'm pleased to see we responded quickly," he said. Not doing so "would have been a green light to Putin and authoritarian governments everywhere" to repeat such extremes. "On the question of freedom of the press, simply to have a president who does not speak of the press as Trump did, as enemy of the people, it's a wonderful change. The fundamental premise of my life and work as a journalist is that people do better when there is an open exchange of information – economically" and otherwise. "As consumers of information, we all have an interest in good journalism ... and journalists don't always live up to that." But he is "glad to have a president standing up for journalists in Belarus, Saudi Arabia, everywhere."

In answer to an audience member's question, Ignatius endorsed the hiring of Sally Buzbee as the new executive editor of the Washington Post, succeeding Marty Baron. Buzbee, the former head of the Associated Press, noted that "her first job" will be to listen to her peers. "I can't think of anybody better to protect those (journalistic) values than somebody from the Associated Press," Ignatius said. "Our wire service reporters are there to get it right, get it quickly," and without slant.

As Ignatius discussed China, he noted that in the last decade China has filed five-times more patents than the United States, underscoring the need to invest in technological development. He also praised Biden's clear-eyed approach to Israel. "There is a long relationship history between Biden and Netanyahu. They're two old pols who have been around for a long time. ... They speak the same language of politics. (But) Israel has not had a stable government for two years and Netanyahu is facing the possibility of a legal trial. ... We're back into the world's toughest problem (Palestinian-Israeli issues), so I hope we have the gumption to stick with it."

Reflecting on his fiction-writing success, Ignatius chuckled that he is fortunate that the fields of fiction and journalism worked for him. "I'm miscast as an opinion columnist because I don't have strong and immediate opinions," he said. "My first reaction is to do more reporting, to unpack." He also greeted with skepticism the prospects that his runaway bestseller, "The Quantum Spy," will be turned into a television series. "It's Hollywood," he quipped. "As far along in talks as they are, until they start shooting it, don't believe it. It's Hollywood."

If he had 15 seconds to talk with Joe Biden, what would he tell him? "Help put the country back together," Ignatius said. "Don't listen to the counsel of partisans. ... Our country is in real trouble, and he needs to make that work."

NOTES: Jefferson President Dr. Ferki Ferati and Vice President Ben Spегgen started the program with an update on the Jefferson's work and they reflected on

the goals of its founding.

Discussing the Chautauqua Movement, Dr. Ferati noted that cities the size of Pittsburgh, with its large number of corporate foundations, don't need organizations like the Jefferson. But smaller cities, like Erie, certainly do.

The Chautauqua Movement inspired many things, such as the Progressive Era in government, the Suffrage Movement, and America's willingness to talk about its future in a real way, Dr. Ferati said. The concentration of America's 800 "chautauquas" were not in the Northeast. They were in the Midwest and the South.

Mark Dombrowski, head of management and government relations at Erie Insurance, introduced special guest David Ignatius.

Understanding America's 21st Century Diplomacy: Lessons from the Front Lines of Europe and Asia



Featuring Ambassador Christopher Hill
Aired Tuesday, May 25

Career diplomat, four-time ambassador, State Department leader. Christopher Hill feels he may owe it all to his two-year stint in the Peace Corps conducting audits of credit unions in Cameroon, Africa. He learned about relationships, trust, and accountability.

First the news of the day: Hill discussed the decades-old Palestinian-Israeli conflict and how the Biden administration successfully got the first thing done: "Somehow you've got to stop the killing," he said, referring to the cease-fire brokered through Egypt and the U.S. "The problem with cease-fires is they often become a bridge to nowhere unless you can do something beyond that." It's going to be tough, he noted, and it must start with a meaningful negotiation. "The U.S. is going to be involved in the reconstruction (of Gaza)" but it eventually leads to whether there can be a Palestinian state. If so, how so, and the growing presence of Hamas, a terrorist group, makes the challenge so difficult, as it has been for decades.

Hill also greeted very positively the news that President Joe Biden will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in mid-June. "I think it is very necessary for our

president to sit down with the Russian president,” he said, and he rejected the notion that the United States’ interests in the region are anything like the Russians’ “extreme belligerence” over a period of years topped by their interference in the last two American presidential elections. Though no longer a superpower, Russia “has a lot of nuclear weapons and a leader who is quite aggressive,” he said. Putin’s “unilateral taking of Crimea from Ukraine, which is very popular in Russia, has helped create some problems of today.”

The forced landing of a commercial airliner over western Belarus to arrest a journalist critical of the Belarus government requires an immediate European and U.S. response, which happened, he said. “To call this 26-year-old journalist a terrorist is quite a stretch,” Hill said. “I think that issue will come up (in talks), as well as Ukraine and the Russians’ continued interference, cyber security issues, and others. “We need some real rules for the road,” he said. “It’s a tall order, no question about that.”

Why do Americans everywhere need to know about these global issues? “The answer is these problems don’t just stay on the edges,” he said. It’s a very connected world – “our economy, energy supplies to Europe, energy chips ... these are worldwide supply chains.” Some may say the United States is in decline, “but tell me who is going to replace us? To some extent it’s our fate (to be involved in world affairs), but it is very much in our interest.”

Specific threats from China, such as their military exercises in the South China Sea and undercutting the U.S. economy by making it difficult for American companies to operate there without turning over their technologies, make it particularly troublesome, but Hill remains upbeat. “I think in the long run we’re going to be around, and China is going to be around, and we’re going to have to speak a common language,” he said.

Efforts by China to turn the South China Sea “into a Chinese lake” make it particularly tough on American allies, he said. And if allies don’t see American involvement in these issues, “they will make deals with China.”

Hill, who is the author of the new book, “Outpost,” unraveled the chain of international studies developed by Josef Korbel, the Czech-American diplomat and political scientist who served as Czechoslovakia’s ambassador to Yugoslavia before coming to the United States and the University of Denver.

Korbel was a mentor both to his daughter, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and his student, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. “These women get together from time to time,” Hill noted. “They have far different views, but they share this mentor.”

Hill’s own career journey started with the Peace Corps, followed to the foreign service, then continued to his role as ambassador to Poland, then Macedonia (Ambassador Richard Holbrooke brought him to the Balkans amid the Serbian attacks). From there, Secretary of State Colin Powell and President George W. Bush asked him to lead the American presence in South Korea, and Secretary Condoleezza Rice asked him to come home from Korea to serve as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He represented the United States in a six-nation challenge that included the U.S., Russia, China, Japan, and the two Koreas. “Sometimes you have to give some things to get some things,” Hill said about diplomacy. “You’re not negotiating with air ... it’s a tough slog.”

Hill credited President Trump for trying to deal with North Korea’s nuclear threat.

“It’s not that easy,” he said, noting that personal persuasion (by Trump) is a difficult path to achieve. “(Trump) worked hard in Singapore in 2018 and Hanoi in 2019, but it didn’t go very far.”

The Biden administration “has taken some time to study the history,” he said, and the appreciation of history is key to understanding relationships. “It’s important to know what’s happened before you get involved,” he said. ... “We need to convince them (North Korea) they’re better off without these weapons than they are with these weapons.”

Hill explained how the Peace Corps had “a profound effect” on him as a diplomat, noting one hard lesson learned: “Don’t think you can tell another people how to vote or choose their governance.” He learned about organization and accountability in the corps.

Though he preferred not to talk about his disagreements with the Trump administration, he said, “I was not happy with the role the State Department had in the last several years. ... I like the idea that diplomats are not only well-trained but are part of a meritocracy – get the best we can get.” He said he hopes Americans “have come to understand that when you send an Army, you have a whole new set of issues. I think our country sometimes conflates military action with foreign policy, and we need to do a better job of it.”

What leader perhaps impressed him most? “I remember seeing Lech Walesa in 1989 when he was still a shipyard worker in Gdansk (Poland). ... Walesa said he’d learned over the years it’s easier to tighten a bolt, and much more difficult to loosen one.” Walesa had “amazing emotional intelligence. ... You look for people who can rise to the occasion, where everything you’ve got is put out on the table.” At a crucial moment, “he rose to the occasion,” Hill said. When Walesa later came to speak before Congress – after the fall of Communism in Poland and the breakup of the Soviet Union – “enormous changes” – his first words were, “we, the people,” Hill said. An electrician from Poland had changed the world.

President Biden’s greatest challenge is to help heal America’s divisions.

“Unfortunately, we live in this kind of shouting culture when the loudest voice prevails,” he said. America needs softer voices and more listening to each other.

NOTES: Jefferson President Ferki Ferati and Vice President Ben Speggen started the program by discussing how important it is for even smaller communities to understand global issues and how they play a part in what seems like something very far away. “New immigrants” make up 20 percent of Erie’s population.

-- The remarks followed a dramatic reunion of sorts between Dr. Ferati and speaker Ambassador Christopher Hill, who was working with Eastern European refugees when war refugee Ferati and his family were accepted into the United States about 20 years ago. As moderator Steve Scully described it, Ferati went on to become a great success story from among the 400,000 refugees who made it out of camps to new homes in new countries while Hill was ambassador to Macedonia.



Featuring April Ryan
Aired Wednesday, May 26

Race, the effects of slavery, journalism, press freedom, and the presidency were all in focus during April Ryan's conversation Wednesday night with City Club of Cleveland CEO Dan Moulthrop.

Ryan a veteran journalist and three-time author, has covered five presidencies in the past 24 years, but none more "unique" than President Donald Trump's "newsy" presidency. She is a political analyst for CNN and Washington, D.C. bureau chief for The Grio.

Ryan noted the momentous occasion of her talk, the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder at the hands of police and just days away from the 100th anniversary of the "Black Wall Street" massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma, when mobs of white residents, many of them deputized and given weapons by city authorities, attacked black residents and businesses in the Greenwood District of the city. More than 800 Black people were injured during the attack on May 31 and June 1, 1921, including as estimated 183 who suffered serious injuries. Much of the district, which was considered the wealthiest Black community in America, was destroyed by fires and bombs. "These were block and blocks of homes and thriving businesses," noted Ryan, and most modern African Americans didn't even know the story until the past several years. Three victims survive, including a 107-year-old woman who witnessed the carnage and recently testified before Congress.

"This is why we're talking (tonight) because there is so much that people don't want to talk about," Ryan said, pointing out that the 1619 controversy marking the start of slavery in the Americas should not be a controversy. It is "an argument over truth" and that critical race theory's basic premise is that this nation "was born in slavery and we're still feeling the effects today."

"A lot of Republicans are independent thinkers," she said, "but at issue is that slavery happened. You can't wash it away. You can't will it away. ... I'm a descendant of a slave."

Ryan pointed out that "the residue of slavery lingers in my family (as in others) ... we worked the land to give inheritance of wealth to other people. ... Some people want to believe slaves we're better off here than in Africa. No, we were ripped away. ... I feel there is a fear of the truth of 1619 because it tells how brutal it

was.”

Race touches everything, she went on. “Race and money touch everything.” Ryan recalled a recent conversation with Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who remarked that some people are surprised that race and infrastructure are intertwined in many of our cities. “Some are surprised that our highways were built before the Civil Rights Act” amid segregated society,” she said. “That system of oppression” in highways and housing may have transformed (over the years), but it still exists, she said. “The question is, how do you undo it.”

Turning to presidential politics, Ryan talked about her amazement at seeing Donald Trump’s rise to power, topped by his “coronation” at the 2016 Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. “I had never seen that kind of celebration. ... Trump ran on working for the forgotten man. In politics there is always someone who feels left out. He touched a cord with people. ... When a politician sees you, and you feel like you’re being heard,” the result is powerful.

At the time, Republican Party leaders like Reince Priebus and Sean Spicer, she said, claimed Trump would “fall in line” with the GOP and its leaders “because he needs our numbers” and organization, “but he did not need them.”

What does the GOP do now? “They realized that January 6 (attack on the U.S. Capitol while Congress was meeting to count Joe Biden’s presidential victory) was a huge mistake, but they want to change the dynamic,” she said. Trying to change that story now is nonsensical, she argued. Yet, the Secret Service estimated a crowd of 40,000 that day in the Mall, but under 500 have been arrested as of now, and very few that day.

“Those Republican representatives were running away” from the violence just as fast as the Democrats were, she said. ... “(Rioters) defecated on floors, looked (to do harm to Vice President) Mike Pence and (House Speaker) Nancy Pelosi.”

She thinks the nation must “get back to the basics” and start teaching civics in the classroom to people who simply don’t understand the principles of the Constitution. For African Americans and Native Americans alike, they need better housing, education, bridging the wealth gap, and perhaps direct payments as part of reparations. America needs that conversation, she said.

Ryan also recalled her lightning-rod question at a White House press gathering to President Trump in 2018 that caught the immediate attention of the country: “Are you a racist, Mr. President?” It was not without context after a series of events that prompted many groups, including the NAACP, to question Trump’s beliefs. “It was a buildup,” Ryan said. “He wasn’t referring to Norway when he talked about S-Hole countries ... I have a right to ask that question ... I didn’t ask it for fanfare but because it was in the air.” The NAACP has defined racism as the “intersection of power and oppression,” she said. “I asked, and he didn’t answer, three times.”

Ryan explained there is a “price to pay” for asking such questions, and she sought therapy to help deal with the crush of criticism she received from Trump and his allies.

The presidency of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris following Trump has been a stark change in many ways. Ryan also suspects Biden will continue to confront immigration. “They’re working on the immigration issue, which is so old and broken, and it’s not just about the Southern border. The biggest issue involves those who overstay their visas. ... They’re trying to make the process more

humane and legal,” she said.

The Biden presidency has also been surprising in many ways as Biden has been “mavericky,” she said. President Biden has been a fixture in politics for decades, “but he’s talking different and walking different than other presidents – he’s transforming a lot of things,” she said. “We didn’t expect this to go this far – he’s totally changed the dynamic of race and the presidency.”

NOTES: Jefferson Vice President Ben Speggen and City Club of Cleveland CEO Dan Moulthrop opened the program by discussing the two nonpartisan group’s missions to provide open forums and special speakers with the overall goal of promoting democracy. Moulthrop noted the natural alliance of the two groups (“We share the same DNA.”). The City Club sponsors about 120 programs each year (cityclub.org).

Jefferson board member Paul Gambill introduced guest April Ryan.

"Our Towns" From Pages to the HBO Screen



Featuring James and Deborah Fallows, Steven Ascher, and Jeanne Jordan
Aired Thursday, May 27

James and Deborah Fallows, authors of the national bestseller “Our Towns” and national correspondents for The Atlantic, teamed up with filmmakers Steven Ascher and Jeanne Jordan for a Global Summit finale Thursday night that centered on the just-released HBO documentary based on the Fallows’ book.

The program, titled “Our Towns’: From the Pages to the HBO Screen,” opened with a film trailer of the documentary and continued with commentary before and after several film clips.

Filmmakers Ascher and Jordan discussed what drew them to the project, as well as their approach to translating the book to film. As a poignant part of the film captures the Fallows’ relationship – even noting their shorthand “grasscutter for dinner” – they talked about how they are truly a unit, working together.

“I can’t think of too many documentaries about books written by wife-husband duos shot by wife-husband duo filmmakers,” noted moderator Ben Speggen.

“What were the dynamics like working together as couples and as two couples working together?” You’ll have to check the full program video to get those answers.

The first clip featured Chris Gardner, jack of many trades in Eastport, Maine. Ascher and Jordan discussed how the interview with Gardner and capturing small-town America was important to the film.

The second clip featured the Santee Sioux tribe in a powerful story that wasn’t in the book but drew the spotlight in the film. The panel discussed the impact of the scene, which disclosed how many tribespeople speak Dakota. And Deborah Fallows, a linguist, pointed out some lessons from the preservation of and teaching of native languages.

Community colleges also play a critical role in the film, as revealed in the third clip, and they continue to be a focal point in the “Our Towns” story.

After a book and film, the panelists discussed a new foundation and what lies ahead for the “Our Towns” story.

The Fallows, frequent presenters and longtime supporters of the Jefferson, were named honorary Erie citizens by Mayor Joe Schember in 2018 as they were presented the Thomas B. Hagen Dignitas Award at Global Summit X.

Their national coverage of news, culture, and trends included Erie as part of the “Our Towns” book that put a spotlight on America’s smaller cities, their struggles, and proactive efforts to reinvent themselves. In addition to a storied career as a journalist, essayist, book author, commentator, and analyst for NPR’s “Weekend All Things Considered,” James Fallows was the chief speechwriter for President Jimmy Carter for two years.

Deborah Fallows, James’ wife and partner, is a Harvard graduate and later earned a Ph.D. in Linguistics. She researches and writes on many subjects, though primarily on education, and her work has appeared in The Atlantic, the former Atlantic Monthly, National Geographic, and Newsweek.

Together their work on [“Our Towns: A 100,000-Mile Journey into the Heart of America” was transferred to documentary film by Academy Award-nominated director](#) and producers Ascher and Jordan.

NOTES: Jefferson President Dr. Ferki Ferati and Vice President Ben Speggen started the program by noting how grateful the Jefferson is for the success of Global Summit XII and the support of all involved. They thanked the Erie community, Jefferson board, staff and the many organizations that sponsored the summit: Erie Insurance, the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, Erie News Now, WQLN Public Media, and the American Tapestry Project – as well as the Jefferson’s event partner, the City Club of Cleveland.

Tim NeCastro, President and CEO of Erie Insurance, introduced special guests James Fallows, Deborah Fallows, Stephen Ascher and Jeanne Jordan.

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