Gaslit Nation Transcript
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"Cosa Nostra Grover Cleveland"
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[intro - theme music]

Sarah Kendzior (00:00:10):

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

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:22):

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine, the film the Kremlin does not want you to see, so make sure to watch it.

Sarah Kendzior (00:00:35):

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

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:43):

We are recording on my mom's birthday, December 6th. Happy birthday, mom. She's @ubco2 on Twitter, so feel free to say happy birthday to her. We did an interview with her early when the show launched about her lessons for the rest of us on how to be a grassroots champion and get bills passed, laws passed in your state. She championed the child car seat law and the seatbelt law in California, including when she was pregnant with me. So that's where I get it from, in case you're wondering. We wanna thank everyone who came out to our three phone banks for Reverend Warnock in Georgia with Indivisible. They were so much fun, incredibly energizing, and now we all wait to see if our efforts combined with all the incredible volunteers on the ground could overcome GOP voter suppression. Republicans in Georgia deliberately moved up the date of a runoff giving less time to get the word out about the runoff for the very reason one would expect.

Andrea Chalupa (00:01:47):

So there's less time people are aware of a runoff and less time to reach voters and all sorts of shenanigans and chaos can enue. For instance, in our phone bank last night for Warnock, we had to change plans last minute where half of our phone bank had to be dedicated to reaching people who asked for absentee ballots and didn't receive one, or may not have received one. And we had to, you know, help them learn about that and go vote. So I hope to God that all of our efforts combined overcame Republican voter suppression in Georgia and that Warnock is reelected to the Senate where we need him because, again, he's wonderful. And also the Senate map for Dems is not that great in 2024. So we need as many senators now. We'll talk about the Georgia election in our upcoming bonus episode, which will be available later in the week for our Patreon subscribers who keep our show going.

Andrea Chalupa (00:02:44):

Thank you so much guys for that. And also a very important call to action: Sarah and I had as our special holiday guest this year on the show, Tim Snyder, the wonderful historian that we all know and love. And

Tim has been dedicating his mind, body, and soul to fighting for democracy to prevail in Ukraine for the sake of democracy worldwide. He goes through, beautifully, eloquently, in his Tim Snyder trademark way on the stakes for all of us in Ukraine. And in that interview, which we just recorded this morning he reminded us that we have to put pressure now on members of Congress, for the love of God, to pass all the funding that is needed now, while Democrats control both chambers of Congress—the House and the Senate—because the scumbags coming into power in the House—the Marjorie Taylor Greenes and the Kevin McCarthy's who are all fascist out, they're all mobbed up with Holocaust deniers and Russian propagandists—they are gonna come in and try to do everything they can to be Putin's little helpers when they take control of the House, including as we'll go through in this week's episode, bringing Hunter Biden's laptop into Congress to testify.

Andrea Chalupa (00:03:59):

You know what I mean? It's gonna get really wacky. So it's extremely important that you check out the show notes for this episode where you can find how to contact both your member in the House of Representatives and your senator. Or just Google for that information and just contact both of them. I'm gonna do it after we record this show and say, "For the love of God, do everything you can now to pass much-needed funding for Ukraine." It's extremely important because the Tucker Carlson Republican Party has made it a pet issue to stop funding for Ukraine, to be proud about this. It's just, it's absolutely disgusting. These people are facing a genocide. Marjorie Taylor Greene, one of her talking points that she goes on and on about—because she has no idea what she's talking about, as we all know—is that she wants to know where every single cent of our aid to Ukraine is going.

Andrea Chalupa (00:04:46):

No shit. Do you understand that they have people who already are set up to do this? It's so hard to apply for a US government grant. I did it. I went through the torturous amount of paperwork work to apply for a US government grant for a media project in Ukraine. And as part of the application, you need to include who your auditor will be, who your accountant will be. So as part of this application, I had to interview accountants and say, "Could I put your name down as a person that'll be auditing this project?" I had to do that just for the application. So yes, there are people whose job it is to audit the hell out of the money we give to countries like Ukraine. The fact that Marjorie Taylor Greene keeps beating on about this... It already exists! It's already out there, it's already operational. It's just the most ridiculous thing.

Andrea Chalupa (00:05:41):

And so it's all part of their Kremlin propaganda because they're fascists and they love what the Kremlin is doing. That's it. That's what it comes down to. It's: The fascists of the world unite. That's what we're up against. So please, please, please join me in calling your members of Congress—both in the House and the Senate—and say, "Please pass funding for Ukraine now, before the end of the year, because if you don't, the money is going to run out and Ukraine is going to be on its own. And that's when the tide could really turn, where Russia could win the war and demolish this country. And that's going to be invigorating for tyrants all over the world, including for us here at home." So please, please, please fight like hell. Make those calls for Ukraine. It takes not very long and I'll be doing it, too, with you. Thank you.

Sarah Kendzior (00:06:28):

Alright. Well, this is the first time that Andrea and I have recorded since the day that Merrick Garland appointed Jack Smith as the Special Counsel, so we've never really had the opportunity to go into that. We're gonna do that today. This has been a really awful past couple of weeks. Other things that happened, of course, is the GOP took the House, which Andrea just mentioned; Trump has called to terminate the Constitution and no official seems to be really doing much about that; we have Nazi

resurgence, again, led by Kanye West, Nick Fuentes, Alex Jones and so on; the SVF crypto fiasco. It's really been quite a ride, so we're gonna try to get in as much as we can. I'm gonna start with Jack Smith, the not so special counsel.

Sarah Kendzior (00:07:21):

In November, Garland, as I said, appointed Smith to oversee specifically the investigations into Trump's actions on January 6th and also Trump taking classified documents and stashing them at Mar-a-Lago. And as we noted in a bonus episode where this news is breaking live, there is no need for a special counsel. This is yet another attempt by Merrick Garland's DOJ to run out the clock and let criminal elites run free, profoundly endangering the American public. And this is what we predicted that he would do a year ago. There is no reason for this. And so, as they are doing this, the DOJ has brought out the old elite criminal impunity template and they are inserting Smith into the role of Savior, which is a role meant to bolster false hopes and to manage expectations. DOJ propagandists are creating a cult around Jack Smith the same way that they did around Comey, Mueller, Vance, Garland, and so many other failures.

Sarah Kendzior (00:08:28):

Smith is being presented as a crusading war crimes prosecutor, and there are already a lot of lies about him circulating from the same propagandists who said things like, "Merrick Garland caught Timothy McVeigh" or "Merrick Garland prosecuted the Unabomber." None of these things actually happened. There is a lot of confusion about Smith's past, in particular, the matter of working at the Hague versus in the Hague because the Hague, of course, is a city in the Netherlands that has a variety of courts, including war crimes courts. This has been rendered in such a bizarre way. It reminds me of that *Curb Your Enthusiasm* episode where Larry meets a guy whose brother-in-law died on 9/11 and then Larry finds out later on that, you know, he died on 9/11 but it was a bicycle accident. That's sometimes how I feel reading these comments about Smith, you know, coming in from the Hague.

Sarah Kendzior (00:09:20):

I'll just get into it. I'll explain which courts he actually worked on and what he did. We'll start with Jack Smith himself. To me, he seems like neither a remarkable or an unremarkable person. His record is a mixed bag of failed and successful prosecutions. It does include a few alarming cases of preemptively closing investigations into US officials. This does not mean that Smith is bound to failure here, but that the process itself is broken and it has been broken for a long time. And this current propaganda blitz is both emblematic of that broken process and an attempt to cover it up. So I encourage you to please ignore the personality cults that are being built around him. And by the way, I don't see him participating in this.

Sarah Kendzior (00:10:16):

There are fake Jack Smith accounts on Twitter. This is not something he's doing. This is something that propagandists are doing around him. You should judge him by his actions and make sure that those actions are things he actually did and not just what you wish he had done or what you fantasize he's going to do. For example, one common claim by the propagandists is that Jack Smith tried Slobodan Milošević for war crimes. This did not happen. Milošević died two years before Smith even arrived for his first stint in the Hague. And this is really in the Hague. He did not work at the court that prosecuted Milošević, which is the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. He did work at the international Criminal Court (the ICC) from 2008 to 2010. And since September, 2018, he has worked at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, which is an independent court created by the EU.

Sarah Kendzior (00:11:14):

What stood out to me when I was looking into this is that this court has been referred to as a "ghost court" by experts on the Balkans. So I'm gonna read you an op-ed about this court by Kosovo expert

Dean Pineles. And he says, "The new court's evolution stands as a stark example of international criminal justice in slow motion. Today, the court has yet to receive any indictments despite a multi-year birthing process and a massive budget of 41 million Euros. The tragedy is twofold: The alleged perpetrators have been allowed to go about their lives with impunity, and the victims and their families have been forced to twist in the wind, waiting for justice to be served. Accountability for war crimes and justice for the victims and their families are important goals in international law. But the passage of time makes it more and more difficult to achieve these goals."

Sarah Kendzior (00:12:10):

"Witnesses die or disappear. Witnesses forget. Witnesses are threatened or killed. Family members die, perpetrators die or disappear. Key personnel resign. Evidence is lost. Stories change. If indictments had been filed in 2014 when the task force had enough evidence to do so, the cases would probably be nearing completion by now. Instead, the new court sits idle like a ghost court and the victims and their families continue to wait endlessly for justice to be served." And so again, that's from Kosovo expert Dean Pineles. And so I wanna be very clear here: Pineles is describing the state of the Kosovo court before Smith was hired as Chief prosecutor. This is before 2018. So this op-ed is not a reflection of something Smith did. And so I of course wanted to find out, well, what did he do once he got in there? Sarah Kendzior (00:13:08):

And there is, you know, relatively little written about this. I keep trying to find articles that predate his appointment as social counsel because so many of them are ridden with errors or propaganda. I just wanna see, you know, what actual experts on Kosovo and on Balkan wars think. And there's not a lot out there about him. Since 2020 there have been 8 indictments in the court, which is not a lot but better than the zero that were there before he got there. Again, how much of that is due to Smith is difficult to tell. But the thing is, it's very important to note the main points of this op-ed, which is that justice delayed is justice denied. The more time passes, the more difficult the injustice is to remedy. And so that is the lesson that the United States should take to heart.

Sarah Kendzior (00:13:58):

And hopefully that is what Jack Smith learned from his experience on the Kosovo "ghost court", which is: Time is of the essence. And if you let the clock run out, all you're doing is enabling elite criminal impunity. And so, you know, we obviously want him to succeed in these efforts of holding Trump accountable. Unfortunately, there's no indication so far that this is likely or that he'll be any more effective than the previous DOJ failures because in order for him to succeed, in order for him to bring justice, he has to thwart the system that hired him to do this. At this point, Jack Smith is a hired hand of the Trump DOJ Industrial Complex. And it would be a pleasant surprise if he overrides their influence, if he actually serves his country by holding those who threaten the survival of this country accountable.

Sarah Kendzior (00:14:54):

I hope he does it. I hope he kind of goes rogue and takes some actions. I think that would be great. You know, obviously the United States has far greater tools at its disposal than the Kosovo Specialist Chambers Court did. The cases are easy to prosecute given the ample public evidence, both of the January 6th attacks, the plotted coup—the publicly plotted coup attempt—that led up to them, the stash of documents at Mar-a-Lago, the continual confessions. You know, the main thing that's been holding the DOJ back from prosecuting Donald Trump is the DOJ itself. So I hope that Jack Smith rises to the occasion. One final note is that it is interesting to me that he is more of an outsider than anyone else we've seen in this role so far. He does not have a multi-decade record of being involved in coverups of state crimes.

Sarah Kendzior (00:15:53):

You know, which is true of Comey, certainly true of Mueller, very, very true of Cy Vance, also true of Merrick Garland and, of course, of his evil corrupt mentor Jamie Gorelick from the Clinton DOJ. There may be things about him that I don't know. When he was announced, the first thing I thought is, This is the most impossible guy to Google. You know, you Google "Jack Smith" and you're kind of lost at sea. So we'll see what happens but what saddens me is I don't think he was hired to win. You know, he was hired to run out the clock. He was hired to lose. So I hope that he thwarts the system nonetheless. Do you have thoughts, Andrea, on the Special Counsel?

Andrea Chalupa (00:16:36):

Yeah, I mean, Biden has two more years and I think he urgently needs to replace Merrick Garland, which he has a right to do. He still has the Senate, which will make that process not impossible. And the reason why he has to do it is, of course, with the Trump case—with Trump getting away with all these crimes out in the open, and as we keep pointing out in the show—the 400-page Mueller Report is a charging memo for Donald Trump. Mueller said under oath when asked by a Republican member of Congress, "Could Trump be indicted when he leaves office?" And Mueller said, "Yes." And then when Barr and Rosenstein tried to cover up the Mueller Report with their memo—which major media fell for because they're such idiots—Mueller, who's famously reticent, came out and made a statement and said this is a huge deal.

Andrea Chalupa (00:17:28):

All Americans should be concerned. This is a danger to our country; Russian aggression against us and the way they're using people like Trump. Mueller came out and rang the alarm on this, right? The famously quiet and hidden away Mueller did that. And Merrick Garland had all of this wrapped up neatly in a bow for him and he completely ignored it. And the mainstream media that fell for Barr's coverup has not pressed him on it. And all of us are just sitting here watching but we all lived through that. We all watched that go down in real time, including the Garland cheerleaders. You're gonna act like that doesn't matter, that the 400-page Mueller Report doesn't matter when it absolutely does? So there's that. But on top of it, dear Lord, we're being terrorized in America by white supremacy terrorism, by Trump's brownshirts, by the Proud Boys, by the incels. Red State, blue state, however you wanna see the United States of America, every single community right now across our our land is under threat from this whole fascist terrorist movement.

Andrea Chalupa (00:18:32):

You had five people killed in a gay club in Colorado. You had Black people gunned down in a supermarket. You had a Jewish neighborhood outside of Chicago, where a lot of Jewish people happen to live, their parade being gunned down. And you had a young woman in her early '20s being interviewed about how she got to spend time with the best mom in the world who was killed by that fascist terrorist. And what the fuck is Merrick Garland doing? You know what I mean? And then of course you have in North Carolina an attack on critical infrastructure, with an entire county being treated how Russia treats Ukraine right now. There was an attack on critical infrastructure where the power went out. So we're the fuck is Merrick Garland when all of these terrorist attacks are happening across our country and we're all just supposed to be sitting ducks?

Andrea Chalupa (00:19:22):

When I go to playgroups with my kids and I'm there with moms, you know, with different backgrounds; there's a Black mother telling me, "They're hunting us, they're hunting us." She's leaving her work late at night and it's not, you know, being mugged on the street of New York City by all the terrorists that Tucker Carlson and all of Fox News and the *New York Post* tries to tell us, you know, New York is some 1970s crime ridden cesspool. No, she's worried about being hunted by one of these white supremacists that

Merrick Garland refuses to protect us from. That's who she's worried about coming home late at night, that some terrorist, some incel is just gonna go up and shoot her point blank. Those are the conversations I'm having with mom playgroups in New York City. It's not about the far right narrative of New York being a crime den right now, which is not true.

Andrea Chalupa (00:20:12):

New York, as we keep saying on the show, is having a mental health crisis, not a crime crisis. It's having a public school education meltdown breakdown crisis because it's not getting all the resources it needs for our critical infrastructure. People are falling through the cracks. There's a big backlog of people who desperately need public services for mental health who are not being treated, who are being ignored, who are slipping through the cracks. That just came out in recent reporting. That's the crisis New York is going through. It's not a crime crisis. And on top of that, you have reports of white men throwing bricks into gay bars in New York City, of white men hunting gay people in New York City, luring them in, drugging them. This is what's happening across the country. So the plug needs to be pulled on the hate machine of social media, of far-right consolidation of propaganda channels from radio to TV.

Andrea Chalupa (00:21:04):

More needs to be done to stand up for that. It's like nobody's doing that. We've done big things before in the past, you know? Francis Perkins, the former United States Secretary of Labor for Roosevelt, she gave us social security. She cracked down on working hours for the week. She moved mountains. She transformed the economy as we know it. And all of these amazing programs were safe until the Reagan Revolution ushered in patriotic pride and greed for the sake of greed. But Francis Perkins, as labor secretary, she was able to get big things done to secure our economy and therefore our democracy. So Merrick Garland and the rest of Biden's cabinet has no excuse to do the bare minimum to protect Americans here on US soil from far-right terrorism. It can strike anywhere. And the fact that they're not doing shit about it, and the fact that Merrick Garland is just some sleepy little turtle that's allowed to be on a leash of fascism just goes to show how dangerous the situation is.

Andrea Chalupa (00:22:12):

I mean, they let Kremlin propaganda mouthpiece Elon Musk buy Twitter—the public square—without batting an eye. They could have stopped that. They could have said, "Wait, we've got questions here, we wanna hold this up." They could have intervened. And it's just a reminder that Biden, he can succeed on some fronts. You know, I think he's pretty good on Ukraine. I think he's pretty good on calling out democracy. But a lot of it is becoming, very clearly, lip service.

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Yes.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so more needs to be done because I hate... I love my country so much, but I hate feeling that my country sees me as completely expendable and a human sacrifice so that all these corporations of social media can continue to make money, all of these far-right giants like Rupert Murdoch can continue to make money, and the gun lobby can continue to make money and so on and so on, and that me and my kids are just human sacrifices for all this green machine, and that Democrats won't stand in the way of that.

Sarah Kendzior (00:23:12):

Yeah, it's... I mean, that was so well said and it's really alarming because we see this from the Biden administration on so many fronts. You know, the Covid policies where he declares the pandemic over and allows people to die, the continuation of Walensky in her position, even as she's—

Andrea Chalupa (00:23:30):

Oh, did you see Walensky's tweet?!

Sarah Kendzior (00:23:32):

Yes. The Tuskegee, you know, like volunteers for their "sacrifice". I mean, it was appalling. And, you know, the blow back was enormous because these are Black men who had syphilis that the US government refused to treat, did not inform them, and they died and passed on the disease to others. The US experimented on Black citizens. And, you know, Bill Clinton, he apologized for it in the '90s and even that was thought of as insufficient; too little, too late. It's disgusting. It's like when Nancy Pelosi thanked George Floyd for dying. It shows how Walensky views Black Americans and I think that that's reflected overall in their covid policy because that is who's disproportionately dying of this disease. Black Americans, native Americans. She behaves like a eugenicist. She was that way towards disabled people.

Sarah Kendzior (00:24:24):

She had to issue a public apology to them for basically saying that they are expendable as well. We talked about this in a previous episode, this weaponized rhetoric; phrases like "pandemic of the unvaccinated" that are not only meant to inflame tension, but they're just factually wrong. Vaccinated people can still pass on and get covid and that was always the case, and they always knew that. And they lied. And this is not an anti-vax comment, this is just the truth. You know, they have limitations. You need to do other things; air filtration system upgrades, things like that. Anyway, I'm kind of going off the topic.

Andrea Chalupa (00:25:02):

You gotta work. I think the problem is that both parties, the central operating systems of both parties, are beholden to the same corporate genocidal class.

Sarah Kendzior:

100%.

Andrea Chalupa:

And you have one of their agents, Sean Patrick Maloney, who, in an environment where he could have pulled off keeping the House for Democrats, it was well within reach in this political environment. A lot of these House races for the Democrats came extremely close and if Sean Patrick Maloney wasn't an agent for the corporate genocidal class, he could have gotten us there. But he chose not to. It was like a power sharing deal where the Dems get the Senate and the Republicans get the House and their masters in the corporate genocidal class can protect their power, their wealth, their bargaining power.

Sarah Kendzior (00:25:53):

And we've seen this before.

Andrea Chalupa (00:25:55):

Crushing unions,

Sarah Kendzior (00:25:56):

Yes, crushing unions, crushing the railroad strikers, denying railroad workers sick pay, a very rare case where the president of the United States could have intervened. Biden could have intervened and pressured the railroad barons to actually give sick days, which is such a minor thing to ask for in terms of like, it's a given right. It's unbelievable that they don't have it. It's very easy to be on the right side of history here, but they have a sadistic policy towards these workers and, you know, family members of workers. And workers themselves are talking about how they're now locked into this position because if they quit, then they lose their pension and they lose their benefits. They're locked into this job, but they're also getting covid on the job. And they, like so many Americans, have remarked about how much they sacrificed during the early period of the pandemic, during 2020 where people thought this was actually gonna end.

Sarah Kendzior (00:26:50):

And it's like, okay, you know, buckle down, do the overtime, risk your life and you'll, one, be just doing the right thing morally, the right thing for your country, an act of patriotic duty, but you will be rewarded in the end. We will appreciate you. And instead, they too are treated as disposable, just like hospital workers, just like teachers, just like service workers, just like everybody. Just like parents. You know, I think parents of young children in particular have been treated just horrifically. And when you get to that point where you're now seeing hospitals filling up with children who are getting respiratory diseases and no meaningful action from this administration, not even a gesture of empathy or sympathy or recognition that it's happening, just "The pandemic's over, the pandemic's over."... It's very rough psychologically to deal with that level of abandonment.

Sarah Kendzior (00:27:44):

And it's also, you know, I think doubly frustrating when we do see them take a clear moral position backed by strategy like they do on Ukraine. It's like, okay, well we know now that you're capable of doing the right thing. We know you're capable of caring about other people, about people who are being oppressed. When does that transfer to the preservation of our democracy here in the United States and of our lives? And to be clear, and I said this earlier this morning when we were talking to Tim Snyder, this is not some either/or situation. You don't dump Ukraine so you can help America. You help Ukraine and you help America because the two crises are interconnected. And this should be obvious because the flip side of this is if you do not strengthen and protect the United States and its people, if you do not gut out corruption from its institutions, then Ukraine will also suffer.

Sarah Kendzior (00:28:34):

And we're about to see this suffering in action with the House GOP taking over in January, you know, featuring people, not just Marjorie Taylor Greene but, you know, Kevin McCarthy wants to elevate Paul Gosar, a holocaust denier, a proud insurrectionist. These are all people who, one, Pelosi could have unseated when the Democrats held the House. They should have never been allowed to remain. And two, should have been investigated long ago by Merrick Garland. There's different degrees to which the GOP supported sedation. I mean, just that sentence, like think about if you heard that sentence 5 or 10 years ago. You would think that the obvious conclusion would be, "Yes, sedition is very bad, sedition should not be in Congress." The DOJ does not appear to be able to arrive at that conclusion.

Sarah Kendzior (00:29:23):

But there are some who are worse than others, who were more intimately involved than others, and that involvement is well documented. Among them are Greene and Gosar and they're about to be rewarded. And the wind up to all of this has been playing out in front of us in social media for the last few months. You know, ever since the GOP announced their game plan, what was it? "Kanye. Elon.

Trump." You know, they announced the playbook and then they just start to enact it. And so, you know, we're gonna talk about what's been happening with that. Ever since Musk bought Twitter, everything has been chaotic and felt more chaotic in part because it actually is and in part because the way that we parse information, gather information from various sources and try to figure out if it's reliable and so forth...

Sarah Kendzior (00:30:14):

For Andrea and I it has often been Twitter. That's the primary vector because you don't have to rely on the mainstream media. You can look to experts on different topics. And what we've seen is, you know, a lot of people are experiencing a rift in the algorithm. For me, this is interesting because all the problems that people bring up with Musk buying Twitter for me were always there. I've been low-key shadowbanned since 2020, ever since I announced that the Capitol attack and the ongoing coup was coming and so have a lot of others. And of course, you know, mob harassment, white supremacists, Nazis is nothing new. Andrea and I were talking before about how this was basically Twitter 1.0, that there reached a point where there were so many neo-Nazis and so many threats of violence, especially starting around 2014, that they had to then create policies to keep people like the head of *The Daily Stormer* or Milo or others off of the network.

Sarah Kendzior (00:31:16):

You can debate about whether it was effective, whether it was right or so forth, but what you cannot argue with is Twitter was never some beacon of civility and good faith discussion. Twitter was always an information war zone. The difference is we figured out the ways to navigate that war zone and a lot of people—civil rights activists in the United States, revolutionaries around the world in Iran, in Belarus, and obviously in Ukraine—figured out how to use Twitter for Democratic ends. Did they win their fights because of it? I mean, not necessarily. But it provided documentation and therefore became a threat. But it was always a minefield. So it's really strange for me to see this now, this "Oh, Twitter has changed so much. Suddenly there are people harassing me and threatening to kill me."

Sarah Kendzior (00:32:09):

I'm like, "Yeah, that's been my life for 10 years." And for Black women on Twitter, you know, they have faced the biggest brunt of that and they also were among the first to recognize a lot of these subversion tactics, including Russian bot and troll farms being launched and the general sort of mapping of the digital public sphere starting in 2014. We've had Sydette Harry on the show to discuss this. And I wrote about some of those kind of freelance researchers in my book, Hiding Plain Sight. Anyway, none of this is new and then now I'm gonna finally, finally get to my main point, which is that these forces have combined, the sort of Kanye/Musk/Trump pyramid and all of its associated entities, to make us try to feel like it's new and to try to use this playbook from 2014 through 2016, from the lead up to Trump becoming the presidential nominee again.

Sarah Kendzior (00:33:09):

They are doing the same thing so that Cosa Nostra Grover Cleveland can rise to power. And what we saw this week, the latest development of this is Matt Taibbi, a journalist who once did really great work about oligarchs and plutocrats and corrupt banks, and all of these things... A really reliable and trusted journalist during that period of Obama's first term, a journalist known for taking on power, is now working on behalf of the richest man alive, Elon Musk. And so this is what he was up to. He tweeted out something that Musk and Taibbi are calling the "Twitter Files". It ostensibly investigates the topic of government influence on Twitter. But unfortunately it is being done in the most tedious and superficial way, through sort of Seth Abramson-style, very long Twitter threads that at the same time are devoid of context.

Sarah Kendzior (00:34:12):

It's meant to recreate the drip, drip, drip effect of WikiLeaks from 2016. And I would call this effort the poor man's WikiLeaks except for, as I said, Taibbi is carrying out this initiative on behalf of the world's wealthiest man, Elon Musk, and he's doing it on the social media platform owned by the world's wealthiest man, Elon Musk, which one would assume is a giant conflict of interest. And so we'll get into more of that later. But I wanna note that despite this attempt to put forth this plan and make Hunter Biden's laptop the new Hillary emails and kind of just drag the information out in order to shift public perception, there are a lot of differences between that era—the 2014 through 2016 era—and now. And most of them are for the worse, although there is one, I think, for the better.

Sarah Kendzior (00:35:07):

So I'm just gonna run through that real quick. The first one is that mainstream media has been gutted. Mainstream media has been under the process of being gutted for a very long time, basically since the internet appeared and especially since the 2008 financial crash and the demolishing or buying up of local news sources. But the media landscape of 2014 through 2016 was so much more rich and free than it is right now. You have paywalls everywhere while this disinformation is free, which makes it very hard to fact check things unless you have a lot of money. A lot of websites have gone out of business. A lot of papers have gone out of business. We just saw a deluge of media layoffs. We're also seeing—as we saw, actually, this was similar in 2014 through 2016—the move of cable media to the right, you know, where CNN is becoming a more overtly right-wing network.

Sarah Kendzior (00:36:07):

It always was a pro-Trump network, as we saw under Jeff Zucker. You see MSNBC firing most of their Black anchors, especially Tiffany Cross's firing was sudden and notable. She was someone who was very outspoken and who I think would be pretty outspoken about what Taibbi and Musk are doing right now, which is one of the reasons that maybe she was removed. And then, of course, you have all of these silos. You have fewer people watching cable news at all, which normally I would think is kind of a good thing. But, you know, they're not watching it because it's been bifurcated. Parts of it are streaming. They're trying to get you to watch things both on Peacock and on MSNBC during a time of high inflation. No one has the money to support all this.

Sarah Kendizor (00:36:50):

No one has the money to support all of these Substacks. And the loss of Twitter here, you know, as it kind of just goes downhill in quality, is also notable because that was a place where if you didn't have money, you could still get information from a variety of sources. And a lot of those sources have decided to preemptively surrender and leave. And that's their business. No one's required to be there. But as I've said many times, you should not cede ground in an information war because this is the consequence of it; that people are less informed. So this narrative that Taibbi and Musk are putting out there, it's a pretty incoherent narrative, which is why I haven't discussed the actual content that much. I mean, if there is something real in this, something meaningful, I will absolutely discuss it because I do think that Hunter Biden is shady.

Sarah Kendzior (00:37:39):

I do think there's serious problems with nepotism and illicit influence, and I really wish good journalists were looking into this in a transparent, non-biased way instead of the situation we have now. Anyway, moving on. Another major change since 2014 through 2016 is the mainstreaming of elite criminal impunity. You can threaten and try to carry out a violent insurrection and then continue to run for president. You can participate in that insurrection and be seated in Congress. You have Nazis being mainstreamed, political violence mainstreamed, to the point that people barely notice it. In 2016, when

any of these things would happen, it was a big deal. People would be like, "Wow, why is the *New York Times* writing Nazi puff pieces?" And now it's just like, "Oh, okay, another Nazi puff piece from the *New York Times*."

Sarah Kendzior (00:38:33):

We've seen it so much that people are used to it. They're used to Trump getting away with crimes. They're used to institutional failure. They're used to the feeling that there's no one to turn to. There's extreme demoralization that is merited. I mean, we're fighting it the best we can, but it's a reaction to things that have actually happened. That was not there as much in 2014-2016. That was more a period of shock as we tried to sort of figure out, well, why is the landscape shifting like this? What do these people want? What are they trying to accomplish? And that's when I get to sort of the, I guess the upside of this is we have seen this before. You are watching an insurrectionist rerun, therefore many folks are less likely to fall for this scheme. We know what the playbook is, we know what the outcome they desire is; a Trump presidency or a similar right-wing extremist presidency.

Sarah Kendzior (00:39:28):

I think for the people aligned with Putin and quite likely Netanyahu, they want the collapse of the United States itself. Everyone knows what a Trump presidency will look like. Everyone knows how far the GOP will go. Everyone knows—well, you would hope—that you cannot reason with Nazis. You can't reason with Holocaust deniers. There's also this flip side to this, which is, a lot of people don't know who Matt Taibbi is. This is one of these situations where this is a very, very online type of controversy. I'll never forget, I was giving a talk at The Strand for my book, *They Knew,* in September, and somebody from the audience asked me my opinion about Taibbi. I get asked this a lot, I think because we both study autocracy and abuse of power and whatnot.

Sarah Kendzior (00:40:17):

And so I start answering it and then I see someone in the audience just mouthing, you know, to the person sitting next to them, "Who the fuck is Matt Taibbi?" And then I realized I need to explain this because most people simply don't know. The way that Andrea and I interpret this information and a lot of people who are, you know, very interested in American politics, very much online a lot, we know this whole elaborate backstory. A lot of people are just gonna be like, what the hell is this and why should I care when there are so many actual crises going on? But then the flip side of that is that that is dangerous because while so far I am not impressed by the Twitter Files, I think that one of the purposes of them is to make discussion of actual corruption very difficult by muddying the waters.

Sarah Kendzior (00:41:06):

You know, it makes it more difficult to discuss, for example, Jared Kushner because they've created what I call in my book, *They Knew*, preemptive narrative inversion where Hunter Biden and Kushner are now constantly compared in the necessity of investigating Jared Kushner in and of its own right. You know, with nothing to do to hunt with Hunter Biden or this sort of bipartisan corruption deluge. They've abandoned that pursuit. It seems to be less serious. They want that contrast to be in your head. On the flip side, you know, if Hunter Biden is a national security risk—which I do think to some degree he is—that needs to be investigated in a serious way, not in this sort of way. And this is all tied into the broader strategy where somebody like Kanye West will go on Alex Jones' show and say how much he loves Hitler.

Sarah Kendzior (00:42:02):

So then Alex Jones, who is going bankrupt, can react in a "rational way", seeming to condemn that statement. The purpose of that is so that people therefore see Alex Jones as less extreme. And as they're watching that they get to be introduced to Nick Fuentes, another neo-Nazi whose profile is rising rapidly.

If you've watched WWE, you will understand what's happening better than if you've taken a crash course in American politics because this is kayfabe. These are fake feuds, fake enemies, people creating narratives that have some grains of truth in a morass of lies. They're sort of real fighting and they're sort of not, and they know how to manipulate the public. The final thing I'm gonna say is that, you know, while Taibbi's thread was really incoherent, there is a core question outside of the Hunter Biden aspect of this that I think also needs to be investigated, which is how much influence does the government have on accounts getting banned on Twitter, tweets getting deleted on Twitter, stories being suppressed on Twitter?

Sarah Kendzior (00:43:18):

Because inadvertently I think what Taibbi revealed is that the Trump White House managed to get some content deleted from Twitter and then the Biden campaign also managed to do so as well. There's a difference between the campaign and the actual State. And one would think that if you're worried about state intervention into free speech, you'd be more alarmed by the people holding actual state power than the latter. And in Biden's case, I think it was mostly that they didn't want... I mean, I think all of us as Americans can agree that we do not want this. We don't wanna have to look at Hunter Biden's penis. Nobody wants this. And those tweets were among the ones that Twitter deleted because they were revenge porn tweets. And I... Ugh. I don't even wanna think about it.

Sarah Kendzior (00:44:08):

But anyway, that aside, I think that we do need to wonder about, for example, why does the DOJ seem to have a bot farm? You know, one that we've documented where there are hundreds of identical tweets. Why is Biden flying known grifters, people who've been under legal investigation for grifting like the Occupy Democrats or Scott Dworkin or what have you to the White House. And then they create these scam PACs that are supposed to be for candidates but actually are just sucking money out of people's donations and then they pocket them. John Fetterman's campaign manager had to call out one of these. Is there something going on there? That would be a great story for... I mean, I'm not gonna really recommend Matt Taibbi, but for somebody to look into. Those are absolutely legitimate questions. So I have no problem with the broad scope of what Matt Taibbi is doing. I have a problem with the fact of how he's doing it and that he's doing it, of course, in tandem with Elon Musk in a way that I do not think is possible to have journalistic independence in this situation.

Andrea Chalupa (00:45:18):

I'm sorry, I'm bored of the Hunter Biden laptop when you have Ivanka and Jared who got \$2 billion from the Saudis and no one's doing shit about that. The Saudis, close allies of Russia, they pumped the brakes on oil production deliberately in the midterms to basically remind the president of the United States of their power. That was a big power flex by the Saudis and Russia.

Sarah Kendzior (00:45:48):

I'm just gonna note briefly, they are also Musk's backers on Twitter.

Andrea Chalupa (00:45:52):

Exactly. And so Jared Kushner, slumlord son of a felon who did some disgusting stuff with his family,

Sarah Kendzior (00:46:04):

Oh, Charles Kushner's blackmailing of his brother-in-law? Yeah, Chris Christie said that the Charles Kushner case was the most disgusting thing he'd ever witnessed. And then he added, "And I'm from New

Jersey!" I wrote about this in my book, *Hiding in Plain Sight*. It's a family of criminals and they're criminals who know how to work the system. If you look at Trump's pardons—I really wish somebody would do this—make a list of everybody Trump gave clemency to or pardoned, the order of them, the reason for them. You will see Kushner very, very much at work. Their goal was always to infiltrate the White House, to rewrite laws, to free their criminal friends. Among the pardoned felons was, of course, Charles Kushner himself. It's very alarming. You know, that's something either we should do, but I really encourage, if you're a journalist and you need a project, do that. Go through the list of the trump clemencies and pardons and see what patterns emerge.

Andrea Chalupa (00:46:58):

Yeah, absolutely. And the Kushners were close friends with Netanyahu who wants to turn Israel into dictatorship and has campaigned for office by showing a giant billboard of him shaking hands with mass murdering dictator Putin. That's Jared Kushner. And so the only person that could marry into a family that toxic would be Ivanka Trump, who grew up being sexualized by her father, who has come out and said that he would date Ivanka, who told Stormy Daniels—the porn star—that she reminded him of his daughter, who is accused of several instances of sexual assault and sexual violence, including when one of the victims was a child, and was close friends with Epstein, Jeffrey Epstein, who had a big old mansion in Manhattan that was a pedophile den. And so, you know, Ivanka's toxic and damaged. Jared Kushner's toxic and damaged. And those two deeply damaged, dangerous people who are just furthering the damage and trauma they were raised on that was normalized for them.

Andrea Chalupa (00:48:07):

And trying to inflict it on the rest of us by bringing Trump to power where he terrorized the world, where people were driven into therapy being forced to live stuck under this toxic family for so long. The three of them were the unholy trinity that ran our country into the ground, that grabbed as much as they could, just like the Russians are looting and stealing whatever they can, including washing machines in Ukraine. That's how Ivanka, Jared and Donald Trump ran our country; like Russians looting and invading international security. And we see clear signs of it persisting with this \$2 billion puppet-on-a-string Saudi deal for Jared Kushner. And the fact that those two who were in the center of everything from selecting Paul Manafort, the longtime Kremlin operative, to run Donald's campaign, to being in the room where it happened, the June, 2016 big handshake deal with the Russians, right?

Andrea Chalupa (00:49:08):

"We'll help each other out" and next thing you know Assange releases those emails that he gets from the Kremlin that were stolen from the DNC and so on. And that divides the opposition in 2016 and the media focuses on that instead of the fact that our democracy was under attack with the help of the Trumps. Right? And so why the hell... You know, you've always said, Sarah, the big litmus test for Robert Mueller's investigation—and of course this applies to Merrick Garland—is whether the investigation is going to meaningfully include and focus on Jared and Ivanka and the fact that those two are out there, out in the open. You know what I mean?

Sarah Kendzior (00:49:47):

It's awful. Everybody is focused so much on Trump—Trump as an individual for January 6th or for stolen documents—but this is about a network. This is about, as I've said many times, a transnational crime that masqueraded as a government. And there were many people whose goal in getting Trump in was really to get Kushner in because his ties are very, very deep. The Netanyahu ties date back to his childhood. His relationship with MBS is what made the murder, the butchering of Jamal Khashoggi possible. And then, of course, you see the Biden administration letting MBS off the hook, giving him

permanent immunity, and again, not going after Kushner. And Kushner's connected to the worst of the Russian oligarchs, the worst Silicon Valley people, a lot of Chinese operatives. It really spans the globe and they give him a free pass.

Sarah Kendzior (00:50:39):

They won't investigate a multitude of violations. He could have been removed from his White House position early because he lied so much on his security clearance forms. But as we've also mentioned, the individual, the "ethics lawyer" who got Jared Kushner into the White House, who made this hellscape possible, is Merrick Garland's best friend and mentor, Jamie Gorelick, which... The refusal to investigate Kushner predates Garland being installed in the DOJ but when people ask, "Well, why was he installed since he's doing such a terrible job?", the reason, I think, is to protect people like Kushner, who his closest friend and mentor brought in there. If he were to actually investigate Kushner, he would be investigating by proxy Gorelick and how that entire process went. This individual who clearly had a multitude of conflicts of interest and illicit foreign activity and financial crimes and so on and so forth.

Sarah Kendzior (00:51:39):

He obviously should have never been there with access to classified information and national security information. We have been in profound danger from the moment he entered and the rest of the Trump crime cohort; Steve Mnuchin, Wilbur Ross, even Rex Tillerson. Remember that? You know, with his Order of Friendship medal from Putin. You know, the first crew. Steve Bannon was in there. Michael Flynn briefly was in there. These are all very dangerous individuals who have access to the highest levels of classified information. And it is so naive—beyond naive—it is so irresponsible to assume that they have not been weaponizing it and monetizing it, and that whatever arrangement Kushner made with the Saudis, that it doesn't have to do with that. But they just stay away. At this point, Trump's a genuine danger.

(00:52:34):

He's a demagogue who has a cult—a violent cult—and he is calling for the demolishment of the Constitution. But the greater danger is the network behind it because he's not a straw man, exactly, but he is a frontman and that's always been the case. And so I am deeply suspicious of all the people who act as if, you know, say Trump is indicted—and I think it's possible he might be indicted and then just nothing will happen. He won't actually be held accountable and he'll be able to run again—but anybody who just focuses on him as an individual and ignores the broader, extremely dangerous network that backed him and still are backing him, I'm very suspicious of these people because all of these crimes were committed out in the open and, you know, everything's paywalled now.

Sarah Kendzior(00:53:21):

So it's like your memory becomes paywalled as well. But this was extensively covered in the mainstream press and in independent media from the period of about 2017 to around mid 2019 when the focus began to shift and reporters became more timid, then Covid arrived and a lot of the corruption investigations just got upended. And then with Biden, I think people had this false sense of security and they're also, you know, they're timid. They don't wanna upset the Biden administration and so there's really almost no one looking out in an objective way for the American people in terms of issues like corruption, plutocracy, transnational organized crime. And those who are doing it, you know, I understand why people paywall their stuff. Everybody is struggling to make a living in this economy, including Andrea and I, but we do not paywall this show for a reason because a lot of times we're the only people reporting on a certain issue.

Sarah Kendzior (00:54:21):

I think I'm the only person who's done a lot of in-depth reporting about the Merrick Garland/Jamie Gorelick relationship. And we think that that information should be as easy to access as possible. That's why we have a transcript site too at gaslitnationpod.com so you can go and get these archives because we're contending with an organized attempt to annihilate collective memory. And it's people like Kushner that benefit the most from this. And then when you have new narratives that are being created by Kanye West or Elon Musk or, you know, Matt Taibbi now, apparently, then those narratives are more powerful because the previous time-stamped, documented evidence is buried. And then you combine that with the lack of institutional action and maybe these narratives will take force. I don't know, I'm gonna read the rest of what Taibbi puts out, but... Man. Everything that he's doing just makes me wish that there is somebody good doing that same job on those topics.

Andrea Chalupa (00:55:26):

[laughs] Exactly. And anybody who beats on and on about Hunter Biden's laptop, which I now in my imagination envision like a Jim Henson Muppet. It's impossible for me not to see it, you know, flapping around its lips up and down like a laptop talking, kind of like the—

Sarah Kendzior (00:55:46):

God, I just have the worst images in my mind and they were all of the things I saw from Hunter Biden's laptop. Sorry.

Andrea Chalupa (00:55:52):

[laughs] But I just see Hunter Biden's laptop as such a clown now, you know? But so anybody who's just one track minded about it, just throw it into their face, Ivanka and Jared and that long criminal file out in the public domain on them, Jared and Ivanka cannot escape justice. We have to keep putting the pressure on them. If it's not going to be DOJ pressure—as it should be—then it has to be public pressure. We cannot normalize them and what they have done. They have to face some sort of trial, ideally a legal trial and legal investigations. But if not, then public trials. We have to basically... Ivanka, when her dad was running for president in 2016, she's like, "Oh, I'm just gonna be the daughter." No, she ends up being like the co-president of the United States.

Sarah Kendzior (00:56:41):

Right, which is why I do not believe her now when she's claiming she's going to stay out.

Andrea Chalupa (00:56:44):

They're gonna try to come back because the Saudis don't give you \$2 billion for nothing. You've gotta pay the piper and Netayahu needs you, too. So there you go.

Sarah Kendzior (00:56:52):

Yeah. And also, everyone should be investigating why there is no investigation of Jared Kushner. This is a question that people seem very timid about asking, and that they used to be much more upfront. You know, Congress was investigating Kushner's relationships with the Saudis all the way back in 2018 and 2019. One of the people involved in that investigation was Elijah Cummings who was also looking at things like Black Cube. And he died suddenly in October of 2019 and nobody really picked up where he left off. There's so many loose ends to look at but those loose ends are forming a noose around American democracy, which is why I don't understand how anyone gives the DOJ or other agencies of accountability a pass because their inertia is action.

Sarah Kendzior (00:57:47):

You know, it is meaningful that they are refusing to hold people who are actively hurting our country now, and who have hurt it in the past accountable. It's not a Democrats versus Republican thing. It's not some stupid election stunt. It's a deep, meaningful violation of our public safety that needs to be pursued. And so you have to ask why. Why is this not thought of as important? Why is there no urgency around the attack on January 6th? This is strange behavior. We understand we've been told to just accept it, and that you get this giant propaganda apparatus with all of these, you know, placating mantras about secret saviors and sealed indictments and secret plans. I hope you know by now that it is all bullshit.

Sarah Kendzior (00:58:37):

And so we can get past the, like, is this gonna happen? And just be on the, why did it not happen yet? And why does it seem like it's not going to happen? Because otherwise, one, in the most serious manner, we may lose our country. If by some miracle we survive, though this will happen again. What this reminds me of most is Iran Contra, which was buried in terms of evidence but also buried from American public consciousness to the point that when people were looking at Trump and they were looking at analogous criminal cases surrounding a presidency, they kept bringing up Watergate because Watergate's the one they remembered because Nixon resigned and justice was served, and the journalists who investigated it were praised instead of threatened or ostracized. Iran Contra was the opposite.

Sarah Kendzior (00:59:26):

And it was also this incredibly complex transnational criminal network intersecting with multiple governments and with a lot of recurring figures from the Trump camp; Adnan Khashoggi, Robert Maxwell, Bill Barr. I mean, this is Iran Contra on steroids. It's just a nightmarish series of untold stories, which again, makes it all the more ridiculous that somebody like Matt Taibbi, who actually does have investigative journalism skills and has displayed them, I don't know, like 15 years ago, could be doing a serious investigation into this. When we've been asked about 'em, I've always said the same thing, which is that American plutocrats and Russian oligarchs, you know, it's the same people. They work with each other. They work with each other to hurt ordinary people around the world. So if you dislike one, you should dislike them all because of what they're doing. It doesn't matter where they're from, it's who they hurt. It's who gets hurt. That's always what counts. So I don't understand his heel turn, WWE style, but, you know, maybe we'll have more on that in the future.

Andrea Chalupa (01:00:34):

Yeah. I wanna end this on, if the Biden administration doesn't protect our democracy, not just have that as a talking point, if they don't stop the far-right fascist terrorism that's shooting up communities across our country where no one is safe, everyone's a target, if they don't reel in these corrupt criminals who are out there holding rallies, doing deals with the Saudis and so on and so on, the whole world is at stake. The US is not going to be seen once again as a reliable ally. And if Biden wants to go off into the sunset as this great president who stood united for democracy on the global stage and united the allies against fascism, he needs to protect American democracy here at home. If we fall, it's going to set off a serious domino effect. And to really underline that point, we're gonna end with a clip from Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, who's saying that without the United States, the European Union is in trouble. They don't have what it takes to really fight the war, to support Ukraine, to stand up against fascism. So remember, it's not just democracy here at home. We can't just flee the country to Canada or elsewhere. The whole world will become a more vulnerable and dangerous place if Biden and his cabinet doesn't do more to actually protect democracy here at home.

Finland Prime Minister Sanna Marin(01:02:00):

Well I think China could play an important role to stop the war if they wanted and it's up to China how they want to act concerning the war. But we shouldn't only rely on that about China or any others. We should make sure that we are stronger. And now, I must be very honest, brutally honest with you: Europe isn't strong enough right now. We would be in trouble without the United States involved in the war in Ukraine. The United States has given a lot of weapons, a lot of financial aid, a lot of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and Europe isn't strong enough yet. And we have to make sure that we are also building those capabilities when it comes to European defense, European defense industry, and making sure that we could cope in different kinds of situations.

[outro - music up and under, roll credits]

Andrea Chalupa (01:02:59):

Our discussion continues and you can get access to that bystanding up on our Patreon at the truth teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior (01:03:06):

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 cost of fossil fuels and facilitates the ongoing transition to clean energy.

Andrea Chalupa (01:03:26):

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 (01:04:03):

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

Andrea Chalupa (01:04:15):

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

Sarah Kendzior (01:04:23):

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

Andrea Chalupa (01:04:29):

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