

Ten Minute T(ea) with Mr. Christopher Jones

**Interview conducted by Maxwell Vale
October 26, 2016**

Q) What's your name?

A) My name is Christopher Jones. I'm the chair of the History and Social Science department.

Q) Nice to meet you. I'm Maxwell Vale, a three-year upperclassman here at Andover from Wilmington, Massachusetts. My first question is—will you be voting in this upcoming election?

A) I will.

Q) For whom?

A) I am voting for Hillary Clinton

Q) May I ask why you're voting for her?

A) One, I believe in the values of policies in the Democratic Party platform. Not universally so, but far more so than the values of policies in the Republican Party platform, or for that matter, the Libertarian platform or the Green Party platform. Two, I have deep, deep concerns about the suitability of the Republican nominee, Donald Trump, for elected office in America.

Q) As do I. I would actually go off on the point and say that I agree with what you just said, but sadly, I'm not of age to vote. I'm only sixteen. If I could vote in this election, I would be voting for Hillary, but she's not actually my first choice candidate for the Democratic nomination. Was she your first choice? Or, when you found out that she would be running for President of the United States, did she have your vote or, were you hoping that another candidate would take the nomination or the Democrats?

A) I tend not to think about who my ideal candidate would be. I prefer to see the viable candidates as the primary rolls around and make my choice at that point. In other words, it was clear there were two democratic candidates who had a clear chance at becoming the nominee. For example, Lincoln Chafee put his name in as a Democrat, but I didn't waste my time thinking about that. Even Lawrence Lessig, the Harvard professor with interesting ideas about campaign finances and money and politics, wasn't viable in my opinion. It came down to Hillary Clinton versus Bernie Sanders. I voted for Hillary Clinton in the primary, largely because I actually, in

pragmatic terms, thought that she was a better general election candidate than Bernie Sanders. Still, I agreed with much of what Bernie Sanders was running on.

Q) May I ask, have you ever felt unsure of your vote in Hillary, due to all of the scandals in the media currently, such as her email scandal and Benghazi, among other things that Donald Trump tries to throw at her?

A) I think it's fair to say I frequently have doubts about the candidates, whether they be candidates now or candidates I have supported in the past, because the amazing thing about democracy is that we put human beings in control. We nominate human beings who are all flawed. I think there's a cliché about this election—we're dealing with two flawed candidates, and we're always dealing with flawed candidates. But, to what degree do we think those flaws keep them from advancing the kind of political goals that we want and expect from our leaders? Do their flaws reveal a kind of character that would betray the values and interests we need from our leaders. So, I've definitely had doubts about Hillary Clinton, and I think that there's a great contrast there between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. I would say the same thing about the kind of character that Bernie Sanders exemplified. As far as we know, he's a relatively unscathed candidate in terms of scandals, whereas Hillary Clinton, who's been in in the public eye for thirty years, has had many investigations about her. I also know that politics is practical and you have to make practical choices about who you want to put in office. There's a lot to be said for the resilience of Hillary Clinton to put up with so much scrutiny over so many years. Sometimes scandals are troubling for me, like the private speeches she was giving to high-level donors. There are also scandals that aren't really scandals, for example, Benghazi. Benghazi is an invented scandal. The notion is of course that she was somehow betraying the country and that she wasn't trying to protect them, and I think that was sort of slanderous. Knowing she was flawed, I still voted for her.

Q) What are your thoughts on the current Libertarian and Green Party nominees, Gary Johnson and Jill Stein?

A) I think both are unfit for the presidency.

Q) I learned that Jill Stein was anti-vaccine, and that's one of Jill's extreme flaws, much more prudent than some of Hillary Clinton's flaws. I don't think that Gary would do a good job either, so I agree with you in your opinion that they are both unfit for the job as President. But, Bernie Sanders is my ideal candidate, and I think Jill Stein is him on steroids. I really liked that, but also, it is too extreme to a sense.

A) Well, the thing about Bernie Sanders—I think, even though he represents idealism, his history as a local politician in Vermont and then as a Senator has been one of pragmatism. He will make deals in order to get certain policies through, even if they're not perfect, which I think is an

admirable trait in a political candidate or in a politician. I think the problem that I had with Bernie was that he never could consolidate any significant, non-white vote in the liberal party and faced considerable doubts in the general election because of his self-identification as a Socialist. I think it's really telling that Bernie Sanders chooses to caucus with Democrats, and even though he's an Independent and considers himself Socialist, he chose to run as a Democrat, and then chose to support Hillary Clinton. It shows that he really is pragmatic. I think Jill Stein running with completely left leaning policies and with the Green Party establishment demonstrates what a lot of third and fourth party candidates do, which is that they would rather upend the political system, than work within it.

Q) What are your thoughts on Donald Trump, and do you think that he is an accurate representation of the current Republican Party?

A) I think that Donald Trump is, and has illustrated this with countless statements, actions, remarks, bigoted, sexist, and deeply uninformed—in terms of basic governmental policies. Set aside any kind of ideological loyalty that anyone might have towards conservatism or liberalism, you can set aside party loyalty as a Democrat or Republican. He doesn't know how certain basic elements of government function. He doesn't know what the Nuclear Triad is. If one doesn't know how many articles in the constitution there are, they're unfit for office. I have no idea if he is an accurate representation of the Republican Party. I think he's channeled the frustration of a significant part of the Republican Party, and did so through the primaries, and he continues to enjoy, probably, thirty-five to forty-two percent of the vote. I think the challenge for everyone, regardless of who they're voting for, is to acknowledge Donald Trump as a candidate that should not be made President. Also acknowledge that there are elements of his message that are serious issues in America that have to be dealt with seriously. To make Trump synonymous with the Republican Party can be problematic because we're in danger of either rejecting all of the politics he represents— because he's racist and sexist and unfit—without addressing the issues in it. But, we're also in danger of electing him and putting him in charge of things. We, all members of the American electorate, have to figure out a way to responsibly acknowledge the issues that have driven a lot of people to support Donald Trump from the right wing of American politics.

Q) Yeah, I agree with that. There's something you pointed out earlier that he “feeds of the anger” of the current Republican Party, specifically working-class America, people who are fed up with politicians making promises that they couldn't keep. Honestly, if there were anything about him that I admire, it would probably be that.

A) I think I would disagree on a couple of points that you just said. First, I think Donald Trump made many promises he couldn't keep, like saying that we would build a wall across the Mexican border and make Mexico pay for it. And, I think that Donald Trump does not appeal to working-class America. He appeals to white working-class America. There are tons of working-class Latinos and African Americans and Asians and people of color, tons of working-class women, even white women, who will not entertain the notion of voting for Donald Trump.

There's very little evidence from any of the polling data that he's ever made any inroads with them. So, that's hugely significant because we have to acknowledge the really important divide between white and non-white America within the working class. So that means solutions, or responsibly addressing the anger of that particular electorate. It means dealing with race, as well as class, and thinking about those categories together, as complex as that will be.

Q) What have your thoughts on the debates been?

A) I think both candidates—in Hillary's case, her command of policy, and in Donald Trump's case, his lack of command of policy—were on display in all three debates. The first debate was really a turning point, and I think his viability as a general election candidate has been declining ever since that moment. At the same time, to look honestly at the polling data over the course of the whole election is to see that Hillary Clinton has basically been in command of this race the entire way. Sometimes we get fixated on certain points in time, like the conventions or the debates, and ascribe too much significance to them. America is becoming more diverse by the years, and there are structural advantages in the Electoral College for Democrats because of the politics in New York, California, Massachusetts, and other states. The Republicans needed to figure out a way of expanding their appeal in the electorate. They knew that after 2008 and after 2012; the demographics all point that way. They chose a candidate who has narrowed their appeal to the electorate. He has narrowed their appeal and perhaps made them more enthusiastic, but as many, many commenters have pointed out, an enthusiastic vote counts just as much as an unenthusiastic vote. A vote is a vote. The Republican Party now finds themselves in a terrible position; they have not yet figured out a way to make themselves a nationally viable political party. Trump will make that worse. It is hard to see how they will respond after this election and what they will do in anticipation of 2020 or 2024.

Q) There are still people in this nation who feel like they can “get away” with voting for a third party candidate, such as Gary Johnson or Jill Stein. Do you feel that we will be “safe” from a Donald Trump presidency if people vote those candidates, or do you feel that we have to whatever we can to keep him out of office, and therefore vote for Hillary?

A) I think protest votes are always dangerous. You can do it with relative safety in a state like Massachusetts or California or New York, where we're about as certain as we can be that Hillary Clinton will win. Even then, I wouldn't do it. The people who did a protest vote in Florida or New Hampshire in 2000 for Ralph Nader, because they didn't think Al Gore was left-leaning enough, delivered us, whether they intended to or not, the presidency by George W. Bush. Protest votes can mean different things. Some people do it because they don't like the particular candidates in the major political parties. Other times, people are doing it because they want a third party, or they want an electoral system with multiple parties, giving people have more options. Historically speaking, what we know is that a constitutional system like America has always gravitated towards a two-party system, and when third parties have risen up, they've only done so for a cycle or two, before they've either been enveloped by one of the older political

parties, or have replaced one of the other political parties. We always gravitate back to a two-party system. I think voting for a third party candidate because you want to send a message to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party, like, 'I'm voting for Jill Stein because I think we should have more environmental policies in the Democratic Party platform', or, 'I'm voting for Gary Johnson because I think the Republican Party is too corrupt and serves elites and are too regulatory', is fine. But, if you're voting for a third party candidate because you like imagining that there will be a time when there are three or four or five parties out there, historical evidence has weighted against you. That's the reality that I think should be acknowledged.

The chair of the History and Social Sciences department at Andover, Dr. Christopher Jones is a scholar of U.S. History who has devoted many of his years to the education and growth of young minds. A frequent and fervent advocate of free thought in the context of a democracy founded on principles of classical liberalism, Dr. Jones has contributed much to the understanding of and reflection upon history as the modern world becomes tangled with historically prevalent questions and ideas. This very interview succeeded a speech Dr. Jones used to urge young minds to think intensively about modern issues while introducing Pulitzer Prize-winning David Shribman at an all-school meeting.