

Gaslit Nation Transcript
19 August 2020
"Inherent Contempt"

Senator Bernie Sanders:

Under this administration, authoritarianism has taken root in our country. I and my family, and many of yours, know the insidious way authoritarianism destroys democracy, decency and humanity. As long as I am here, I will work with progressives, with moderates and yes, with conservatives, to preserve this nation from a threat that so many of our heroes fought and died to defeat. My friends, I say to you, to everyone who supported other candidates in the primary, and to those who may have voted for Donald Trump in the last election, the future of our democracy is at stake.

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*, available now.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the Trump administration and rising autocracy around the world. And so, today, it is yet another edition of deja news over here in Gaslit Nation land, and we're both about to implode, but I will bestow the honor of that to Andrea. You can lead in the general mind fuck that we're about to go down here.

Andrea Chalupa:

Thank you very much, Sarah. Well, to get our point across this episode, as you heard in our opening clip, we had Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont. That was a clip from his speech at last night's Democratic National Convention. Bernie Sanders is saying what Gaslit Nation—Sarah and I—have been saying since 2016. So in effect, Bernie was our white male translator for this episode. It's great that he finally caught up with us. If we sound extra frustrated more than usual it's because Sarah and I have been screaming about this and getting a lot of hit pieces in the media from people that were open Sanders supporters, brushing us off and trying to discredit us as hysterical and all that. And yeah, now here we are. All of this matters because it could have been avoided. People could be alive today if we took seriously the people that tried to warn us back in 2016, and people in power, people in a position to do something about this, to act with urgency, simply did not.

Andrea Chalupa:

From James Comey, to leaders in the intelligence community, to leaders in both parties, Democrats as well. And so, all of this infuriating, not because Sarah and I want to get into any ego dance contest with anybody out there. Not at all. All of this is infuriating because again, innocent lives were destroyed by the Trump Crime Family. And by the fact that they stole the 2016 election with the obvious help of the Kremlin, all of that was happening in plain sight. And people just brushed it off and refuse to acknowledge those with years of expertise in studying Kremlin aggression and how authoritarianism works. People were just shallow, absolutely shallow and mindless in how they were covering one of the

most important elections in our nation's history in 2016. And the fact that they've caught up now... and now we're wondering if it's too late, so that's where we are now.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. That's the thing, it's like, they're still doing it. I'm very glad that Bernie Sanders used the word "authoritarianism" last night. It was a profound relief. It was the kind of response that we've been waiting for from our political officials from 2016 on. He could have given that same speech in 2017, a few months into Trump taking office. And he was surrounded last night by people who still wouldn't acknowledge the severity and who still won't talk about it with the urgency and the passion that this moment necessitates. So all praise to Bernie for last night's performance. I hope that his followers are listening to him. I hope they're also listening to people on the Left, like Noam Chomsky, who has made a similar plea where he recognizes we are not voting for a ticket. We are not voting for a party. We are voting for a system of government.

Sarah Kendzior:

It is autocracy, or it is democracy. And if you vote for the Democrats, you have a chance at retaining our democracy and as Noam Chomsky said, "Vote for Biden and then haunt him in his sleep." Or something along those lines. Meaning, vote for this ticket that you may not necessarily be thrilled about and then challenge them, push them, try to get them to pass progressive policies, try to get them to hold criminal elites accountable. But there's no chance of doing that if we have a mafia state, if we have a crime cult at the helm of our country. Of all the things that I wish people had listened to me and Andrea and many others—Timothy Snyder, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, all these scholars of authoritarian states—we were all saying the same thing in unison, in 2016, despite vast other political differences.

Sarah Kendzior:

There are people who, on domestic issues, are more conservative than me—people like Garry Kasparov—also issuing the exact same warnings. We all said, you have limited time. You have limited time to fix this because your institutions are going to collapse, but they still would not even acknowledge the possibility that this was an autocrat in wait, even as he confessed, even as those around him confessed. And it is so grotesque to go back and review the media of the last four years. I hope everyone preserves those documents. I hope they preserve those Op-eds, all those things calling people like us "alarmist and hysterical". I hope they frame the fucking issue of the New Republic called "The New Paranoia", which was an article about me and Andrea and others, who they believed were senselessly declaring that Trump was not on the level. One of the things they criticized me for was not believing pundits who said that Trump was going to pivot. That was just like a wild, crazy thing I was doing. That article, by the way, was written by a ghost hunter. Do you remember this, the one that came out?

Andrea Chalupa:

Hunted by a ghost hunter and then we thought we might be ghosts. Remember that? We're like, "Was this the rapture and we're ghosts? Because we have a ghost hunter writing a hit piece on us?"

Sarah Kendzior:

It was so surreal. It was so surreal. And it went on and on. Trump does all of the classic moves of a dictator. He's putting children in cages. He's installed his family into a dynastic kleptocracy, he's surrounded by mafiosos. It's all in the public domain. I mean, that is the real subject of fascination for me here. There are so many books about Trump. There are so many studies of Trump's psychology.

Although also, people did not listen to mental health experts. They did not listen to Bandy Lee and to others warning that he was a sociopath, warning of the grave danger there. But anyway, there are all these books looking into his internal world. The real subjects of scrutiny should be these good Germans, in our Congress, in the media, who denied this until it was less than 90 days before the election and we have hardly any chance of turning this around. We're just so fucking furious.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm not going to hold back. It's the combination of Bernie's gratifying yet enraging comments at the Democratic National Convention, and then we have Volume 5 of the Senate Intelligence Report on Russian interference in the election, subtitled, Holy mother of duh. I mean, it is just all the shit that we wrote about for years, shit from my book, which I wrote in 2019, it was published in 2020, in Hiding in Plain Sight. Things like Konstantin Kilimnik being a Russian agent, it's like Jesus fucking Christ! I wrote about that. I talked about that on television, I was not alone by any means. Plenty of experts on this topic, other writers, people in Congress, former members of Congress, we all talked about this.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is deja news. We've all been there before and they're doing it again. The thing is, is there's such a difference between knowing information and acting upon information. And it has been the latter, where the failure has been most profound and the failure has led to mass death. I am not overstating that. People would be alive if you had listened to our warnings and the warnings of other experts and heeded them and acted on them and acted with courage and conviction back in 2016 and 2017. You would not have 170,000 dead Americans. You just simply would not have that. And so, that blood is on your hands. If you're one of those people who laughed this off, if you're one of those people who went off about hysterical alarmists, their deaths are on you.

Andrea Chalupa:

Exactly right. You're exactly right. You're complicit in this. With this Senate Intel Committee Report, some obvious findings of it, I'm quoting from it now: "Manafort's presence on the campaign and proximity to Trump created opportunities for Russian intelligence services to exert influence over and acquire confidential information on the Trump campaign." You don't say. [laughs] This will be the last episode of Gaslit Nation everybody because Sarah and I, our brains have exploded and we can no longer do the show. We're sorry to inform you. It was all there back in 2016, for anybody that was following Kremlin aggression closely, anybody that was following Ukraine closely and not trying to muddy the waters there and "both sides" the story. Some of the very big crises we're dealing with that got us into this swirling vortex of crises, when we still do have an overwhelmingly white news media, and that includes foreign policy.

Andrea Chalupa:

So that includes people that covered Ukraine and tried to "both sides" issues there and not really showing any sensitivity to, Hey, yes, Ukraine has a Neo-Nazi issue, but it's quite small compared to the Kremlin's mass murdering xenophobic terrorist state, which you assholes go on RT to try to like promote yourselves. So what I'm saying is that, when Sarah and I were screaming about Trump threatening to turn us into a police state, really tightening the screws on our democracy, it was Black people who took us seriously at first. It was Black people that elevated our voices because communities of color, they're the ones that understood the realities of a police state firsthand. And they were the ones that took us seriously. It was white people in the media that snickered at us and discredited us and slandered us.

Sarah and I would not be sounding this frustrated today if our newsrooms across America—and this includes foreign policy desks and think tanks, and anybody who is a voice of information and a window to what's going on in the world and what's going on in the ground across our country.

Andrea Chalupa:

If those jobs were filled with people of color, we would have greater sensitivity to the tremors of a police state. They would see it coming before it would get this bad. And so, I think part of the solution to Trump-proof and Putin-proof, our democracy moving forward, has to be the diversity of newsrooms and think tanks and anybody covering any issue anywhere. We need to expand the perspective of how we receive information in this country. Right now, it's predominantly white and predominantly male and white males—and white women too—are in a luxurious position where they can more easily withstand actual authoritarianism when it does take hold. Whereas, it's going to be the historically marginalized communities, the communities of color, that are the first impacted. And we've seen that, of course, with COVID-19, with the massive amount of deaths and trauma with communities of color during this pandemic.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, absolutely. And that's assuming we have a media going forward. I mean, one thing I think people have forgotten is that about half of news outlets, or half of journalists, were furloughed or lost their jobs after COVID-19. And this was already after gutting. I've seen many saying that this is going to create even more of a reversion, a backtracking, into an even more elite, white male, wealthy family dominated media environment. So please continue supporting independent media. That's been the way that other voices have gotten heard. And be sure to continue the fight for freedom of the press because if Trump is reinstalled for a second term, this terrain is going to crumble. It's amazing that Andrea and I are able to do this show at all. We're very glad that we're able to leave a historic record of the events that have transpired over the last few years.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm not confident in our ability to do that in the years to come, should Trump remain in office. I think we'll move much closer to being the sort of traditional autocracy with state censorship, with manipulation of social media monopolies to block information from the public. A lot of potentially terrible things can happen, so don't take any rights for granted in that respect. So, in other news, since last week, which is about a century ago in Trump time, we have the vice presidential pick and it is Kamala Harris. And so, Andrea wanted to share some thoughts on that, yeah?

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. Some good news. I finally won something. And what I'm referring to is that, on January 4th, 2019. You all remember 2019, it was last decade. But as of January 4th, 2019, we were coming straight off of the high of the blue wave of the 2018 midterms. We had this great bright future ahead of us. This was before Nancy Pelosi broke our hearts and said no to impeachment, even though we all had organized and showed up in that blue wave, demanding accountability. So January 4th, 2019 was a relatively more innocent time in our nation.

Sarah Kendzior:

No, it was the shutdown dude. We were in the shutdown. Don't forget that. I mean, in retrospect it seems innocent because it was pre-pandemic, but anyway, continue, continue.

Andrea Chalupa:

We're still in a shut down because Donald Trump failed to avoid a pandemic-

Sarah Kendzior:

That was the prelude to the current catastrophe. But go ahead. Sorry to interrupt.

Andrea Chalupa:

On the January 4th, 2019 episode, titled, Cabinet Of Horse-

Sarah Kendzior:

See? Shutdown. Sorry. [laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

We should call this episode Cabinet of Horrors Part Two. So, on that episode, I came out swinging with an extremely early endorsement of Kamala Harris. And a lot of the points I made in my original endorsement stand today over my excitement for her being the vice president pick and how historic that is. And just to show you how early I was on this endorsement, I didn't even know how to pronounce her name properly. Obviously, I've worked to correct that. But we are going to play an excerpt of that endorsement because it stands with everything I want to say today about how extraordinary this is that she is on this ticket. And we all have to fight like hell to make sure that she is the next Vice President of the United States.

[begin excerpt]

Andrea Chalupa:

Again, in 2020, don't vote for a savior figure. Politicians are deeply flawed, just like we're all deeply flawed and nobody's going to save us. We're going to save ourselves. And with that said, I do want to say that I'm buying up all the merchandise and I'm buying up all the fan pages and I'm going to go all in very heavily on—because I have a good instinct about this—I am all for Kamala Harris. I'm all for Kamala Harris. And I'm going to go on record early. I know. I'm all in and here's why. Because, here are the very compelling reasons I think Kamala has to, at a minimum, just be on the ticket, VP or president. It doesn't matter.

Andrea Chalupa:

Kamala first and foremost, she is from Northern California, which is the Rebel Alliance like in Star Wars. Northern California is so progressive and forward thinking, it leads the rest of the country forward. We're all behind Northern California. She is from Oakland, born and raised in Oakland. Oakland is the center of everything good right now. In New York City, they're selling T-shirts that say "Oakland". That's like the big artistic and activist moment that Oakland is having right now, culturally in America. She was the Attorney General and a Senator of California, which is the fifth largest economy, now bigger than Britain. So it's practically being a leader of a significant influential country. Okay? So that's enough experience to be leader of the free world.

Andrea Chalupa:

The problem is that Democrats often overlook talent coming from California because they're slaves to the electoral map. But look at Republicans. Republicans elected two presidents from California, Reagan and Nixon, and they did just fine with the electoral map. So we really have to give California a chance and not take it for granted. It's the most populous state in the union. Californians happen to be everywhere. They'll be electrified. They'll be activated, wherever they are, across the union. So as long as you have good, strong messaging, good, strong, progressive values in platform, a 50 state strategy—because there's progressive everywhere, everywhere—then someone like Kamala Harris stands a very strong chance. And yes, she's not perfect, but she is a fighter. She's done some brilliant fact checking and Senate hearings that you could do a wonderful compilation of how much she's sliced into people in the Senate hearings, that would go viral.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so, I'm really excited about her. Just to give an example of what a fighter she is, she refused to give a cop killer the death penalty, even after Senator Dianne Feinstein at the time called her out for it at the cop's funeral. Thousands of police stood up and applauded that, she would not back down. She does not believe in the death penalty in that case. Kamala Harris is somebody that stands by her values. Yes, she's made mistakes. Yes, there's room for evolution, improvement, like there is for all of us.

Andrea Chalupa:

I just think, especially being a woman of color, it's the women of color who are a major part of the dam that are keeping fascism from flooding America right now. It's not like the pundits on TV. It's not Steve Schmidt and David Frum and other so-called “ally” Republicans who get—like Joe Scarborough. It's not up to Joe and Mika to determine who our Democratic challenger is going to be. They're not the ones who are going to be driving relentlessly day in and day out people to the polls. It's Black women who are going to be doing that. So it's like, I just think Kamala Harris is somebody that if she were a man, she would be spoken about more seriously as a serious threat. She has even more experience right now than Obama had when he ran for office. I think that she's a major threat. I think she's inspiring and tough and I would love to see her as President of the United States. But unfortunately, since she's a woman, they're going to be settling for her to be a VP, but she should be president.

[end excerpt]

Andrea Chalupa:

What's really interesting is that in the reporting, Bernie Sanders is coming out and saying that he really wanted her to be the VP pick; that was his top choice. That's really interesting that that's coming out. Kamala is the number one most liberal Senator in the US Senate, according to govtrack.us, which has a ranking on this. She even is more liberal in the Senate than Bernie Sanders. So when you see the Bernie or Bust people not wanting to vote, or trying to push a third candidate or whatever they do—some of them have a reputation of being petulant when they don't get their way—remind them that Kamala Harris is even more liberal than Bernie Sanders, according to her voting record in the Senate. We can link to that.

Andrea Chalupa:

I also want to go through some of the highlights of her foreign policy positions based on an interview she did with the council on foreign relations.

Andrea Chalupa:

This is significant because people on the left have to embrace foreign policy. We have to understand that we can't just fix the problems here at home; we have to work to confront dictatorship abroad because in the 21st century, corruption anywhere is corruption everywhere. These fancy international accounting firms and banks that launder money, they work across borders. These oligarchies buy up wealth in capitals around the world. They launder their money to properties around the world. Donald Trump's properties are a big Russian money laundering operation, essentially. There's been lots of reporting on that and we'll link to that in the show notes. So we need strong foreign policy to protect our interests here at home.

Andrea Chalupa:

In the 21st century, foreign policy is domestic policy and domestic policy is foreign policy. So where does the very liberal Kamala Harris stand on foreign policy? So we'll go through some highlights based on her interview with the Council on Foreign Relations. Kamala Harris wants to rejoin the Paris Agreement, adding that the US should invest heavily in clean energy, R & D and advanced energy storage and bringing the transformative technologies that have already been developed right here in the US, to scale around the world. She pledges to support humanitarian aid and support to countries harmed by Kremlin interference or aggression, like Venezuela and Ukraine. "And unlike the current occupant of the White House, I will consistently stand up to Putin in defense of democratic values, human rights, and the international rule of law." Kamala Harris pledges to stand up to China saying, "Under my administration, we will cooperate with China on global issues like climate change, but we won't allow human rights abuses to go unchecked. The United States must reclaim our own moral authority and work with like-minded nations to stand up forcefully for human rights in China and around the world."

Andrea Chalupa:

Kamala Harris wants to establish a plan with experts to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan. That's a foreign policy priority of hers. She wants to rejoin the Iran Nuclear Deal and hold Iran accountable. She voted to end US support for the Saudi led war in Yemen, which has driven the world's worst humanitarian crisis, including a man made famine. She calls to fundamentally reevaluate the US relationship with Saudi Arabia. Thank God. The US has to cut off ties with Saudi Arabia, for obvious reasons. They killed a journalist that lived on US soil. They killed one of our own at the Washington Post. So there's going to be more of that if we don't cut off ties with Saudi Arabia. She supports a two state solution for Israel and Palestine. She calls for the US to build strong diplomatic and economic ties across Africa or China and Russia will continue to aggressively expand their interest across the continent, posing human rights threats there. And for trade agreements like the TPP, Harris says she wants pro-labor, pro-environmental trade deals and to include civic organizers and labor organizers at the table in establishing international trade agreements.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, this is all great. This is all wonderful. She's ready to go, day one should she ever have to be president of the United States. And I am thrilled for October 7th, which is Kamala Harris day, where she is going to get up on that stage and Mike Pence is just going to malfunction. You're going to just see him curl up in the fetal position and it's going to be joyful to watch.

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh yeah, he has no chance. That's assuming he actually does the debate and is allowed to be left alone with a woman that is not his wife. So obstacles await for Mike Pence. I remember the day that you endorsed her because it was so early and we both switched to-

Andrea Chalupa:

It was so early! I was like, "Hey, new year, new me, Kamala endorsement."

Sarah Kendzior:

People should know we switched to Warren—or I didn't switch. I chose Warren later and then we both endorsed Warren. But at that time, I remember saying like, "my vote for president is Democratic candidate X. And for VP, it is Democratic candidate Y." Because again, it is about voting for a system of government. Harris was probably mid to highish on my list. Biden was on the lower side. It's irrelevant. It does not matter. This is the team that we need to get behind. This is the vehicle that will hopefully bring change, bring accountability, bring prosecution to the Trump administration and all of its crimes. This is something that is a necessity. This is something that should not be up for debate because if we've learned anything over the last four years, it's that if you don't prosecute and investigate these criminal Republican administrations—whether Nixon for Watergate, Reagan's administration for Iran-Contra and George H. W. Bush's role in that, the Bush administration in its illegal Wars after 9/11, the Wall Street crash—

Sarah Kendzior:

When you don't do that, you end up with all of the individuals who committed those crimes back in office, back making policies, back destroying the country together in unison. And so, they need to be brought to account. I'm hoping that her experience as a prosecutor and her strong voting record against Trump, against all of his terrible appointees who she did not want to confirm, I hope that that's an indicator that they'll have the courage and the fortitude to wage that battle because it is absolutely necessary. There is no moving on here. There is no kumbaya moment. It is impossible. We are dealing with the mafia state. We are dealing with entrenched criminality. We are dealing with sociopaths and psychopaths who have taken power, who have allowed ... I mean, I'm losing count of the number of Americans we've allowed to die. 170,000 from coronavirus alone, which could have been prevented. Children in camps. I mean, it goes on and on.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is not a normal time, even by the standards of prior corrupt, GOP administrations. That was a predecessor, that set the standard. But this is unprecedented. We have a Kremlin asset. We have been hijacked from within. We're going to have failures of intelligence, of diplomacy, of every facet of our international relations from here on in. it's going to take a very long time to rebuild those relationships of trust abroad. It's going to take a very long time to rebuild our institutions here and that's if Biden and Harris manage to get into office and are able to start pursuing those tasks. So that said, I encourage you, vote for them. Vote for them, vote Democratic down the ticket. Then at least you have a shot of turning this around and should they get in, push them on this.

Sarah Kendzior:

My concern with Kamala is not any of the bullshit that's being pandered around the press, where they're questioning her legitimacy as a candidate. They've revived birtherism to target her. It's not her qualifications, it's not her intelligence. That is all great. I'm worried about what positions she will

endorse and under what kind of pressure. I am a bit worried that she and Biden will do the thing that Democratic administrations have always done, which is turn the other way and try to befriend people who are acting as hostile, murderous enemies. They can't do that. And I hope they realize, they have the support of the majority of the American public behind them if they go after these criminal elites. I think Americans are completely fed up. They are fed up with this entrenched corruption. They are fed up with the loss of life and the apathy, and even glee, to which that loss of life is greeted. And so, I think, make that known to them, make that known to your own Democratic representative as these months go on, that we are not settling; we are settling the score.

Andrea Chalupa:

America is such a weird country where the minority can hold the majority hostage. That's what we have here. It's just so bizarre that we're stuck in this situation, but I think that's always important to remember, that the majority of Americans want to move forward with progressive values, with building a fairer union for all, a freer and fairer society. We want environmental justice. We want social justice. We want to say Black Lives Matter and to see it practiced across the justice system and in schools and in the healthcare industry. That's who we are and we're just being held hostage by a rabid, racist, genocidal minority party that's completely devoured itself and keeps mutating like a virus and getting worse and worse and more destructive as time goes on.

Andrea Chalupa:

So the power that's reliable power is grassroots power. So we're going to elect the Democrats we need up and down the ticket in November. We're going to do what it takes to secure our vote. We're going to show up in person to vote early, mindful of protecting ourselves and others from spreading COVID-19. We're going to bring snacks and a lawn chair and comfortable shoes like Michelle Obama told us to do in her powerful address at the DNC last night. We're going to make sure that our family and friends, the people we talk to on the phone, the people we chat with online, our neighbors, that they all have plans to do the same, because we're going to get through this through community, people talking to other people and making sure that everyone has a plan to show up safely to polls and vote early.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yes, you can request a mail in ballot, but it's better still to show up and vote in person if you can, if you can. If there's a serious issue with your health, obviously request a mail-in ballot and help others who need to do so as well, and make sure you follow it closely because we're at war now. And they're looking for any sort of reason to discount your ballot. They're trying to find any T you did not cross, any I you did dot, to try and say, Oh, well, this might not count. Republicans rely on voter disenfranchisement. They always have. And so we have to really fight like hell and make a plan now to secure our vote. It's in our hands. And whoever wins in November, we have to continue showing up for each other, showing up for our community. The Gaslit Nation Action Guide lists all these great ways how you can get involved in your community.

Andrea Chalupa:

If there's something you want to see in your country, go out and build it. Do not let these idiots terrorize you because terror is all they really have. My grandfather, who survived being tortured by Stalin during Stalin's purges—and before that, he survived Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine—one thing my grandfather would say when I was growing up is, “doubt is the devil. The only power the devil has is to scare you.” The only power the devil has is to scare you. When you feel terrorized by what's going on in

this country, understand that that's what they want. That's a deliberate strategy to demoralize you and break down your defenses, your ability to read through the news-speak, all of it. They want you to feel like there's no hope. Dictators, autocrats—wannabe autocrats—rely on taking away your hope.

Andrea Chalupa:

We see it playing out in Belarus today, where all these people filled with hope are taking to the street. And the dictator is saying, you're not getting a new election, over my dead body. So he's trying to take away their hope so he can stay in power and continue to enrich himself and his family. So here in the US, when they're trying to terrorize us, it's a deliberate strategy. So you've got to fight back by understanding your power comes not from fear, but from hope. And you have to keep hope alive. So go to the Gaslit Nation Action Guide, because it's about hope. It's about finding your hope. We have all of these guides to reclaim your hope. Part of that, when you fight for your hope, when you fight for your mind, you unleash your creativity and you start building things again.

Andrea Chalupa:

All of us in the coming weeks ahead, in the months ahead, the year is going to drag on, so many horrible things are going to happen between now and the election. You can count on it. And so, what you need to do, is hold onto your hope, unleash your creativity and build, build, build, build. All of us right now have to be in a mindset of creativity and a mindset of building. Go out and create something. Whether it's a poem, it's a song, it's a letter to an old friend, do something to get in that mindset of hope and creativity. And from there, you're going to get all these other ideas blossoming of how you want to improve the community where you live, maybe a referendum you want to pass in your state to secure your elections, or maybe a mission that you want to take to make sure that your house or the building where you're living is incredibly green, and fight to spread that awareness where you live locally.

Andrea Chalupa:

All of us now, the answer to the terror that these wannabe autocrats are deliberately unleashing on us, is to reclaim our hope and to be in a mindset of creativity and building. You should feel that energy inside of you of wanting to build and build and build. That's where we have to be right now, is unleashing our creativity in the face of their terrorism.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. And we need to look at these events that are transpiring with imagination, and that necessitates having a dark imagination so that we can see the possibilities ahead. And this is something that has frustrated me enormously about the election integrity situation and especially the role of the post office and Trump's attacks on the post office, because it was utterly predictable that he was going to do this. I mean, we did an episode on this in March, and I warned specifically that, because of coronavirus making it necessary for people to vote by mail, which was not as common before, of course he's going to attack the post office. People act like this is some sort of amazing insight on my part. It is not at all. I mean, if you want to predict what Trump is going to do, you just look at the mechanisms that would allow his opponents to gain any kind of leverage or have any kind of accountability. And then you look at how he's going to destroy them.

Sarah Kendzior:

So, you know that if his strategy in the past was to hack machines, which seems to be something that people are finally admitting happened in 2016—Andrea and I called for a vote audit back then because

we believed that that had occurred, in particular because Harry Reid had warned about it—when they don't have the machines, they're going to work to sabotaging voting by mail. And that means they're going to target the postal service, which is also not surprising because the GOP has been targeting the postal service for about four decades. People like the Koch brothers poured an enormous amount of money and energy into that effort. This is just another government institution that they have been determined to destroy. So, the Democrats should have been prepared for this and they absolutely should not have gone on vacation.

Sarah Kendzior:

Pelosi had to be dragged by her fellow House members back into holding hearings and holding Congressional sessions just like she had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to impeach. I mean, it's absolutely maddening. One encouraging thing is that one of the other early people to warn about the attempted destruction of the postal service was Joe Biden. He warned about this months ago. And just in a sign of our political culture, one of those smirking political fact-checking sites wrote an article saying that Joe Biden had a wild conspiracy theory that Trump was going to destroy or attempt to destroy the postal service. They rated this claim as a lie and they mocked him for it. They had to issue a correction saying, yes, this is indeed true and Trump himself has admitted to it. And it's like, when are you going to catch on? When are people going to catch on?

Sarah Kendzior:

When you want to figure out what Trump is going to do next, you just think, what is the worst possible thing that they could do? It doesn't matter if it's legal. It doesn't matter if it's moral. It doesn't matter if it's never been done before. That is the thing that they will do. Let your mind go to that place. I'm glad to see that Biden's mind went there and he also has been bringing up, early, Trump's, very—not even likely—Trump's refusal to concede. There's just no way that Trump is going to concede this selection. He seems somewhat prepared, but Congress is not. It's been just another dereliction of duty on Pelosi's part, just continuous refusal to use the powers of the House, to use the power of the purse, to use inherent contempt.

Sarah Kendzior:

In last week's episode, we talked about Ted Lieu and his long running attempt to use inherent contempt to force people who are subpoenaed to show up, to force people to hand over documents. And at that point, he was kind of throwing his hands in the air and tweeting like, “yeah, nothing we can do”, without naming the problem, which is Pelosi and the House leadership prohibiting these Democratic Representatives who do want to do their job from doing it. That seems to have changed because enough of these Representatives came out and they demanded that the House return from its recess, and they demanded that hearings about the postal service be held and that Louis DeJoy be subpoenaed. I'm not quite sure he's subpoenaed yet. I think he was merely invited. That's not good enough. They need to go with full force.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think that the reason these Representatives did that, is because their constituents—who are not getting their mail. They're not getting vital things through the mail, like medication and food, and as well as ballots for voting. They put pressure on these Representatives. And so, that works. That's the grassroots power that Andrea was referring to before. So never give up on that. Never be deferential to your Representatives. They are public servants; they are there to serve you. So make those demands and they

might actually listen, and then they will make demands of leadership. And then we may finally get something done.

Sarah Kendzior:

So I'll let you respond in a sec Andrea, but I just want to bring up that this weekend, on Saturday, August 22nd, there are going to be protests to protect the postal service. One of the people organizing these protests is Walter Shaub, the ethics expert, a former government official. He is on Twitter. He's been extremely informative about this. I urge you to follow him and I urge you to support the postal service, support them in a meaningful way. Don't go the Pelosi route, which is "give your mailman a flower". That's literally her answer to this. That's what she said should be done to solve this constitutional crisis. Demand more, demand subpoenas, demand your mail. Demand this institution, which is a beloved and necessary part of American life, be protected in a meaningful way. Show up. We are one community and the postal service, I think, represents that in a way few American institutions do.

Andrea Chalupa:

One thing I love about Michelle Obama's speech last night is how it, I don't want to say clarified, but it built on her 2016 Democratic Convention speech, where she famously said, "When they go low, we go high." I think some people could interpret that as saying that being the bigger person means that you tolerate this abuse that goes on and you don't touch it. That's certainly how Pelosi has been carrying herself in Congress. Remember early in 2019, when she shocked us, when she said she wasn't going to impeach Trump because he's not worth it. And we were like, what are you talking about? You have children in cages, you have a state sanctioned pedophile ring going on at the border because of Steven Miller's inhumane border crisis that he deliberately created to terrorize and destroy innocent lives and to destroy asylum seekers. It's all deliberate state terror, and you're not going to impeach this monster?

Andrea Chalupa:

You could think... one interpretation could be Nancy Pelosi saying, he's just not worth it, of her taking the higher road. And when Trump goes low, we go high. I think, with Michelle Obama last night, when she built on that, she was like, listen, when I said, when they go low, we go high. What I meant was, you don't use the enemy's disgusting, snarling, noise-making because you're just going to get drowned out in that racket. But you do enforce strong boundaries. Empathy cannot exist without setting and enforcing strong boundaries. And that is what public servants like Pelosi must do. They must set and enforce strong boundaries, like impeaching the most corrupt president in the history of our country. Like arresting his major donor, who is now deliberately, deliberately destroying our US Postal Service in a way that could profit him directly because of the businesses that he's invested in. And also, profit him by keeping his friend Trump in power. So you arrest someone like that.

Andrea Chalupa:

Tampering with the mail is a federal crime. You have Representatives in Congress who want the FBI to investigate this. If this were a Black woman who did this, she would be arrested. We know she would be. You cannot have democracy, you cannot have empathy, without setting and enforcing strong boundaries. And we have example and example of Pelosi refusing to set and enforce strong boundaries and her members—not just AOC and the Squad, but a lot of these white men from rural and swing states like Tennessee and Virginia and blue states that are just recently blue, like Virginia—calling her out and saying, my God, do your job. Do your job. And so, I think whatever happens in November, what we all

have to be set on, is changing the entire culture in Washington, where we fight for policies of empathy. And in order to do so, you set and enforce strong boundaries.

Sarah Kendzior:

Absolutely. I'll never forget that week in March—in March, 2019—because that was such a pivotal week. That was the same week that the judge who had been threatened in the Manafort case had declared that Manafort, a blood money criminal, had led a "Otherwise blameless life." It's the same week that Bill Barr shut down the Mueller probe, the probe that was already deeply flawed. We were watching things collapse around us and then Pelosi comes out and she says, very clearly, "I'm going to make some news. We're not impeaching." We're not impeaching no matter what.

Sarah Kendzior:

The Mueller Report, emoluments, children in cages, being a Kremlin asset in the White House, abusing the pardon power, none of that is worth impeaching. And when she said, "he's not worth it", what she meant is, you're not worth it. Americans, this country, is not worth it. This Constitution is not worth it. Your rights, your safety, your freedom is not worth it. It means nothing to her and she has made that abundantly clear over the last 18 months. This is not a popular thing for me to point out and believe me, I wish it weren't true. I wish this weren't true about her, because if she were a different kind of Speaker, there would be people alive today and we would be in a safer and stronger position.

Sarah Kendzior:

But I think, because of the power of the blue wave and the anxiety that people had felt for very good reason throughout 2016, through 2018, people saw in her what they wanted to see instead of what was actually there. When she clapped for Trump, a lot of people thought that that was ironic. It was not ironic. When Trump was adamantly supporting her to be the speaker of the House, that was not ironic either. That was not trolling. When she jokes with Bill Barr about the prospect of Barr being arrested and treats it like a little joke and a little game, that's not a slight; that is complicity. And you can look back and I think in a later episode, we'll do this. We'll do a little career retrospective of all of these collaborations that she has had, all these compromises that she has made, with the worst of the Republican Party.

Sarah Kendzior:

Whether it's the DCC taking an unparalleled donation from Len Blavatnik, a Russian oligarch partner, a partner of sanctioned oligarchs who pumped money foremost into the GOP and into Trump's partners but also into the Democrats in 2019 and suddenly, those hearings and those investigations stopped. You can look at her role in pardoning Sholom Rubashkin, who had a migrant labor, slave abuse farm, basically, in Iowa. She joined a number of the absolute worst Republicans, white supremacists, like Steve King, people like Bill Barr, even Brett Kavanaugh, was involved in this to get this guy pardoned.

Sarah Kendzior:

This was one of Trump's many horrific pardons, and she signed on. She wrote a letter, voluntarily, over her own will, joining along with them. She of course refused to consider impeaching George W. Bush. That was slightly more understandable because that was in 2006, and there were only two years left. Unlike Trump, there wasn't really a question about whether Bush should leave office, but again, imagine if they had—

Andrea Chalupa:

I don't think that's understandable. I think George W. Bush was a war criminal and he unleashed the four horsemen of the apocalypse in Iraq and Afghanistan. So I think that was-

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes. No, I think he should have been impeached. It's more just the logic.

Andrea Chalupa:

She missed that one as well.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. She missed that one and we would be in a better position. And the Obama administration missed that one too. And they had time while they held the powers of the House, the Senate and the presidency in the Obama administration to do that and she didn't. As Andrea pointed out earlier, she refused to say that Black Lives Matter. We have a record of racism here. We have a lot of performative things like wearing kente cloth but not actually supporting policies that help disenfranchised Americans and Americans who are discriminated against. It goes on and on. We see this with the Squad, with the way that she treats these young female Representatives of color. When Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar were getting severe death threats—not just people writing nasty memes or tweeting at them, actual death threats where law enforcement had to be called in—she wouldn't condemn it, she wouldn't offer protection. She eventually did, but again, only after outcry.

Sarah Kendzior:

It is only after massive public outcry that we can get her to do anything that does not enable Trump and his cohort. That has been her record of the last 18 months and quite honestly, it is time for change obviously, in getting rid of the Trump administration, but she needs to be gone as Speaker. This is in some ways reminiscent of 1999, when the Republicans rose up against their horrific speaker, Newt Gingrich—this is a blight on the party, the postal service—and her reaction to that, her refusal to do anything, is the culmination. I think, finally, people are seeing what was there all along. And again, I wish this weren't true. I wish she had done a good job. I wish she had served her country. I wish she was the person that so many thought she was, but she's not.

Andrea Chalupa:

Right. I think for us, we keep looking for the 4D chess that random people on Twitter promise us Pelosi is playing. But when she's sitting down in an interview with Joy Reid and Pelosi, the leader of the Democratic party can't even answer why Black Lives Matter, why we have to say Black Lives Matter—and she provides an all lives matter answer—on closer examination, she's just not the right person for this moment in history. Sarah and I get attacked for this from random people online all the time, and people try to assign motives for us for why we would dare take on Nancy Pelosi. And it's very simple. It's because we want her way of doing things to be a thing of the past. We want to usher in a new culture, a progressive culture, an empathetic culture that stands up to bullies because that's the only way to manage a bully, is to set and enforce firm boundaries.

Andrea Chalupa:

So we want AOC and fresh young leaders to be the future of the party. And they're spreading. You had in Missouri, you had Lacy Clay getting voted out by a Black Lives Matter organizer, who will hopefully be joining AOC and others in Congress. And so, that's what it's about. It's about Trump-proofing and Putin-proofing our democracy. It's about ushering in, across the board, unleashing the real America, allowing the majority to have their policies and their laws and their norms in place. We're tired of being held hostage by the rabid minority in this country, the Republican party that's completely gone off an autocratic cliff, and they're proud of it. They are the party of autocrats now.

Andrea Chalupa:

And in order to do that, we have to claim our values and fight for our values and challenge ourselves to be more empathetic and challenge ourselves to set and enforce firm boundaries, because that's how we're going to make sure we never have to relive the hell of the Trump years again. Because, we promise you, the way these autocrats work is they rely on dynasties in order to stay in power and to continue to enrich themselves. Ivanka and Jared are still young. They're going to be with us for very long time, and they have the resources to hire powerhouse PR firms and to pull together these friendly "open-minded journalists" to write puff pieces about them and to do a whole rehabilitation tour where they rewrite the past, they whitewash the past, and they separate themselves in the public's mind from all the crimes committed by their administration on their watch. That is what we're ultimately up against.

Andrea Chalupa:

The only way we're going to rebuild our democracy and be resistant to the Trump Crime Family coming back to power is by furthering policies of empathy, and that requires setting and enforcing strong boundaries. Pelosi seems tone deaf to a lot of that. And so, yes, we want to stay united in this election. We want to see Democrats keep the House and take over the Senate and remove Trump's enablers from the Senate. We want to see the most progressive, most liberal Senator, Kamala Harris, serving in the White House as Biden's VP. We want all of that. We want to be united, but understand, we will end up back where we are today if we don't shift the culture in Washington and elect leaders across the Democratic party, leaders on the state level, that understand the power of empathy and the powers that are required to set and enforce strong boundaries.

Andrea Chalupa:

You need to stand up to these bullies. You need to get in their faces. You need to call them out and you need to anticipate their darkest moves because they are terrorist regimes at heart. They practice terrorism. They try to demoralize. They go low. And Pelosi just simply lacks that imagination. We want her to be a thing of the past. She can get us through this election, but ultimately we need to usher in a new future of the Democratic party.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. I mean, we are going to be living with the consequences of this election for the rest of our lives, which is one of the reasons that we're encouraging you to—despite her criticisms of other Democrats—vote for this Democratic ticket. And I think one of the biggest divides between the Pelosi-type Democrats and this new generation coming up is in fact age. It's the fact that we know, if we're in our thirties and forties, that we are living with the results of this administration, that we may be living in a fascist country or in a country torn apart by civil war, and certainly in a world destroyed by climate

change and a world in which we're going to lose a lot of our safety and, quite possibly, our freedom. We're aware of this, and we have our own children in this world and we want to change it for them.

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, that's how I've felt for a long time, that for people our age, it's kind of too late for us in terms of, well, what do we want out of life? In some sort of selfish way, some sort of personal goal away. I think the purpose of our generation is to fight for the next generation. And I think that these younger leaders, these Representatives who are in their thirties, forties, and fifties, they know that. They're fighting for their children, too. In Missouri, I voted for Cori Bush. And first I'll say that Lacy Clay was someone who called for impeachment early, who was receptive to listening about things, and so I do appreciate that he did that. But I voted for Cori Bush. My husband and I, we walked down to our polling area. We didn't think she had a chance in hell of winning. She had run before-

Andrea Chalupa:

And this is the Black Lives Matter organizer that I mentioned.

Sarah Kendzior:

Well, be careful at that. Black Lives Matter is kind of, as an organization, disliked by the Ferguson protestors. She was a Ferguson protester. She was a frontline protestor. She was somebody who got out on the streets and fought for Michael Brown and fought for Black rights and against the police brutality, which is so endemic to the St. Louis region. She's a street fighter. She's someone who will get out there and get in your face and fight for you. Did I think she would win? No. I was pleasantly surprised. I was honestly shocked. But when I cast my vote, when I was thinking, well, who, who do I vote for here? I thought, you know what? Who will understand the fight that my children will experience? Who would fight for my kids? Who would just really get it, on a gut level? It's Cori Bush.

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, Lacy Clay has done some good things, but he's an older guy. He's from a political dynasty. I don't think he feels the sort of incredible raw anxiety of our generation, which has had to live with the continual destruction of institutions for our entire life, and then with existential crises, with climate change, with pandemics. We're not protected, yet we are trying to protect our own children. I looked at her, and my husband and I were like, yeah, we're going to do it. We're going to vote for her, and I think a lot of people felt that way voting for AOC, voting for Ilhan Omar, voting for Katie Porter.

Sarah Kendzior:

We see people who are struggling in the way that we have been struggling, just as a generation. And then we see this older generation, that just seems absolutely apathetic to our suffering and pain. Unfortunately, Joe Biden has made some missteps here in the way he speaks about younger people. Hopefully he won't do that again, because I do think that, obviously, he's an empathetic person. But there's a gap there and it really comes through. You see it with Beto O'Rourke, you see it with Julian Castro. You see kind of just a recognition that we're in for a very hard road and we need to fight very, very hard and be incredibly realistic about what's ahead, while also being idealistic. Aiming high, aiming for a better world, aiming for a restructuring of our society and getting rid of these empty prestige institutions, getting rid of this elite criminal impunity that has destroyed this country from within.

Sarah Kendzior:

You have to be brave to wage that fight because you're going up against the worst people in the world. You're going up against plutocrats and oligarchs and the mafia and entrenched criminality. And it's been dangerous. I mean, one of the reasons Andrea and I were so angry—and are—in the beginning of this episode, especially, is our lives have been threatened so many times. And the lives of our loved ones, our families, our friends have been threatened so many times. And those threats have either been viewed with apathy by the leadership of our own party or people from there have helped contribute to that culture of threat against us.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so, I think there's just an incredible vulnerability that we face when we put ourselves out there and critique these people who are so much wealthier than we are, so much more connected than we are. We're citizens, and we want Representatives who fight for fellow citizens and who see us as fully human. And I think that these elites within the Democratic Party, and obviously within the Republican party, they don't see us as fully human. And that dehumanization, that broad humanization of the American public, the culmination of that is the Trump administration and we need an overhaul of this entire system of governments in this political culture.

Andrea Chalupa:

And we can do it by welcoming greater diversity, and socioeconomic diversity included, and all of these fresh, young, forward thinking voices. It's about shifting the culture to be progressive, to be self reliant. It's about accepting our own power wherever we live and just accepting the fact that we're far more powerful than we realize. And we have to use that power and stay vigilant and be engaged and be creative and build something. Build something. It's about all of us getting together in our communities and building something, leaving something of value behind. And that's what we're all going to be doing together, long past November.

Andrea Chalupa:

We have to, or we'll be right back here, but possibly even worse. Okay? Because we're already on life support as it is, as a democracy. So, I wanted to also ask you Sarah, because you mentioned something that I thought was interesting, I wasn't aware of. The young woman that one in Missouri, who's going to hopefully be in the US Congress, she was a Ferguson organizer, but you said that there's a big difference locally on the ground where you live in St. Louis, between being a Ferguson organizer and a Black Lives Matter organizer.

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, I've definitely written about this in articles. There's one called "Ferguson, Inc." and a few others, written around the time when I was covering Ferguson, but I wrote about it also in *Hiding In Plain Sight*. A lot of outside NGOs, protestors, media, people, et cetera, came into St. Louis County, came into a region that they barely knew and then exploited the situation. I don't think all of them did it intentionally. It's not like they came here necessarily looking for money and fame. I think that the way the media covered it contributed to that. But a lot of people who are not from St Louis or Ferguson became associated with the region and Black lives Matter, both as an organization formally but also just as sort of like a broad banner, became distinct from the Ferguson battles. I wrote about this in my book. Somebody who I knew who unfortunately died—he was murdered, he was shot to death and then his car was set on fire.

Sarah Kendzior:

Sorry. Darren Seals. He got in a fight with a prominent Black Lives Matter activist—kind of a slap, not quite a fist fight—because of the feeling of exploitation of the region, because of this feeling that Black Lives Matter came in and hijacked resources that should have gone to the long suffering Black communities of St. Louis who were spending all of this time in the streets. And so, yeah, I mean, I don't know how Cori Bush nowadays would define herself, but I certainly know that among the activists who are out night after night in Ferguson, they see their movement as distinct from Black Lives Matter. I mean, they certainly share the same goals, drawing attention to police brutality, to systemic racism; they're aligned in many of their positions. It's more of just, don't come in and exploit and capitalize on our pain.

Sarah Kendzior:

It wasn't just like Black Lives Matter that did this. The national media did it. Government officials did it. Ferguson became viewed as a hashtag. It became viewed as this sort of abstract phenomena, whereas on the ground, people were going through a tremendous amount of pain and then posttraumatic stress disorder afterwards. It's incredibly common here. And meanwhile, you saw people making bank that didn't live here and didn't have to live in the aftermath. Hopefully, a lot of these feuds—I mean, I think to some degree, people have put them behind them because we're all fighting against this broader menace of autocracy, which is of course intertwined with a culture of white supremacy, with a culture of police brutality. It's all a part of the same story, but yeah, it's definitely a distinction to note.

Andrea Chalupa:

Great. Thank you for that. So, Cori Bush is who we're talking about. She's a registered nurse, a pastor, and an activist from St. Louis, Missouri. And she just defeated 10-term incumbent Lacy Clay for the House race there. And if she wins, she'll be the first African American woman to serve in the-

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh, she's won dude. It's a Democratic race. She's like AOC. She's in. A Republican hasn't won this area—I mean, good, Lord. Before Lacy clay, it was his father. The Clay Family has been in this position since 1968. I don't think there's a way in hell that she's not going to be the Representative. It's basically a done deal. So I think Cori's in and I think she's going to bring the fire, should we actually survive to January. That's a good thing.

Andrea Chalupa:

That's fantastic. That's what we need. We need more people like Cori Bush entering the system and cleaning it out. That is how we're going to, little by little, year after year, election cycle after election cycle, build a more progressive union so this can never happen again. We're not just trying to defeat Trump in November, 2020, we're trying to defeat Ivanka Trump in 2024, 2028. That's it. Okay? And we do that by building a more progressive union, election cycle after election cycle.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, I wanted to go out with some music from the Belarus protesters on the ground who are still organizing. There are strikes being organized across Belarus today, where workers are striking from factories, where workers for the state propaganda TV services, they're also striking. Artists and theaters are striking. It's this massive nationwide strike across Belarus, along with ongoing peaceful marches. And

to lead us out of this week's episode, we're going to play a clip, which we'll link to in our show notes, you can watch the video. This is a really inspiring video of musicians on the street marching while playing music from a Russian punk rock anthem that came out in the 1980s and was adopted as a protest anthem by the post-Soviet world. We'll link to some information on that as well.

Andrea Chalupa:

Here we are, musicians on the street, marching in Belarus

[anthem]

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. And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the Palm oil industry, donate to the orangutan project at theorangutanproject.org. Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon, it keeps us going.

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