

Gaslit Nation Transcript

1 April 2020

“The Trump Crime Cult Has Blood on Their Hands”

Sarah Kendzior:

The story of Donald Trump's rise to power is the story of a buried American history, buried because powerful people liked it that way. It was visible without being seen, influential without being named, ubiquitous without being overt. The Trump administration is like a reality show featuring villains from every major political scandal of the past 40 years—Watergate, Iran-Contra, 9/11, the Iraq War, the 2008 financial collapse—in recurring roles and revivals, despite the widespread desire of the public for the show to be canceled. From Roger Stone to Paul Manafort, to William Barr, it is a *Celebrity Apprentice* of federal felons and disgraced operatives dragged out of the shadows and thrust back into the spotlight with Donald Trump yet again at the helm. The crises of political corruption, organized crime and endemic racism are all connected and they shape everyday American life. But in addition to these structural problems, we contend with specific powerful individuals who have acted against the public good for their entire careers.

Sarah Kendzior:

We see the same old men again and again, vampires feeding on a nation and draining the lifeblood from words like treason and trauma and tragedy. They are buffered by backers who prefer to operate in silence, free from the consequences of scrutiny. There is a reason they call it a criminal underground. You walk over it every day, unaware it exists until the earth shakes below your feet. In the eyes of autocrats and plutocrats, the future is not a right but a commodity. As climate change brings unparalleled crises, the future becomes a rare asset meant to be hoarded like diamonds or gold. To millionaire elites, many of whom already had an apocalyptic bent, a depopulated world is not a tragedy, but an opportunity, and certainly easier to manage as they insulate themselves from the ravages of a literally scorched earth.

Sarah Kendzior:

The last four decades have led to the hoarding of resources on a heretofore unimaginable scale by people who have neither baseline respect for human life nor a traditional sense of the future. Their destructive actions have programmed a desperate generation to just settle for scraps instead of settling the score. Unless we were part of the opportunity-hoarding elite—the Ivankas and Jareds of the world—my generation did not get to have choices. Instead, we had reactions. We fought to hold onto what we had before it was stolen while thieves demanded our gratitude and supplication. The opportunity hoarding elite told us we were imagining the permanence of our plight, and sold us survival as an aspiration. This book tells the story of how they cornered that market.

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Sarah Kendzior:

I'm Sarah Kendzior the author of the bestselling essay collection, *The View From Flyover Country*, and the upcoming book, *Hiding In Plain Sight*, out next week and available for pre-order now.

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and a filmmaker and the writer and producer of the upcoming journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, which is available for streaming right now in the UK and will hopefully be available very soon for streaming in North America.

Sarah Kendzior:

And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the Trump administration, rising autocracy around the world and a global pandemic. So things keep getting worse and worse. This is week five of our coronavirus special eternal ongoing series. I am still in shelter-in-place in St. Louis. I have not left my home in a long time. But Andrea, you have your own story and safety precautions to tell if you'd want to get into that.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, so everybody watching in New York City in the news, it's pretty amazing how New Yorkers are finally abiding by essentially shelter-in-place. They're staying home, they're locked inside. I don't care how beautiful your apartment is, all apartments are ultimately apartments. They're boxes. You feel closed in. It's suffocating. New Yorkers, they go to the parks, they go to Prospect Park, they go to Central Park, they go wherever there's a playground in their neighborhood and that's therapy. That's community therapy for people where they run outside, they bike, they go with their families. If you go to Prospect Park on any given Sunday, Saturday, it's just packed full of people from all walks of life enjoying nature together. That's our therapy. And now, with everybody stuck inside in a box with their family, what you're not really getting much of in the news is that it's a mental health crisis.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's a mental health crisis. People are stressed, people are fighting more than ever before. And as much as you see these beautiful, heartwarming videos of New Yorkers going out and thanking medical workers, everybody, essential workers, everybody screaming, making noise at 7:00 PM and those wonderful, heartwarming viral videos. The fact is to live in a big city, a dense city, and be stuck inside and stuck inside your box, it's very difficult for one's health. I personally do not blame anybody leaving New York City if they need to, as long as they do it responsibly. And you're in charge of that. You are in charge of that. So for instance, here are the steps you must take if you do decide to leave and you have every right to leave as long as you do it, again, responsibly. And the first step is you must quarantine for 14 days minimum.

Andrea Chalupa:

You must stay inside 14 days minimum. If you go out to your trash room, just take all the proper precautions. Live as though you already have the virus. Imagine all your neighbors already have the virus. Just take every proper precaution when you go drop off your trash and recycling. Scrub yourself when you come back in. Live like that for 14 days to ensure that you simply do not have it. Make sure that wherever you're going next, you quarantine there for 14 days. And that if you're going to go stay with family, good friends, make sure that you have a plan on how you're going to quarantine for 14 days. And you lay down ground rules, including just how you can ensure a healthy amount of space between

people for 14 days and stick to that. No matter how difficult that might be, stick to that because this is a highly, highly contagious virus.

Andrea Chalupa:

It can impact everyone. You see a lot of young people getting it. And the worst thing about it is that this is a virus that forces you to die alone. You have people dying alone. Okay? So you're not only possibly risking other people's health where you don't know what complications they might have wherever you're heading, if you're going to go somewhere else outside of New York, but you're also possibly condemning someone to die alone. So take every proper precaution. If you do decide to leave, drive from New York City, be careful how many stops you make. Wear gloves, bring sanitizer, bring whatever you can to just travel as though you already have the virus, even though you know you don't. So just take all of those proper precautions because it's on you. It's on you.

Andrea Chalupa:

And for anybody that wants to judge others for leaving New York City, look at that city, what it's undergoing right now, the constant sound of sirens outside the window that people in New York City have to live in while they're shut inside, while they're kept away from their therapy, which is the parks, being together out in the street, just getting that fresh, open air. It's a mental health crisis as well for people that don't have the virus that are stuck inside. It's a mental health issue. So do not judge New Yorkers. If they need to leave, they need to leave. As long as they do it responsibly, they are fine. They're making sure that they're staying safe and they're keeping other people safe. That's on all of us right now. We're all responsible for each other right now and always in fact. And that's a lot of what the show stands for, is the fact that we're responsible for each other and we have to refuse to abandon each other and protect each other.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so New Yorkers, if you need to leave, do so responsibly. Leave cautiously. And people in other states outside of New York, we are not lepers. New Yorkers are not lepers. When you choose to live in a city like New York City where you're living on top of each other, you have to, at a base level, like people because they're in your face all the time. In my experience, I've lived in New York since 2006. I was raised by two New Yorkers. My mom grew up in the South Bronx. My dad grew up in Astoria, Queens. New Yorkers are some of the nicest, most helpful people in the world. If you yell out on a street corner a direction you need to go, everybody stops and tells you where to go. It's like human Google Maps on the corner on the streets in New York.

Andrea Chalupa:

People have massive hearts. They love to support their neighbors, they love to support community. You develop a special relationship with the people at the bodega. That becomes an extension of your family. They watch you go through things because of all the random stuff you ask or at the counter. So, you guys, support each other. It's a city with a massive heart. So trust that New Yorkers will always do right by each other and they'll always do right by wherever they need to go during this crisis. And so please do not treat them like lepers. Please trust that they will do what's best for the greater good. Because when you live in a city like New York, you're often forced to. It's a city that's often hit by crises.

Andrea Chalupa:

I was there during hurricane Sandy. I was there shortly after 9/11. New Yorkers have massive hearts and they do look out for each other. And just trust that what they're undergoing now, it's not just the virus itself, it's also the massive difficulty of being stuck inside during this time and what that means for all these different situations and just to be understanding of the decisions that people make or are forced to make and just have open minds and be supportive of each other because we're all trying the best we can to navigate a once-in-a-century pandemic.

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Sarah Kendzior:

This episode of Gaslit Nation is sponsored by Best Fiends. Are you going stir-crazy due to the pandemic? Give your mind a break with Best Fiends. Best Fiends is a puzzle game that you can play right on your phone. You can collect cute characters, solve puzzles, and compete against your friends and family. Best Fiends updates the game monthly with new levels in events so it never gets old. My kids play together and they've already progressed through over 15 levels. Parents, this is a great way to relax as a family while the kids are home from school. Best Fiends is fun for users of any age to play. Engage your brain with fun puzzles and collect tons of cute characters. Trust me with over 100 million downloads, this five star rated mobile puzzle game is a must play. Download Best Fiends free on the Apple app store or Google play. That's friends without the "R", Best Fiends.

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Sarah Kendzior:

One thing we've been stressing on the show since this crisis began is that of course Trump and his lackeys are trying to use the facetious dynamic created by cable news back in 2000 of red states and blue states to try to pit Americans against each other during a time where we need to pull together, to try to demonize certain populations, in particular immigrants. You especially see this with people who are Chinese Americans, but also just creating this vision of red states and blue states and you see this reaction on Twitter. I live in Missouri. We're, I think, one of very few podcasts or just shows that have this dynamic of someone living in a "red state"—and in reality all states are a purple state—and somebody living in a "blue state", talking together and supporting each other and we hope that that dynamic is replicated.

Sarah Kendzior:

Because one thing I'm sick of seeing on my end is this myth that Trump is withholding necessary medical supplies from blue states—that's very true and we will get into that, and yes, it is being done out of malice—because he wants to reward the red states. Now that's bullshit. I have lived in Missouri... I mean I've lived in Missouri for 15 years, but I've obviously been here for the entirety of the Trump administration and under a Republican government beforehand. We don't get shit. You know, when our rivers flood, when we have natural disasters, when we get hit by tornadoes, when we get hit by healthcare crises, when we get hit by anything, they do nothing for us. They do nothing for the ordinary people of Missouri. And this is true of pretty much any red state.

Sarah Kendzior:

And there is also an animosity at times from the state government to the large Metro regions that basically make up the bulk of the population of these states. Like for me St. Louis and Kansas city. So I am not expecting this crisis to go well for us in Missouri. We currently have the fastest rising rate allegedly in the country, although I think that's because they didn't bother to test anybody until recently. We also have a lack of hospitals, especially in rural areas. And this is one more thing to think about. Andrea brought up being responsible. If you're going to leave a big Metro area like New York City, think about where you're going and do they have the resources in that region to support you and others should you get sick? Because there's a difference, I think, between going to your parents' house or somewhere where you already have support and thousands of people descending on a rural community that might not have any hospital at all.

Sarah Kendzior:

So you're just going to end up back where you started. You're going to end up back in a big city if God forbid you get sick. So those are all things to think about. In terms of safety, the way I see this crisis—I was saying this to Andrea before—is I was a kid during the AIDS epidemic, constantly taught about safe sex from the age of like six or seven years old on, because they knew that people were going to have sex anyway. They are going, teenagers, were going to have sex anyway even though AIDS was out there. And so saying abstinence is the answer, that was never realistic. And the same thing is true about people moving around.

Sarah Kendzior:

People are going to leave big cities and they're going to go to other places. They can either do that completely irresponsibly and we could live in denial that it's happening at all. Or they could do it responsibly, the equivalent of wearing a condom when you're having sex. So we need to be realistic about the crisis at hand, that it hits people in different places and in different ways, but that we are all one country no matter what this administration says. So put your stereotypes aside, put your empathy at the forefront and just look out for each other. I don't think there's ever been a more important time.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's devastating. Because at least after 9/11, New Yorkers packed the bars. They could come together in grief in the bars. And here, it's part of the cure is also...the medicine is difficult to take. The isolation, the forced isolation, and you're desperate. You're desperate to see people. You're desperate to connect with people. You're feeling the trauma of all these stories of needless deaths of nurses, doctors that are dying. And so of course you want to be together with everyone and you're forced to do it virtually. And sometimes being virtually connected is extremely difficult when you have young kids, babies, infants, that you have to watch like a hawk. Because if one little thing happens, they knock over scalding hot tea, coffee, or any little tiny thing, they put something in their mouth. It's like, where do you go for an emergency room? How soon can your child get treated? So it's a crisis that people are living in, in New York City. So just take that into account. It's just this is unprecedented for us that we're stuck in isolation during a time of great trauma.

Sarah Kendzior:

Exactly. And so just to give the lowdown on what's been happening and the horrific way that the Trump administration has handled it. We currently have 3,000 people that have died from coronavirus in the United States, over 160,000 infected. Those are only the cases that we know about since testing remains sparse in most regions. As we said, among the hardest hit are large coastal cities like New York. But

you're also seeing the rate of infection spreading everywhere, including in Detroit, New Orleans, and all throughout Florida. Trump's response to this plague has been to deny states resources that they desperately need, like ventilators and personal protective equipment, and to proclaim that hundreds of thousands of dead Americans is actually a good thing, which he does during his daily propaganda hour that the media continues to air despite Trump's advice literally killing people. And so in addition to that, Trump has demanded that state governors praise him excessively.

Sarah Kendzior:

He has slandered governors like New York's Andrew Cuomo, and Michigan's Gretchen Whitmer, and he has denied the residents of their states lifesaving equipment. He is acting like a mafia boss because he *is* a mafia boss. As we've said many times on this show, Trump has spent his entire life connected to organized crime and, since the 1990s, to the Russian mafia. This entire scenario of him denying disaster assistance to states unless he is granted favors in return was predicted by impeachment legal witness, Pamela Karlan in December 2019.

Pamela Karlan:

Imagine living in a part of Louisiana or Texas that's prone to devastating hurricanes and flooding. What would you think if you lived there and your governor asked for a meeting with the President to discuss getting disaster aid that Congress has provided for? What would you think if that president said, "I would like you to do us a favor. I'll meet with you and I'll send the disaster relief once you brand my opponent a criminal."? Wouldn't you know in your gut that such a president had abused his office, that he'd betrayed the national interest and that he was trying to corrupt the electoral process?

Pamela Karlan:

I believe that that evidentiary record shows wrongful acts on that scale here. It shows a president who delayed meeting a foreign leader and providing assistance that Congress and his own advisers agreed serves our national interest in promoting democracy and in limiting Russian aggression. Saying "Russia if you're listening", you know a president who cared about the Constitution would say, "Russia if you're listening, butt out of our elections." And it shows a president who did this to strongarm a foreign leader into smearing one of the President's opponents in our ongoing election season. That's not politics as usual, at least not in the United States or not in any mature democracy.

Pamela Karlan:

It is instead a cardinal reason why the Constitution contains an impeachment power. Put simply, a president should resist foreign interference in our elections, not demand it and not welcome it. If we are to keep faith with our Constitution and with our republic, President Trump must be held to account. Thank you.

Sarah Kendzior:

So that's Karlan testifying in 2019, but you hardly need an expert to tell you that. All you need are your own two eyes. This is how Trump reacted to Hurricane Maria. This is how he has reacted to fatal crises his entire life. He exalts in them. This has been a consistent personality trait for as long as he's been in the public eye. Last week I wrote an article for The Globe and Mail called "The Plague of Donald Trump". And I'm going to read you one paragraph to give you examples of how far back this goes: "Nothing seems to matter to Trump, not only in the sense that the things that matter to other people like love and loss, do not matter to him. Nothingness itself matters.

Sarah Kendzior:

Destruction and annihilation are what he craves. 'When bad times come, then I'll get whatever I want,' he told Barbara Walters in a 1980s interview. His initial reaction to 9/11 was that the collapse of the World Trade Center made his own buildings look taller. His initial reaction to the 2008 economic collapse was joy at his potential to profit. Everything to Trump is transactional. And you, all of you are the transaction."

Andrea Chalupa:

Oh my gosh. I mean, yes, Donald Trump is a mob boss. As we've always said, the stolen election in 2016 of Donald Trump was a marriage between the Russian mafia in the East and the Russian mafia in the West. Trump Towers essentially functioned as a dorm for the Russian mafia in New York City. There was a full-on Russian mafia gambling den just right below Trump's own floor that was busted by the Feds. He knew. Donald Trump made it his business to know who was buying/renting in Trump Tower where he lived. Of course he would make that his business. Not only because it's his home, his tower, but also, information is power. So he knew who was there. Manafort had his own museum to corruption, his own apartment inside Trump Tower and so forth. So one of the things that I started doing in my quarantine is I started reading a book by two Washington Post reporters called *A Very Stable Genius* by Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker.

Andrea Chalupa:

And the book opens with a scene... one of the earlier scenes they describe in the opening chapters is the Trump Crime Family win the 2016 election. And there everybody is sitting around the table. The transition team is about to kick off, and Ivanka Trump, the Russian mafia Princess Ivanka Trump, turns to Michael Flynn and says, "You know, Michael Flynn, you are so loyal to my father. You can get any job you want. What job do you want?" And she offers him an opportunity on a silver platter. One witness in the room was describing it as though it was a princess. Ivanka was the princess with her sword knighting Michael Flynn for all the loyalty he showed to her father. Michael Flynn was of course the only person with any military experience, military "credentials", that embraced Trump fully and did so early on and traveled through the states with Trump, became really good friends with him.

Andrea Chalupa:

They embraced his support even though Michael Flynn is a known dingbat. The guy is the comment section of a Breitbart article. He's absolutely unstable. The weird Islamophobic, racist, delusional, pro-Russian rants that would come out of his mouth were known as "Flynn Facts". That's how, what a loose cannon he was. He even led a "lock her up" chant at the Republican Convention, which was very much in the spirit of the Donald Trump of Ukraine, which was Viktor Yanukovich, another mafia kingpin that Paul Manafort helped bring to power over there in Ukraine, who locked up his female opponent, Yulia Tymoshenko, kept her in prison. No matter what your feelings were in Ukraine about Yulia Tymoshenko, you knew that having a political opponent like that thrown into prison unjustly on some trumped up charges, that that was a major civil rights crisis. And as it was, leading a "lock her up" chant as Michael Flynn did on national television was very much waving a massive red flag that this was an operation with authoritarian instincts.

Andrea Chalupa:

And was willing to trump—there you go, there's a word for you—willing to trump the rule of law for their own power grab as they did. And Ivanka Trump, who gaslit many Americans in 2016, painting herself a champion of women, she was willing to reward the imbecile who led a “lock her up” chant against the closest female candidate, woman candidate for President of the United States. So the first, most serious contender to break the glass ceiling, Ivanka Trump was rewarding that guy. And so of course you would, because this isn't a matter of mental health with Trump. When people... mental health experts like to say, "Oh, he's deteriorating, he's unfit for office." He's certainly unfit for office. That's without question. But it's because of the culture of corruption that he was raised in. His father, Fred Trump, a KKK member, arrested at a KKK rally in New York City, who made his money in a very corrupt, abusive, abrasive fashion in New York City development.

Andrea Chalupa:

He learned all these brass knuckle tactics from his own dad, Fred Trump. Fred Trump's dad ran a brothel. So corruption, amassing a fortune and amassing power through corruption very much runs in the family. And Ivanka Trump was raised in that culture of corruption. It is very much a part of her. So saying that Donald Trump is mentally unfit to be president, he's morally unfit to be president. That's a matter of fitness in and of itself. And Ivanka Trump is unfit to serve as President of the United States because she is very much her father wrapped up in a prettier, sparkly package.

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, and that extends to the entire administration. As we've gone over on the show many times, people like Ivanka or Flynn are not the exception. It's sort of an array of kleptocrats, sadists, white supremacists, eugenicists, mafia associates, vicious plutocrats, racists. I mean, it's just, there is no redeeming quality inhabiting that White House. That White House is a cesspool that needs to be disinfected for more than this virus. But on that note, I want to talk about something that I've been thinking about since this emerged. Because in addition to Trump's corruption, his cruelty, his narcissism, his sadistic amorality, there are other traits that he's shown consistently over the course of his life and that have been well documented in the public domain for decades.

Sarah Kendzior:

And one of them is an intense form of germophobia that has resulted in him constantly washing his hands. And so there are people who refuse to believe this about Trump. They refuse to believe that he is a germaphobe. And I've noticed that whenever I bring this fact up, I am just deluged by a bot farm that uses the same phrases over and over again. It's always, “how could he be a germaphobe? He's raw dogging a porn star.” I mean, it's just, it's cut and paste. As well as responses from a couple of Russian state media outlets who are strenuously denying this fact. So that's interesting that that keeps occurring. But I have documentation. I have a lot of documentation going all the way back to the '90s. I'm going to read you some of that.

Sarah Kendzior:

So in his 1990 book, *Surviving At The Top*, Trump, or the ghost writer of Trump writes: “I've always had very strong feelings about cleanliness. I'm constantly washing my hands and it wouldn't bother me if I never had to shake hands with a well-meaning stranger again.” So that's 30 years ago. The 1991 biography, *Trump*, describes Trump as "preoccupied by a fear of communicable disease" according to former Trump casino executive Jack O'Donnell. In his 1997 book, *The Art Of The Comeback*, Trump describes himself as so germophobic that he refuses to touch elevator buttons or shake people's hands.



And he says, or the ghost writer says for Trump, "one of the curses of American society is the simple act of shaking hands. And the more successful and famous one becomes, the worse this terrible custom seems to get. I happen to be a clean hands freak. I feel much better after I thoroughly wash my hands, which I do as much as possible." And so this goes on and on.

Sarah Kendzior:

There's 30 years of these records. Over the last several decades, Trump described shaking hands as "barbaric, disgusting, and very, very terrible" and referred to himself as a "germaphobe, a germ freak, and a clean hands freak." Throughout his presidency, he has had assistants carry a bottle of Purell wherever he goes, and he applies it between mandatory handshakes at White House parties. Trump has also demanded that disinfecting wipes be served with his meals. And there are numerous articles about this, especially by Michael Kruse at Politico. So what's interesting to me is that these lifelong, well-documented habits changed exactly when the novel coronavirus emerged.

Sarah Kendzior:

Suddenly, Trump became an enthusiastic handshaker and backpatter, touching everyone around him at press conferences. According to another article by Michael Kruse, former Trump Organization executive Louise Sunshine, characterized Trump recently by saying the following: "He went from being a germaphobe to being a germaholic." So this is very strange, especially since Trump is a narcissist. So you would think that he would see the virus purely through its potential threat to him as he has with other national crises. He's also in the demographic of people most likely to die, which is men over 70 years old. So he has a reasonable fear of death here, but instead he has radically changed his habits, behaving more as someone who wants to spread or catch the virus than as someone who wants to avoid it. Put simply, he's acting like he's immune and people should ask why. So I don't know if we want to go down this road. I mean, I have theories.

Sarah Kendzior:

I've had thoughts about this for a while. You always have to be careful what you say during a public health crisis. But it's weird. It's something that people should know. We have a lot of world leaders who've either their wives or their assistants, or in the case of Boris Johnson, themselves have come down with coronavirus. A lot of people that have interacted with Trump at events like CPAC and APAC have gotten coronavirus. Trump, of course, had his massive freak out about Ebola in 2014. But this is an actual threat. This is something that would be likely to kill him. He's also been obsessed with his own mortality, obsessed with fatalism. I wrote about that in The Globe And Mail as well. And he's absolutely blasé, he seems to be enjoying this.

Sarah Kendzior:

And of course he enjoys it for the damage that it's raw and he gets off on the loss of life. But he's also someone who's always lived in fear of that. If you go back and you look at old articles about Trump to the 1980s, another preoccupation was fear of nuclear war. And he was absolutely convinced that the world was going to end through a nuclear apocalypse. And he has this attitude of just, "well, that's the way it is". Like "we're all just going to die and that's that. And I don't think much about that." And I think that that reflects this emptiness in him, this hollowness in him where he just does not understand the ability to love and he doesn't understand the loss that people feel when those that they love die. That's not a part of him.

Sarah Kendzior:

Whatever capacity that exists for a person to feel that has never been there. As I've said before on this show, his way of reconciling with that was to become the guy who can push the button. Like if he's going to die, then the world needs to go with him. And so I'm viewing his reaction to the coronavirus and especially this sudden 180 on his lifelong germophobia through that lens. And I don't know completely what to make of it.

Andrea Chalupa:

It is weird that he's had so many encounters with people who ended up having it and yet he himself hasn't had it, because the guy is not in the best shape. I mean he's just simply not. His McDonald's habit-

Sarah Kendzior:

Well the McDonald's thing, that's another thing that plays into this, honestly. I mean I've always thought he acted like a dictator in this way. He likes McDonald's because he refers to it as "clean". Like, that's what he said in interviews. He knows it's clean. He knows it's what he's going to get, the same thing every time. And so it's not just like he's satiating his taste buds as we all like to do with McDonald's. It's the way that dictators act when they feel like somebody is going to poison them. That's how Trump has been with his McDonald's urges. But go on.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's almost like it's the closest we've seen to him having an actual conscience because he's afraid of being poisoned. That's like some recognition that he knows he's done bad things and that people would rightly be after him. You know what I mean? That's the closest we've seen to any sort of admission of guilt. Even though he's been pressed on the record many times to take responsibility and he simply does not. He thinks he's "a very stable genius", God's gift, that he was put here for as a savior on earth, the King of Israel, all those things that he's attributed to himself as any narcissistic dictator as they all tend to be. In terms of all this germaphobe lens on Trump and just how blasé he's being, it is bizarre. It is him very much stuck in his own reality. And it's disturbing because one of the Roy Cohns in his life today that's helping keep him safe is Putin.

Andrea Chalupa:

And Putin is, as Angela Merkel pointed out after a phone call with him, is very much stuck in his own reality. And so that's why you see the news out of Russia of such low numbers. And Russia's doing so great in this pandemic, which all of that has to be taken with a grain of salt because the Kremlin is—especially with the strongman Putin in place who likes to show off his bare chest and wrestle tigers or whatever the hell he does—they're very much trying to show strength, strength in the face of this pandemic, and superiority. And so when you see low numbers coming out of Russia, take all of that with a massive grain of salt.

Andrea Chalupa:

Reflecting on what a crisis Trump is in power during a crisis, it just points to the fact that we have this election coming in November 2020. It will very likely move forward. Only Congress gets to decide if it doesn't. It will very likely move forward. And what's very troubling is that the writing is so clearly on the wall of how mismanaged this is. And we have a whole library of soundbites of Donald Trump downplaying this crisis that will just explode in his face. And as time goes on, the coastal waves we're

seeing of the virus in the big coastal cities, in California and New York and so forth, that wave is going to enter the heartland of Trump country. And that's as time goes on.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so with how horribly Trump has mismanaged things, this pandemic is just another political liability for him. And of course the markets—which he lives and breathes by—the markets are going to have jitters throughout this year. And all of this is to say that this pandemic, which is also going to keep Trump rallies locked for business, there'll be no Trump rallies in 2020 for Trump and Jeff Zucker to broadcast, because Jeff Zucker is very much complicit in bringing Trump to power. The Trump rallies ran on CNN as though they're in an infomercial just like free ringing on CNN. And so what is Jeff Zucker going to do for his blood sport with his sports news background? What's Jeff Zucker going to do in 2020 with no Trump rallies to depend on to juice the ratings in a very morbid way?

Andrea Chalupa:

So all of this is a point that this pandemic is yet another weakness that's going to hurt Trump's chances in the presidential election, but ultimately it doesn't matter when he stole the election in the first place in 2016 with the help of the Kremlin. So what I'm saying is that Donald Trump and the oligarchs of the Republican Party desperately need to steal this election again in order to stay in power and avoid accountability. And that is a conversation we cannot lose sight of. That is a risk we cannot lose sight of.

Andrea Chalupa:

So to the campaign managers of the Bernie Sanders campaign, of Joe Biden's campaign, this is not another presidential election as usual. This is a war against a mass-murdering dictatorship that's a mafia state and closely aligned, ideologically and financially, with leading oligarchs in the Republican Party, including the Trump Crime Family, that stole the White House in 2016. They're all aligned and they're going to do whatever it takes, including new tricks we haven't seen before. And also the old ones, because those were reliable in 2016. They're going to do whatever it takes to steal the 2020 Presidential Election to stay in power because they have to. They have to. Russia has to avoid sanctions. The Trump family has to avoid prison and they have to stay in power so they can hand the crown to Ivanka when it's her turn.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, exactly. And I am concerned about whether we're going to have the election in November. And previously my concern, and this concern remains as well, was that we're going to have the election and they're going to rig it through a combination of domestic voter suppression, foreign interference and insecure machines or simply Trump refusing to concede. All of those things are still problems. I did not think the election would actually be canceled, because dictators love elections. They love to get that false mandate. They love to have that “95% of the people voted for me. This election is an expression of the people's love. Now I'm going to do this horrible act because the people want it. It's not what I want, it's just for the people”. They love to do that. They flaunt their power.

Sarah Kendzior:

They do it in the cruelest way. They love to live that pretense. In this case, we do have a genuine public health crisis. And at this point, it's not safe for people to go and vote in primaries at least through the

normal way of pressing buttons on a machine that others have touched before. Everyone needs to be reevaluating the strategy both for now, but especially for November, which makes it all the more horrific that Congress has decided to take the month of April off as this pandemic is roaring, as the death tolls are set to spike nationwide like a wave of disease overtaking America. They're not there. And one of the things that they really need to be working on is an alternative to voting in person in November. And the best way to do this is to vote by mail.

Sarah Kendzior:

There have been states that have already been doing this, like Oregon, for a long time. And Ron Wyden, the Senator of Oregon, has proposed that that's what we do in November. It's not a completely foolproof solution, but it's actually better than using these machines, which were already vulnerable to hackers, which have all sorts of ways of being manipulated. Jenny Cohn has written quite extensively about this. And so I don't think it's a coincidence that as this is being proposed, the Trump administration is saying that they need to shut down the US postal service by July. So of course if that happens, there will not be voting by mail. And I don't know how they will carry out an election because assuming that coronavirus is still with us in the fall, which is a pretty good assumption, I don't know how you can tell people ethically they need to go out and vote in person, especially older folks.

Sarah Kendzior:

So we need to protect the postal service. Please call your representatives and tell them to protect the postal service. And what they're using as a pretext now is "we can't afford the postal service. We can't keep it afloat". But that's not a problem when it comes to giant corporations, when it comes to their donor friends. If they want to bail somebody out, they'll bail them out. And they're using this as an excuse. And this is a pattern that we are seeing all over the world. The first dictatorship of the European Union is now here and it's Hungary where Victor Orbán is using coronavirus as an excuse to further consolidate his power to put in absolutely draconian measures.

Sarah Kendzior:

You're seeing in the UK the postponement of elections. You're seeing in Israel, which was pretty close to getting rid of Netanyahu as their main leader because he's been indicted multiple times. He just kept coming back like the virus itself and he's now there using the coronavirus as a means to consolidate his own power. And you're seeing it in Brazil, too. And with all of them, this very cavalier attitude about death when it comes to their own countries' populations and almost a glee, a disgusting, perverse joy at seeing their own constituents suffer, to know that they are weak, know that they are sick, they know that they can't get out and protest, they know that they can't get out and vote. So this is the ideal for any aspiring dictator and that includes Trump.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, I mean, so one of the series I've been enjoying escaping into during quarantine is *The Witcher* on Netflix. I highly recommend it. And *The Witcher* is simply a monster hunter in this fantasy series based on a video game, I believe, or based on something, I don't know. So the Witcher hunts monsters of all kinds and that's just how we have to be right now in an age of monsters. Sarah mentioned Orbán, the first dictator of the European Union, and Netanyahu, how he's making a power grab. It's absolutely true. I mean, Trump himself is talking about pardoning Michael Flynn. Michael Flynn, who of course was on the phone with the Russians when Obama passed his sanctions in response to their attack on our democracy. And Michael Flynn was reassuring the Russians not to panic, not to go overboard. And they

didn't initially and that was a very much a quid pro quo for election help that they're going to ease off the sanctions.

Andrea Chalupa:

And then they have been giving Putin very much his checklist, including a weakening America that's pulled away from the Western Alliance and instead has boosted the autocrats that the Kremlin supports, such as North Korea. So it's a very dangerous time. And in addition to that, the monster in the White House has very much lived up to his reputation of evil. Here from ABC news: "A Massachusetts tribe is losing reservation status for it's nearly 300 acres, raising fears among Native American groups that other tribes could face the same fate under the Trump administration." Well, why would that be? Why would Donald Trump suddenly take away this important status for a Native American reservation, the Mashpee Wampanoag? Well, there's a long standing feud that Trump has with this tribe over control of a casino. Of course, there is.

Andrea Chalupa:

I mean, he's living up to his idol now, Andrew Jackson, who has committed some of the worst genocide against Native Americans, all for blood money. I mean, it's just a blood money power grab against an already vulnerable community in America, Native American communities. So this is who he is. He's a monster. So I just want to remind everyone that yes, the pandemic is the big news, but please do not lose sight of our responsibility, our collective responsibility internally that we have, to rely on our own power now to take on these monsters. We have to be the monster that we've been waiting all this time to come in and save us. We are the monster hunters. And on our website, [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com), we have an Action Guide with many things that you can do safely from home. Learning about these groups, books that you could read to get yourself mentally ready for this fight.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so we call on everybody listening wherever you live, because these monsters are global and they're consolidating their power globally and they happen to all be aligned. So we're calling on all of you to identify the biggest monster in the town, in the city, in the county, in the state where you live, and get your community together through Indivisible, Move On, whatever community you have to take on that monster. Put a big target on that monster's back. And organize together, make phone calls, send texts to vote that monster out of power in November 2020 or whatever the soonest election is. Just find a monster and just get rid of it. Adopt a local monster and rid your community of that monster. That's what we all have to be doing now.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. You know, and hopefully as I said, those elections will take place. The one thing to do now is contact our current representatives about how the elections in November are going to be conducted, about things like voting by mail. And I'm glad you brought up what's happening to Native Americans because that is one of what's going to be many devastating power grabs and policies that are going to try to be passed by this administration during the coronavirus crisis. We're going to see devastating environmental policies. We're already seeing them trying to repeal a lot of EPA guidelines or basically saying it's a free-for-all during corona time. And I am afraid of that. I'm afraid of what's going to happen to our state parks, our national parks, our national monuments.

Sarah Kendzior:

Again, I keep referring people to those shows we did during the government shutdown in the beginning of 2019 because that was a prelude to this crisis. That was them testing the waters. And now that they have the pretext of the coronavirus to try to implement all sorts of horrific policies.—and granted, these are not people who always require a pretext, but in this case it is a genuine public health crisis and it makes it much more hard to fight back against—they're going to do all sorts of things. So watch for those policies. Watch also for pardons. We're already seeing the seeds of Trump wanting to release Manafort, to prevent Stone and Flynn from being incarcerated. We've already seen the cancellation of the hearings that were supposed to investigate Bill Barr for his role in lying about the Mueller probe, lying about the Mueller Report as well as other crimes that he's committed in office.

Sarah Kendzior:

All of these people need to be held accountable. And it's not about vengeance, it's about justice. It's about protecting the most vulnerable Americans. The reason that Andrea and I have gone on and on about Trump's relationship with Russia and with Russians, with organized crime worldwide, it's not that we like hunting down criminals. This is not something that we want to do for fun. This is not something anyone wants to do with their life. It's because that cohort, that cabal of criminality, it has a direct effect on American life. You cannot separate those crimes from the broader humanitarian catastrophes that we are facing today. And coronavirus speaks this very clearly. And you're finally seeing people who were so reluctant, who were all like, "Oh, he'll pivot or he'll be held in check." No matter how many times he got away with some abhorring atrocity and flaunted it in our faces, they're finally like, "Yeah, he has to go because he's mass-murdering us."

Sarah Kendzior:

And I'm like, "Yeah. Welcome to reality. I'm sorry that it took you so long because that actually hurt the rest of us, but he needs to go." This virus will not be contained when Trump is in office because he has no desire to contain it. He's only going to use it as a way for him and his cohort to get away with even more crimes, even more atrocities, some of it out of greed, some of it out of sadism. So yes, please work to protect the elections in November. Vote these guys out. If they refuse to leave, we need a way to fight back.

Sarah Kendzior:

People need to start being a lot more creative, a lot more innovative and acting with a lot more urgency because we never had time. We didn't have time back in 2016 and we sure as hell don't have time now. So please, Congress, citizens, everybody, just get your shit together. I know that we're in a crisis of survival in a very real day to day, existential way. And our foremost priority should be looking out for each other, protecting each other, helping the most vulnerable. But we also need to look out for our democracy and our rights at the same time because those two things are inextricable from each other.

Andrea Chalupa:

Our discussion continues and you can get access to that by signing up on our Patreon at the Truth Teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior:

We want to encourage you to donate to your local food bank, which is experiencing a spike in demand. We also encourage you to donate to direct relief at [directrelief.org](http://directrelief.org) which is supplying much needed

protective gear to first responders working on the front lines in the US, China and other hard hit parts of the world.

Andrea Chalupa:

We encourage you to donate to the international Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria and refugees who are some of the most vulnerable people in the world through this pandemic. Donate at [rescue.org](https://rescue.org). And we also encourage you as always to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry. Donate to their orangutan project at [theorangutanproject.org](https://theorangutanproject.org). Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon. It keeps us going.

Sarah Kendzior:

Our production managers are Nicholas Torres and Karlyn Daigle. Our episodes are edited by Nicholas Torres and our Patreon exclusive content is edited by Karlyn Daigle.

Andrea Chalupa:

Original music and Gaslit Nation is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Visenberg, Nick Farr, Damian Arriaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

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