

Jeanne Hoffman. Welcome to the Kosmos online podcast for September 9, 2010. I'm Jeanne Hoffman. Today we're talking with Jerry Brito about pursuing a career in ideas. Hi Jerry, how are you?

Jerry Brito. Hello Jeanne.

JH. Thank you for coming on our show today.

JB. My pleasure.

JH. I just wanted to ask you some questions about non-traditional academic jobs that people could get and sort of about your background. I was wondering first if you could tell me a little bit about your educational background.

JB. Well, I went to Florida International University for my undergrad, that's in Miami where I'm from, and during my senior year there I interned at the Cato Institute, and then I came back, they liked me enough I guess to ask me to come back full-time after I graduated, and I was at Cato for about 3 years and then I left to go to law school at George Mason University and I got my JD there.

JH. So what sort of career path did you take after getting your JD?

JB. Well, it was pretty simple. I kind of stayed in the same building and have been for the past five years. Susan Dudley, who was the director of regulatory studies at the Mercatus Center at George Mason, during my last year of law school, I took a course with her, in fact a course I now teach at law school, and I did well in the course, we hit it off, Susan asked me what I was thinking about doing after law school, and I was looking around, considering going the traditional route, working at a law firm, although I was kind of not looking forward to that, and she told me about an opportunity at Mercatus. Originally it was simply a fellowship, a one year fellowship. I jumped on that, so that's how I got here.

JH. And what are you working on today?

JB. So now, I'm working for the most part on technology, telecommunications policy, so how the internet is regulated if it's regulated at all, that's generally where I've been focusing my time.

JH. And you said a class you're teaching now, so you're teaching at the law school?

JB. Yes, so I'm an adjunct at the law school. I teach a regulatory clinic, and what we do there is we have law students choose a regulation that is currently being proposed by a federal agency and we teach them about the regulatory process and how to write a comment; so a comment is

sort of like a formal file to the agency expressing a review of how the agency should or should not, and so they write a comment and get file them.

JH. Ok so how did you get into adjuncting from being in policy?

JB. So this is, again I owe a lot to Susan, so she was teaching the course, and after she left for Mercatus that became available and I co-taught at first with Jerry Ellig who also works here and it took off from there. So my expertise in large part has been in regulatory studies, that's the department I worked in Mercatus, and I developed an expertise there so the extent where I could teach this. And so, the law school here looks to Mercatus for adjuncts in many cases, so that's how it came about.

JH. And how would you differentiate your personal career path with the traditional academic career path?

JB. Well, especially if you're looking at a legal academic career path, it's very, sort of written in stone, it's very strict about what you have to do in order to get into legal academia. But one, you've *got* to be on law review, and you've got to be probably an editor on your law review, so right off the bat, if in law school you didn't accomplish that, you're out, I'm sorry to tell you, although of course there are exceptions. Then you have to clerk for a judge, preferably a federal judge, if not a Supreme Court judge, and then after that you need to publish and to get on the market. And so there's a very typical sort of career path especially for higher rated academic jobs. So yeah, my path differs completely in that I really wasn't interested in doing most of those things. Being in law review I think is very helpful when you're in law school because it opens up so many doors not just to academia, so I think that's very important, and publishing is always a good idea, writing about ideas and getting them published, and that's fine, and beyond that so far as clerking, and going through the trials that that entails, not necessarily because you love it but because that's what you have to do to get into that field.

JH. And you made it clear that working in a law firm also does not appeal to you, so what made you interested specifically in a career in ideas?

JB. You know, I think like a lot of people, I just have always been passionate about ideas, and about policy, so there's different ways to do that full time, and doing it this way with a JD is the most fun for me.

JH. And how would you personally define what having a career in ideas means?

JB. What it means is that the way we, in our democracy, we make decisions, either in Congress or courts, or the regulatory bodies, and these decisions are not made at random, although often times it does seem like that, a lot of times these decisions are made, they're founded on,

ideas. And some ideas are better than others. So ultimately a career in ideas is a career in education. We're trying to educate folks about the correct ideas I would argue so that they can make better decisions. A lot of times its frustrating simply because a lot of cases decisions are not made based on ideas, what interests were able to spend to get their preferred outcome through, so that can be very frustrating. But to the extent that, on the margin, we can influence a decision because good ideas are better and that's what we try and do.

JH. And what sort of market exists for these careers in ideas?

JB. I think there's certainly a lot of think tanks, different kinds of interest groups, that will have positions that can be compatible with your ideas that you could go work for. I think journalism is a wonderful field, that if I didn't do this I might be a journalist. Journalism especially if it's not simply straight news reporting, where you have a chance to tell a story, whatever that may be, it's a great opportunity to educate and to show ideas in practice, and to anecdotally show ideas and consequences, and so journalism is a great way to do that, and increasingly on the web. I don't know if this can be a career, it hasn't been proven yet I don't think, but the web certainly opens it up so that anyone can tell stories and interact with other people and engage in ideas.

JH. Let's say I'm interested in ideas, but I don't want to take the typical academic career path. What sort of path would you suggest that I take in order to get involved?

JB. So, if you're not interested in the traditional academic path, you probably don't need a Ph.D. You might want it because you find it enjoyable to get a Ph.D. but you might find you spent a lot of time getting it and then might not have much to show for it if you're not interested in continuing down that road. JD is an option. I think a Juris Doctorate is a wonderful education that teaches you how to think. People think you go to law school and learn *the law*, but you don't learn the law, you learn how to look up law, and you also learn how to think logically, how to take arguments and just pick them apart, and eventually you get to a good logical argument. So I think a JD is a wonderful education, no matter if you're going into journalism, it will make you a better journalist, if you're going into business it will make you a better business person. The problem with a JD is that it's very expensive. And so you have to be going with your eyes open that you're going to be in debt for a while. So honestly, I would say start doing it. Just get involved, start writing, and see where it takes you. To really get into a position where you're publishing, where you're making contributions, you probably are going to have to get an advanced degree, whether it's a masters or a JD, simply because it's sort of a bond that you have to present. Lots of folks, like if you think of David Boaz at the Cato Institute, Ed Crane, neither have advanced degrees, they both have bachelors, and I would say both of them are working in the field of ideas, so I don't think that's...the COO of Mercatus doesn't have an advanced degree, they only have a bachelors, so I don't think not having an advanced degree is going to stop you from advancing there.

JH. And speaking of the word 'expensive', I've noticed that a lot of these careers tend to be centered in big cities, like Washington, D.C., New York, San Francisco, if I ever went into a career in ideas, would I ever be able to support myself?

JB. So that's a big tradeoff. Yes, I think you would be able to support yourself, I don't think you have to worry about going hungry or not having a home. However, if you look at some of your peers, in your, say my law school class, who decided to go the more traditional route, they are probably living a lot more comfortably than I am. The question you have to ask yourself is, is that translated into happiness? And it may well for them. You know, spending 80 or 100 hours in the office so that they can have a 100" TV may be what makes them happy, it sure wouldn't for me. Usually when you're working the world of ideas, you have a lot more freedom, certain intellectual freedom, you don't have to believe in anything for one thing, not just that you get to advocate for ideas you do believe in, and you are very self-directed in most cases. You can take your research in the direction you want to go. And so to me, that quality of life that you get from that, while you sacrifice maybe some income potential make up that way. But I will say, that ultimately if you're good at what you do, and there's a market for what you do, you know you're writing your advocacy, you will make money, so I wouldn't be too concerned.

JH. So as far as quality of life goes, what is the number one thing you enjoy most about your job?

JB. I think it's the freedom. Where today my schedule was to do some more reading, I'm writing a paper, so I'm writing a law review article, and I was going to read a book in preparation for this article, doing some research, but I do a podcast as well, and I had a friend of mine as a guest on a podcast and we had a debate about spectrum policy and that went up on Monday, and he posted on his blog some more thoughts, where he is rebutting some of the things I said, and I'm trying to read but I can't because I'm just thinking about this blog post, you know I've got to respond to this, so I just stopped reading, and started graphing what is basically a min-law review article, so what I'm doing is I'm trying to defend property rights, and so I have the freedom to do that, to say this is important, I'll work on that and read again later. So if your idea of bliss is sitting and reading and writing, you'll like this.

JH. Well that's great, thank you very much for joining us today.

JB. My pleasure.

JH. If you'd like to know more about Jerry Brito, visit JerryBrito.com. And if you're interested in a career in ideas, log on to Kosmosonline.org, connecting the network of liberty-advancing academics. This is Jeanne Hoffman, signing off.