

Gaslit Nation Transcript

06 May 2020

"Hiding in Plain Sight: Sarah Answers Your Questions"

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 Trump administration and rising autocracy around the world.

Andrea Chalupa:

On this special, we are bombarding Sarah with questions about her new book, *Hiding in Plain Sight: The Invention of Donald Trump and the Erosion of America*. In the last episode, I interviewed Sarah, and in this episode, our listeners are interviewing Sarah. Normally, we do a monthly Q&A, with our Patreon supporters. You can sign up there to ask us a question every month, and get in on that big family table. We get a lot of weird, wonderful questions, because we have a lot of weird, beautiful people that support the show. We cannot make the show without them. That Q&A's a lot of fun for us, we get to connect with our listeners, we get ideas, we get a good laugh, we get a nice release. It's just, we enjoy it.

Andrea Chalupa:

Join the fun there on our Patreon. For the big release of Sarah's book, we opened up the Q&A to everybody, so we put a call out on a recent episode saying send us your questions, and then a call out on Twitter. Here are all the questions we received from people, from all over, about Sarah's new book.

Andrea Chalupa:

I will start the show with the first question from David. David asks, "Morning Andrea." Good morning David. "Please mention the *Gaslit Nation* action guide and ask Sarah if there's a single thing each of us can do to remove Trump in November, what is it?"

Sarah Kendzior:

All right. Thank you David. For those of you who don't know, we have a *Gaslit Nation* action guide at gaslitnationpod.com, that gives a lot of different recommendations about not just removing Trump, but sustaining our democracy, preserving our rights and freedoms and so forth.

Sarah Kendzior:

One of the things we emphasize in that guide is to act locally, and think independently, and that everybody has a different skill or talent or ability that they can bring to this struggle. I encourage that. I think it doesn't do much if we're all doing the same thing. We're all living in different places, we all have

different skills and different disadvantages. Find something that you're interested in that you want to get involved in your own community or nationally.

Sarah Kendzior:

Just go for it. One thing though that everyone should do in November is vote. In order for that to be possible we need to have elections with integrity, which are currently being threatened. I do encourage everyone right now to talk to your own representatives about election integrity, about voting by mail which is likely to be necessary, because of the coronavirus crisis, and on that note, about the GOP's attempt to shut down the Postal Service. If we can't have an election, if we can't have a fair and free election, then obviously, we are going to be stuck with this transnational crime syndicate masquerading as a government for an even longer period of time.

Sarah Kendzior:

That is something that everyone can do.

Andrea Chalupa:

Great answer. Okay. The next question is from—Chrisandra asks, "I'm deep into the book, enjoying being able to listen to Sarah read her own words via the Audible app while I follow along with my physical copy." Wow, that's really studious. "Sarah, your masterful prose elucidates revolting truth with poetic beauty like a spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down. Furthermore, your love of St. Louis and the history of the state of Missouri reminds me of how Jane Jacobs wrote about the boroughs of New York City in the 1960s and '70s. The death and life of great American cities. A View from Flyover Country, Dark Age Ahead, Hidden in Plain Sight." Those are the two comparisons Chrisandra makes.

Andrea Chalupa:

"As someone who foolishly believed that my longtime plan to embark on a decade of international nomadism would conveniently allow me to avoid the worst of what is headed our way, I'm especially interested in your reasons for remaining in Missouri. Is there anywhere you would move to if barriers like affordability weren't big issues? Or, do you still believe in the possibilities and likely necessity of community building wherever you find yourself?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Right. Thank you Chrisandra. That was very kind of you to say, especially the Jane Jacobs comparison. I definitely don't think embarking on a decade of international nomadism was foolish. My God, to be able to travel again now with coronavirus, I fantasize about it all the time. We all know life is short. Take advantage of any opportunity you can to expand your mind, see the world, learn new things. There's no shame in that.

Sarah Kendzior:

About Missouri, no, I wouldn't move. I wouldn't leave St. Louis. Of course there's a barrier of affordability. I'm married, we're raising children here, we don't make that much money. We're trying to stay afloat, and of course, there's a lot of uncertainty with coronavirus. No one's really moving anywhere. But I like living in St. Louis. I think it's a genuinely interesting place. I don't want to generalize about the culture of St. Louis. Obviously, the political culture of St. Louis and Missouri is quite corrupt, as you see in my book.

Sarah Kendzior:

People here are more blunt, less pretentious, I've met so many interesting people. The most interesting people I've met in my life live in St. Louis. It's a city full of free shit, which I highly enjoy—our museums, our parks. I love the landscape of Missouri, I love going to the Ozarks, I love hiking. I don't want to say I loved, because I'm really hoping all these things come back and I'm able to enjoy them again at some point, but the openness of the land and the gothic quality of some of these places, and the food and the barbecuing, I don't know. There's so much that I really do love about living here, that I don't want to move.

Sarah Kendzior:

I love to travel. I love to visit other parts of the US, and other parts of the world. This is my home, and this is also where I brought up my children. My children were born in St. Louis. This is where their friends are, their community is. This is what they know. When you have children, you see the world through their eyes. You become very grateful for the people in your community, who make their lives possible, their teachers, our neighbors, and so forth.

Sarah Kendzior:

I feel attached to them, I feel protective of St. Louis. Yeah, there's no place like home, even during a pandemic.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. That decision of whether to stay or leave is always a difficult one for anybody. Jennifer asks, "This question is for the Hiding in Plain Sight portion of your podcast, thank you for taking questions." I'm reading all of these, I'm reading the compliments, I'm reading all the, everything that people are writing here. Okay. "In chapter seven, you touch on the QAnon believers, and how occasionally, they hit on something real. Sarah, has any of your academic research on other authoritarian states covered this act of threading truth with lies, intended to spin them as conspiracy, and if so, do you know if there are paid operatives who sit around scheming how to best spin these controversies into conspiracy theories, or do they happen organically?"

Andrea Chalupa:

"Also, I was shocked to hear about the threats to your safety. Please remain safe. We need your voice now more than ever."

Sarah Kendzior:

All right. Thank you Jennifer. I appreciate that. Yes, this is definitely something that authoritarian states do, particularly in the digital era. I discuss this a bit in Hiding in Plain Sight, when I talk about networked authoritarianism, which was a theory proposed by the social scientist Rebecca MacKinnon, around 2010, maybe a bit before. It was basically that, authoritarian states like Russia or Azerbaijan were purposely leaving the internet partially open, they weren't censoring it entirely as was expected, so that they could basically torpedo the entire notion of truth, so that they could let conspiracy theories and propaganda and false narratives and threats and mobs and all these things that are now part of basically every country's political culture, including ours, so that they could let this thrive.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes, this is frequently a state-sponsored operation, and Peter Pomerantsev—Andrea, you probably agree with this—is somebody who has studied this from within, how Russian media has controlled these narrative arcs, and yes, there are people that sit there as spin masters, they develop conspiracy theories, they put them into orbit. This isn't new. This predates the internet. It's also not unique to authoritarian states. This is something that America did, this is where so many racist narratives, for one thing that immediately springs to mind, come from. We've been fed a lot of garbage, I think, throughout our lives.

Sarah Kendzior:

Adulthood is often a process, in the US, of disentangling yourself from propaganda that you were taught in school or by the media, or just learning buried truths about our history. Yeah, there's a political agenda there. Sometimes, I don't think it's completely conscious, it's just people reiterating things they heard in other places. Sometimes, it's quite intentional and deliberate. It's certainly the case with the Trump administration. They're very adept at this, and Trump spent his whole life, even just as an individual, inserting stories about himself into tabloids, playing himself on reality TV.

Sarah Kendzior:

As to the QAnon folks, QAnon, for example, was discussing Jeffery Epstein long before the media discussed Jeffrey Epstein. I have no patience for the people in QAnon who are encouraging violence, encouraging authoritarianism, none of that. I do think that there are people who just are aware that there is an incredible level of corruption and exploitation, and atrocities being committed by elites in high positions of command, that no one is holding accountable. They get sucked down this wormhole of QAnon, which at least is willing to admit what Epstein was doing, or Dershowitz, or other people in that fold.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think it's a shame that some people who maybe discovered this basically, a cult at this point, got sucked into it, maybe with good intentions in mind. The remedy to this is to just tell the truth. It's to tell the truth even if it implicates powerful individuals. It's to tell the truth even if it pisses off people on both sides of the aisle. If everybody would just come clean about these atrocities, and quit trying to protect criminal elites, for reasons of access or power or whatever, we would all be in a better place. We would all maybe even be able to unite again as a country.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's so bleak to think, wow, maybe we'll come together around the horrific truth of Jeffrey Epstein, but honestly, that's one of those few things that almost everybody agrees on. I always encourage people to pursue the truth in that regard.

Andrea Chalupa:

All right. Oh, and just to add onto that, you mentioned Peter Pomerantsev. He has a great book that we have on our Gaslit Nation reading guide that you can check out on gaslitnationpod.com, get our reading guide there. The book of the author Sarah mentioned, Peter Pomerantsev, the book is called *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*. He talks about Russia essentially being a propaganda empire and how propaganda works—the fever dream of it— and how it has mass produced.

Andrea Chalupa:

Go check that out. Okay. Robert asks, "Sarah, your epilogue, yes, painfully, heartbreakingly, tearfully, we cannot expect to see peace in our time. And yes, instead, we expect continued erosion of our freedom, horrific shifts in our environmental climate, in our national law, surveillance culture to exacerbate fear to the point of submission, no longer recognizable as such. Wearily, we expect elite criminal impunity to prosper as long as officials continue to refuse to enforce its accountability.

Andrea Chalupa:

"Soberly, we expect recessions and censorship, and finally, fearfully, we understand that violence will indeed be upon us all. No, of course we cannot accept this, an American autocracy. We refuse to accept this, we will never settle. Sarah, please talk a bit about what it will be like to settle the score."

Sarah Kendzior:

Thank you, Robert. Thank you for putting up with my bleak and relentless book. We're not headed into good times. I recognize this as somebody—I'm probably, if I'm lucky, halfway through my life. God only knows what's coming down the next couple years. I basically am fighting for my children's future, maybe for our grandchildren's future. Maybe they will have a shot at something good. Maybe they'll have a shot at a sustainable and just world. At this point, one of the biggest problems I think we have is a lack of understanding about our own history, and about the people who govern us. In *Hiding in Plain Sight*, I lay out these networks of power, in which you see the same names recurring over and over again, for 40 years. People like Trump, Manafort, Bill Barr.

Sarah Kendzior:

Then also, you could trace that back to their mentors, to Roy Cohn, to Henry Kissinger. There's this whole untold story about the post-World War II order. I feel like my book is just a sliver. I left a trail that opens up a lot of avenues of exploration, and I hope that people go down them. I hope people explore them, because I think we need something akin to a truth and reconciliation commission. We need deep, unsparring examinations of atrocities from recent American histories. The ones that have broken us, that have entrenched corruption, that have torn this country apart.

Sarah Kendzior:

We need all that to be aired in public. The financial collapse, the war in Iraq, what happened before and after 9/11, the inability to prevent that crisis, and of course, the role of organized crime in government, which is one of the major stories that the media just won't touch. For now, what I try to do is bring forth information, convey it in a way that resonates with people. There are other people in other jobs, our whole notion of what the law means, what the courts mean, it's up in the air, because that's the only thing that this band of elite criminals cares about, is their impunity. They want to hold onto their money, they want to hold onto their power, and they want to be immune from prosecution.

Sarah Kendzior:

They have become increasingly successful in this latter venture, in not actually being held accountable in the courts, not being incarcerated even though they're extraordinarily dangerous. They're just out and about, running around, people like Michael Flynn and so forth.

Sarah Kendzior:

There needs to be accountability there. That's one of the reasons I'm not optimistic about the future, is because Trump has been packing these courts, the GOP has been packing these courts with lackeys, who

preemptively exonerate the guilty and persecute the innocent. We need people to be stronger, we need them to be open about threats for example, that judges and juries are facing—that's happening right now with Roger Stone.

Sarah Kendzior:

Basically, a culture of brutal honesty, and then on top of that, compassion and having a conscience, and just trying to do right by other people. Even at the most simple level, even in just your day-to-day interactions with other human beings, there's this sense of, okay, we've got the weight of the world on our shoulders, we have all these giant problems crushing us, and hurting us and pushing us down, how do we ever solve it all? We can't, as individuals. Collectively, we can make a choice in our own lives about how we treat other people. We can also work together and organize with other people, and attack a lot of these systemic issues, beyond what I mentioned. There're so many other things. There's economic inequality, climate change, and so forth.

Sarah Kendzior:

There are a lot of opportunities to try to make the world a better place. I would encourage you to look at it as an opportunity, rather than a doomsday sentence. We're on the precipice, we could go in a number of different directions. Like I said, I'm not optimistic, but there's no point in being either optimistic or pessimistic. We're going to do what we can, and then we're going to see where things play out.

Sarah Kendzior:

In terms of the score being settled, I think we need total honesty, total exposure, and then preventing these individuals or people like them, people with the same ambitions and evil goals, from achieving power again. There needs to be a system to lock them out of that process, so that they can no longer attack and prey upon the vulnerable.

Andrea Chalupa:

Agreed. Jeff asks, "If you had 30 minutes with Biden, and his team, what would you recommend that they do right now?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh God.

Andrea Chalupa:

Basically, everything you just said.

Sarah Kendzior:

Pretty much. Today's April 22nd. I've been saying all along, Biden needs a coalition, he needs people, other democrats, behind him. He needs to announce his cabinet and who's going to be guiding his decisions. He does need to embrace a more progressive policy platform, especially in light of coronavirus and all of this economic devastation. He also needs to focus on election security, and making sure that we even have an election where we can vote for Joe Biden.

Sarah Kendzior:

Though I have some problems with Joe Biden, I absolutely encourage everyone to vote for him, because you are voting against an existential apocalyptic threat. Biden is currently the alternative to that. Definitely feel free to criticize him and encourage him to embrace a more progressive platform, but for those of you who aren't voting, that is such an irresponsible and cruel move right now.

Sarah Kendzior:

Unfortunately, vote for Biden.

Andrea Chalupa:

The next question is from Julia. She asks, "So excited you're going to interview Sarah about her book today". Me too. "My question for Sarah is, can you tell us more about how your childhood parents and the culture you grew up in influenced the course of your life? i.e. writing, living overseas, studying kleptocratic countries, anthropology, et cetera. We know that being a badass is something you're born with, but besides that. Love you both." Love you Julia.

Sarah Kendzior:

Okay. Thank you Julia. I don't know. I talk more, probably, in this book about my life and my autobiography than I ever do in any other format. It's generally not something I'm that comfortable doing. I was a nerd with a problem with authority and that hasn't really changed at all. I don't know. I'm somebody... I like to explore different things, I like to travel, I like to move around. I'm restless. My interests are a mix of highbrow and lowbrow. I generally do what I want, in terms of following my own heart, my creative pursuits, my principles, whatever. I don't care about my reputation.

Sarah Kendzior:

If I have advice to give to the world, that is my advice, is just fuck all that. Fuck the careerism, pursue your dreams, hang out with people you actually like, that's why I do a show with Andrea instead of working for a media corporation. How I got this way? I think I was always this way. I find my diary from when I was 10 years old, and I'm, like, exactly the same. I did have a good support structure in terms of my grandparents, who also lived in my hometown, and they helped raise me, just as much as my parents did. I loved hanging out with them, I loved talking to them.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think I benefited from having regular, close contact with people who had lived through the Great Depression and had lived through and fought in World War II, and had witnessed so many awful atrocities and managed to persevere. I think that that instilled in me a belief that yes, things could fall apart at any time, which is scary, but that you just keep going. You work through it, you suck it up, you take the hits, you keep living your life, and you look out for other people. That is what they left me with. I'm always very grateful. I think I was extremely lucky to have four grandparents around.

Andrea Chalupa:

The next question comes from Sheridan. Sheridan asks, "Really appreciate the work you're doing. I'm a couple chapters into the new book. Excited to finish it. My question is this: the current GOP is quite obviously complicit in this criminal presidency. Do you think they see what you see and know what you know, and support the goal of transitioning America away from democracy? Or do they live in ignorance like most of America? What percentage of the GOP do you believe fully understands what's going on and supports Trump anyway?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. That's a great question. I think the answer to that question has changed over the last three years. I think initially, there was always an inner center to the GOP, that was completely aware of this operation that Trump and his criminal cabal were engaged in. Paul Manafort was a GOP operative, Roger Stone was a GOP operative, and the entire time that they were GOP operatives, they were also criminals. They were the heirs of Nixon, and Nixon criminal politics.

Sarah Kendzior:

Then, you have to look at the GOP in general. We had a massive wave of resignations during Trump's first year in office. It was a record number of members of the GOP stepping down. Even if they were pretty young, in their 40s or 50s. I think that's because they realized that in terms of their own careerism, opportunism, what have you, there was no choice but to join what was essentially an apocalyptic cult by that point. There was no choice but to surrender their individual aspirations to the Trump dream, which is just a kleptocratic dream for Trump and his family.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think some of them just didn't want to be involved in that. That doesn't mean that they're necessarily good people, or that they're going to go join the democrats or what have you, but they don't approve. I think Justin Amash is another example of someone who quite publicly doesn't approve.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think that there has been a move away from democracy and embracing democracy from the GOP for a long time. They'll talk about economic freedom, that was their whole calling card during the Reagan era, but what they really did was strip away our personal freedom by making us trapped in a system of debt, of lost opportunity, of lost wages, of not being able to survive, and when you're in that kind of conditions, you're not actually free.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think that their idea of democracy became entwined in that. It became a culture of fear. I think some folks were drawn to the GOP because they seem to have this strongman politics aspect that could be maybe comforting when you're constantly living in fear. Fear from terrorism, from economic collapse and so forth.

Sarah Kendzior:

In terms of what's happened now though, now we've had basically a mafia, not basically, we've had a mafia state in power since 2017. The GOP did stuff like put Michael Cohen in charge of their finances. He was the Deputy Finance Chairman for the Republican Party. They had Russian mafia people putting in money through proxies like the NRA. What that means is that probably every Republican has dirty, dark money in their campaigns. They've accepted it. It's likely foreign money. They're basically trapped in this net. Yes, I do think that they understand this, I think they understand that this is a culture built on blackmail and threats and bribes, and they've decided to just accept their lot in it, and carry on.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's become a cult. These are cult members. That's why they're so intractable. That's why they wouldn't vote to convict him, even though they themselves would be freed from this. They're too afraid. That's a severe problem. That's an unprecedented crisis for American history.

Andrea Chalupa:

The next question is from Diane. Diane asks, "I'm still in progress listening to the audiobook. I did a surreal thing, which was to go on a solo backpacking trip with the audiobook. So there I am simultaneously marveling at the explosion of life that is springtime out in nature, while listening to apocalyptic accounting of the death and destruction of our country. Anyway, I wanted to tell you that when I saw your link to politics and prose and saw that you could support local bookstores buying from their libro.fm page, I wondered if I could do the same but for my own local bookstore, Chaucer's Books.

Andrea Chalupa:

"On my laptop, I did a Google search." I'm reading it all, folks. If you send it to me, I'll read it. "On my laptop, I did a Google search for Chaucer's and found a link to their website, but Hiding in Plain Sight was not listed. I went back to libro.fm, and searched for Chaucer's through their bookstore search. That caused libro.fm to change my bookstore, and then I could search for Hiding in Plain Sight and buy it through my local bookstore.

Andrea Chalupa:

"Success. It was convoluted but I managed to figure it out, and support my city's last standing real independent bookstore." That's why I read that part, because that's an important lesson to us all, to support independent books, even if you need to take an extra step to do it.

Andrea Chalupa:

"A question for you. Do you think progressives should do outrageous things so that our protests get covered like these fake Davos funded protests? I'm thinking stuff like a kinetic sculpture parade, a protest die-in, things that are colorful and surprising enough, but not violent or horrifying, just to get on the news. Maybe we need a new Arlington West or an AIDs quilt project."

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. First, thank you so much for buying the book and the struggle you went through to get it. I don't know exactly about outrageous things, but I think protests should be strategic. A lot of aspects of a good strategic protest is spectacle, is a play to emotion, is an honest presentation of the facts. I think there is a lot to admire in AIDs activism and in the gay rights movement. When I was a child, these were taboo topics. They did not have mainstream support.

Sarah Kendzior:

That's one of the few really positive social trends over the last 30 years. Almost everything else seems to be moving backwards, but in terms of gay rights and certainly of acceptance of people who have HIV or who had AIDs, we've moved forward. There's a lot to learn from that history.

Sarah Kendzior:

One thing that's frustrating is you can't make the media cover a protest in the way you want. I was a firsthand witness to Ferguson, I was covering those protests myself in St. Louis, and I was also watching

the national cable news coverage of those protests. I knew that the news networks were only on one block of one street, yet they would have this background of riots and fire. They would portray it as if it was the entire city. They would find basically people that fit their preconceived narrative of what a black community in St. Louis was like. Whether it was trying to portray them as violent, which is what Fox did, or interviewing people who didn't even live here, and making them the unofficial or sometimes official representatives of a movement to which they weren't really attached.

Sarah Kendzior:

So, a lot of this is out of our hands. That's why I like social media, because I think it puts some of the power back in our hands. It allows for a correction of that narrative. I always encourage people to find their own way. And if you hate the mainstream media coverage, and you have the means, then cover it yourself. Tweet about it, write your own essays, post your own photos, try to get the truth out there, organize your own protests, and also realize there is life beyond the mainstream news bubble. It may seem that everyone is believing what they see on TV, but they're clearly not, or they wouldn't all be online bitching about it.

Sarah Kendzior:

That's honestly a pretty shared sentiment. You hear it from the Right, you hear it from the Left. Everybody is mad that the news is not reflecting their reality. So they're not really as powerful as they seem, and we spend a lot of time breaking down what they did wrong. That's a worthwhile pursuit. An even more worthwhile pursuit is to build up those who're doing things right, whether independent media outlets or individuals who are protesting or individuals who are documenting the protests.

Sarah Kendzior:

That sometimes is a more effective means of getting your point across.

Andrea Chalupa:

The next question comes from Ingrid. Ingrid asks, "I'm your long-term fan from Glasgow, Scotland." We're long-term fans of Glasgow, Scotland, Ingrid.

Sarah Kendzior:

True.

Andrea Chalupa:

"Could you ask Sarah to what degree she shields her kids from the realities of our global shitshows? My son is 18 and pretty savvy aware, but I often ponder how I would be handling things if he was younger. What parental line do you tread? Love to you both, thanks for all your work, I'm proud to support your Patreon." Thank you Ingrid.

Sarah Kendzior:

Thanks Ingrid. That's a difficult question. I have two kids. I have a nine year old and a 12 year old, so third and 7th grade. So they're older. They read a lot, they read a lot of history, they certainly know quite a lot about this administration. They're aware of what I do, and they're also aware, unfortunately, of the threats to my personal safety that I've received, because there've been times we've had to quickly leave our house or so forth.

Sarah Kendzior:

I try to shield them as much as possible from that threat. I don't want them to think about my own life being in jeopardy, about me maybe not being around in the future. I just don't go down that road. I just tell them I'm going to be, and they're not allowed to listen to this show either. They're totally banned from listening to Gaslit Nation.

Sarah Kendzior:

I do try to give them a broader education. Back when we did have freedom of movement and museums and stuff open, I was always taking them, as I write in the book, to presidential libraries, to museums, showing them the historical roots of the current crisis, so that they know that Trump didn't appear out of nowhere, that there's a history of racist demagoguery, that there is a history of systems collapsing. They're very aware of this. I also write in the book about a period of my own life, when I had two young kids and my husband was out of a job for over a year, they've lived through this. We live in a rough city, so to speak, we live in a city that's been on hard times for a long time.

Sarah Kendzior:

They're observant kids. They pick up quite a lot. It's not like I'm in some sort of suburban bubble or wonderful world where they just don't know what's out there. They know it because they've experienced it, their classmates experienced it, I experience it.

Sarah Kendzior:

I am much more upbeat with them than I am on this show or I am in public life on Twitter. I want them to have a real childhood. I want them to have friends and interests and a good time, and be happy and embrace the joys that they find in life. Yeah, I do hide some of my more pessimistic prognostications. I certainly hide the stuff I cover that has to do with Epstein or really disturbing shit. It's just not appropriate for children at all.

Sarah Kendzior:

I don't hide the general situation. I don't think that there's any point in that. My kids, they still believe in Santa, but they also know about the existence of the Russian mafia. So, yeah, that's what it's like to grow up in my house.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'd also just say, having my kids and having my husband is just a tremendous gift, and a benefit, and I love hanging out with my family. We're a very close knit family. Back when we could move around, we loved to go on road trips, and we would go hiking, and we'd go out and do stuff. It was easier to "stay sane" before we were self-isolating from a global pandemic. Hopefully, we'll get back to that soon.

Andrea Chalupa:

Nowisthetim asks, "How do you keep from anger, rage and despair taking hold of your everyday thoughts in life as we see what's unfolding?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh, I don't. I'm totally full of rage. I'm full of rage pretty much all the time. Honestly, I don't know another way to be, given what's going on. Maybe I channel that rage in a good direction, hopefully I do. I know I feel a sense of visceral relief after I've written something or after we've recorded one of these shows. Because sometimes, it feels like all the energy is drained out of my body, like Eleven on Stranger Things at the end when she was battling people. My daughter's like, "That's like you mommy, after you write." Because I'm just so tired, it takes so much out of me. I put everything on the page.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think it's perfectly normal to be extremely angry right now at what's happening. I honestly find it baffling that our officials are not acting with that level of anger, and maybe they think it's a matter of propriety or respectability, but I think it's wounding to the public, because what it comes off as is a lack of empathy or a lack of recognition as to what people are experiencing.

Sarah Kendzior:

Despair is something different. That's more of a private emotion. Of course, we all have moments of despair, I do too. I try to just keep going. But the rage, the rage can be healthy. The rage can be fuel for your principles and your stances and your willingness to confront things.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, I would just encourage people to embrace their rage.

Andrea Chalupa:

Sophie asks, "Thank you so much for the excellent, inspiring and courageous work that you do. My question for Sarah Kendzior, if you have time for it: what advice would you give to folk, especially women and people of color, who are attacked and gaslit repeatedly in their work? How to find survival strategies."

Sarah Kendzior:

That's a good question. Andrea and I experience this all the time, and women of color experience it more than we do. You can witness that on Twitter every day. I think what a lot of us have done is just try to back each other up, to find a community, to find partners. When you see somebody being attacked, reach out to them in support. I encourage people, share other people's work.

Sarah Kendzior:

There's this insular culture—you see it more on social media—where it's just a bunch of white guys retweeting other white guys, who are retweeting things that are either lies or distortions, or just things that are playing down the extent of pain that's being experienced. I just encourage people to build up others. Don't value people by their titles or the prestige attached to them. Value people by what kind of person are they? What are they saying? What kind of positions or moral stances do they hold? What kind of art are they creating?

Sarah Kendzior:

That's what makes people interesting. I think we live in a fucked up society, where other things like wealth and title and so forth are valued more. I've always tried to basically destroy that system, in part because I think it's immoral, I think it's unsustainable, but it also prevents a lot of voices from being

heard. A result of living in this system, if you are a woman and you are a creative or intelligent person, is that you're going to be continually marginalized, pushed aside, put down, et cetera.

Sarah Kendzior:

You got to just try as much as you can to just not give a shit about any of that. Constructive criticism is one thing, but mindless attacks or mob attacks are something just, I don't know. I don't find it worth my time. I'd rather find my community, find a support system, and then just proceed from there.

Andrea Chalupa:

Rudy asks, "Here's my question. How does it feel to be always right? How do you not lose hope after yelling into the void for the last five years? Hope your quarantine is going okay. Be safe."

Sarah Kendzior:

I don't know if I'm always right, but I'm right pretty frequently. So is Andrea. We both think it sucks. We want very badly to be wrong. The reason that we're right so often is that we are dealing with people who are following the textbook moves of an autocracy, and who are often announcing their ambitions in advance. Just this last week, everyone's so shocked about Trump and his stance on immigration—that's what he ran on! That's what Stephen Miller said he was going to do, and then they actually do it, and everybody is surprised.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think what they're really surprised at is the lack of accountability and the lack of pushback from other officials. They're surprised that rules and norms and laws even, are so malleable, that there isn't this real system, that it's all invented.

Sarah Kendzior:

I don't know. In the book—it's true, the part of the question about hope—I say outright, I don't think about hope or hopelessness. I don't see the world in those terms. I see it in terms of principle, and in trying to do what's right. What alternative is there to that? Just throwing your hands in the air? I have kids, I have other people I care about, I care about the next generation and making sure that they don't inherit the system that I'm currently living in, and that I grew up in. I wouldn't wish that on anybody.

Sarah Kendzior:

Of course I'm going to work to change things. I take the Han Solo perspective of "never tell me the odds", because it's just not worth it. It's not worth obsessing about that aspect.

Andrea Chalupa:

The next question comes from Sabercat. Sabercat asks—I love the names, by the way—Sabercat wants to know, "Can you see any nonviolent path toward unseating the Trump administration and its corporate backers?"

Sarah Kendzior:

That's a good question. I don't know. I do think we're headed towards violence, especially in between the period of the election, assuming it's held in November, and inauguration of whoever wins in January, whether it's Trump or Biden. I think that if Biden wins, if it's even very obvious that he won, if there's a

sweep, I think Trump will refuse to accept the results. He's going to seek to stay there, he's going to declare the election illegitimate. I think he's going to encourage violence and terrorism from his supporters. He's already doing that.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think if he wins, he will do the same thing, only it'll be portrayed as a kind of victory party. I do think we're headed for violence. In terms of removing him, one of the reasons I've been so pissed off over the last three years is that we had many opportunities to remove him, although the "we" here is pretty exclusive. It's really officials who hold the legal or political power to do that, like Robert Mueller or Nancy Pelosi. These are people who failed us. James Comey is another. They made the wrong choices. They did not act in time. They allowed a criminal empire to grow and entrench itself, and purge agencies and pack courts, and make everything harder to fix.

Sarah Kendzior:

So now we are at this point, which many countries arrive in when they have a corrupt autocracy that really, the majority dislike, in power, of, is there going to be violence? I don't know, because I think that mass protest, as I describe in the book, it's lost its leverage in the US to some extent, because the GOP doesn't care about winning elections, they don't care about being popular, they care about stealing elections, which is a completely different thing.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think protest is still a worthwhile pursuit, but I do worry about it becoming violent, because again, they don't care ... I studied in Uzbekistan a massacre where the state just gunned down hundreds of people in plain sight, kind of similar to Tiananmen Square massacre in China, which notably, Trump praised. I think that they would take that same approach. I can see them mass murdering protesters, which is one of the reasons I've been hesitant sometimes to advise a course of action there, because they don't care who sees it. They're autocrats, they're mafiosos, they're ruthless. They still need to be removed, though. I would just say, try it from every avenue possible. From elections, to lawsuits, to whatever you could think of.

Sarah Kendzior:

Above all, be an honest broker. Tell the truth. In terms of trying to get people to your side, don't try to deceive them or lie to them. Just lay out the story and lay out what's at stake for everybody. This is an existential crisis. There's the possibility of us all getting on the same page and if that happens, then we're much more powerful as a collective than as individuals.

Andrea Chalupa:

John asks, "Hi. I listen to Gaslit Nation weekly and share the same frustrations with our current nightmare situation, that this point all stems from an obvious, top-down, non-leadership situation. My question is, can you envision a future where in the United States, actual crime as we witness daily is eventually served notice and punished? Going back decades as you have outlined, and recognizing that as a whole the US hasn't been very strong in enforcing punishment for white collar crime and mobsters in general, it is difficult to see a situation where as a country, you recognize criminal behavior and just flat out punish it with teeth, in the hopes of averting future situations, whether it be in political campaigns or otherwise.

Andrea Chalupa:

"I agree we can't hope for a savior, but at the same time, feel we should expect those in power to do their jobs. It shouldn't be too much of an ask."

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, I absolutely agree. I always say to keep our expectations high, even if you know they won't be met, or are unlikely to be met. These are public servants. They are working for us. We are paying their salaries. So, no. This sort of sycophantic attitude that a lot of people have developed towards the politicians or officials "on our side", by which I mean Mueller, Comey, Pelosi, the SDNY court system, whoever it is that they think is going to bring this whole operation down, there's this whole vibe of "oh, don't criticize them, don't point out their flaws.", even when those are the people that are letting us down, those are the people who are making entrenched criminality possible.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think yeah, you should criticize them. You have every right to. Make it as constructive as you can. I am worried at this point that so much time has passed, as I said before, that the Trump administration has managed to redo the court system. They've packed it with their lackeys and their apparatchiks. They've purged experts from our political system, whether experts on the Russian mafia in the FBI, or people like Vindman and Yovanovitch and Fiona Hill, and all the others who testified on impeachment, who were very knowledgeable about kleptocracy, both in the US and in the former Soviet Union.

Sarah Kendzior:

I do worry that we will not have much of a takedown of this. And now we have coronavirus, which of course is increasing the entrenched economic inequality and opportunity hoarding and favoritism towards corporations over people that we had before. I don't know though. We are at a breaking point. It's possible we may be in for a very—I think we are in for a very tumultuous year. You never really know what's going to be the result of that.

Sarah Kendzior:

It is frustrating that Congress won't do their jobs. I think even just having a to-do list publicly—they once had this, they had a list of 81 people they wanted to have under oath to testify before Congress about all of Trump and his cohort's white collar crime activity, and its role in the 2016 election. They abandoned that entirely. If they just go back to that, to hearings, to all these things, which they can do virtually, if we're able to have this show virtually, and everyone else is teaching virtually, working virtually, Congress can operate virtually too and have hearings virtually.

Sarah Kendzior:

They need to do that, because it's just important for people to know the truth. It's important to try to pursue justice, even if you don't think it's going to be delivered.

Andrea Chalupa:

The next questions—series of questions—come from Skydweller. "Forgive if these questions have been covered on a show already, but I'm curious as to what led Sarah into anthropology. Did she seek the scholarship? Was it a field she's already aware of? Was there an event that inspired her to go in that direction? What did she originally plan to be when she grew up?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Okay. Some of that's answered in *Hiding in Plain Sight*. No, I never set out to be an anthropologist or an academic. I don't even think I knew that those types of jobs existed as a kid. I wanted to be a writer. That's what I've always been in some capacity, whether in academia or in journalism, or, for a time, writing fiction. I lay out in the book how my career path went. Like a lot of people my age who don't have any money, it was untraditional. It had a lot to do with what kind of fellowships I was offered, what kind of opportunities presented themselves at the time.

Andrea Chalupa:

Follow-up questions from Skydweller. "What contributed to her ability to distill the complex such that it's digestible by a mass audience?" *Guns & Roses*, probably.

Sarah Kendzior:

Obviously.

Andrea Chalupa:

"Having an English teacher, an engaged mom surely helped, but did Sarah have a leap in learning to think critically, and how did that happen? i.e., is it replicable? Does she have other unusual intelligence in addition to ... What is-

Sarah Kendzior:

Synesthesia. This is someone, okay. So, I have synesthesia, which is just a thing where in your head, when you see letters or numbers, they are in color, they have sounds associated with them. When I see musical notes or chords, they are also in colors. I sometimes discuss this on Twitter. It's impossible to explain this to somebody who doesn't have it. As a kid growing up, I really thought everyone had synesthesia. Of course, everybody knows that A is red or what color chord C is, or things like that.

Sarah Kendzior:

I don't know. I was a musical kid. I taught myself how to play piano. I was very artsy, I wrote a lot. I have no idea. I think that yeah, that probably contributed to the way I write, to it being a kind of unconventional style of writing or thinking, but I don't know. Everybody's a product of multiple influences and God knows I was all over the place, in terms of who I hung out with, and my interests, and *Guns & Roses* really were an influence. Andrea was being sarcastic, but it's totally true.

Sarah Kendzior:

I learned a lot from my musical collection and whatnot, but also from more highbrow shit. Yeah, it's a real mix.

Andrea Chalupa:

Just to expand on these questions from Skydweller, she also, or he, says, "Here's one motive for my questions, how can we help others, especially kids, learn to think more critically and analytically? How can we learn to suspend belief, disbelief, and examine information with fresh eyes?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Those are great questions. Of course, now we have kids home from school so this is something I think about a lot, and I'm always encouraging them to just read widely. Just explore everything. If you have an interest and it's esoteric and weird, just follow it. I don't know, sometimes people ... I think the younger generation is abandoning this proclivity, and I think it's good. But when I was growing up, people were often so obsessed with "what do my tastes indicate about me? What do my interests indicate about me?" Your CD collection or your book collection was considered this giant statement on your internal world and I would watch people cover their actual tastes and interests, because they were embarrassed or something like that.

Sarah Kendzior:

I was never like that. I always just let it all hang out, and I always just, I wanted to travel everywhere, I wanted to see everything, I wanted to read everything. That's just how I was wired. When my kids show that same tendency, I encourage them to explore everything, except for as I mentioned, this podcast and my associated R-rated works.

Sarah Kendzior:

One thing that's happened to our country is I do think there's a deficit of imagination, because if you're imaginative, if you're not conforming, you're really discouraged from having a prominent voice in our culture. We have, technically, a free media, but they act in such monotony, and I think the presence of algorithms in which stories are just literally repeated over and over and over in a literally robotic way, it's led to people thinking in a robotic way. We've had such a sea change in terms of how we process information because of the internet.

Sarah Kendzior:

I also think we've had such an immense amount of propaganda and bullshit and conspiracy theories, that people have become very hypervigilant, but in a negative way, about opening their mind to the possibility that things are not what they seem. They don't want to seem alarmist, they don't want to seem hyperbolic, they don't want to seem hysterical. That tendency has, in fact, doomed us in many respects over the last four to five years in particular, but just general, in terms of learning the truth about things.

Sarah Kendzior:

Because the truth is often much more alarming, and much more complex than it's presented, but people are so worried about their reputations and about seeming a certain way or not advancing in their career that they're ignoring really important things, whether it's systemic racism or income inequality or the presence of a transnational crime syndicate masquerading as a government.

Sarah Kendzior:

So I definitely encourage people—remain open minded, but be vigilant in your sourcing, double check information. Don't accept anything at face value, but also don't dismiss anything at face value.

Andrea Chalupa:

Skydweller is not done yet. "What have other societies done to overcome tyranny and what new thinking/actions do we need to apply in the face of mainstream and social media organizations that support authoritarianism?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh God. That's a huge question. Since we're running low on time, I would just encourage you to go back to our archives. We have them on gaslitnationpod.com. We have a reading list. We have many episodes where we detail how other countries have done this. Andrea has spoken quite a lot about Ukraine and their revolutions. This is the kind of question that—I am trained as an anthropologist—you need to look at each place in its own political and historical context.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. Check out the Gaslit Nation action guide, and the reading guide on gaslitnationpod.com.

Andrea Chalupa:

Natalie asked pretty much the same question. "Everything feels very hopeless right now. What actions should we be taking, what can we do when we feel helpless, where do we look for hope, how do we get out of this autocracy situation?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. That's the question we've been reckoning with for years, and certainly, one that we wrestle with every time we do this show. It's normal to feel that feeling of hopelessness, to feel some sense of despair or panic. There's so much shaming of that emotion, I see that all the time on social media, "How dare you express any kind of negative feeling?" It's normal! We're living through a pandemic, we're living through a proto-fascist regime, we're living through a mafia syndicate. It's tough.

Sarah Kendzior:

So what I do during those times is I reach out to people who I love and who I trust for support. I also don't feel bad if I'm binge watching Netflix or reading a book for fun, or what have you. I used to go out for hikes and stuff before the self-isolation rule—just to try to free my mind a little bit and not be so overwhelmed by this. I answered earlier in the show about pragmatic suggestions, but I definitely encourage a sense of perseverance. This isn't going to be solved easily. It's not going to be solved all at once, but just keep going and know that you're part of a broader struggle.

Sarah Kendzior:

There are millions and millions of people, tens of millions, who feel the same way, and are working to the same goal. I think it's harder now with the pandemic, because we don't see each other face-to-face as much. We don't even see each other really represented in the news, because they're too busy with the AstroTurf protests or the propaganda rallies. Everybody's out there, and you're not alone in this. That's something important to remember.

Andrea Chalupa:

Zacharias asks, "If Sarah were to want a position in the Biden administration, what job would she want and why?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh good God, no. I don't want to be part of any administration. I don't want to run for Congress. I don't want to do any of that, at least not now. If you force me to pick a position, I would say Secretary of

State. We'll just go with that. I'm a writer, first and foremost. I have a tendency to criticize power, which means I'm not probably ideally suited to work within the halls of power. Yeah, I think I'm good where I am.

Andrea Chalupa:

Jeanette says, "I'm listening to Sarah read her book. It is amazing, I just wanted to thank her for writing it and being so candid." That's wonderful, Jeanette. Okay. Jeffersonsnote asks, "Sarah, you are the voice of St. Louis and flyover country, but you're originally from Connecticut. I can tell, winky face. What did you learn there and take with you to central Asia and beyond?"

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, I grew up in central Connecticut, and took it with me to central Asia and then the center of the US. I grew up in Meriden, Connecticut. I described this somewhat in the book. Meriden is another blue collar, post-industrial town that by the time I was born, its glory days were long behind it. My parents grew up there, my grandparents grew up there, hardly anyone in my family has left Meriden. I, actually, was kind of moving up in the world when I went to St. Louis, which at least is in its own way, a major city, and it's got museums and cafés and what have you.

Sarah Kendzior:

I don't know, I haven't really gone back to Connecticut since the '90s. I would go back to visit my grandparents when I could. Then when they died, I just don't go back as much. My parents come to visit me. In terms of my childhood, I was a very typical early millennial/late Gen-X kind of childhood. Latchkey kid, a lot of freedom. They said that we're the best-prepared generation for the pandemic because we're used to just hanging around the house and having to entertain ourselves, and having to be self-sufficient. That's true. That was true of my life. I don't know. It's one of these things where I'm much more attached to where I'm bringing up my own kids, where I live now, and I've lived for 16 years, and where I'm a mother, than my own childhood.

Sarah Kendzior:

Because in the times that I have gone back, it's like everyone I know has left. There were no opportunities for us there. My old neighbors and friends, they live all over the country. It's not the nice thing where you go back to your hometown and everyone's there. My grandparents are gone, the stores that I knew, the mall, it's all wiped out with the economy. I like to visit my parents. That's it.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. St. Louis is where it's at.

Andrea Chalupa:

We have a few more questions, which we're going to save for our next show, which will be back to taping weekly, starting next week, after this brief break, just to recuperate from an active news cycle. Then we're back at it again, and we'll wrap up the final questions. If you want to continue on with the Q&As, we do them every month for our Patreon supporters who keep our show going, and give us the freedom to say what needs to be said. Thank you for everyone who listens to the show, who supports the show, who gets the word out.

Andrea Chalupa:

Please check out Sarah's book, *Hiding in Plain Sight*. Get a copy for yourself, get copies for everybody that needs to know what's happening and where we're headed if we don't stop it. If you need hope or other ideas for reading material, go to the Gaslit Nation website on gaslitnationpod.com. Check out our action guide and also our reading guide. Thank you all for listening.

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, 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. Donate at rescue.org. If you want to help critically endangered orangutans, already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to The Orangutan Project at theorangutanproject.org.

Andrea Chalupa:

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

Sarah Kendzior:

Our logo design was donated to us by Hamish Smyth at the New York-based design firm Order. Thank you so much, Hamish.

Andrea Chalupa:

Gaslit Nation would like to thank our supporters at the producer level on Patreon...