

Gaslit Nation Transcript

20 April 2022

“Targeted by the Mafia State: An Interview with Cheri Jacobus

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/targeted-by-with-63965956>

[intro theme music]

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestsellers, *The View From Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*, and of the upcoming book, *They Knew: How a Culture of Conspiracy Keeps America Complacent*, available for pre-order now.

Andrea Chalupa:

I am Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine, a film the Kremlin doesn't want you to see so be sure to see it.

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:48):

Welcome to our special spring series, *Gaslit Nation Presents... Rising up from the Ashes: Cassandras and Other Experts on Rebuilding Democracy* [howling wolf SFX]. Our bonus episodes available to Patreon subscribers at the Truth-teller level and higher feature our esteemed guests taking the *Gaslit Nation Self Care Q&A*, so for fun ideas, sign up to hear that.

Sarah Kendzior:

Joining at this level also gives you access to hundreds of bonus episodes on topics in the news today. We'll be back with our regular episodes in July. If you're signed up any time between now and then at the Democracy Defender level or higher on Patreon—

Andrea Chalupa:

You'll get special access to watch a live taping of *Gaslit Nation* over the summer. More details to come. This interview was recorded December 7th, 2021.

[begin interview with Cheri Jacobus, recorded December 7th, 2021]

Sarah Kendzior (00:01:42):

We have a special guest with us today. Cheri Jacobus is a political commentator who was the founder, president and executive producer of “America Reads the Mueller Report” and today is the host of the podcast, *Politics with Cheri Jacobus*. I am going to read an excerpt from the biography on her website: Cheri Jacobus’ commentary, while right-of-center, at times takes on the Republican Party, including its leaders. Currently a registered independent, she's a strong and impactful critic of Donald Trump, a stance

that has come with a price. But her commitment to her guiding principle of country before party remains steadfast and strong. She has appeared on a number of media outlets across the political spectrum, including—hehe, CNN, which we're gonna discuss—Fox News, MSNBC, CBS, PBS, ABC, and now *Gaslit Nation*. So welcome to *Gaslit Nation*, Cheri.

Cheri Jacobus (00:02:38):

Thank you. Thank you for the intro. I do want to note though that my podcast has been on pause for almost a year because of my health issues. So that's the one thing in my bio... Everything's on pause but I'm back doing things like these. So, thank you guys for having me on. Very much appreciate it. It's good to get back in the saddle.

Sarah Kendzior (00:02:57):

Oh, well, we're really happy to have you. I've been following you for a while. We've been in the thick of it together. Right now we're kind of doing this series of interviews on *Gaslit Nation* with people who we feel were very early at calling out both the threat of Trump, but also the broader rise of autocracy in the United States. And you were one of the people who did that, even though you were a member of the Republican Party at the time, and I've watched for years as you've gotten a lot of heat from all sides for your warnings. And I just want to say, you know, I really appreciate that because it is not easy to deal with that at all. Some of the people you've criticized, including the former president, are very dangerous. So I appreciate your honesty and I appreciate your willingness to talk about them in a straightforward way. I just wish others in your former party had followed your example. So thank you for that. My first question for you—you know, to start, to get the history down of the last wonderful five years—is, When did you realize Trump was a threat to the United States?

Cheri Jacobus (00:04:11):

Well, you know, they first asked, it was an old friend who was working on the Exploratory Committee who was heading over to the super PAC and approached me about being the communications director for the campaign. I was living in New York at the time and I was not interested. I thought Trump was a buffoon and I thought it would hurt my career. I figured, He can't last more than a couple of months. But you don't just say No to an old friend, you take the meeting. So I said, Well, why don't we sit down and talk about it? We met for lunch and he brought along a guy I'd never heard of before by the name of Corey Lewandowski—without telling me—and they eventually admitted that they kind of had to do this by surprise because they were not being successful in getting good people to meet with them.

Cheri Jacobus:

At that time they openly talked about the super PAC. Corey wanted to move quickly and, you know, I felt like the ball was kind of in my court and I stalled for another three weeks before agreeing to meet with them again because I just didn't want to, I had other things going on, I was sick, you know... And then I agreed to another meeting and that's when I saw behavior that I'd never seen before in anybody that could even be remotely professional. So I left. I was down on the sidewalk of Fifth Avenue. I remember I called my mother and said, "Oh my God, this guy..." She goes, "Well, don't burn bridges with your friend." And my friend said, "Hey, Corey thought you did great. And he thought maybe he was too hard on you."

Cheri Jacobus:

And so I'm being diplomatic and I said, "He's an emotional guy in a big job." I have this all on text. And then I waited a day and then I emailed him and said, "Hey, thanks for thinking of me but this isn't for me. Didn't appreciate the hazing. Good luck. Have fun working on the super PAC." And that was it. And I continued to, you know... There was, what, 15, 16 people in the primary and I sometimes praised or criticized lots of them. There were other campaigns that approached me. That's what happens when you spend your life in politics and particularly when there's a field that big of people. Then I first publicly criticized Trump when he went after John McCain for his POW status. And that was done. A few months after that I noticed there was this article. My friend, he left after the announcement. He never went over to the super PAC.

Cheri Jacobus (00:06:19):

But there was this article that came out in the *Washington Post* for which I was not the source. It's my understanding that it was Roger Stone working through Sam Nunberg. Stone had been fired or pushed out of the campaign and they really wanted to screw Corey Lewandowski, so they outed them on having a super PAC that was run by a Corey Lewinski pal in Colorado. When I noticed that Lewandowski and Trump were lying about it and threatening to sue the post, I came forward to say, "Oh, I know all about it. They told me all about it." And that's when I was banned from Fox, immediately, after years and years and thousands of appearances. So that was chilling, that in a primary Trump had that kind of sway.

Cheri Jacobus:

Oh, also that day was when the catfishing started with me, somebody pretending to be a lawyer with privileges in the UK and the US representing big Republican donors who wanted to make sure Trump didn't win. We later found out when working with the FBI, same day, that's when the catfishing started. Then I was on CNN a few months later, the whole subject was, Is Trump's self-funding? And I brought up the super PAC again that night. Trump defamed me, said I begged him for a job twice and was turned down. I could prove that they came to me and I said, No. It's all in writing. And his buddy Jeff Zucker banned me at CNN for him. That was chilling. I'd forgotten that he had greenlit *The Apprentice* for Trump when he was head of entertainment at NBC.

Cheri Jacobus:

So I was kind of done. And at this point now we're sending a cease and desist. We've got Don McGahn, wanting me to sign an NDA and Trump would delete the tweets about blah, blah, blah. At that point, I realized that I was being catfished by these guys and that I wasn't going to enter into any legal agreement with Trump where he had any control over anything I said. This was when I started knowing this is not business as usual. I'd been in politics a long time, in media. I had never witnessed anything like this. And then the night, late night, when we realized that Trump people knew that I figured out they were the catfishers—it's a lot of details I won't get into—that's when I was told that Trump had guys, that I needed to get a squad car in front of my brownstone, that Trump had guys in Queens who were probably on their way over to cause me harm.

Cheri Jacobus (00:08:40):

I didn't leave my apartment for five days. Yes. That's just skimming the surface of what I went through. So, When did I know? I knew that this was very different. I'd been in top political situations. I was running campaigns, congressional campaigns, gosh, starting when I was 28 at a time when women weren't doing it, but I didn't get the memo. And I was pretty good at it too. But, you know, I've been through some tough political things, as most people in this business have, but I had never, ever been

through anything like that. So I knew. That's why it galls me when people have doubts or think that you're a conspiracy theorist when you talk about things that you know, that happened to you, that you've seen.

Sarah Kendzior (00:09:19):

Yeah, and one of the most frightening things is that your story is not uncommon. There's variations on a theme because this is the way that they go after people. It's the way that they threaten people and try to control the narrative. And I've always felt like different folks, you know, different pieces of this big puzzle of corruption and of abuse of power, what do you think they were afraid that you had found out or would find out?

Cheri Jacobus (00:09:48):

Look, if it had really gotten out and gotten legs that Trump had a super PAC and was lying about it... You know, it was reported and then everybody forgot about it because he moves on to the next scandal. He did not want this talked about. Here I was on primetime talking about it and it wasn't just me... Well it was as per published reports, but it was something I had direct knowledge of. At any other time, had the media not been so addicted to the Trump ratings, Trump would've been out of the race within about two weeks after that. He shut down the super PAC immediately. Also, by the way, later on when *Politico* was getting ready to publish a story about the catfishing, that's when my email was hacked.

Cheri Jacobus (00:10:28):

So there was an FBI investigation. There's more on that. There's just so much. We don't have to get into all that today. But, you know, I know that Geoffrey Berman, who was head of the Southern District of New York, he was told by Jeff Sessions to shut down certain investigations when they got too close to Trump.

Sarah Kendzior:

Wow.

Cheri Jacobus:

And in my case, it would've been JD Gordon who would've realized it because there was another instance where JD appeared to have access to information from my hacked email, which I believe he got from Michael Caputo. So this was all a Roger Stone/Caputo op, as so many things are. So, you know, there was a lot going on and I didn't know some of this until I was approached by lawyers or whistleblowers—who I see as whistleblowers—who also had certain investigations shut down by Berman. And I think that's why Geoffrey Berman was so adamant that he would testify under oath to Congress after Barr was trying to fire him. But he very carefully negotiated narrow lines of questioning and he would only do it behind closed doors because I don't believe that he wanted to talk about those investigations that he had been asked to shut down.

Sarah Kendzior (00:11:35):

Do you feel like the FBI was defending Trump in this case, or did they take your concerns seriously?

Cheri Jacobus (00:11:42):

I think it started out legit until JD Gordon figured out what was going on after they talked to him. Then it was shut down. I thought indictments were ready to happen. I went over a year where I wasn't allowed to talk about it. Here I am tweeting all the time and I knew this was going on, and there were three data points that showed that Trump world—people in Trump world—had access to my hacked emails. And the FBI knew that. So I had to sit on this. And I also know about the time when it was pulled. They told me they sent it to Mueller and I believed that for a long time. I no longer believe that because that's just not how this stuff works. And it was again, lawyers who were IC whistleblowers who, when they saw me— because I finally just started putting some of the stuff out in social media—when they saw me mention Holland & Knight firm, which is the Trump firm that he used in Florida.

Cheri Jacobus (00:12:35):

Then the DC office was his transition team and I was lied to about that. But, yeah, Holland & Knight has some dirt on them on this. I probably should be somewhat careful. *Politico* had a lot of this. They knew a lot of it for a long time and they sat on it. They still have. They also had confirmation from former senior producers at CNN that I was banned, that the word did come down from on high, banned because of the Trump tweets about me and there were people on the inside saying, “She's proven that he lied” and it didn't matter. So, you know, when you're not one of the big players, when you don't matter, the people who know the truth don't care. So I think there's a lot of people who are anti-Trump, but they don't really care if you're not a big player, if there's still ratings to be gotten, if somebody's still gonna lose their credibility, if they stick up for you.

Cheri Jacobus:

And I did put on social media that Chris Cuomo was one of them. He and I were friendly. One time after I was on his morning show, he took me out for a plate of eggs and he wanted to pick my brain on how he could better compete against Morning Joe and Fox & Friends. And then when this happened to me at CNN, he didn't go to bat for me at all and he knew the truth. So there's a lot there. I'm throwing a lot of information out there and it still only skims the surface. So I'll stop here if you want to talk about something else, but I have been well aware for a very long time how corrupt Trump is and how people that we did not think were corrupt in the media are indeed corrupt. I think when you have the chance to tell the truth and you don't because, ratings, you're corrupt.

Sarah Kendzior (00:14:14):

Yeah, absolutely. Feel free to get your story out there. That's why we invited you on. We want you to be able to speak freely and be able to tell people a lot of these stories that much of the media was ignoring, in part because the media is in on the story. To kind of circle back to some of the people you mentioned and also the FBI, you have Roger Stone, a career dirty tricks GOP operative, now a convicted felon, someone who routinely engages in threats, in blackmail, in bribes, a known dirty operative. You have Michael Caputo who was Putin's image consultant, a person with deep ties to the Kremlin. And then of course you have Trump, whose long list of crimes, bankruptcies, investigations, all these horrible things that he'd done were in the public domain because he was a public figure for 40 years.

Sarah Kendzior:

And yet in 2016, there was just incredible reluctance of one, the media to just talk about this in a straightforward way. Like, this is an Alliance of criminals—and you could add in there, of course, Manafort and also Corey Lewandowski with his battery (I'm not sure but I think he was indicted or arrested for that.)—everyone surrounding him is terrible. And you would think the FBI would think to

themselves, Well, one, this is a national security threat clearly, and two, we have people coming forward—you, but also others—saying, Hey, these guys are threatening us, these guys are hacking our email, what the hell is going on? I mean, how do you explain the environment of 2016? Because that seemed like a time where we had a chance to kind of fend this off and people didn't take that chance. And I still don't understand why.

Cheri Jacobus (00:16:00):

Well, I think that the people who were playing ball with Trump—Jeff Zucker, Roger Ailes we kind of expected, Roger Ailes at one point decided, Okay, we've had our fun now let's get serious, let's get him. And then Trump trumped him with all the fake bots and trolls after that debate that Megan Kelly finally came down on Trump for his long history of misogyny. And what I read was that Roger Ailes and the people who run Fox were absolutely shocked at the response. They didn't know that Trump had that kind of support and in the primary. Well, it was all bots and trolls. They thought it was viewers. They were fooled. And so they then started backing Trump. But they had no intention. They were like everybody else thinking, We're gonna have our fun for a while and get our ratings.

Cheri Jacobus:

And again, if people like Cheri Jacobus get hurt, if the little guy gets hurt, nobody cares. They just don't care. And a lot of people made their careers on this. You've got people like Kayleigh McEnany who has zero political experience, who is just someone in a short skirt on TV with hair extensions, then they get her on CNN and she wasn't even necessarily a Trump supporter... And everything I say by the way, if it's just personal information that I know, I'll let you know, but this is as per published reports, how she happened to say something favorable about Trump once on CNN and they came to her and basically conveyed to her that if she'd be pro-Trump, she'd get more air time because they were having a hard time getting pro-Trump people on TV.

Cheri Jacobus (00:17:27):

For someone like her with no political experience, to be told you're in if you're pro-Trump, she became Trump. Then you've got Jeff Zucker who's quoted as saying he was “creating characters in a drama”. He's not a news guy, he's an entertainment guy. So he created her out of whole cloth for Trump, put her on TV, put her in a chair next to David Gergen as if they were colleagues. And, my God, the woman ends up being White House press secretary. All kinds of dangerous lies and this is helping to build fascism. So, anybody who failed to act when they had the chance, or worse, played footsies with Trump thinking, Oh, it won't matter this one time, anybody who did this—and I feel the same way about the super PACs, you know, Lincoln project in the last campaign thinking, Oh, we'll just pocket the money because we're doing good work, too, remember—anybody who abused their position, whatever that position was, by not doing everything they could to stop this, by not upholding integrity and decency and journalism, whether it's a lawyer who got too scared and purposely threw a case or a judge who got too scared, anybody at the FBI, they're all guilty. They're all guilty. Yes, Putin played a role, but the media, especially, pretending that they didn't do this... They did. They're guilty.

Sarah Kendzior (00:18:46):

Yeah, it was collaborative. And just to emphasize your point for our audience, I was watching the clip of you from February, 2016 where you were on CNN with Kayleigh—God what's her name? Meh-Kenny. I spared myself watching the press conferences when she was doing them. I'm like, I'm not sitting through this. It's bad enough I have to read it— and you were doing the right. You were standing up for your

country and then you had written on Twitter ,sort of looking back at this, you said (this is from February, I believe, 2021), “5 years ago today, Trump head Jeff Zucker banned me from CNN after this segment with Kayleigh. CNN even scrubbed the transcript from their archives then gave Kayleigh a paid contract.” This is something that concerns me a lot because we're seeing all this manipulation of algorithms, we're seeing paywalls go up, but we're also just seeing this concerted effort of the media to rewrite the narrative of what happened in 2016. That's one of the reasons I wanted you on because I want to preserve the truth.

Cheri Jacobus (00:19:50):

And I found that out from a reporter who was actually calling CNN and they wouldn't talk to him on the record. He's like, “Why'd you stop having Cheri Jacobus on? She's been on for years. She's been on hundreds of times.” He even tracked it and how it fell off. He was nailing them, saying “You did this for Trump. You did this as a favor for Trump knowing that he was lying.” It was a reporter who poured through that and said every other segment from that night's show is in their archives—a transcript is in the archives—but what they did is they pulled just the one where I was talking about Trump and that super PAC.

Sarah Kendzior (00:20:21):

Yeah. See, that's interesting to me.

Cheri Jacobus (00:20:23):

That's why I also think that the whole fight between Trump and CNN is fake, because he and Zucker, you know, Zucker is his little buddy. There might have been some times where some of it became serious, but let's not forget that all of the people that Jeff Zucker gave contracts to, normally if someone gets caught lying on TV, they're gone, whether you're a guest or PA. They had Michael Caputo on which helped him raise money for his GoFund Me that I'm sure he pocketed. They had Kellyanne on after she was caught lying. They gave a contract to Kayleigh McEnany and they had on Jason Miller. They had on that Scottie Nell Hughes person, you know, people with no experience and people who... Corey Ladowski after he'd been arrested for manhandling a female reporter and putting actual reporters in bullpens and out and out lying.

Cheri Jacobus (00:21:12):

So it wasn't serious. So because of the close personal friendship between Jeff Zucker and the Trumps—and Jared Kushner and Ivanka and all of them—CNN was third in the ratings. And you noticed Trump was never mentioning Rachel Maddow and MSNBC, but by pretend-attacking CNN, he elevated them so they could be viewed as the equal and opposite of Fox News. It helped them. Every time he mentioned CNN's name, it helped them. And in return, Jeff Zucker would make sure that he had plenty of pro-Trump voices on. And he banned me and I'm sure others for Trump. So it's just kabuki theater and I don't think they can be taken seriously. You've got Chris Cuomo who has come out and said, “Hey, by the way, Jeff Zucker knew everything I was doing in terms of supporting my brother, the governor.” [laughs] So, Zucker is still there. He said he was leaving by the end of the year, but he's there.

Sarah Kendzior (00:22:05):

Yeah. It's been frustrating to me that other people have not seen through this, through Trump's media tactics, because it's so consistent; the fake fights, the kayfabe WWE-style battles, that is exactly what they're doing. You saw it also, I think, with the New York *Times*, Maggie Haberman. The people he targets

are people whose stories he wants you to read because he's covering up crime with scandal, you know, with fluffy kind of stuff. But one thing that's interesting to me—especially because they were so upset with you for talking about his finances—is that there's this very interesting (and potentially lucrative for any network head) dark underbelly of organized crime surrounding Trump; all of these mafiosos, sexual assaults, the kind of things that usually tabloids just eat up. They stayed away from all of that.

Sarah Kendzior:

The really serious stuff like the Epstein-related court case where a 13-year-old had accused Trump of rape, or a woman accused him of that happening when she was 13-years-old. All of his ties to the Russian mafia, his ties to the Italian mafia, even though a lot of this was in books. You know, it was in books by Wayne Barrett, David Cay Johnston, etc. Not hard to find. If that kind of stuff sells so well and could potentially make Jeff Zucker a huge profit, why would they stay away from it?

Cheri Jacobus (00:23:26):

Well, because these media organizations are run out of New York. I spent 30 years in DC and it was completely different moving to New York, a different culture surrounding it, because DC tends to think that they're the center of the universe and that they kind of control those things. And that's why the establishment in DC was caught off guard when the media basically said, No, Trump's going to be your nominee, because nobody believed that it was really going to happen. And then of course the establishment got back in line—they all got in line behind Trump—so they could all remain in their positions as cogs in the wheel. New York is where these mafia guys are. They're all connected. And then every once in a while, somebody who's lightly connected that has a good personality or a clever Twitter, you know, they become little TV stars.

Cheri Jacobus:

And we forget about how close they all were and how some of them still are close. The public doesn't know this because they watch them or they just have their little tweet and they're like [mocking tone] “Well, I really like him” or something, like, “I think she's really good”, and they don't understand what the true connections are or how these people even get on TV or in the positions that they have. Richard Nixon famously started calling the press, the media, because he knew that it was an insult. We don't have press anymore, we have media. There's a difference and it's not good. I have family members who are glued to Fox and are Trumpers and they don't know half of the stuff that we know. They aren't on Twitter. Most Trump supporters are not on Twitter.

Cheri Jacobus (00:24:54):

They might be on Facebook. They watch Fox news. They watch their local TV, which is why when I did *America Reads the Mueller Report*, we bought half-hour time slots and local TV to get people. They aren't part of the cult. They don't know what they don't know. And when they're presented with certain facts, when it's undeniable because they're not seeing it on Fox, they are genuinely surprised. And some of them can be gotten through to, but they're not because Trump told them all, Don't listen to anybody but Fox, only listen to me, everybody else is lying to you. And we never saw that in years past. We knew there was competition. We knew there was bias from certain networks and everybody watched who they wanted to watch, but it was never this, “Everybody else is lying to you. Everybody else is fake news. Only watch Fox.” And it's dangerous.

Cheri Jacobus:

For the first couple years that we were all in this fight, I think all of us thought, We can win this. And I don't want to depress anybody, but I don't know if we can now. It's been going on for too long. And we now know as of today that Bannon's not gonna see his trial until July 18th and Mark Meadows is not cooperating with the January 6th committee. He just cut that off. The January 6th Committee will not get anything done because all these folks that they want to talk to are stalling until after Republicans take the majority in the House and they can disband the January 6th Committee and these guys all skate. So everything is riding on the DOJ and Merrick Garland. And unless you just want to have blind faith, that's not looking good. I think we are in serious trouble.

Sarah Kendzior (00:26:24):

Yeah, I agree. I think people don't understand that in a situation like this—whether you're dealing with a mafia state or encroaching autocracy—time is the enemy. We've never had time. They needed to act quickly. But also another thing that I've found when I've talked to folks who voted for Trump or who are skeptical about the kind of things that we know a lot about, particularly the organized crime connections, they think, "Well, if this were real, if you were telling me the truth, someone would've done something about this. They would've highlighted this information. They would've clearly arrested him; The CIA or the FBI or the Obama administration or the media. You know, "The media hates Trump, obviously they'd bring this up."

Cheri Jacobus (00:27:05):

Or, "Why didn't Mueller indict him if he was guilty of something?"

Sarah Kendzior (00:27:08):

Exactly. So it's like the lack of accountability, the lack of urgency—of expressed urgency—from these officials helps create this feeling that we must be lying, even if the evidence is in the public domain and it's really old. Sometimes I'll point that out to people, like, I'm not showing you something written while Hillary Clinton was running for president. This is from the '80s, this is from the '90s, this is a court document. And I completely agree with you that people can be swayed, because most people don't want a con artist/crook/criminal as a president. They'll accept a bigot, they'll accept a jackass, but they don't want to be conned, but they don't want to be screwed over. I think that's a natural bipartisan American instinct. But they feel like we must be, or others must be wrong or lying or what have you because of the lack of action. What do you think of how this is gone? You were part of a project or helped lead a project to bring the *Mueller Report* and its conclusions to a broader array of American households and get the word out there about things that had been investigated and offenses that Trump had been found to have committed, especially obstruction of justice and whatnot. And then there were no indictments. Now we're seeing a similar pattern with Garland and we saw that pattern with Cy Vance and with others. What do you make of all of this?

Cheri Jacobus (00:28:26):

I think that the fix has been in for a long time. The fact that Mueller said that, "Yes, the president can be indicted upon leaving office" and he laid out no fewer than 10 instances of obstruction of justice, and nothing has happened. And I don't understand these people on social media and others saying, "Trust Garland, there's a plan." It's just, no, there's not. And then they always revert back to talking about just January 6th, talking about the insurrection like, "Well that takes time." Well, the reason I don't think Garland is doing anything on anything is because he's done nothing on anything. Okay. If there were indictments on the obstruction of justice by Trump outlined in the *Mueller Report*, something that's been

wrapped up and tied with a bow and doesn't need months of investigation because we see Trump committing obstruction of justice on television and he just basically rubbed our faces in it the other night when we see the tape with Mark Levin, bragging about firing Comey and that made the Russia issue go away, basically.

Cheri Jacobus:

So, you know, the fact that we've seen nothing means that... I don't have blind faith in Merrick Garland. There's no reason to. So the Department of Justice, they cannot talk about things. Well, this stuff always gets out when people are being questioned. Same with Mueller. When someone's being hauled in and questioned and there are subpoenas, people know about it. We've seen nothing done on the *Mueller Report* obstruction of justice. So again, if Merrick Garland's DOJ was indicting Trump on obstruction of justice and the *Mueller Report*—and some of his other crimes that are long proven, where the DOJ doesn't have work to do on this, it's already been done—I might be more willing to say, “Okay, I understand why we're not hearing anything yet on the key players, including Trump, for the January 6th insurrection.”

Cheri Jacobus:

But to have this blind faith in Merrick Garland when he's done nothing on anything, basically, is just ridiculous and stupid and I'm surprised and disappointed. Some people I consider to be smart people that you see on Twitter, just doubling down on this... If you have helpful information or encouraging information and analysis saying, “Well, maybe it's not all gloom and doom, maybe he's doing this”, but the doubling down and the fact that there seems to be bots and trolls now is disturbing to me. It hurts the credibility because I do like hearing the encouraging information by people who know about these things, to give us hope, but when there's such an agenda at play, I no longer trust them. It's either ego or there's something else going on because it makes absolutely no sense.

Sarah Kendzior (00:31:03):

Yeah, it really doesn't. And you and I get attacked by a lot of the same people and then they've expanded. It's such a broad array. It's bringing us all together but, you know, they'll target, for example, Laurence Tribe—

Cheri Jacobus (00:31:17):

Not directly. They'll go after me and then they will talk about him, but you don't see them going after Laurence Tribe personally because they know better. My God, he was the law professor at Harvard Law School for Merrick Garland. But when he's retweeting me and agreeing with me, they go after me. I guess it's easier to attack me than him, or Glenn Kirschner or somebody like that.

Sarah Kendzior (00:31:39):

I think that's part of it. I think there's also a heavy dose of misogyny involved. They target you, they target me, they target other women. It is like QAnon. In my book, *Hiding in Plain Sight*, that was written back in 2019, I compared these sort of “Mueller's coming” folks to QAnon because it was baseless. It was based on absolute fantasy, fabrication, the same lines; “Trust the plan.” “There are sealed indictments.” “There are secret saviors.” “They're just waiting for the right moment.” “They're dotting the i's and crossing the t's” and everything but the word INDICT, apparently.

Cheri Jacobus (00:32:16):

“They would never be influenced by X.” Yeah, we hear that all the time. It's like, what happened to Tish James? She's running for governor now, but what happened?

Sarah Kendzior (00:32:24):

I don't know. And it's sort of poignant to me that we're having this conversation on Pearl Harbor Day. We're having this conversation on the 80th anniversary of the day that our country was attacked and everybody saw that it was attacked and everybody rallied together to see this. And I do feel like we've been attacked from inside—I know we have—and the people who voted for Trump are also under attack. The vast majority of them, I think, don't know the severity of what has occurred. What has happened to our institutions in that they don't want to protect themselves? Because the ultimate outcome of this is either going to be some sort of balkanized dissolution, or autocracy and the loss of our basic rights and freedoms, or violence and civil war, or all of the above. What is in it for them?

Cheri Jacobus (00:33:13):

Well, we're pretty much part way there already, which is why when we'd just started talking, I said it might be too late. It is frightening when you see those that we respected, institutions that we need to do their jobs, simply not doing it. And we're being told to shut up about Merrick Garland and trust him. But Rome is burning, and we're being told that we're wrong. It's like, just give us something. Give us some justice, because it's not happening. I think it's perfectly legitimate to call for his firing and I think that you need some members of Congress to gather together as a group and say, very specifically—have an event, do an op-ed together—and demand that President Biden fire Merrick Garland for cause. It is not political to fire somebody when they're not doing their job. Not for the January 6th stuff but for all of the other things that have simply gone ignored, such as 10 counts of obstruction of justice in the *Mueller Report*. There is no evidence that Garland is doing anything. He can be fired for cause and he should be. If you had Democratic members of Congress speaking out like that as a group with one voice, that gives cover—political cover—to President Biden in the firing.

Cheri Jacobus:

And, of course, the Trumpers will scream that it's political. There's nothing you can do about that and you shouldn't worry about that. And, of course, Republicans in the Senate are going to do all the, okay, they're not gonna confirm his next pick. So you have an acting AG who's gonna go in there and give us the justice that we need because this will be our last shot. And again, it might already be too late. I was shocked when Roger Stone and Michael Caputo were caught lying under oath to Congress, committing perjury about their contact with a Russian that goes by Henry Greenberg. It was Mueller who refreshed their memories and they were allowed to amend their testimony. They lied. They lied and Caputo was an employee of the Trump campaign, I believe, at the time when he was meeting with this guy.

Cheri Jacobus (00:35:22):

He claims that he never knew him before he was approached, this Henry Greenberg, who wanted \$2 million for dirt he had on Hillary. And it just so happens—and this is something I put on Twitter that has gone completely ignored—but Michael Caputo had his little Miami post office box in this little, teeny, tiny Miami storefront and he had it there for years. You know who else had a little mailbox in that same little spot just a few feet away? Henry Greenberg. They knew each other. And you can communicate and exchange money in those little mailboxes and not be just detected by people who were maybe monitoring your phones and your online communication. And that has been completely ignored. Also four days—I think it was four or five days—before the *Washington Post* story broke that Caputo and

Stone had lied under oath to Congress and got caught, Caputo quickly got out of that PO box address after being there for years. That was his Miami business address.

Cheri Jacobus:

This is important stuff. This stuff matters. Now, there's one member of Congress—I won't say who he is—he was on the committee and he did tell me that there were some of them that wanted to refer Caputo and Stone to DOJ for indictment at that time for perjury, even though they knew that at the time Jeff Sessions would let them off the hook. But just Congress doing their part and others were just like, you know, why bother? That's where everybody who didn't do their jobs really screwed up, and I think Democrats in Congress, for letting these guys off the hook, played a role in that as well. Indict them. Refer them for indictment then let the chips fall where they may. Let it be around Sessions' neck to let these criminals off the hook, these liars off the hook. That's something, I don't know if the statute of limitations has run out on that, but Merrick Garland could be acting on that.

Cheri Jacobus (00:37:10):

Congress could still do that. They could refer all of these people to DOJ for indictment and they should. And they should go after people who violated the Hatch Act. When you've got Kellyanne Conway standing behind the microphone on the White House lawn laughing about the multiple violations of the Hatch Act that she had done, because she knows nothing will happen to her. So that goes back to what I was saying a little while ago: Everybody who didn't do what they were supposed to is guilty in putting us where we are now with Trump and Trumpism and fascism.

Sarah Kendzior (00:37:43):

And one of the things that's so frustrating is, you know, Trump, of course, he confesses his crimes all the time. He confessed obstruction of justice again this week. He confesses the crimes before he does them, as he's doing them—he's like a live tweeter/live narrator of his crimes—but so do the people in his circle. So did Roger Stone, so did Michael Flynn and so did Caputo. And I really think Caputo is an underexplored figure. I know he did this to you and he did this to me, too. He harassed me on Twitter but while harassing me ended up implicating a number of his criminal conspirators, especially Paul Manafort. I could just ask a question and he would fold. He would start bragging about things Manafort had done in Russia. It doesn't seem like these guys are very difficult to get to talk.

Sarah Kendzior (00:38:30):

And I remember when that happened, this was very early on in the beginning of the Mueller probe, I thought, My God, this is gonna be the easiest prosecution of all time. If I can get this guy to start blabbing out secrets on Twitter—which of course he then went on and deleted, but I have the screenshots—this is gonna be a piece of cake. This will take like a couple months. That's why it blows my mind that everyone's like, "Oh my God, it's so complicated. It takes so long." It's like, Dude, they told y'all. They left a record. They left a trail. What is up with that? And then when Michael Caputo—

Cheri Jacobus (00:39:00):

They must know that they'll never be prosecuted.

Sarah Kendzior (00:39:02):

Yeah, that's what it seems like to me. And then of course when he ended up on CNN where they were presenting him as some sort of objective commentator and not as Trump's advisor, not as Putin's former advisor, not as a liaison-

Cheri Jacobus (00:39:14):

They legitimized him.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes.

Cheri Jacobus:

They normalized him.

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, I'm just trying to see the end game here.

Cheri Jacobus (00:39:20):

Yeah. He's somebody who should have been a subject of some of these segments rather than sitting there like he's one of these people who are respected longtime political operatives. Well, although some of the CNN political analysts are frauds and don't actually have political experience, but that's another story. You know, they had Caputo there, they legitimized him, they gave him credibility, they normalized him, and now when they have to report on him, they'll put it on the website but you don't see them talking about the stuff about Caputo because they're embarrassed. And they should be. They should never have had him on. And Jason Miller. You know, gosh, I mean, you just look at the people who in normal times would never have gotten that far, but Trump likes to hire and promote people way above anything... I mean, some of these people could never have gotten within 10 miles of a job at the White House or a campaign like that.

Cheri Jacobus:

So of course they will do anything to keep these jobs, like Kayleigh McEnany and frankly even Kellyanne Conway. I mean, she was a pollster. She'd never worked for an elected official and it showed. And you don't put a pollster in a job like that at the White House. So there were so many inappropriate hires and appointments because Trump only puts people in who have to be so grateful—and plus don't know any better—that they will lie for him. They will just do as they're told. Otherwise, you have people who at some point would be like, Yeah, I think I'm done here. They don't want to put their own career at risk.

Sarah Kendzior (00:40:52):

Right, or they're conscience at risk.

Cheri Jacobus (00:40:54):

We have all these players that just popped up out of nowhere that no one had ever heard of before because, again, they're given this opportunity that, my goodness, they never would've gotten it before anywhere. And so it's very dangerous, but what's dangerous is when you've got the TV executives who are the ones giving them the credibility, like, Well, if Trump wants that... You know, you've got all the

other Republican campaigns, when they all met after every election, there's something—I don't know if it's Harvard, whatever—but they all have meetings and all the campaign operatives and you've got Jeff Zucker and some of the other TV heads there and they have a big meeting. We read that at that one when Jeff Zucker was claiming that they were very fair in their coverage, you had the political operatives from the other campaigns just screaming at him, saying “You gave Trump in the primary more coverage than all of the others combined. You kept that camera on the podium.”

Cheri jacobus:

And Jeff Zucker was quoted at one of the big CNN Town Hall meetings when they had staff really complaining and expressing sincere concern that all of their coverage of Trump was making him the nominee, he said, “I don't care. Keep the cameras on him ‘til the eyeballs leave.”

Sarah Kendzior:

Mmmhmm [affirmative]

Cheri jacobus:

I mean, this is horrendous. And so I just, here we are, what, six and a half years later when all this stuff started? And we can't undo it and it's getting worse and worse and worse. Where we are now with Merrick Garland, there is absolutely no excuse for him to have not acted on anything related to Trump. People say, “Well, you only get one shot at the thing.”

Sarah Kendzior:

No.

Cheri Jacobus:

Two things: No, Trump isn't king. And first of all, you get as many shots as there are crimes. Period.

Sarah Kendzior (00:42:41):

Exactly. No, it's a completely facile excuse and it's the same one they rolled out for Mueller, for Cy Vance, for James Comey. They roll out the same little catch phrases all the time. “You come at the king, you best not miss.” You know, “Get the little fish to get the big fish, blah, blah, blah” and none of it pans out. We can see what's happening in reality and what's happening is either very little, nothing, or he's abetting Trump by doing things like defending Trump against E. Jean Carroll in her case. I want to ask about a separate topic though because you're one of the few people who will go into this, at least on Twitter. So you left the GOP. You're now an independent, I'm an independent too, so we get to be independents together. But you are not part of the Never Trump Lincoln Project and you've had some qualms with the way that they operate and the way they carry out their activity. What's your opinion on the Lincoln Project these days?

Cheri Jacobus (00:43:35):

Well, I saw early on, first of all, when you have just political operatives doing something like that, and I didn't understand the George Conway role because I've always had serious questions about him when he became Never Trump very suddenly, just weeks before Justice Kennedy announced his retirement and

George's good friend, Brett Kavanaugh, was nominated. But the Lincoln Project, it was just political operatives. When you had a group like Bill Kristol's group—and by the way, I used to be in these Washington meetings with all of them—they were legitimate. I'm sure they pay their consultants what you're supposed to make because people can't work for free, but these people were not purely just political consultants. They all did other things and they pulled together to do their group. And you would see a report on, “This is our buy. This is what we're spending. This is who it's about. And this is who we're going after. And this is where it's airing.” And that's legit. That's standard. That's what you do.

Cheri Jacobus (00:44:18):

With the Lincoln Project, first of all, all guys when it first started and they added on two women as unpaid advisors. Eventually one of 'em got paid, but they did that when everybody was like, What's this brothers in arms thing? So right away, you're like, Okay, what is this? And I knew it was going to be part of that whole consultant kickback culture. I didn't say anything, but when I started noticing they were putting these ads on Twitter and not saying where they were airing and they were too long to air on TV. So it's not like they were targeting doing this on local TV where they were going to actually hit persuadable voters, because close elections are won or lost in those margins.

Cheri Jacobus (00:45:04):

It was playing to the crowd, preaching to the choir and getting a lot of money. I did have confirmation from one of the former people there that that, in fact, was their plan. And then they became successful beyond their wildest dreams, I guess. There are famous quotes from Steve Schmidt saying, you know, “building generational wealth” and we know all about all the scandals, but it was the money. And then when the first reports came out, it backed up what I'd already been noticing. Every time there was an article, they'd say “Here's the ad” and they'd show it, put a link to it, but there was no information about how big the buy was. It used to be that there weren't so many political reporters. Now, maybe anybody can be a reporter and they don't know how to do this, but I've never seen that before, ever. And people just became so invested. Then they started spreading a lot of money around to a lot of people, and that kept a lot of people who knew exactly what I did quiet. So it didn't surprise me at all when it finally all came out.

Sarah Kendzior (00:46:04):

Yeah. I mean, it amazed me from the start. I think there's a variety of people attached to the Lincoln Project, some of them I like more than others, some may be in there in good faith. But George Conway? How in the world are people falling for this? I was watching people, you know, Democrats, liberals. retweeting Kellyanne Conway's husband. Again, this reminded me of professional wrestling. I was like, this is the most scripted, fake thing.

Cheri Jacobus (00:46:35):

People think our side is smarter than the MAGA side. They're not. There was a group of Never Trumpers who were meeting in secret every two weeks and we were sworn to secrecy. It was by invitation only, sworn to secrecy because some of the people there—some of the younger ones—could lose their jobs. One day I walk in and there's George Conway sitting there and he had just had something published in the *Washington Post*. Now, George Conway has known Trump, flew around in the plane with him. He and Kellyanne have known him for years, lived in one of his buildings. He advised him, but they were Ted Cruz supporters because they were there with the Cambridge Analytica money. And then when Ted Cruz

was out, they switched and Kellyanne went to be the campaign manager for Trump, so now Kellyanne and George are Trump supporters.

Cheri Jacobus:

George was up for the job of solicitor general. He didn't get it and that became public. So now he's up for another position with the Trump administration and when his name became public, he pulled his name out. I think that's clearly because that would be really embarrassing for George Conway not to get a second job that he was going after in the Trump administration. He's worth about \$40 million. He doesn't need the money. So he didn't need any Lincoln Project money, but he needed credibility. So I think George realized, Okay, Trump's gonna screw up, he's not gonna last long. And George is a Federalist Society guy. He founded the Harvard Chapter. He figures, Okay, I can do my best work by working the long game with the courts and he'll be the hero. That gives cover to Kellyanne too.

Cheri Jacobus (00:48:06):

So when he showed up at that meeting and then they told us that he had asked to be at it, I'm thinking, first of all, this is really bad for the people who could lose their jobs if George goes home and tells Kellyanne who's at these meetings. It felt like a real betrayal. It did not feel legit that this guy suddenly—this really smart guy worth all this money—all of a sudden realized that Trump was bad when the rest of us had known it all along. So right away, I'm like, something's going on here. Something's going on here. And I even predicted that he would start some group that would take the heat off Kellyanne so that they could both still be a power couple and play both sides. And sure enough, that's what happened with the Lincoln Project. But when George showed up at that meeting—I didn't go anymore after that, by the way—when George showed up, it was within a few weeks, a couple weeks after that, that Justice Kennedy announced his retirement and Brett Kavanaugh was nominated, who's friends with George Conway from way back when they did a lot of their, I guess, dirty work.

Cheri Jacobus:

So something was up. Now, there were people in this group, very high profile Never Trumpers, who had columns, high profile columns now, syndicated columns. And no fewer than three of them eventually came out in support of Kavanaugh. So, I think it's pretty obvious that George's job was to get prominent Never Trump support for Kavanaugh to make sure that it made it safer for, say, Susan Collins. And she was rewarded, I believe, in her campaign because she was way behind in the polls and something happened. And as Karl Rove allegedly famously said, "You can cheat when you know the polls are within three points in a state." Well, she was way behind. There is no way that Susan Collins won that race legitimately, but they had to pull out all the shops for her. But if you could get prominent Never Trump support for Kavanaugh, you've just made it safe for Kavanaugh. And I think that that was George's game. He was playing the long game for the courts because that's what he and people like him care about. They don't care about Trump and he wasn't going to get the job he wanted with Trump, so this was a way to do that for the Federalist Society.

Sarah Kendzior (00:50:12):

Yeah, and it was distressing to watch people fall for it, for this idea that somehow Kellyanne Conway is working as Trump's spokesperson, committing all sorts of illegal offenses, violating the Hatch Act and so forth, and somehow they just stay married, even though he's allegedly now rabidly opposed to everything the administration is doing and fearing the repercussions for him. It was so phony and it

diminished my faith in humanity to watch person after person fall for it. I guess it's just kind of in tandem with this, you know—

Cheri Jacobus (00:50:47):

Or pretend to fall for it because there was something in it for them.

Sarah Kendzior (00:50:50):

Yeah. It's a really frightening thing, I think, because the stakes we're dealing with are so high. It's the loss of our country, it's the loss of our rights, and it has nothing to do, I think, in this sense of partisanship. You and I come from different political perspectives and very much see eye to eye on this because the question is autocracy versus democracy. It's truth versus lies. It's a matter of integrity and we're being force-fed so much bullshit by people with an utter lack of integrity and a lack of patriotism that, you know, it sounds so corny, but it really chills me how little people seem to care about the *fate* of our nation—they're very into the *faith*—and these baseless institutionalist conclusions. On that note, what would you like the Biden administration to do to keep our country safe and free?

Cheri Jacobus:

He has to fire Merrick Garland immediately and put somebody in as an acting. He has to do that to save the country. There will be yelling and screaming about it. It will not mess up the investigations. We've already seen reports on the inside that people that work at the DOJ do not like Merrick Garland's style. He's more like a judge. He keeps everybody at arm's length and has people dealing with junior people. I think Joe Biden needs to bite the bullet, get this done, just like with Afghanistan. You take the hit for it but you've got to do the right thing and save our country. We need an AG. We need this now. January 6th Committee is not going to do it so this is our last hope. It has to happen.

Sarah Kendzior (00:52:21):

I agree with you a hundred percent. And that's a very good observation that he did do this incredibly difficult task of taking us out of Afghanistan, which inflamed everybody—obviously was disastrous, predictably, in certain respects—yet cannot fire the AG that's not doing his most basic, rudimentary tasks of protecting Americans from harm, from obvious criminals who keep plotting new coups in public and confessing to prior crimes. I don't get it. But I'm grateful that you see clearly and are willing to express it on the hell site of Twitter where we continue to be mobbed by propagandists and fabricators of various—.

Cheri Jacobus (00:53:02):

And people who we thought were allies in this. That's what's chilling to me. I feel like we've lost our numbers. I'm very surprised that some of the people who are doubling down really trying to get us to support Garland, but they don't have any reason.

Sarah Kendzior (00:53:14):

Yes! Exactly. That's what's so weird.

Cheri Jacobus (00:53:16):

I don't understand the attacks. Why are they so vociferously defending him instead of just saying, Well, there's some signs... You know, that's what's creeping me out a little bit about people who I considered allies.

Sarah Kendzior (00:53:29):

And it's bullying. And what's strange is like, you know, you and I, we're critiquing, one, Trump and the GOP crime syndicate apparatus, which of course we all should be. And we assumed that that was what they were upset about too. And then we're critiquing Merrick Garland, super powerful, wealthy, in a position where he can do things that we as citizens cannot Merrick Garland. And that somehow is taken as a personal critique. We get very personalized bullying back at us for not worshiping the prokurator like it would be in Russia.

Cheri Jacobus (00:54:05):

If it's going to be a personal attack, then you either have another agenda and I'm not going to give you the spotlight. You're not gonna use my Twitter following to spew this stuff. But a lot of it is these anonymous... There's a bot troll army and that's very telling as well, but it's the higher profile people. And then I realize maybe they're not so high profile. [laughs]

Sarah Kendzior (00:54:24):

I don't think so. They're just really loquacious. They tweet all day, all night and it is a bot army, but I'm concerned that the DOJ and the FBI appear to have a bot army that recurs because the same thing happened with the Mueller probe.

Cheri Jacobus (00:54:38):

I think it's somebody acting on their behalf.

Sarah Kendzior (00:54:40):

Yeah, I think so too. And I think it's the parts of those institutions that, one, Trump and his crime cult, but in the process they want to protect their own botched investigations or complicity from being exposed to the masses. They need to keep up this illusion that it's just a matter of time, or that it's incredibly difficult when it's really not that difficult. It's frustrating. If this were another country and you heard that, that there's a troll bot army that attacks journalists who critique the attorney general, you would think that sounds like an autocratic state. And we're not quite at that point yet. You and I wouldn't be having this conversation if we were fully at that point, but it's absolutely the direction we're headed. And I guess what distresses me is that so many people are heading there as volunteers. They're not being necessarily coerced into it. Maybe they're lured into it with money or other incentives. I don't even know. I don't know their thought process, but they've signed on board and it also has that cult-like feeling, which is really creepy.

Cheri Jacobus (00:55:41):

You know what it is though? They're afraid to face the truth because it is so frightening. I think there is a lot of that. People just want to hang on to hope because the truth that we're seeing is terrifying and people just aren't willing to go there yet.

Sarah Kendzior (00:55:53):

Yeah, I think that that's a big part of it, especially when you put all the little pieces together, you know, just things that you've mentioned off hand in this interview. If you were to do a deep dive and any of those individuals—Stone, Caputo, Zucker, what have you—you're gonna end up with something very, very dark, very upsetting. And I think that a lot of folks understandably do have trouble dealing with that.

But that's the challenge that we've been given, unfortunately, for our era. That's the war that we have to fight. We're in an information war, we're in a war against transnational organized crime, and against aspiring autocrats. I appreciate you for doing your part and I'll keep doing my part, troll army be damned. [laughs]

[outro theme music]

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 Oil Change International, an advocacy group supported with the generous donation from the Greta Thunberg Foundation that exposes the true costs of fossil fuels and facilitates the ongoing transition to clean energy.

Andrea Chalupa:

We encourage you to help support Ukraine by donating to Razom for Ukraine at razomforukraine.org. We also encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan. 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 theorangutangproject.org. Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon. It keeps us going.

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

Original music in Gaslit Nation is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Vissenberg, Nik Farr, Demien Arriaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

Gaslit Nation would like to thank our supporters at the Producer level on Patreon and higher—oh, and by the way, if you don't hear your name on this list and you've signed up, we're going to say your name

starting in July and it keep it going for how long you've donated, FYI. So, we'd like to thank... [Patreon supporter list]