

Gaslit Nation Transcript

17 February 2021

Where Is Christopher Wray?

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/wheres-wray-47654464>

Senator Ted Cruz:

Donald seems to think he's Michael Corleone. That if any voter, if any delegate, doesn't support Donald Trump, then he's just going to bully him and threaten him. I don't know if the next thing we're going to see is voters or delegates waking up with horse's heads in their bed, but that doesn't belong in the electoral process. And I think Donald needs to renounce this incitement of violence. He needs to stop asking his supporters at rallies to punch protestors in the face, and he needs to fire the people responsible.

Senator Ted Cruz:

He needs to denounce Manafort and Roger Stone and his campaign team that is encouraging violence, and he needs to stop doing it himself. When Donald Trump himself stands up and says, "If I'm not the nominee, there will be rioting in the streets.", well, you know what? Sol Wolinsky was laughing in his grave watching Donald Trump incite violence that has no business in our democracy.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestselling books *The View from Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*.

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller *Mr. Jones*.

Sarah Kendzior:

And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world, and our opening clip was of Senator Ted Cruz denouncing Donald Trump's violence in an April 2016 interview. So, we had a big week last week. We ended up doing two Patreon-only impeachment specials, because on Saturday, Trump—a traitor who backed a violent attack on the Capitol for the sake of prolonging his own power illegally—was acquitted by his co-conspirators in the Senate. You can go and listen to our episodes on that.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm just going to rehash a couple of points for folks who don't subscribe to our Patreon, but of course, you should because you can get this early. The first point is that the impeachment managers were able to prove that Trump incited a violent insurrection. They used videos, social media, and other primary source accounts, but as we noted and many others did as well, they should have also called witnesses. But in addition to that, one thing that they should have done is explain how Trump's inner circle of elite criminal backers served as a bridge between Trump and the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys, QAnon, and other violent actors.

Sarah Kendzior:

The individuals here include Roger Stone, who coined the "Stop the Steal" phrase not in 2020, but all the way back in 2016 when he was working for the Trump campaign and threatening a bloodbath if Trump was not installed as president in 2016 under that election. This is an old story. This is an old narrative. This whole Big Lie thing that the media suddenly discovered did not emerge in 2020. It's been their guiding precept the entire time.

Sarah Kendzior:

There is also Michael Flynn, who was conveniently pardoned not that long before the Capitol coup and who went to serve as the QAnon hype man, getting the conspiracy theorists riled up, using his military background to try to give the illegal insurrections some sort of façade of illegality. And of course, Flynn and his son, Michael Flynn, Jr., were instrumental in developing the Pizzagate conspiracy theory which served as a prelude to the QAnon conspiracy theories that were to come. Then there is Steve Bannon, another campaign manager for Trump.

Sarah Kendzior:

And I'll just quote him, this is a quote from Steve Bannon on January 5th, the day before the violent attack. He said, "All hell is going to break loose tomorrow. Just understand this: All hell is going to break loose tomorrow. It's going to be moving. It's going to be quick. So many people said, 'Man, if I was in a revolution, I would be in Washington.' Well, this is your time in history. It's all converging, and now we're on the point of attack tomorrow... And all I can say is: Strap in. You have made this happen, and tomorrow, it's game day."

Sarah Kendzior:

That was said on his podcast. That's the kind of a clip you might want to play in the Senate chambers to show, very clearly, that Trump's inner circle was guiding this attack. They were giving out directions, they were giving out instructions, and they weren't hiding it. And then finally, another person who had all of this evidence towards incitement in the public domain was Lin Wood, Trump's lawyer in 2020 who used his Twitter account to recruit insurrectionists and gave them specific details on what to do. So, for all of these guys, they didn't need to call witnesses.

Sarah Kendzior:

They didn't need to call them as witnesses. They didn't need to call people who witnessed their behavior as witnesses, because all of them put this out in the public domain. They felt so confident that they were going to get away with it, and there was reason for that. They had been pardoned, and some of them—like Roger Stone—had been participating in criminal operations on behalf of the GOP for his *entire* career, facing no repercussions. So you have to ask, why? Why were they not brought up during the Senate impeachment hearings?

Sarah Kendzior:

Why are they not facing repercussions or seemingly investigation now? The big problem is not these randos who joined QAnon after seeing a Twitter post that got them heated up. It's these elite power players who have surrounded Trump and who have been guiding our country down a path of distraction for a long time. One final name to add to this is Rudy Giuliani, who was serving as a similar role as Flynn and Stone going out and talking to the Trump crowds, going on TV and spreading the lie that the election had been stolen from Trump.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's another long-time Trump lawyer, another lackey, another individual deeply immersed in organized crime. And we saw the first sort of signs of life regarding any kind of consequences today where Congressman Bennie Thompson, who I believe is from Mississippi, filed a federal lawsuit today accusing Donald Trump, Rudy Giuliani, the Proud Boys, and Oath Keepers of conspiring to incite a violent riot on the Capitol on January 6th with the goal of preventing Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential election.

Sarah Kendzior:

His lawsuit alleges that by preventing Congress from carrying out its official duties, Trump, Giuliani and the hate groups directly violated the 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act. So Andrea, given that you are such a Ulysses S. Grant fan and have studied the aftermath of the Civil War and similar hate groups that led to that law in 1871, what are your thoughts on all of this?

Andrea Chalupa:

I think a lot of people should bring lawsuits against Trump and his family, like a class action lawsuit against mass trauma. Obviously, we need to use all the laws we have at our disposal, even if they go back to fighting white terrorism after the Civil War, because we're up against the neo-confederates today and they want to dismantle our democracy. It's just plain as day, and they're just chipping away at us, chipping away at us. I do think it's worth noting the one senator who is up for reelection in 2022—that's Lisa Murkowski of Alaska—and her statement on why she voted to impeach.

Andrea Chalupa:

This was, of course, the most bipartisan impeachment trial ever in terms of the large vote. It wasn't enough to convict, clearly, and remove Trump from running for office again. He's going to come back with a vengeance. He keeps telling us that. Richard Burr, the senator of North Carolina, who is not running again. He's had enough apparently. Lara Trump is being endorsed for that seat from Lindsey Graham, one of Trump's most reliable lackeys in the Senate. Everyone wonders, what does Trump have on Graham? Well, Graham was caught up in Trump's hate speech, his violent rhetoric, during a Trump rally in 2016.

Andrea Chalupa:

Trump gave out Lindsey Graham's phone number to the rally. This was at a time when Trump rallies across the country were leading to an increase in hate crimes. That is research out of a team of researchers out of Texas that were looking at comparing counties in 2016 that hosted Trump rallies compared to similar counties that did not. They saw an over 200% increase in hate crimes in the counties that had Trump rallies in 2016, and Lindsey Graham was a target of Trump behind the podium.

Andrea Chalupa:

I think it's very important for people to understand, all the hate speech that we've been polluted by over the last five years has consequences. Now that Trump is off the hook, thanks to Republicans in the Senate, we're going to continue with that fire hose of hate speech terror being targeted to create a culture of terror to subdue Trump's opponents, journalists, political opponents, and so forth, so Trump can keep his hands clean and his supporters can carry out the acts of violence for him.

Andrea Chalupa:

That's why it's really important for us to hold up the rare occasions where Republicans do what's right by their country. So now I'm going to read from Lisa Murkowski's statement: "On January 13, when the U.S. House of Representatives impeached former president Donald J. Trump for a second time, I committed to upholding my oath as a U.S. Senator—to listen to each side impartially, review all the facts, and then decide how I would vote. I have done that."

Andrea Chalupa:

"And after listening to the trial this past week, I've reached the conclusion that President Trump's actions were an impeachable offense and his course of conduct amounts to incitement of insurrection, as set out in the Article of Impeachment. The facts made clear that the violence and desecration of the Capitol that we saw on January 6th was not a spontaneous uprising. President Trump had set the stage months before the 2020 election by stating repeatedly that the election was rigged, casting doubt into the minds of the American people about the fairness of the election."

Andrea Chalupa:

"After the election, when he lost by seven million votes, he repeatedly claimed that the election was stolen and subjected to widespread fraud. At the same time, election challenges were filed in dozens of courts. 61 different courts, including many judges nominated by President Trump himself, ruled against him. President Trump did everything in his power to stay in power. When the court challenges failed, he turned up the pressure on state officials and his own Department of Justice. And when these efforts failed, he turned to his supporters."

Andrea Chalupa:

"He urged his supporters to come to Washington D.C. on January 6 to 'Stop the Steal' of an election that had not been stolen. The speech he gave on that was intended to stoke passions in a crowd that the president had been rallying for months. They were prepared to march on the Capitol and he gave them explicit instructions to do so. When President Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol, breached both chambers of Congress, and interrupted the certification of Electoral College votes, he took no action for hours."

Andrea Chalupa:

"The evidence presented at the trial was clear: President Trump was watching events unfold live, just as the entire country was. Even after the violence had started, as protestors chanted 'Hang Mike Pence' inside the Capitol, President Trump, aware of what was happening, tweeted that the Vice President had failed the country. Vice President Pence was attempting to fulfill his oath and his constitutional duty with the certification of Electoral College votes."

Andrea Chalupa:

"After the storm had calmed, the President endorsed the actions of the mob by tweeting, 'These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!' This message, in defense of only himself, came nearly four hours after the attack on the Capitol began. President Trump allowing the violence to go on for hours without any clear directive or demand for peace – his intentional silence – cost Americans their lives."

Andrea Chalupa:

“President Trump was not concerned about the Vice President; he was not concerned about members of Congress; he was not concerned about the Capitol Police. He was concerned about his election and retaining power. While I supported subpoenaing witnesses to help elucidate for the American people President Trump's state of mind during the riot, both his actions and lack thereof establish that.”

Andrea Chalupa:

“If months of lies, organizing a rally of supporters in an effort to thwart the work of Congress, encouraging a crowd to march on the Capitol, and then taking no meaningful action to stop the violence once it began is not worthy of impeachment, conviction, and disqualification from holding office in the United States, I cannot imagine what is. By inciting the insurrection and violent events that culminated on January 6, President Trump's actions and words were not protected free speech.”

Andrea Chalupa:

“I honor our constitutional rights and consider the freedom of speech as one of the most paramount freedoms, but that right does not extend to the President of the United States inciting violence. Before someone assumes the office of the presidency, they are required to swear to faithfully execute the office of the President and to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. President Trump – the nation's elected leader, the Commander in Chief of our armed forces – swore an oath to defend America and all that we hold sacred.”

Andrea Chalupa:

“He failed to uphold that oath. One positive outcome of the horrible events on January 6 was that hours after the Capitol was secured on January 7, at 4:00 a.m., Congress fulfilled our responsibility to the U.S. Constitution and certified the Electoral College results. We were able to do that because of brave men and women who fulfilled their oath to protect and defend Congress. I regret that Donald Trump was not one of them.”

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. I mean, it's one of those things where this shouldn't be hard for Republicans and statements like that shouldn't be rare, because as we saw throughout the impeachment hearings themselves, the violent rioters in the Capitol were directly threatening to murder them. They were running after Mitt Romney. They were threatening to hang Mike Pence, and whatever you think of the Republicans—or for that matter, the Democrats—clearly, running around threatening to assassinate people is not something that should ever be accepted in our Capitol.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's amazing to me the way that the majority of these Republicans just kind of shrugged and looked the other way when they are targets. They are pawns. They think they're players, but they're just pawns. One of the few kind of signs of life I've seen besides Murkowski and I guess Romney and a few others in the Senate is in Georgia, where Georgia's Secretary of State was on tape with Trump threatening him, telling him to change the election results so that he would win. And then his whole family was threatened because he refused to comply with Trump—a mafia president—and his orders.

Sarah Kendzior:

What's interesting to me is that while we're watching, in Manhattan, lackey Cy Vance, who has decades of experience of letting the wealthy, corrupt elites just off the hook—whether it's Jeffrey Epstein or Ivanka and Don, Jr.—in Georgia, they may be cracking down. A Georgia prosecutor is investigating that phone call, as well as the call between Lindsey Graham and Brad Raffensperger, the Secretary of State. And that's part of a broader criminal probe seeing whether Trump violated Georgia law. I have a little bit...

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, it's such a strange world in 2021 where we have a blue Georgia, first off (two Democratic senators and Georgia voting for Biden), but also a Republican Party in Georgia that for its many flaws seems far more willing to stand up for Trump. And I think it's because they're removed from the mafia culture of New York City that has always served as a buffer for Trump, for Giuliani, for Michael Cohen, for so many people in his criminal cabal. Georgia is also corrupt. Georgia is corrupt in a different way.

Sarah Kendzior:

Georgia is corrupt in a neo-confederate way and within that is a certain kind of pride. They don't appreciate being treated as pawns of the Trump machine, a machine that will take away their vote, a machine that will threaten them if they don't instantly obey. So, I think that is something to watch. I don't have great faith in a good outcome, because there's basically never been an outcome where Trump actually had to face accountability for his crimes and where all of the other individuals I named had to face any kind of meaningful consequences.

Sarah Kendzior:

And even when they did, like with Manafort going to prison, for example, they were released not long after, so all these “Mueller is going to save us, Vance is going to save us” assholes, they're just consistently wrong on this, because they're underestimating how deep the rot goes. But the rot in Georgia is of a specific and disparate nature. And while I don't like rot and corruption in any way, it'll be interesting to see how that plays out.

Andrea Chalupa:

Speaking of rot, I think we should acknowledge the millions of people in Texas right now who are freezing in an-

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh god, including my sister.

Andrea Chalupa:

...in extreme storms made worse by climate change, which Republicans refuse to deal with because they're busy making money off of all the corporations and their corporate backers that pollute the planet at the expense of all of us. John Tedesco, an investigative reporter for The Houston Chronicle, tweeted out a story: "The ERCOT grid has collapsed in exactly the same manner as the old Soviet Union. It limped along on underinvestment and neglect until it finally broke under predictable circumstances. That's how the state's power grid failed millions of Texans."

Andrea Chalupa:

Annis Parker, the former Houston mayor, shared that story with her own addition writing, "25 years of total Republican control of the state of Texas." That's what it got voters, a Soviet Union like failure at a time when they need basic services the most. You might be wondering, why would voters go against their own interests election cycle after election cycle? Because the power of losing your inhibitions is extremely strong and intoxicating. These are voters who vote for corruption, who vote for officials to cut taxes for the rich that will then be...

Andrea Chalupa:

With all the cost associated with that being shouldered by the poor and the shrinking middle class and vote against a reduction in basic services—like maintaining roads and a power grid—because they want to be able to live free of accountability. They don't want to have to do all of that heavy work of being empathetic towards the needs of a changing society. They don't want to have to be "politically correct" towards women wanting equal rights and an equal representation in the world, towards people of color, towards transgender people.

Andrea Chalupa:

They want to be able to have the freedom of essentially being bigoted and openly racist and having this "freedom." When they talk about freedom on the Republican side, what they really mean is freedom from accountability, freedom from empathy, freedom having to deal with sharing this world with anybody else. That's why you always have these Republicans come into power with some belligerent foreign policy, which is a reflection of their belligerent domestic policy. This is what Republicans get us—a Soviet failed state in the making.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's very fitting that they had a Kremlin asset as president that led to the mass murder of nearly half a million Americans from a totally avoidable pandemic.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, absolutely. It's fitting that one of the senators who was backing this insurrection and remains utterly unapologetic is Ted Cruz. That's the thing that Trump's supporters and Republicans in general need to learn. The pandemic should have proven it to you: they will let you die. They want you to die because you're in the way, unless you are one of their donors, unless you are in this incredibly rare 1% stratified segment of the elite. And within that, you have no capacity for independent thought and are happy to obey their orders.

Sarah Kendzior:

They want to get rid of you. You're a useless eater, as the fascists of yore would say.

Andrea Chalupa:

They think you're gross.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, they think you're gross. They think you're useless. They know climate change is real. They have known that the whole time. This whole thing where they pretend to not believe in climate change and not believe in science, what they want, as Andrea just said, they don't want to be accountable to that.

They don't want to make actual policy decisions about that. They don't want to do things for the benefit of ordinary people and not for the benefit of fossil fuel companies or large corporations that make up their donor base.

Sarah Kendzior:

And then, of course, on top of that, you have just plain old sadism, as demonstrated with Trump, who was very content to let a pandemic ravage this country. And you also have this apocalyptic evangelical view of a futureless world of people like Mike Pompeo, who govern according to the rapture. So, when a climate change disaster occurs, they don't see it as a crisis. They see it as an opportunity.

Sarah Kendzior:

Sometimes if they're deeply pious or at least pretending to be for political clout, they see it as a sign and they present it as a sign, that it's God's will and God's will to apparently have the Republicans let Texans, who don't have the proper pipes or homes to prepare for this kind of winter storm, just die off. I'm very worried about what's going to happen in Texas especially, but also some of the surrounding states over the next few days. It's a personal worry for me. My sister lives there. She lives in Dallas and she hasn't had power since 6:00 last night.

Sarah Kendzior:

And she's in her house with two children. They can't drive on the roads. They took every precaution they could, but homes simply aren't built that way. And there are people much worse off than her. There are homeless people. There are very poor people. You know, there's going to be death from this event. It's a horrible, tragic sign and it's just a sign of how urgently we need federal intervention, but we also need to figure out something about states like Texas, which, of course, has its own grid. And they took great pride in having its own grid.

Sarah Kendzior:

And they have made some moves towards green energy and so forth, but Texas is an oil-powered state. That's where their politicians get their profits, so they're very reluctant to kind of embrace a sensible climate change policy. But we're going to be having more and more of this in the years to come. Even as I record this show from St. Louis, it's like a wind chill out there of, like, negative 15, and I'm just hoping that I'm not in the rolling blackout while we're recording. So, a couple other thoughts I didn't get to in the Patreon episode.

Sarah Kendzior:

Where's the FBI? This is something I've been wondering now for over a month. Why does it seem that the FBI is not investigating people like Flynn and Stone and Bannon and Lin Wood, even though they blatantly helped organize and participate in these attacks, putting their words and their endorsement in the public domain? Where is Christopher Wray? Why has he not held press conferences on the attacks? Why are we not getting regular updates from our government on an investigation of our own Capitol?

Sarah Kendzior:

If you were old enough for 9/11, you may remember not a day went by for like a year where we didn't hear of some development in the investigation of the 9/11 attacks. It was just constant. Here, we actually had a breach of our Capitol, with five people dead and people threatening to assassinate our

representatives, and they are quiet. If I were Biden, I would fire Wray, so I wonder, why is Biden keeping him on and what exactly is the FBI doing?

Sarah Kendzior:

We have a very troubling history of the FBI for the last basically 30 years, where we had James Comey, who, as we've reminded you many times, took the head of the Russian mafia off the FBI's top 10 most wanted list right when Donald Trump was gearing up his election and people like Michael Flynn were meeting Putin in Russia in December 2015. That's when he removed Semion Mogilevich. He then, of course, ignored calls from people like Harry Reid to investigate Trump's connections with Russia and make those connections publicly known to the United States before the election.

Sarah Kendzior:

Instead, he just concentrated on Hillary's emails. We also had previous FBI directors William Sessions and Louis Freeh who went on to work for the Russian mafia as consultants after being in the FBI, which is a very strange thing to do. As an FBI director, you have plenty of career options. Why would you choose to work for the people who you were just warning were the most dangerous and violent in the world and who were set-

Andrea Chalupa:

Money. Money. Money. Money. Money.

Sarah Kendzior:

Even with money! You could make so much money being slightly less corrupt. You could just go work for some other gross organization. Why does it have to be the Russian mafia? And then, of course, there's Mueller, who was the head of the FBI while Epstein was running around, Manafort was running around. Mueller basically helped suppress information that was in the 9/11 investigation about the role of Saudi Arabia and probably other countries and their involvement in those attacks. He's a cover up guy. So, we have this continuum.

Sarah Kendzior:

And Wray, to me at least, seems like he is part of that continuum of covering up deep-seated institutional rot, infiltration of our institutions by organized crime, and complicity by primarily the Republican Party, but to some extent, the Democratic Party as well, particularly just in terms of negligence, of refusing to stop these threats about which they are warned many, many times. This applies to basically every Democratic administration of my lifetime.

Sarah Kendzior:

There's another thing, too, with the FBI where we've seen them tweeting out, like, "Have you seen this guy?" and it's like some low level QAnon acolyte wearing a MAGA cap, looking all crazy. Who they have not called to pursue are the high level stormtroopers, the people who folks like Roger Stone and Michael Flynn and so forth have been interacting with and cultivating as operatives for years and years—people like Ali Alexander, who just called for a civil war yet again despite his open participation in this violent insurrection.

Sarah Kendzior:

People like Alex Jones who has been beating this violent conspiracy theory drum for 20 years, working with Trump, working with the administration. And then other people who are known as the "alt-right." They do not seem interested in holding these people accountable. They're not even talking about them, just like they're not talking about Stone, Manafort, Flynn, et cetera. It's like they're afraid, or complicit, one or the other.

Sarah Kendzior:

What it comes down to is the FBI is acting as if they are protecting all of these individuals and protecting the wider transnational network that is behind them, which extends into Russia, into the UK, into Israel, Saudi Arabia, and so forth. This was not an all-American insurrection. Obviously, many people just joined it because they really, really liked Donald Trump and they thought he would protect them if they went and stormed the Capitol for him.

Sarah Kendzior:

But we also had really sophisticated operatives—people like Roger Stone who have been in this game for 40 years, since Nixon, trying to take down America and are willing to work with anyone from any country to do it. And it's very disturbing to me that the FBI just seems to be making no effort in this respect.

Andrea Chalupa:

Someone should take the footage of the sea of white people storming our nation's Capitol and CGI it or whatever to turn all those white people to Black and Brown people, and then send it to the FBI and see if they do anything about it finally.

Sarah Kendzior:

Maybe, although Ali Alexander is Black, I believe. I mean, he's certainly not white, and they're just like looking the other way. I mean, I think it's the embrace of white supremacy. It doesn't matter what your actual skin color is or what your ethnicity is, as long as you are willing to back white supremacy as a concept—as a precept for how the United States should be governed—then they're cool with you. That goes all the way back to the days of J. Edgar Hoover. We've got some deep problems in the FBI.

Andrea Chalupa:

Without question. But obviously, if this was a Black Lives Matter siege on the capitol, which would never happen, but if it was, we would have a *much* different national response, a united federal response of press conferences and Chris Wray would be likely speaking. This feeling of, if this was such a big deal, surely someone would be doing something about it.

Andrea Chalupa:

And that was the same crisis of normalization we're up against with the rise of Donald Trump in 2015-2016, a guy who was dependent on dirty Russian oligarch money, whose Trump Tower was a Russian mafia dorm, whose campaign chairman worked for a decade for the Kremlin in Ukraine and against U.S. interests. Surely if Donald Trump was so mobbed up and in the pocket of Kremlin interest, somebody would have done something about it. And we're up against that now. We had a rushed impeachment trial. We have an absent FBI director who should be very visible and holding weekly press conferences.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's fine that the FBI is tweeting out images of these insurrectionists and saying, "Do you know this person?" and then suddenly a bunch of ex-girlfriends and ex-wives turn that guy in. That's great and that's helpful, but what we need is an extremely visible response to this. Because if you don't, then you're going to normalize this, and then the next coup is just going to slide right in and people are going to be like, "Okay. Ivanka Trump is president now for life. Our kids are going to be born and die under an Ivanka Trump regime."

Andrea Chalupa:

That's what happens is failed coups come first and then they learn, and they spruce up their tactics and they wear down their opposition. And they steamroll over any accountability and they normalize those tactics. The next thing you know, they're in power. Once they're in power, they're extremely difficult to get out of power. You see examples of this everywhere. The decline of democracy is a worldwide problem. You have Myanmar right now being overtaken by a military coup, by the same military generals that oversaw the genocide of the Muslim minority.

Andrea Chalupa:

You have Bolsonaro who is propped up by hardline evangelicals, who has been inciting massive political violence through his rhetoric. He gets to enjoy plausible deniability and say things like Trump does with fake news and accusing his opponents for being the ones that are inciting political violence, just like Trump and his allies do. But meanwhile, you have murders in the streets of LGBT people in Brazil and violent attacks on female journalists, violent attacks on trans women.

Andrea Chalupa:

You have the only openly gay member of Congress in Brazil having to flee the country because of this hate rhetoric. Hate speech is not protected speech. Hate speech is a weapon in the playbook used by dictators, used by strong men like Bolsonaro, like Trump. Hate speech is an extremely reliable weapon. When Russian opposition leader, Boris Nemtsov, was killed in the shadow of the Kremlin, in the initial hours, one of the comments observers were making was, "Yes, it could have been the Kremlin."

Andrea Chalupa:

"Yes, it could have been the NFSB, but it also could have been this culture of hatred drummed up by Putin's propaganda machine, this culture of terror, of disinformation, of propaganda that drove somebody to do it." Understand that hate speech is not protected speech. It is a weapon.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, absolutely. That's why it's critical that we never normalize that kind of speech and rhetoric, which, of course, our media did steadily over decades, but particularly under Trump's rule. And don't normalize the coup. I shouldn't have to say, don't normalize a fucking coup—an attempted violent coup that led to death on our Capitol.

Sarah Kendzior:

But I look at the last four years and among the things that we've normalized, or other people have normalized, are the President of the United States being a Kremlin asset, the President of the United States being named as Individual One in a federal probe, mass death from a pandemic that the

administration let spread and then outright said, "Let's infect them." We've normalized that. People have normalized the statistics of death that come in from the COVID pandemic every day. And now we're on the like, "Oh yeah, it looks like it's going to be another coup."

Sarah Kendzior:

"A coup is coming around the bend on March 4th." That's the kind of conversation that people have nowadays, and it's because of the lack of urgency and the lack of action. And it's crazy because we see people express urgency when they talk about "cancel culture" or when they get all freaked about AOC or Bernie or Warren or other progressives. Then we see the Republicans get in action. Then we saw last year at this time during the primaries, the Democrats assembling into centrist voltron and all dropping out at once so that Biden can take the lead.

Sarah Kendzior:

They know how to organize against things. They know how to inform the public about things. They know how to bring consequences for people, but the people facing consequences are either the most vulnerable or those fighting on their behalf. They're not these criminal elites who are the actual source of pain and suffering for this nation, and further normalization is just going to make the matter worse. Speaking of normalization, should we discuss The Lincoln Project and its members?

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, what a tragedy. [laughs]

Sarah Kendzior:

I don't know if it's a tragedy. It's just like a...

Andrea Chalupa:

Well, it's a tragedy because all of the millions that The Lincoln Project raked in, including for John Weaver, who is out there trying to molest young men and lure them in with promises of fancy jobs, all those millions could have gone to credible organizations like Run For Something, like Every District and done all...

Sarah Kendzior:

Or Stacey Abrams' group.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, and fueled all the important essential grassroots work that's needed when we're up against a right-wing takeover hijacking our democracy. That's the real tragedy there.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yep.

Andrea Chalupa

What's interesting is that there are warning signs about John Weaver. He took some job at one point in the recent years under Trump linked to Russian oligarchs, and he had to get named and shamed to

reject that job as far as we know. It's sort of like, where are your values? You know what you're up against. You're out there openly fighting for it, and then you go and take some blood money assignment? Clearly that guy was sussed, that's what kids say, the kids who play games that I am not really fully aware of.

Sarah Kendzior:

The kids who John Weaver solicits online.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yes. So, I'm glad that The Lincoln Project is dismantled. There is also George Conway, who is associated with it. George Conway who was married to the Goebbels of the Trump regime, Kellyanne Conway, who gave us the atrocity of coining "alternative facts". Kellyanne Conway was an effective pitbull for Trump. She was hawking Ivanka's wears on TV. George Conway being associated with it was also a red flag.

Sarah Kendzior:

No kidding! Sorry.

Andrea Chalupa:

We were always outspoken about George Conway. When people would ask us about him in our Patreon Q&A, it would like, "Let us tell you about George Conway." It's not surprising to learn either that they have a teenage daughter who's struggling right now, and then they put her on... She goes from documenting a personal crisis for the world to see on TikTok to being on the stage for American Idol. It's like, how dystopian can you be? This felt like a Black Mirror episode. So, this is clearly a troubled family.

Andrea Chalupa:

Parenting is the hardest job in the world, but just the choices this family is making out in the open is very much contributing to this really large unease that they give off. These creepy vibes by George Conway and his wife Kellyanne. It's like, I wish they would go away, but they're going to remain useful for Trump and his family. Kellyanne Conway will continue to rake in blood money as the pitbull for Trumpism, and George Conway will continue to look the other way to try to gain a foothold in respectable mainstream culture. And that's how these guys are playing us.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, it's controlled opposition. I don't know how people couldn't see this. We were very blunt about George Conway and also about just, do not give The Lincoln Project your money. That was the takeaway of every Gaslit Nation episode. Please, God, do not give them your money, because this is people who have a long history of terrible decisions, of things like trying to launch the Iraq War, launch Sarah Palin's career. And yes, it is possible that Republicans, when greeted with Donald Trump could change their mind and could try to work for the greater good.

Sarah Kendzior:

When they said they were going to put out ads to try to convert Republicans to vote for Joe Biden, it's like, okay, whatever. But over time, it became very clear that that's not where the money was going. The Lincoln Project is falling apart for a number of reasons. The main reason is that founding member, John

Weaver, as Andrea just said, is a sexual predator. Among his victims is a 14 year old boy who he was trying to solicit online. The other members of The Lincoln Project knew about this.

Sarah Kendzior:

Even though this information was brought to the public recently, they knew since allegedly March of 2020. That's a very long time to cover something like that. Weaver stayed in the group until the summer. The bulk of the money that they made went not to those ad campaigns—which incidentally, there's no proof those ad campaigns convinced anyone of anything. They were basically preaching to the converted. They were getting some Democrats and Liberals all excited because for once it seemed like there might be some fight in them.

Sarah Kendzior:

If there's any takeaway here, it's that Democrats like it when people fight vehemently against Trump and fight on their behalf, which, of course, Pelosi and Schumer and others refuse to do. And so they go and they embrace The Lincoln Project, a scamPAC who was taking the money to enhance their personal wealth. For example, departed member Steve Schmidt said that his goal was to create "intergenerational wealth" for himself and for his family.

Sarah Kendzior:

These guys raked in millions of dollars, often from donations from Democrats who, again, could have been donating to a variety of other groups that actually need the money and actually do practical grassroots organizing to help vulnerable communities and help good candidates. And they bought themselves mansions. And then the last thing they did is they posted private DMs between a reporter who was investigating the two things that I just mentioned and a departed female Lincoln Project member who had complained about misogyny and complained about mistreatment.

Sarah Kendzior:

And they posted them all online, until George Conway kind of broke in and said, "Hey, guys, I think this is a federal offense for you to do that," and then they deleted them. But the damage was done and the mask was off. The hostility was out there. There are a variety of people in The Lincoln Project, or are supporting it. I think some are worse than others. I think one of the worst is George Conway.

Sarah Kendzior:

And anyone who fell for this little James Carville, Mary whatever her name is from the 1990s rehash of like, "Oh, we're a Democrat and a Republican, but we get along and we're a couple." It's a reality TV show plot. Kellyanne Conway, obviously, as Andrea said, is Trump's Goebbels. George Conway, a Federalist Society member, was never on the right side and was never trustworthy. Trump would have gotten rid of Kellyanne Conway long, long ago if George Conway were not actually on Trump's side.

Sarah Kendzior:

The fact that people can't see this, it's like Trump does this all the time. He let Michael Wolff, who has long served as a kind of tabloid PR guy for various nefarious actors for New York City, like Jeffrey Epstein for example, he let him hang out in the White House for a couple of years to write a book that used the prime Trump tactic, which is cover up crime with scandal. They want you to think he's stupid, incompetent, obnoxious, disgusting, whatever, as long as you don't think that he's a criminal and as long as you don't bring forth criminal consequences.

Sarah Kendzior:

The Conway family understands this tactic extraordinarily well, and they're using it to their benefit through social media and now on TV. That brings me to Claudia Conway, who—whatever you think about this—is a victim of this situation. The Claudia Conway situation is like a vortex where the Trump kleptocracy meets the Britney Spears documentary, and you realize that people didn't learn anything from any of them.

Sarah Kendzior:

Claudia, of course, became well-known because she would post TikTok videos claiming that her parents—both of them—were abusing her and calling for emancipation. And in some videos, she showed the abuse. She taped Kellyanne Conway abusing her. That's one of the reasons that Kellyanne Conway left the White House and George Conway left The Lincoln Project in the fall of last year. But no one ever intervened into this family. No one ever looked at the abuse. Instead, they put her on TV, which is making people wonder, was this all staged?

Sarah Kendzior:

Was Claudia Conway herself acting out this family drama on TikTok as a prelude to maximize profits on TV? I'll just say, either way, she is a victim of abuse. If she's being abused by Kellyanne and George Conway (which I find likely), then she's an abused child. If she's being told to act out parental abuse and then go on a national stage to profit off of it, then she's abused again. That's just another form of exploitation. And it's so depressing that we have all these conversations about the exploitation of teenage girls.

Sarah Kendzior:

We saw it with Britney Spears. There's been a conversation about the treatment of Princess Diana. We go through this over and over again. And, of course, there's been a lot of talk because of MeToo about teenage victims and about people like Evan Rachel Wood, who recently came out about Marilyn Manson and his abuse of her when she was a teenager. Teenage girls are in a vulnerable position no matter what when they're dealing with predatory adults, when they're surrounded by them, even if those adults are claiming that they're acting on their behalf.

Sarah Kendzior:

They're not. So, this whole situation is so depressing and so disgusting, and I just hope people don't fall for it. Please stop falling for the same tricks over and over. Please stop falling for scandal covering crime, for reality TV normalizing a criminal family. That is how Donald Trump got into office, by the way. He got into office because of The Apprentice, because a lot of people fell for that image of him as a tycoon.

Sarah Kendzior:

He was using his Apprentice properties to launder money, which I documented in my book *Hiding in Plain Sight*, and he was also backed by Mark Burnett, who's first choice for reality TV show was Putin. This is an actual serious thing, this reality TV infotainment complex. It structures American political culture probably more than anything else. Reality TV, cable news, tabloid news, it all intersects. You can't look at something like Claudia Conway going on American Idol and just sort of dismiss it as a trivial story or none of our business or whatever.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's a dark omen, because they're all going to try to rehabilitate their careers this way. And then you also have the form of rehabilitation that was attempted by members of The Lincoln Project, who then went on to say, "I'm not going to show you my finances. I'm not going to tell you what we're actually up to." You cannot trust these folks. You cannot trust dirty Republicans who have a really horrible documented history. They're very likely not turning the page and seeing the light and embracing a moral position.

Sarah Kendzior:

I really wish they were, but I think when someone does that—when someone is seeking redemption or they're seeking to turn their life around—they act differently. They would be going out and backing people like Stacey Abrams. They would be backing these movements for civil rights and not just making cool ads or getting media attention or being pundits on cable. They'd be doing something much more meaningful, and they'd be putting their money where their mouth is. They just don't. They don't do that. It's just for them.

Sarah Kendzior:

And I know that's very disappointing for a lot of people, but you got to open your eyes to these schemes and get out of this delusion of a noble Republican Party. I know Nancy Pelosi is out there calling for a "strong GOP." That was her takeaway from the Senate impeachment hearings. It's not, "we have a Kremlin asset backed by transnational crime ordering violent insurrection on the Capitol and getting away with it", but "we need a strong GOP", even though the GOP itself backed Trump, supports Trump. We don't. We need something different.

Sarah Kendzior:

We need an overhauled GOP. We need a GOP that's gutted from within and maybe turned into, I don't know, like a lowkey Alex P. Keaton Party. I don't even know what its future is. It doesn't have a future because it's a fascist apocalyptic cult, and it has no place in American politics. So, I don't know why that's her position. Anyway, do you have thoughts on that?

Andrea Chalupa:

Friends don't let friends vote Republican. The Republican Party gave us Donald Trump. It's extremely rare when a president loses the popular vote but wins the Electoral College. That has happened twice in our lifetime, both times Republican. It's been this whole fallout from the Reagan revolution that we've been suffering under. This whole lie. The gaslighting of trickle down economics that just exploded the income inequality gap. All of these Republicans that became Never Trumpers, you were part of the problem.

Andrea Chalupa:

Trump was your Frankenstein monster. And now you want to cash in on trying to curb your own creation. Well, it's too late. He's unleashed. And once you create a dictator, once you empower him, once the culture has brainwashed tens of millions of people into voting for him, it's extremely hard to overcome that. We're now living with this. I think in terms of reality television, it's the dumbing down of America. The rise of strongmen are preceded by a dumbing down of mainstream media, of television culture.

Andrea Chalupa:

You saw that Berlusconi in Italy. He, through his cronyism, got all these regulations pulled back. And he was able to buy up a bunch of TV networks, and he dumbed them down. He turned them into misogynistic weapons against women, showing just scantily clad women and just salacious reports. So, it's no surprise when Berlusconi runs for president and pretty easily wins because he set the stage for that through his trash TV culture. It's not surprising that you have the rise of the far-right authoritarian threat, a white supremacist terrorist movement.

Andrea Chalupa:

That was preceded by Rupert Murdoch having his way with our media landscape. Rupert Murdoch, the son of a eugenicist. It's a dangerous time, and that's why we're always screaming at the Democrats to do more, to use their power in Congress to hold all these compelling hearings, to extend the impeachment trial, because they need to break through the wall of normalization. They need to break through the cage bars of far-right propaganda in America. And by using your authority, which already commands an audience, which already comes with built-in press interest—which is rare, right?—you have such a privileged perch on which to protect us and help us.

Andrea Chalupa:

And if you're not using that to the fullest by creating must-watch compelling TV by airing out this whole cast of characters, from Steve Bannon to Flynn to Michael Flynn's brother at the Pentagon that deliberately slowed down the much needed urgent response by the National Guard as our Capitol was under siege. By not wheeling out all these whole colorful cast of characters and then bringing them out there, not necessarily forcing them to testify, but giving each of these guys their own investigation in Congress, you would turn C-SPAN into the new Fox News.

Andrea Chalupa:

People would be watching this and devouring this scandal. And that's one of the things we don't understand is that we question all the time is you... In this reality TV climate, the best reality TV right now is to come after Trump and investigate him. People will eat that up. And the fact that Democrats are being timid and containing their power there is extremely infuriating. And the prospects for that for the upcoming election in 2022, it makes me worried.

Andrea Chalupa:

It makes me worry that they're missing such a major opportunity and Republicans are just going to clobber them into 2022, because the independent votes they need in these swing districts don't understand the urgency. Because if there was an urgency, surely somebody would be doing something about it, surely Christopher Wray would be testifying before Congress, surely all of these characters or adjacent characters to Bannon and Flynn and others would be forced to testify before Congress, surely they would be gripping testimony for the next two years.

Andrea Chalupa:

And instead, we're getting it swept under the rug. We're getting it rammed through. Nancy Pelosi wants to dust her hands of this, and we cannot emphasize to you how dangerous this is. You are allowing your opponent to relax, stretch out their arms, their fingers, and enjoy making their next move. You have put the ball so firmly into the hands of Trumpism and they're going to have so much fun now coming after you. It's horrible to live in this culture right now in the U.S.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's horrible to think I have to protect my family not just from everyday life, but also the threat of authoritarianism coming. We're living our life through this pendulum swing of election cycles now. Normally, it's "okay, the Republicans now take the Congress in the midterm because we have a Democratic president", but it's no longer the Republican Party as we knew it as kids growing up. It is an authoritarian threat. And the next time they want to stay in power, they don't want to have to lose again. They were humiliated, and they felt victimized.

Andrea Chalupa:

They were humiliated in front of all the world when they lost the 2020 election. So you know they're going to come and prove something to us next time. Ivanka Trump has a chip on her shoulder now from the 2020 election. She is going to come and prove something to us next time, and they're not going to give up power so easily next time. I'm really fearful of the Democrats' response in giving them the opportunity to do that.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, absolutely. And just to wrap up here, the lack of urgency and also just the rushing through of that trial, the refusal to have witnesses after saying that they were going to, that made it much worse than when they said that they weren't going to be and people just thought that because people has this flickering moment of hope. All of that combined with just the grim circumstances under which we're living—the pandemic, climate change disasters like we're seeing in Texas—it adds up to a lot. It takes a toll on your mind.

Sarah Kendzior:

It takes a toll on your heart. What I want people to do—this is why we call the show Gaslit Nation—is don't doubt yourself here. Don't doubt your perception. Don't doubt your frustration. Don't doubt your fear of the situation. It is normal to feel afraid about what is happening right now. And when you see people blowing off a violent insurrectionist coup led by the president on the Capitol, it is a big deal that that happened. It's also a big deal that they're blowing it off. You should be outraged. You should never, never let it go.

Sarah Kendzior:

Just like you should never let go the 2016 election and Trump's long-term collaboration with transnational organized crime and the Kremlin. You should never let go the way the media protected him throughout all of this, the way our institutions failed us throughout all of this. There's no room for forgiveness and moving on here until there is actual accountability. That is when people can forgive. And it is so necessary.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's necessary from just a consequences for criminals standpoint, for our national security, for our national safety, but it's also integral to our national cohesion, to our literal ability to exist as the United States of America. We need true accountability, and that's not just a commission that issues a report. That's serious consequences for the most powerful people who participated in this event. And coincidentally, they are often the same people that participated in the worst events of Trump's campaign and presidency, which were investigated for their illegality.

Sarah Kendzior:

These are people who already have been indicted—people like Bannon, Stone, Manafort, Flynn. It is a long list. And then they were pardoned because Trump predictably abused the pardon power. This needs to be rectified or they're going to keep coming back. You are living in the political version of a slasher movie. The villain is not actually defeated. He's out there lurking in the background. And just like in a slasher series, the sequels get worse and worse and worse each time until they are utterly unwatchable.

Sarah Kendzior:

So, please keep pushing your representatives for accountability. Do not doubt yourself. Do not doubt your feelings. Do not doubt your eyes and ears. That is what they want from you, is to just shrug your shoulders, surrender, and move on. And that is unacceptable.

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 due to the coronavirus crisis.

Andrea Chalupa:

We also encourage you to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria. Donate at rescue.org. And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to The Orangutan Project at orangutanproject.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. And you can also subscribe to us on YouTube.

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 in Gaslit Nation is produced David Whitehead, Martin Wissenberg, Nick Farr, Demian Arriaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior:

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Andrea Chalupa:

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