

Gaslit Nation Transcript
24 February 2021
Texas Republican Massacre
<https://www.patreon.com/posts/texas-republican-47937205>

Music Clip from Breathwork by Sidibe (<https://lnk.to/SidibeBreathwork>)

Sidibe:

I just wanna take it in and let it out
And give it up and leave it all to breathwork
All I wanna do is relate
Forget all the plans that I had made
Beauty all around you
Let it surround you
And leave it all to breathwork

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

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

Sarah Kendzior:

And this is *Gaslit Nation*, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world.

Andrea Chalupa:

The song that you heard at the start of our show is called *Breathwork*, and it is by the artist Sidibe. "Sidibe is an independent artist, five octave vocalist, songwriter and guitarist with roots in Louisiana and Senegal. The singular tones and vibrations of her voice have led to descriptions that include otherworldly and ethereal. Her music defies genres as she effortlessly weaves classic and contemporary elements into her romantic musings. Sidibe's role as executive producer and her enduring collaborative relationship with Nico Stadi and Warryn Campbell have brought a sense of continuity to her music while still allowing for expansion. The fruit of this creative relationship includes four self released EPs, an exclusive Japan album, song placement, and a Prince connection. Sidibe's 2016 EP, *You Got the Luck*, garnered the attention of Prince who selected her song, *I'm Only Dreaming*, for his personally curated *Purple Pick of The Week* playlist. As it turns out, this was Prince's last cosign before his departure."

Andrea Chalupa:

"She is currently working on new music and preparing for the release of her next EP." Sidibe sent us her recently released single *Breathwork*, and she writes, "I've been practicing holotropic breathwork for years. It has been a transformative experience that has led to so many insights about my place in this universe. When we breathe together with intention, the synchronization creates a powerful bond and awakens our awareness of belonging. The past year has been challenging on so many levels. Practicing

breathwork helped me through some dark times, and really opened my heart to deep feelings of love and unity. Writing about that outpouring of love seemed natural. Breathwork is an expression of my need and desire to relate to other people. That is one of the reasons I love making music; it gives me a way to infiltrate other people's lives and connect with them. When people listen to the song, I hope they'll feel connected to me too."

Andrea Chalupa:

That is beautiful. You can find her on Twitter @sidibe. That's @sidibe, and at her website, www.sidibeofficial.com. And she's also on YouTube under Sidibeofficial. Thank you so much Sidibe for sharing your beautiful music with us. We are so incredibly grateful for the reminder of the importance for all of us to take time during this time in collective trauma to breathe, and heal ourselves, and in doing so, we help heal others. So I wanted to also give a shout out to a Gaslit Nation listener on Twitter—you know who you are. You, like me, are an enormous Taylor Swift fan.

Andrea Chalupa:

And I promised you over Twitter the story of how Taylor Swift—whose albums, Folklore and Evermore, have been helping me during this rough time—how Taylor Swift inspired Mr. Jones. And I think this is a story for anybody. Right now, an important reminder that everything is awful. We're staring into the dark abyss, and the abyss just keeps screaming back, and it's a time of just...you can just get lost in the emptiness and the darkness and feel really dead inside. It's the pandemic, it's the mass death, it's the horrific corruption—everything we go into on the show—and of course the winter.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so I want to encourage everyone to listen to this story as well on the importance of making art and the healing power of making art and just to get your hands messy and make whatever art you want. Make bad art, make good art, just make art because it's saving my life right now and reminding myself to be creative, even when I don't feel like it. So without further ado, here's how Taylor Swift—her DNA, her creative DNA—is part of the Mr. Jones story: I was watching old archive footage of the Soviet Union, and how masculine it was. It was all these big steel statues of the ideal Soviet man. It was these rapid modernization projects, like building dams with all this archive footage of the earth exploding. They were just going to reshape the earth how they wanted to and build modernity. And as part of that, they were just going to wipe millions of people off the face of the planet as they did in Stalin's genocide of Ukrainians and other groups. And that was just totally unnatural, of course. And, reflecting on how masculine and unnatural that was, I was going for a run while listening to Taylor Swift's album 1989, which was the exact opposite of course the Soviet Union.

Andrea Chalupa:

And it struck me how unapologetically girly she was. Her music made me want to dance on a bed, wearing a side ponytail and singing into a hairbrush. And then that got me thinking about how ancient civilizations worship the Goddess and fertility and how women giving birth must have been like a supernatural event for early civilizations. And then that led me to researching the oldest myths about Mesopotamian Goddesses, and one of those myths created the structure of the story of Ada Brooks, the journalist in my film who is this Mesopotamian Goddess as based on a real myth, who sends her king lover on a quest in the underworld, and that is Gareth Jones. And so throughout Mr. Jones, even in this final cut, there's little threads, little nods, to the Mesopotamian Goddess as inspired by the music of Taylor Swift.

Andrea Chalupa:

That's a big messy collage of influences and that is in tribute to a Gaslit Nation listener who I was chatting with on twitter, and all Taylor Swift fans, and anybody who wants to just understand that art is a big, beautiful mess. It's a collaging of all the things you love. So I encourage everybody to go down that rabbit hole yourself and just start with something random, just like I just described this random journey of influences, and just see what that cooks up for you. And as dark as things are right now, art therapy is real therapy and it does save lives. It does help you. It's helping me right now and I hope you'll join me in being creative in making a big mess of what you love.

Sarah Kendzior:

All right, Andrea. Well thank you for outing yourself as a Swifty. I hope people are not casually cruel in the name of being honest.

Andrea Chalupa:

Why would I out myself? I'm proud! We've just never had this conversation before and I'm grateful for it. And I'm proud. So continue.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes, I will. So, as we said, this is a dark time. Of course, it's good that people are able to still find any kind of light, any kind of comfort, because we're now approaching the one year anniversary of the pandemic. People have been talking about the pandemic wall for a while, but just judging on conversations we're seeing nationwide, on social media, among people and what's left of that phenomenon known as "real life", this seems to be the week that the country collectively hit that wall. We are now at half a million Americans dead. If they were to build a cemetery for all of those victims, it could fill an entirely new Arlington National Cemetery. If the Vietnam War Memorial were a memorial for COVID-19 victims, it would be 87 feet high—the size of a nine story building. So part of my struggle is just how do we even process this? How do we talk about this? How do we grieve this, especially when both the virus and the response to it seems to be often bringing out the worst in people? And then how do we grieve also when we're encouraged as Americans to cover up our emotions and to carry on?

Sarah Kendzior:

And I see that over and over again, people expressing their guilt about not meeting their quota of productivity, about not feigning optimism in the future, and I feel like this push to feign happiness in the face of a global plague that has destroyed our economy and, of course, is also abetted by white supremacy, by a recent attempted violent coup, by the rise of autocracy worldwide—this push to feign happiness is an extension of the myth of American exceptionalism. And we're not exceptional here, we're suffering, and we're exceptionally bad at acknowledging that suffering and accepting that that suffering exists. There's a deep-seated fear in admitting any vulnerability, any pain, in public because it could mean that you may be rejected and even materially punished. You could be stripped of your job, deemed someone who isn't a team player, you could be deemed someone whose first fealty is to faking it for the sake of profit.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so, I see a lot of people from outside America commenting on this, on sort of the strangeness of the American reaction to COVID. And they don't just mean the people who, they still don't think it's real or they're refusing to wear a mask although I think a lot of those same fears structure that reaction too. I

think they're watching a country try to plaster on a happy face out of fear of not doing so. What outsiders mistake for sanguinity is really precarity, and what people see as apathy is actually a mask covering utter desperation. And I think people get to a point where it's impossible to cover that up but my question is, why should people cover this up? It's normal to grieve. It's normal to mourn. It's normal to feel bad for the suffering of people you don't know, and it's good to want to help people who are suffering. And we've had four years of a pathological liar, sociopath, murderous president and administration, one that outright said, "let them be infected".

Sarah Kendzior:

And I think while everyone knows this—they see the senseless brutality of this, they know how many of these deaths could have been prevented—the gut reaction deep inside is just astounding fear; fear that people can be that cruel and that powerful at the same time; fear that they got away with it, which so far, they have; and fear, of course, that they're going to come back either literally, as we've noted many times, you see the same malicious actors inhabiting multiple administrations holding multiple positions of power. You see the media buffering them, inviting them on to meet the press, pushing Big Lie after Big Lie, but it's also just a general culture of cruelty that can seep into any avenue of power and to democratic avenues of power as well.

Sarah Kendzior:

And you just kind of see it—I hate to say—in the Biden administration's reaction to this crisis. Obviously Biden understands the pain and the suffering and the grief. He's not like Trump. He's not exalting in it, he's not encouraging it, and they are doing a vaccine rollout that you can see from the graphs of how it accelerated as soon as Biden got into office, has been, I mean, certainly compared to Trump, it's been good.

Sarah Kendzior:

But the broader suffering remains and the material suffering is really not being remedied at all. And I'm very fearful, because this is beginning to feel to me like 2008 and 2009, when Obama came in after George W. Bush and Wall Street crashed the economy. And instead of punishing the perpetrators, making sure that they couldn't do this again, they had kind of, not the Big Lie but the Small Lie—the streamlining kind of lie. The most blatant example of this is what's happened with the \$2,000 checks that Biden as well as other Democratic candidates campaigned on. In the case of Georgia, the campaign for Warnock and Ossoff was literally, "If you want to \$2,000, vote Democrat", and they are giving now, or not even now, at some point in the future that is undetermined even though it's supposed to be immediate, they're going to give people \$1,400 instead. And there's all of this bullshit about how people should know that you're supposed to deduct the \$600 from the \$2,000 promised money and that \$1,400 is fine, literally nothing about this is fine.

Sarah Kendzior:

There should have been monthly checks of relief, like every other developed country in the world. Of course, Trump wasn't going to do that because he's a sadist who wanted people to suffer, but I'm sorry, \$1,400 is not \$2,000 any more than two plus two is five. This is gas lighting, and it's abusive, and it shows how disconnected our officials are from the reality of everyday life. If you've ever been in a position where your family is literally struggling to survive—to pay your rent, to buy food, to buy gas, to heat your home—\$600 is everything. \$600 is an enormous amount of money. I see so many people just commenting like, "Oh \$600, what does it matter?" It matters so much. And I'll just say, everyone will

remember how they felt when they saw Democratic candidates come in and tell them that they were going to get a \$2,000 check, and everyone is going to remember how they felt when that check did not come and then, assuming it does come, was actually for \$1,400. They're going to remember that \$600 and it's beyond just an election mistake or a partisan mistake. It's a moral mistake. It's breaking a promise.

Sarah Kendzior:

And this is a time where we need to build trust. They go on and on about unity, but trust is the backbone of unity. And if we can't even trust in a promise so simple—and really, for them to add the \$600 they promised, it's chump change for them. It's nothing for them. So I don't understand why this of all battles is the one that they chose.

[begin advertisement]

Sarah Kendzior:

This episode of Gaslit Nation is sponsored by Best Fiends, a puzzle game you can play on your phone. Best Fiends challenges your brain with fun puzzles, but it's a casual game so it doesn't stress you out, which is just what we need right now. With Best Fiends, you can collect cute characters, solve puzzles and play alongside your friends and family. There are new in-game challenges and events every month, so the game always feels fresh. My family members love it and they've already passed level 280. Best Fiends is made for adults, but it's bright, colorful, fun and approachable for everyone. Engage your brain with fun puzzles and collect tons of cute characters. Trust me, with over 100 million downloads, this five star rated mobile puzzle game is a must play. Download Best Fiends free on the Apple App Store or Google Play. That's Friends without the R, Best Fiends.

[end advertisement]

Andrea Chalupa:

I just think it's important to remind people since we're up against the Republican Party trying to rewrite his story, which is so dangerous—and I can tell you from watching this play out, the Kremlin is excellent at rewriting history. You have in Russia today a large number of the population that sees Stalin as a great hero, nevermind the fact that he mass murdered some of the best and brightest of Russian society. So Republicans are trying to rewrite the whole pandemic mass murders and it's important to remind people, the pandemic was completely preventable. Trump knew how bad it was. Trump admitted to the investigative reporter, Bob Woodward, for his book, *Rage*, how deadly this virus was. He knew. He admitted to downplaying it, and yet he and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and his daughter, Ivanka Trump, as their White House adviser, failed to stop it. Not only did they fail to stop it, they deliberately withheld desperately needed aid to states they viewed as political opponents, meaning the Trump family leveraged the deadly virus as a weapon.

Andrea Chalupa:

The mass murder was deliberate. They even wielded the weapon of the virus out in plain sight by politicizing and mocking wearing masks. They turned protecting oneself from the virus into a culture war. Nurses reported people dying in hospitals in denial, angry, insisting the virus was a hoax. Trump incited the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of Americans, just like he incited a violent attack on our Capitol. Donald Trump is a mass murderer, and the Republican Party continues to embrace him, and

some of these Republican leaders act like they're in a hostage situation to protect shreds of credibility. They are not. The Republican Party is Donald Trump because the Republican Party created Donald Trump with their rampant greed and corruption.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, no, I just want to add a little bit to what you said by naming and shaming some of the specific individuals who caused this, because I think as part of the rewriting that the Republicans are doing, trying to make it seem like this amorphous phenomenon instead of a purposeful malicious handling of a global plague that people used to personally profit. The coronavirus team, first and foremost, was led by Jared Kushner, who should be prosecuted for a very large number of reasons and who, as I've said, is incredibly dangerous to national security. And he's also honestly my litmus test of whether justice is being served. This was true during the Mueller Probe; my view of whether that probe was successful was whether he was indicted, but he wasn't even interviewed. They did absolutely nothing about him despite his massive number of crimes. We also had on the corona team, Mike Pence, Steve Mnuchin, of course, Trump himself, Ivanka as mentioned, Wilbur Ross, Stephen Miller and his wife Katie Miller, Michael Caputo, who previously served as Vladimir Putin's image consultant.

Sarah Kendzior:

There needs to be a much more rigorous investigation of these specific individuals, not just of the coronavirus pandemic itself, but these individual actors. We're watching them rightfully hone in on people like Andrew Cuomo for blowing it in New York, for contributing to the deaths of people in nursing homes in New York. They need to expand that to the executive level.

Andrea Chalupa:

That's what I'm saying. If you can go after Andrew Cuomo, who is terrifying in his own ways and a big establishment figure—powerful, connected—if you can go after Andrew Cuomo, why aren't you going after Jared Kushner, Ivanka Trump and all these other names? You have it in you to go after Cuomo, that's great. Now do the rest of the long list of corruption that we've been suffering under.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, then we can unite. We could finally unite under a bipartisan platform.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, exactly. To be clear though, Cuomo is not on the same level as Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump and Donald Trump, but the fact that that Kremlin clown car is treated as untouchable—as Teflon Don—that needs to end immediately for the sake of our democracy, for protecting our future, and for the massive national healing that has to happen.

Sarah Kendzior:

Exactly. And on that note, let's talk about Texas. We had another week of horror to add to our post violent coup trauma, ongoing pandemic trauma. We also had a climate change trauma in Texas with the worst storm in over a century in a state that was not equipped to deal with it for a variety of reasons, some of which are completely understandable. Like homes' water pipe systems are not designed for this kind of weather event. People who lived in those places were not being illogical when they didn't buy a home that was properly insulated for weather that you might expect in, like, Minnesota, or if they didn't have winter clothes. This was not the fault of the people of Texas. It was, however, the fault of the

government of Texas, of this incredibly gerrymandered corrupt fossil fuel backed Republican government. And the most dominant example of this was Ted Cruz, who as everybody knew flew to Cancun at his wife's behest, sheepishly flew home the next day after being caught. I don't know how he thought he wouldn't be caught. There's a part of me that thinks that Ted Cruz is actually trying to torpedo his career.

Sarah Kendzior:

You may remember like in the very beginning of the Trump administration, we had a record number of Republican resignations and a lot of those resignations came from people like Paul Ryan, who had big careers ahead of them, who were very proud, who had their own very distinct ideological view of what the Republican Party should be: a very bad one, but a very bad one in a different way than Donald Trump's and they didn't want to be Donald Trump's lackeys, so they just quit. They didn't quit in a brave way. They didn't quit with condemnation. They just kind of stepped away from the whole thing and thought, "Yeah, maybe Michael Cohen shouldn't be handling our finances", so on and so forth. Ted Cruz, you may remember from the GOP convention in 2016, was very reluctant to join in in the applause of Trump. He was the holdout. He was also the runner up, but he was not on board the Trump train, and like a chump, he joined it. He is fully sucked in, fully contaminated. I think he thought he'd be getting a Supreme Court appointment or maybe a bigger role in the administration, but no. He's stuck. He is stuck forever being an accomplice to an attack on the Capitol, an accomplice to organized crime, and very likely tainted by all of these criminal connections that the GOP as a whole has, that the NRA—the major backer of the GOP in terms of campaign money—that they have.

Sarah Kendzior:

Ted Cruz is trapped. And so I think he may be kind of trying to implode, but in a post-Trump political landscape, I don't know what even it takes to make someone truly implode. I think every horrific, cruel move people make is rewarded. You see that in who is going on TV news. For example, over the weekend. Meet the Press and all the other Sunday shows were full of Republicans still pushing the Big Lie that the election was stolen. They're not being shamed or shunned for pushing that lie, they're being encouraged to tell that lie over and over again. And those shows are just PR operations for organized crime and for white supremacy and white supremacist violent groups at this point. So you should absolutely not be watching them.

Sarah Kendzior:

Anyway, back to Ted Cruz. The big contrast, of course, was when, you know, one, Beto O'Rourke—the real senator of Texas—started organizing all of these grassroots efforts to help out Texans, to direct them to aid. And then AOC, a representative from New York City, joined in and went to Texas and was working with other members of the House or Texas representatives and raised I think at this point \$5 million in relief, and people freaked out. She got attacked from everyone. She got attacked from the left. She got attacked from the center, from the Pelosi-type Democrats. She of course got attacked from the GOP. This is someone who wasn't doing anything but helping people out. And this is someone who critically was treating Texas as America, as the same America she lives in in New York. And as someone living in St. Louis, Missouri, where I am simultaneously represented by Cori Bush and Josh Hawley, there aren't words to describe how appreciative I am of this, because this is how we should be viewing ourselves. We are Americans. We are united and we are all suffering under the same plight.

Sarah Kendzior:

And when Texas is hurting—when innocent people in Texas are hurting because of the brutal policies and corruption of their state leadership—the reaction should never be to say, “Oh, you voted for it”, or “Oh, you deserved it” which first of all, it's bullshit. This is a state that in the last election when 52% GOP, 46% Democrat and that was after rampant voter suppression, disenfranchisement, incredible gerrymandering, propaganda and so forth, but nonetheless, no one deserves to freeze to death. I don't care who you voted for. I don't care if you voted for Donald Trump.

Sarah Kendzior:

No one deserves that fate, and it really worries me that, as a country, that's somehow a controversial view. And the other view that people deserve what they get because of who they voted for or what party they're in when it's literally a matter of life or death, when it's literally a matter of children and elderly people and the most vulnerable people dying, that just say that you deserve it is not controversial? That's crazy. And for AOC to be derided for making a good faith effort as an American to help fellow Americans out, I mean it's just... ugh. I don't know, what are your thoughts on that?

Andrea Chalupa:

We're all one country. Human rights extend to all of us, like you said, regardless of who voted for. And what's terrifying about the situation in Texas is because that is an actual hostage situation by the Republicans in charge who have created a system that makes it difficult for people to vote through gerrymandering and so forth. There's people that should not be in Congress and only are there because of the Republican gerrymandering. That's a real hostage situation that has created a very real humanitarian crisis. And I'm going to read from this thread by a New York Times correspondent, Jack Healy, who visited some hardhit people. There's countless stories like this across states like Texas. And Jack writes on Twitter, and we'll link to this in the show notes: “I'm helping cover the storm in Dallas where there's water pouring from people's ceilings but not their faucets. Here's what they have to say after four days of this mess.”

Andrea Chalupa:

“This is The Family Place, a domestic violence shelter where 123 women and kids fled one crisis only to face a different one.”—And it shows footage of puddles, puddles across this shelter.—“Shelters across the state have been abandoned because they're utterly destroyed by burst pipes thawing and spewing water everywhere. This is Linda and Alphonso. The rest of Dallas basically got the lights back on today. Not them. Day four without power. Their apartment was 37 degrees at noon. They're sleeping at Alphonso's barber shop tonight. Meet Jimena, six months old. Her mom spent four days heating bottled water on a barbecue to make formula. They're all sleeping in the car in their driveway because they worry about COVID in a shelter or motel. It's day four of this misery and just the start of repairing wrecked flooded homes. So many people said they're angry and tired and yet still hopeful to get their lives back in order.”

Andrea Chalupa:

People are freezing. Now this is me talking. So that's that thread and we post the show notes for every episode where you can find that for free on our Patreon for this week's episode. So, as we've seen in the reports, people are freezing to death in their beds, including children. People are dying from carbon monoxide poisoning by trying to keep warm inside their cars in one of the richest countries in the world. People are without heat, without clean running water, and dying inside their homes from cold because of Republican and corporate greed and a criminal, deliberate lack of regulations. There should be

lawsuits. There should be many lawsuits for every single death. The Republican Party and these corporations that back them, they have created a failed state in Texas. And that's why we're always saying on the show, clean up where you live locally. Go to war on the autocrats where you live locally. Confront the corruption where you live locally. Elect actual, real public servants.

Andrea Chalupa:

We need to flesh out these corporate lobbyists or we're going to have more Texas Republican massacres. We keep saying, because of climate change, because of all the pressure humans are putting on the natural world, we're entering an age of pandemics. We're going to see more pandemics unfortunately if we don't elect good public servants in government and make government work for all of us. And in addition to that, we're entering regular increased patterns of deadly weather. From the Associated Press: "‘Deadly weather will be hitting the US more often, and America needs to get better at dealing with it’, experts said as Texas and other states battled winter storms that blew past the worst case planning of utilities, governments and millions of shivering residents."

Andrea Chalupa:

"This week storms, with more still heading east, fit a pattern of worsening extremes under climate change and demonstrate that local, state, and federal officials have failed to do nearly enough to prepare for greater and more dangerous weather." Forget about Trump. Trump is the dancing clown that likes to suck the oxygen out of the room. He's the distraction. The big, dark forces are what created him and propelled him into power and that is the rage we now need to channel against them. We need to fire our public service civic spirit towards them. We need to show up in confronting them. We need to stay engaged in activist communities and carry that same blue wave energy to flush these people out who keep creating these humanitarian crises by destroying our governments from within. We need people who understand what government is and why we need it and why it is an important part of establishing civilization in the first place. And we're going to lose our civilization if we don't have a government in place, a solid one that works for everyone.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, exactly. And I think, hopefully this puts the kibosh on all of the fanfare over secessionist movements which we've been seeing, I don't know, for years on end, but especially in the last year as a result of the purposeful fracturing of "red and blue states" by the Trump administration, in which resources to battle COVID-19 (and sometimes other crises) were denied to either blue states, or critically blue cities. And this is where I get very frustrated because there is no such thing as a blue state or a red state. As I've said in my books, America's purple, purple like a bruise. And so one of the things that Texas has shown is what it might look like in reality if a state were to secede. And this goes out to the MAGA fans, as well as all the faux progressives wanting to secede into some sort of liberal paradise. What you actually end up with, with this kind of balkanization, is an incredibly dysfunctional miniature version of this dysfunction that we have now in which plutocrats and other corrupt actors will capitalize on people's pain.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is what will happen if there is successful secession no matter where it goes. There are no noble actors here. You're going to have, you know, everyone's heard about the guy whose power stayed on during the storm and he ended up with a \$16,000 bill—you're going to see that. You're going to see more of that exploitation, more of that lawlessness, if we are to break apart because, of course, why did

this happen to Texas? It's because almost all of Texas, with the exception of the panhandle, is on its own grid. And they had enormous pride in that. They felt like, "We are independent, we're not reliant on the broken federal grid". And, you know, it all imploded. I mean, they were seconds away from Texas—one of our wealthiest, largest states—having no electricity, and in some areas no running water, for months on end. They very narrowly averted an even greater disaster. So that kind of problem, which I think people just don't think this stuff through. Like, if there's a session, well, what happens to power grids? What happens to the military? What happens to our weapons? What happens to our economies, to trade, to borders, to families being separated over borders? You have to actually think this stuff through. I'll just tell you it's going to look a lot like what Texas looked like last week, so let's stay together.

Sarah Kendzior:

A couple other things just referencing points we've made on the show in the past: I just want to remind everybody on this occasion that Russia committed the greatest cyber attack in US history on this country in 2020, including our grid. So if you want a preview of what will happen if we do not get our cyber defense in order, again, look at Texas last week. That was the thing that I was fearing throughout the Trump administration, of course, because Trump welcomes this. He leaves the back door open for these kinds of cyber attacks, but I still have fear of it now and so this is just yet another reminder that we need to look much more rigorously at infrastructure attacks and at what kind of response we'll have if they happen. How do we protect citizens? This is something the Biden administration should be looking at more closely. And then just finally, to Andrea's point, like, yes, we absolutely have to vote these assholes out.

Sarah Kendzior:

But if you live in a red state—"red state"—if you live in a GOP hostage state, then you know exactly how difficult this is when you're contending with gerrymandering, with voter suppression and all of these structural issues. So a few things you can do if you want to help out these states is one, focus on voter suppression, focus on voter rights, back national groups that are aiming to make sure that horrible voter ID laws meant to disenfranchise people are not passed. We're going through that in Missouri.

Sarah Kendzior:

And also, if you're safely cloistered in your democratic paradise or whatever—I don't think anyone is in a paradise right now—then pour some money into candidates that will turn things around. My new representative, Cori Bush, replaced a prior Democrat. He was okay. Lacy Clay came out for impeachment and I appreciated that, but he didn't have the fire. He didn't have the sheer force of will that Cori Bush has and I think that's because she's from a younger generation, because she's a frontline activist, so she's willing to get out in front of all these issues. And I'm very grateful for that as someone living in St. Louis. But folks like her can't succeed on their own. They need material support. They need people behind her.

Sarah Kendzior:

And also, this younger generation of Democrats, who I think have the potential to be tremendously effective and influential, they need to stop being treated as kind of fringe players. This is the mainstream. The proposals that they have—things like the Green New Deal or healthcare for everybody—these are not wild, crazy ideas. These are sensible, pragmatic ideas that boosts the economy. And it's only because we live in this bizarre fun house mirror media environment that somebody like Michael Caputo, for example, who I've mentioned before—a person who helped kill off

Americans with coronavirus and whose previous career was as a Kremlin PR lackey—he gets to do things like go on television and be treated as a regular guy, an informed source. Convicted felon, Michael Cohen, is all over TV just kind of pontificating on the state of the nation, but AOC is like the wild and crazy one here? Cory Bush is? No, those are our public servants.

Sarah Kendzior:

And the reason people think they're “out there” is because you are so unfamiliar at this point with the concept of the public actually being served and of everyone—of all Americans—deserving good compassionate representation. This is not a horse race. This is not happening for our entertainment, this is not happening for our ratings. These are our lives and these are our deaths. And I think that the shock of that, of seeing people who are actually committed and who care versus this geriatric cohort, not all of whom but many of whom seem to just treat this as for or just this sort of like, “Oh, there's nothing I can do kind of attitude”—I think it shocks people, but what I hope is that it shocks people out of their complacency.

Andrea Chalupa:

The Chuck Todd Industrial Complex that allows these Republican white supremacist terrorists to come on and normalize the Big Lie that the election was stolen and that Biden is an illegitimate president, and to blame renewable energy or whatever, or just to muddle the truth and normalize this autocratic movement which is the modern day Republican Party, they're complicit in these humanitarian crises. They're complicit in the mass murder. And they are going to continue in putting our lives at risk if we don't remove the Chuck Todd Industrial Complex from power. We need to desperately diversify newsrooms. We need to expand newsrooms and we need to fire Chuck Todd and replace him with an actual journalist because of right now, Chuck Todd's abysmal, whatever the hell he's doing, is coming off as though he's either bought or really, really stupid, or a combination of both. He needs to get out of there, especially in a national crisis. He's a danger to us.

Andrea Chalupa:

So we should go on to trying to undo the damage of the Chuck Todd Industrial Complex by reminding everyone that we just had an attempted coup. It was a violent attempted coup and that is why the Merrick Garland hearing could come soon enough. We need a strong impartial attorney general. Merrick Garland has a history of taking on white domestic terrorism. From the Washington Post on his time as a top Justice Department official: “In his senate questionnaire, Garland said the most important cases he worked on included the prosecution of Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski, who carried out 16 mail bombings over 17 years killing three and injuring scores more. And that of McVeigh, a former Army surgeon who came to hate the US government and identify with far-right militia types.” That is in reference, of course, to the Oklahoma City bombing, considered one of the worst domestic terrorist attacks in US history.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, Garland is going to have the job of investigating and prosecuting another horrific domestic terrorist attack, which was Donald Trump's violent assault on the US Capitol. In his testimony at his confirmation hearing, Garland paid tribute to America's first civil rights president, the man we all know and love here on this show, Ulysses S. Grant. There's a great documentary about Grant available on Amazon that everyone should see for greater context on the times we're living in and what we're up against. From

Garland's testimony: "Celebrating the Department of Justice's 150th year reminds us of the origins of the department, which was founded during Reconstruction in the aftermath of the Civil War."

Andrea Chalupa:

"To secure the civil rights that were promised in the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments, the first attorney general appointed by President Grant to head the new department led a concerted battle to protect voting rights, woting rights from the violence of white extremists, successfully prosecuting hundreds of cases against white supremacist members of the Ku Klux Klan with a mission to uphold the civil and constitutional rights of all Americans, particularly some of the most vulnerable." Garland became emotional talking about his own personal family history that he credits with inspiring his public service.

Sen. Cory Booker:

About your motivation and maybe some of your own family history in confronting hate and discrimination in American history.

Merrick Garland:

Yes, Senator. So, I come from a family...where my grandparents fled antisemitism and persecution... The country took us in and protected us. And I feel an obligation to the country to pay back. And this is the highest, best use of my own set of skills to pay back. And so I want very much to be the kind of attorney general that you're saying I could become, and I'll do my best to try and be that kind of attorney general.

Sen. Cory Booker:

I believe your heart and I'm grateful that you are living that Micah Mandate.

Sarah Kendzior:

With Merrick Garland, I have my apprehensions and it's not really about him as a person, it's about this whole system. It's about the fact that we have had 40 years of attorney generals and others in law enforcement turning a blind eye to organized crime, not prosecuting white supremacist or militant groups hard enough—although Merrick Garland thankfully is an exception to that. What I'm hoping he understands and will pursue is the way that white supremacist and militant groups and white-collar organized crime have collided. That's what the Trump administration was, and it's really personified in people like Steve Bannon and, of course, in Roger Stone. And we have been saying, really for four years because that's when Roger Stone created the "Stop the Steal" slogan and called for a bloodbath if Trump did not become the president. That happened in 2016, and then it just continued to happen for four years up to 2020 when the bloodbath actually occurred.

Sarah Kendzior:

We've been saying, Roger Stone needs to be locked up. Roger Stone is a threat to American public safety, American national security, and he has been implicated in a very long litany of crimes over American history. He's, like, the Forrest Gump of blackmail and violent threats, and he just occurs, again and again, starting at Watergate and going up to now. And yet he is out. He was indicted. Trump, of course, pardoned him just in time to get in on this action. There have been a few developments regarding Stone over the week. As we previously noted, the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys both met with Stone and Stone, of course, is one of Trump's closest friends and advisors, with a connection going back over 40 years. It was confirmed by Mother Jones that six Oath Keepers who acted as security guards for Stone also participated in the riot and entered the Capitol. There's also a very strange case

regarding one of the rioters, Jessica Watkins, who is a member of the Oath Keepers. Earlier in the week, this was according to her lawyer.

Sarah Kendzior:

The lawyer for Watkins claimed that she was present at the Capitol “not as an insurrectionist”—this is a quote—“but to provide security to the speakers at the rally, to provide support for the legislators and others to march to the Capitol as directed by the then president and to safely escort protesters away from the Capitol to their vehicles and cars at the conclusion of the protest. She was given a VIP pass to the rally. She met with Secret Service agents.” So, whoa. When we saw this, we were like, “oh my God”, because we have had a large number of questions about the role of the Secret Service in this attack. At the time, Biden was having to have his team vet them again. You may have forgotten this already but before the inauguration, there was great fear that there was going to be another violent attack on that event, and that perhaps there were rogue Secret Service agents who were going to take the side of Trump and his violent anti American team instead of the side of the American Republic and its constitution.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so that was an interesting claim. As for the other claims that she was escorting legislators—one assumes people backing Trump—this again opens up the question of why Ted Cruz, Josh Hawley, Lindsey Graham, others who participated in the “Stop the Steal” lie and who were encouraging the attacks on the Capitol, why they are not being investigated, why they're not being censured or kept off committees in the Senate, and so forth. Anyway, yesterday, Watkins' lawyer has backtracked on the last part of the claim, saying that “she did not meet with the Secret Service ahead of Trump's rally, but she does say she was asked to do security by the event organizers.” And so, of course, my question is, was one of those organizers Roger Stone, who is deeply embedded with the Oath Keepers?

Sarah Kendzior:

And this whole Oath Keepers situation, I mean, for me, it just brings back flashbacks of being in Ferguson, because I live in St. Louis so I covered that in a lot of detail in 2014. And I remember walking down the street there and Oath Keepers were on the roof just, you know, with guns aimed at me and other people on the street—not in the sense that they knew who I was or anything like that but they were just allowed to wander around with their weaponry out, and the police did nothing. They did nothing to contain them, at least on the nights that I was there.

Sarah Kendzior:

Whereas if a Black Ferguson protester were to do the same thing—if they were to hang out on a rooftop with weaponry aimed at people on the street—my God, I mean they would be taken down in a matter of seconds. And so we just have this continual streamlining of militant groups, giving them a pass, giving them the benefit of the doubt, where they absolutely do not deserve it and they in fact flaunt their impunity in our faces. And then finally, this is another disturbing article from the Washington Post: “It was revealed this week that federal investigators have admitted that they're investigating organizers like Roger Stone and Alex Jones, but they say that charges are unlikely”, and they don't say why.

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, I just... this blows my mind. They're already making moves to arrest Black Lives Matter activists, people who they have accused of being in Antifa under that broad banner, but this is so blatant. And in

the cases of both Roger Stone and Alex Jones, these are repeat offenders. These are people who have participated in incitement of violence, in threatening people, in insurrectionist movements, in abetting sedition, in all of these things for decades on end. And January 6 was just the most kind of incontestable event in this respect. It was on video. They confessed to it. They flaunted it, and yet still, they are hands off. And so I'm very curious how Merrick Garland is going to handle that situation.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. And speaking of justice denied. Cy Vance! He's got a tax returns. The Supreme Court ruled in his favor and he even hired Mark Pomerantz, a former federal prosecutor who took down the mob or some big-

Sarah Kendzior:

Gotti, I think.

Andrea Chalupa:

Gotti. Yeah. All right, so next to the Chuck Todd Industrial Complex you've got the legal fantasy cosplay that cable news likes to feed us with all these lawyers and former prosecutors being very much by the book in tantalizing justice which will never come. And so if you want to know what Cy Vance's reelection strategy is for Manhattan DA, remember, there's a big old Democratic primary coming up this June, and there was speculation that he might not be running again because his fundraising numbers were so low. Well, the reality is that Cy Vance has to call just a handful of people and suddenly has a war chest overnight. And he's got the advantage of being an incumbent, and plus he's teasing us with all this justice, despite his abysmal track record and being very much part of the problem.

Andrea Chalupa:

So we just want to remind everybody not to get your hopes up and not to put your faith in Cy Vance ever. Instead, put your faith in yourselves, put your faith in grassroots power, put your faith in the work we have done that we are standing on in terms of protecting our democracy and, little by little, bringing it back. It's not that we don't have power; that's not the issue. What we're all frustrated by is how hard we have to work and how we have to remain vigilant for our own protection and for the protection of our families and our future. But that's just the reality that we're in right now. We've been on autopilot for far too long and we paid the price for it with a President Donald Trump in the White House and Ivanka and Jared. That's the price of civic autopilot. Democracy is a lifestyle. That is the opening statement of the Gaslit Nation action guide and we encourage everyone to go check it out on gaslitnationpod.com. An important item on that list is make art.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, just a few things on Vance for people who haven't listened to the show before. The reason we're sceptical of Vance actually doing anything meaningful with Trump's taxes is because of his track record, which you can hear all about in a recent episode where we interviewed Eliza Orlins who's running against him. Vance is known for letting elite criminals off the hook. Among the people who he abetted are Jeffrey Epstein, Harvey Weinstein, Dominique Strauss-Kahn—so we have a number of sexual predators there—Ivanka and Don Jr. for fraud, and we talked, I believe two weeks ago in that episode, about him letting Paul Manafort essentially off the hook by timing the prosecution so that Manafort could not be pursued under double jeopardy.

Sarah Kendzior:

So there's that. There's a lot of people hyping up, as Andrea said, Vance hiring Mark Pomerantz, who had worked on prosecuting the mafia. My response to that is, well, Mueller did the same thing. He hired a whole bunch of mafia experts, white-collar crime experts, and what did they do? Nothing. They did nothing. It doesn't matter what somebody's background is, it matters what kind of actions they produce and who they are willing to take on. It is one thing to take on John Gotti; it is another to take on a transnational crime syndicate that's got its hooks in giant corporations and in governments around the world.

Sarah Kendzior:

Is Cy Vance brave enough to do that? History says no. And so I don't take this as a great sign. I mean, it could go either way. I obviously want it to go the right way. And the final thing is that the tax returns that they're getting from Trump are only from 2011 to 2019, so I don't know how useful these are going to be. I think the ones where he's the president are going to have been carefully put together by, I don't know, whatever the president uses for his accountants to file taxes. There's-

Andrea Chalupa:

An Alan Dershowitz, an accused pedophile.

Sarah Kendzior:

[laughs] And Alan Dershowitz, yes. There's not going to be some sort of blatant, like, "Hey there, I'm laundering money, I'm violating the Emoluments Clause, I'm embezzling out of the federal government." That's not going to be in the tax returns. It's something that happened—we all watched it happen—but it's not necessarily going to be documented and the same is true of the years beforehand. This is among the very few times in Trump's life, where he had a legitimate income, sort of, with The Apprentice. He was the host of The Apprentice and he was paid for that show. He was also, as I documented in my book, *Hiding In Plain Sight*, using The Apprentice to advertise his money laundering properties in New York City as prizes for the contestants on The Apprentice. This is something he actually did, including with Trump SoHo, with which he was engaged with various—what did my lawyer tell me to call them? Mafia affiliated actors.

Sarah Kendzior:

[laughs] Sorry, like Felix Sater, and so forth. These are not the most revealing years. I think if you really want to get into the story of Trump and his finances and his criminal history, you need tax returns from the '80s and '90s, you need to look at debt, you need to look at expenditures, you need to look at how Russian mafia money and other mafia money was pumped into his enterprises and was used to build him up. That's the story. There's very likely something quite bad in these tax returns or I think he would have simply released them, but it's putting it all together in context looking at those returns along with the investments and bankruptcies and crimes that he committed over the course of his life. That's a very difficult thing to do and I hope that our media rises to the occasion should these things even be released into the public domain.

Sarah Kendzior:

Which is my final point of hesitancy about this, which is Vance has shown no inclination that he's actually going to release these tax returns to the public, even though Trump was the President of the United States and every president has released their tax returns to the public. So we might not even

have the capacity to judge the contents on our own, and that would be a shame. So at the very least, I hope that that happens and should Cyrus Vance lose, I hope that whoever replaces him as the DA does make that public so that financial experts and investigative journalists can have a go at them. So, yeah, not to end on such a down note but please, stop the savior syndrome. Stop going from one institutionalist to another in a broken system, from Mueller to Pelosi to Cyrus Vance. This is not working out for you. You're building up your hopes and you're getting crushed every time. And, of course, I would love to be wrong here but, as Andrea has said countless times, grassroots power is the most reliable—

Andrea Chalupa:

Is the most reliable power we have left. I thought we could say it together [laughs]]

Sarah Kendzior:

[laughs} Emphasis on reliable. We're currently living in a time where we can control almost nothing. We've got a plague that is running rampant. I mean, thankfully it's starting to go down but it's still a severe problem. We have an economy that is at a Great Depression level. We have incredible political instability, basically unrivaled since the Civil War. We have changes in technology that are quite honestly terrifying in terms of their capacity of surveillance, in terms of the way they take things out of context and turn us into automatons. It's a very dystopian time. But grassroots power is real because it comes from yourself, from your own decisions, from your own alliances, and you can use that to push back in an honest way against all of these dystopian forces and try to create a better world. So please, instead of putting your hope and faith in people who don't deserve it, put your faith in the people around you who are working for good.

Andrea Chalupa:

And without further ado, here is the artist Sidibe and her song Breathwork.

Music - Breathwork by Sidibe (<https://lnk.to/SidibeBreathwork>)

Lyrics Video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcWJAgvwZkk&feature=youtu.be>

Andrea Chalupa:

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

Sarah Kendzior:

We want to encourage you to donate to your local food bank, which is experiencing a spike in demand due to the coronavirus crisis.

Andrea Chalupa:

We also encourage you to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria. Donate at rescue.org. And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to The Orangutan Project at orangutanproject.org. Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes: it helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon: it keeps us going. And you can also subscribe to us on YouTube.

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

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

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

Gaslit Nation would like to thank our supports at the Producer level and higher on Patreon...