

Gaslit Nation Transcript
13 September 2023
“Terrell Starr on Living Among Drones in Kyiv”

[advertisement]

[opening clip]

Reporter (00:30):

I want to ask you about this news that Speaker McCarthy has formally launched an impeachment in. Kirk has said he's going

Senator John Fetterman (00:36):

[in faux pearl-clutching tone] Oh my god, really?! Oh my gosh. Oh, it's devastating [laughs]. Ooh, don't do it. Please don't do it. Oh, no. Oh, no!

[theme music up and under]

Andrea Chalupa (00:54):

Welcome to *Gaslit Nation*. Our opening clip was Senator John Fetterman, who got elected with the help of the thousands of phone calls *Gaslit Nation* listeners made at our phone bank party to Pennsylvania voters. That's him trolling the party of Putin. Welcome to a special live taping of *Gaslit Nation*. Our live audience Q&A will run as next week's bonus episode, and you can get access to that and all of our episodes ad-free by supporting the show at the Truth-teller level or higher. Sign up at patreon.com/gaslit—that's patreon.com/gaslit—and you'll get access to all sorts of fun stuff, including invites to exclusive events... Which reminds me, we have a special coming together, a special *Gaslit Nation* Night Out, this Monday, September 18th at 7:00 PM. I will be at P&T Knitwear with the historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat, the author of the bestselling book, *Strongmen*, and Russian mafia expert, Olga Lautman, discussing the new *Gaslit Nation* graphic novel, *Dictatorship: It's Easier Than You Think*.

Andrea Chalupa (02:06):

I'll be doing a special meetup an hour before the event at 6:00 PM. I'll send info out just for our Patreon community and you'll come if you want to, and you can get a signed *Mr. Jones* poster. I'll have an N95 mask on and plenty of free N95 masks because there's absolutely nothing weird about wearing an N95 mask. It's a very considerate thing to do. There's a lot of people out there that need you to wear one, so I'm going to have one on to protect myself, my loved ones, and you. And so come with your N95 mask or get one free from me. And that's going to be Monday, September 18th at 7:00 PM at P&T Knitwear. Again, there'll be an exclusive little meetup for our Patreon community. Details for you folks over on Patreon that make our show possible. Look out for that soon. Thank you to everyone who makes *Gaslit Nation* possible. We could not make this show without you. Now, on with the show. We are joined today by a friend of the show, Terrell Starr, who is in Kyiv, Ukraine. Terrell, thank you so much as always for being with us.

Terrell Starr (03:13):

Yeah, of course. I'm really happy to talk to y'all and I'm here in Kyiv right now. You talked about the gun violence, about the shooting in Brooklyn. We don't have gun violence here. Yes, there's a war, but I feel safer than most folks in the United States, that's for sure. But I'm looking forward to talking about what's going on in the States. I was a political reporter, covered the last election, so this is definitely up my alley in addition to foreign policy.

Andrea Chalupa (03:41):

And you are, of course, the host and producer of the podcast, *Black Diplomats*, which is decolonizing the foreign policy world, which you've done essential work on. You are one of the leading voices in helping Western audiences understand Ukraine not through the Moscow lens that dominates the think tank world, that dominates academia all across the West, but through a human rights Ukrainian agency center. And you do that for hotspots all around the world through your essential podcast, *Black Diplomats*. Thank you so much for doing that.

Terrell Starr (04:18):

Yeah. Yeah, of course. I mean, it's foreign policy for everybody else. I think that in the United States, people wonder why people don't care because we don't make it relatable to the average person and that that's what I do. And I'm also—before we get into it—next week, I'm going to restart my newsletter that's also called *Black Diplomats*, where I do most of my reporting from Kyiv but I'll be talking about foreign policy, just really breaking it down for us to really have a dialogue and we could talk to each other about it in ways that are not wonky and not think tankish stuff. So look out for that. Y'all can follow me at @terrellstarr on Twitter—I'll never call it X—and Instagram. Reach out. So yeah. Yeah, most definitely. You can follow me there, too.

Andrea Chalupa (05:07):

Awesome. And so before we get into all the big breaking news that just happened, walk us through your time in Kyiv; the summer you've had, where you've stayed. Do you feel safe where you are? What's the world like around you?

Terrell Starr (05:20):

Well, so I moved to Kyiv this summer because I want to stay here for a few years and cover the war via my newsletter, and I'm going to be starting a YouTube channel where I cover the daily life of what's going on in Ukraine. I think people are inundated with war reporting. They know about the M16 conversation. They're very aware of the troop formations, etc. But what they don't know is that this is a vibrant country that, outside of the war zones, if it weren't for martial law, in many instances, you wouldn't know that there was a war going on. I'm in Kyiv right now, downtown. It's where I live. It's a cosmopolitan city. The theaters are open and the bars are open. You can get some of the best food, some of the best cocktails, some of the best everything here in Kyiv. Life is going along relatively normally, and I know that's really hard for people to believe, but that's why I'm here.

Terrell Starr (06:15):

And you'll be seeing that in my upcoming YouTube channel next month, and then you'll start seeing some reporting from me with my newsletter next week. But the world around me... Sometimes you wake up to air defense systems working and you hear the explosions. Some people, it freaks them out. I've gotten used to it. And you wake up around three o'clock, four o'clock in the morning, and thank God for the Patriot systems because there was a time where many of those missiles would be getting through. But because of the Patriot systems that are protecting the skies here, many of them are not.

There are nights where all the drones are caught. There are nights where all the missiles are caught. And so when you ask what's around me: drone and missile strikes. And when I was in Odessa a few weeks ago, I actually saw a drone from my window hit the city center, and people were saying, "How come you didn't go to your shelter?" And my response is, "My window is right here. I woke up to explosions and I just saw it. So it wasn't like I had time to run, okay?" So you deal with that. But otherwise, Ukraine is a great place to be and it'll be better once Ukraine wins the war.

Andrea Chalupa (07:35):

That's straight out of Orwell's *1984* where Winston Smith's walking around and they are just drones, just bombs landing there, and people are just carrying on with their business.

Terrell Starr (07:43):

Our Terrell's 2003 living in Kyiv. It's this live time.

Andrea Chalupa (07:50):

Well, Orwell and his wife, Eileen, lived through the blitz of Hitler just bombing London relentlessly. And so obviously that's where that came from. And he was holding his wife one night and he said to her, "I can hear when the bombs are getting closer because your heart speeds up against my chest." And that's what your life is like. You're living with Putin's blitz basically.

Terrell Starr (08:10):

Yeah. You know, I'll tell you when the war... It does something to your emotional DNA.

Andrea Chalupa (08:15):

Fuck yeah, it does.

Terrell Starr (08:17):

For example, when I saw people... It was the first time when I actually saw people die right in front of me and when I thought that I was going to die because I was literally caught in a Russian missile strike, like a fighter jet, I actually saw the jet come down and hit our checkpoint. I was with the territorial defense unit at the time. And it changes you. Now, some people, they take medication, they smoke weed at rates that they ordinarily wouldn't do it. And there are some people psychologically who say they just can't take it and they want to leave because they can't deal with the prospect of when or if they'll be hit by a missile strike. And if this is your home, of course you can understand that. People like me, I can come and go as I please. So it doesn't... Now, it should bother me, to be honest with you. People are saying, "You're crazy for being over there." But it doesn't bother me because I have a mission and a particular reason why I'm here. But war is a really horrible thing that human beings shouldn't do to each other. But it just speaks to the treachery and evil of Valdimir Putin, who is just a heartless, black-hearted individual who has no soul.

Andrea Chalupa (09:36):

No, absolutely. And people are raising children. Children are living with caretakers who are extremely stressed and having to put on a brave face. You have divorces, marriages under strain, and kids going to school...

Terrell Starr (09:50):

Domestic violence. And I'll tell you one thing: If you walk through the streets here, you see a lot of people with disabilities. So this country was not prepared to adequately support people with disabilities. One of the things that I was going to do is start a tour operator company here. And for those who happened to be interested, I do tours here for Ukraine, people who are interested in what I would call adventure tourism. I take small groups of people—about two people, five people—and take them around Ukraine and show them what's going on. They talk to military people, talk to anti-corruption activists, whoever they want to talk to. I customize the tours, but if it's something that you're interested in, you can reach out. But you see a lot of people with disabilities, a lot of people in crutches, a lot of people with prosthetic legs, and it's thousands of them, perhaps tens of thousands of them throughout the country.

Terrell Starr (10:46):

And it's children. A lot of these people are soldiers, but a lot of them are civilians. And the trains, for example, if you have to get on a train, just something simple like that. And I'm thinking about it because I'm taking people to Odessa on Friday. If you are in a wheelchair, there's this special... It's almost like a crane that's not designed for people that they use to get you on board the train. And so just imagine a system that has not been adequately updated to deal with people with disabilities, having tens of thousands of people with various physical situations that make it harder for them to move around the country. But when you walk around Kyiv, it's impossible not to walk past people and you don't see them on crutches or prosthetics.

Andrea Chalupa (11:35):

Wow. And the children, of course, are all survivors of missile strikes on schools, on buildings.

Terrell Starr:

Yep.

Andrea Chalupa:

Okay, so when you hear the sirens at night, the bomb sirens, what do you do? Do you sleep through it? Where would you go?

Terrell Starr (11:46):

I sleep through it. So there's a shelter across the street from us. I sleep through it, but we know—

Andrea Chalupa (11:53):

What if you shouldn't sleep through it, what if you should go? Because you never know. It's like a game of Russian roulette.

Terrell Starr (11:59):

Well, there's a shelter. It is. There's a shelter across the street. But to go back to your thing about Russian roulette, people are tired of running. So, the sirens go on all day here. I wouldn't say all day, I would say several times a day. Even during broad daylight, you see people running down the street. You see people walking their dogs. Part of it is because people have faith that the missile defenses work, and they do work really well. But the main thing is that people don't want to run anymore. So I was in Zaporizhzhya a

few weeks ago, and for those who don't know, in the city of Zaporizhzhya, but the city and the oblast is in the southern part of Ukraine. It has Europe's largest nuclear power plant. And the Russians are currently occupying it and engaging in nuclear blackmail. I went there, and those people—when you talk about missile strikes, when you talk about sirens, it's on steroids there. It does not compare. This is a city, pre-war, of about 750,000 people. And they also had the Kakhovka Dam situation. And just to give you all a visual about what's going on here: So, the Russians blew up at the Kakhovka Dam and, essentially—

Andrea Chalupa (13:20):

IWhich is as bad as launching a nuke.

Terrell Starr (13:23):

Yeah, it destroyed the ecosystem there, and different species of fish and other sorts of animals just completely blown out. Environmentalists are still trying to figure out the devastation of that. But one of the visuals that you'll see—and this is just some of the reporting that I'm working on right now that you will see in my newsletter and my YouTube channel, which is also called *Black Diplomats*, that'll come out next month—is that the water levels just plunge significantly. And so there are beaches where there ordinarily were not beaches. So the riverfront of downtown Zaporizhzhya has been permanently changed. And so when you talk about running, these people have gone through so much that when they hear an air siren, they are just not running and saying... It essentially means, "Fuck you, Russia." And I know that sounds cliché, but that's the energy here. So when you say, "when I should run," we would be running all day long. And if you're not living here, you're not going to understand it.

Andrea Chalupa (14:37):

Yeah. That's just a lot to acclimate to.

Terrell Starr (14:39):

Yeah. Yeah, it is a lot to acclimate to. And what's also happening is that you have a lot of Ukrainians who are coming back for a number of reasons; because they realize that life in the West, or EU, is not what it's cracked up to be and they find it difficult to take care of themselves, take care of their families. Here in Ukraine, for example, for all of the issues that are happening here with the war, you could still get excellent healthcare, for example. So I was sick for the past three weeks. I had a bacterial infection in my throat and a few other issues, and I had to go to the doctor. I had three doctor visits and a series of tests, and I saw different specialists, sometimes at once. I went to a private clinic to get my treatment and between the multiple specialists over those three visits and the medicine that I was prescribed during that three week period, it didn't go over \$400.

Terrell Starr (15:48):

Could you imagine if I were in New York City? A doctor's visit, especially if you don't have insurance, would be more than \$400.

Andrea Chalupa:

Absolutely.

Terrell Starr:

Let alone the battery of tests that that would've taken me through. So, life here in many respects, if you can deal with the stresses of the war and the military and things like that—and I know that sounds like it's a lot, but if you are a Ukrainian, this is your home and you believe in the future of this country (and I think it's a pretty dope future), then you feel good about your chances. The country is eventually going to be joining NATO. And you know how the United States and Europe is, particularly with the Germans... “Well, we don't think we should give them to you. We don't think that we should give you the Abrams tanks or the Leopards.” Then you eventually give them. “Oh, we don't think that you should get the ATACMSs”.

Terrell Starr (16:44):

And we saw in the latest ABC News report that Ukraine, likely in this next military aid package, they're going to eventually get them. Or the F-16s, where you know that Denmark and another coalition of countries are currently training the Ukrainians. And eventually the F-16s are going to be in Ukraine and the Ukrainians, with their ingenuity, are going to figure out how to fuck the Russians up. They always do. So even somebody, with me as a foreigner—and I was on your show with Malcolm Nance when this war started—I never fucking believed that the Russians were going to take this country. Ever! So people are feeling really confident in their country's capabilities. And so when you ask people how they're enduring this war, you just have to point to the past year and a half about how much of this country, Ukraine, has taken, how much Russia wanted but they aren't going to get and they can't get, and they won't get because these people fucking hate them, right? And I feel good being here because I just want to be one of the first Westerners who's a part of really helping this country to rebuild. I want to bring Americans here. I want to bring your audience here on my tours. I want to bring you here. It's funny, the Black dude from Brooklyn bringing the Ukrainian girl on a tour.

Andrea Chalupa (18:12):

You're more Ukrainian than I am! [laughs]

Terrell Starr (18:15):

Well, I'm taking my Ukrainian classes and maybe in a year, that'll be true. I'm actually taking... One of the people who I'm escorting around the country over the next four days is from the Ukrainian diaspora. So that's actually pretty true. And I'm actually going to do my best to help him and his cousin with a little bit of translation. But yeah, I mean, everything that this country is going through is going to be for the greater good and not only for... You know, it's going to be for the greater good of the wider west and I want to be a part of that conversation in discussing why.

Andrea Chalupa (18:52):

And we're so grateful for you, which is one of the many reasons why I constantly worry about you, and I can't wait for you to come home. But I am proud of you and I'm grateful for you as you know. Beyond words.

[Cozy Earth advertisement]

[Hello Earth advertisement]

[transition music]

Andrea Chalupa (21:49):

The power of video. You all can see maybe tears streaming down my face from listening to Terrell speak and fucking up my makeup and stinging my eyes. I got my concealer and my mascara a little too close to my eyeballs, and now my left eye especially is just stinging away. But I'm going to get through it because the show must go on. Listening to you talk... my God. I just want the people listening to know Kyiv is one of the most enchanting cities in the world, in a country filled with enchanting cities. And Terrell can obviously back me up here. There's this fusion, international fusion restaurant. I forget what it was called, but friends took me to it when we were filming *Mr. Jones* and Kyiv. And I ate this miso-infused fish that was like pure butter, and I had these flowery cocktails blooming all these really funny little cocktails. It was just this, you walk in and it looks like a restaurant that was designed by Jose Andres. And then you go to this speakeasy. I remember going into a speakeasy, the one on Khreshchatyk, I think.

Terrell Starr:

Yep.

Andrea Chalupa;

It's kind of by the McDonald's on Khreshchatyk, a speakeasy. I walked in there with some friends and Mustafa Nayyem, the Afghan Ukrainian who launched the Euromaidan protest with a Facebook post, was just posted at the bar, drinking. And being me, I went up to him, I'm like, "I love you. You are an angel on earth." And I tried to buy him a drink because he's a hero of the world. Oh, my eye's about to get messed up guys. I'm going to go Tammy Faye Baker in my left eye in a second because of [laughs], it's leaking. But Mustafa Nayyem bought *me* a drink, you know? And there's a big river running through it, and people have beach parties on the rivers and DJs come out, and it's a very bohemian, avant-garde lifestyle there. It is enchanting. Terrell and I, our whole friendship was born out of this shared spiritual soul level love for our times in Ukraine. When we get together in a bar in Brooklyn, our minds go back there. And the funny thing is, we've never actually hung out there yet, but I promise you *Gaslit Nation* listeners, when it's safer to do so—and to be perfectly honest with you, I don't want to take any risks, knock on wood, until my youngest baby is at least five years old because Olga Lautman, the Russian mafia expert, is trying to organize a conference in Kyiv and she's like, "Oh, you got to come out."

Andrea Chalupa (24:20):

"You've gotta come to Kyiv." I'm like, "Not right now." I know a lot of parents—and I hate to say that. It's a very privileged attitude to take. There's moms like me that have no choice but to live there, that have no choice but to fight and work there, go to the front. And it's a very privileged attitude where I'm like, I'm making the choice. I have the choice. And I don't choose to go until my baby's at least five. But when I do go back to Ukraine, Terrell, we're going to have the night of all nights, and we should absolutely do a meetup with *Gaslit Nation* listeners who have heard me talk about this country since the show first launched.

Terrell Starr (24:53):

Listen, I'm ready. I'll show you around town. And I know all the spots.

Andrea Chalupa (24:57):

Well, I know all the spots too, alright?

Terrell Starr (25:00):

Well, actually—

Andrea Chalupa (25:00):

Well, I mean you know the spots more than I do because a lot has changed, obviously, especially in these recent years. But you know the spots. You'll show me around. Okay.

Terrell Starr (25:08):

Yeah.

Andrea Chalupa (25:10):

Okay, so let's talk about the big breaking news. The fascists in the house are finally doing their fascist pageantry: bringing show trials. Obviously, Kevin McCarthy, the Speaker, has a super thin unmanageable majority in the House, including members of Congress in New York State where these guys could easily get pushed out of power because New York is getting organized. There's a lot of investment going into New York to make up for the big losses here in the midterms. And so Kevin McCarthy is finally going forward with the Biden impeachment inquiry. And the big concern here is that whatever he does could be tied to getting any sort of cooperation with the house to avoid a government shutdown, to pass a balanced budget and all that. And what's on the stake, of course, is much-needed military defensive aid and support for Ukraine, like you said, to keep the skies closed, to protect the lives of civilians, to prevent more maimed children.

Andrea Chalupa (26:16):

And the impeachment inquiry, the investigation, is going to focus on Ukraine because the focus is Hunter Biden who had work in Ukraine. And Biden, of course, famously called for the firing of a deeply corrupt prosecutor, prosecutor general in Ukraine who everyone was calling for the firing of. Biden was on the right side of history in doing that. That had nothing to do with Hunter. He was just repeating what Ukraine's well organized and passionate civil society was calling for. And so what you're going to see as part of this impeachment show trial in the House is a ramp up of the GOP and their Kremlin bot farms—and their Chinese bot farms because China's a big sponsor of Russian terrorism—basically painting Zelensky as the worst Jewish stereotype, as they're doing; of stealing American money, taking it out of your baby's mouths, that money should be going to you where you live in Texas and Michigan and Pennsylvania and elsewhere. So you're going to see this whole attack against Ukraine. It's not just an attack on Biden, it's a pro Kremlin Russian disinformation operation. That's what people have to understand. It's engineered not just to hurt Biden and help Trump in 2024, but to hurt Ukraine and to speed up Russia's genocide in Ukraine. So could you comment on that?

Terrell Starr (27:31):

Yeah, absolutely. So I think the thing with Kevin McCarthy is that he is not part of the extremist side of the Republican Party. He has such a paper thin majority in that you have these members who are part of the Freedom Caucus who are yahoos, that it takes one person to call for him to vacate his seat, right? So he has a very tenuous role. So based on that alone, he doesn't have any choice but to go on with this inquiry of Joe Biden, otherwise it'll be a threat to his own leadership power. And the danger in all of this is that Democrats have a better chance of winning the House than maintaining the Senate because, you know, there are more than a dozen Senate seats—I think a couple dozen Senate seats—that are going to be up for 2024. And those are going to be very challenging roads ahead.

Terrell Starr (28:23):

And so I think that in this instance, when you talk about a shutdown of the government, I think that the strongest chance of that happening is now more so than ever precisely because of the Matt Gaetz and the Boeberts and the Marjorie Taylor Greenes of the world who... You never thought that the extremists of the Republican Party could become more extreme, well here it is. And you have Trumpism to thank for that. And what Democrats have not been able to do is come up with a robust and vigorous messaging that appeals to the depths and the most marginalized of our party in the ways that Republicans do for theirs, right? And so we are not reaching our people in the way that Republicans are. That's the biggest issue. And I don't see that happening with Biden even. In fact, there are a number of things that Biden can boast about.

Terrell Starr (29:27):

They don't effectively communicate that to the American people. Now, you're also dealing with this disinformation age which I don't think that this current administration is prepared to adequately respond to. And that's a major thing. You brought up the fact that Marjorie Taylor Greene and the Chinese and Russian bot machines... They are as pro-Russia as Marine Le Pen in France or as Orbán and Hungary. If you notice, there's a whole ecosystem with Tucker Carlson—and I think that he's one of the biggest ringleaders, right? He is the ringleader of internationalizing these American far-right extremists and these European far-right extremists because one of the things that they value above all else is their whiteness. And they have a singular message of being anti-immigrant, of having the claims that Russia is being unfairly attacked. They have this same theme. There is an attitude of wanting to disengage from the rest of the world, and at the heart of it is all based on whiteness.

Terrell Starr (30:30):

And the Democrats don't have a message for that. And Tucker Carlson is the ringleader more so than anyone, right? I think that he is the international ringleader of disinformation and in aligning all these political figures that Viktor Orbán appears at APAC, for example. So all those things are happening. I am worried that in addition to Ukraine aid being held up, the government shutting down, which means that government officials will not be paid. You know, in the Senate, I know we were talking about the house, but in the Senate, Tuberville is holding up the nominations of key leaders in the military, particularly the Marines, for example, and that impacts Ukraine as well. And so I'm not sure how this is going to unfold, but if there is any time where I legitimately fear that the government will shut down and that'll be a significant problem, it's now precisely because of the yahoos who are in this Freedom Caucus.

Andrea Chalupa (31:32):

Yeah, without question. And so the Kremlin is doing really well for itself because of the United States, because of its infiltration and having overtaken, completely, one of the two major parties. And that brings us to the general matchup. Let's say it's Trump and Biden. The polls are showing that it's going to be very close in a general election. Of course, there's the slave state monument, the slavery monument of the electoral college that's going to determine the outcome, unfortunately. And you have the media playing into this whole debate over Biden's age, and of course the troll bots are all over that as well. And making Biden look like the grim reaper. "That's how old he is." They're trying to make him look weak against this virulent Mussolini, manly man Trump. And then of course you have reality itself: the mass grief, the mass trauma so many people are feeling because of the pandemic, the people we've lost, the jobs we've lost, child poverty rates are going up.

Andrea Chalupa (32:34):

Climate crisis is now. Biden was in Maui where he missed an opportunity, where people were burned alive. He missed an opportunity to announce a climate emergency. You have Gen Z coming up as a bigger voting block that are putting pressure on him, rightfully so, to do so. And so you have a lot of folks that are like, “Why should I vote for Biden? This is just a lesser evil.” And so it's the same dynamic we saw in 2016 when people were feeling like it didn't matter to them that the Supreme Court was at stake. People felt left behind across America, across parties. So what would you say to people today about, “Why should I vote for Biden? He's not fighting for me.”

Terrell Starr (33:16):

Well, the first thing I would do is I would talk to people about what their needs are. And the best person who does this more so than anyone that I've ever covered as a journalist is Latasha Brown of Black Voters Matter. Latasha Brown of Black Voters Matter, she and her group were primarily responsible for bringing Georgia to the Republican Party in the 2020 election. So it's these grassroots activists—

Andrea Chalupa (33:42):

Bringing Georgia to the Democratic Party.

Terrell Starr (33:44):

I'm sorry—winning that state for Joe Biden in the presidential election in 2020.

Andrea Chalupa (33:49):

Mmhmm [affirmative] And the two Senate seats.

Terrell Starr (33:50):

And the two Senate seats. It's Latasha Brown's organization. And I don't want to just single-handedly say it was her because it's a whole bunch of people, but she is one of the best organizers this country has ever seen. Anyone who covers us electoral politics from a grassroots level will tell you that. And if they tell you otherwise, they don't know what the hell they're talking about. And so what I would do is I would talk to them in the way that she does. And she asked them, “How are you doing? And what do you need?” Because in most cases, these people have never spoken to an elected official in their life. No one has ever asked them what they care about. No one has spoken to them about what their needs are. And Democrats are awful at that primarily because they do not understand that their demographic—the people who are really going to come out for them on a consistent basis—are people of color and poor people. And the current structure and dominant apparatus of the party focuses on the white middle class, focuses on the white working voter. And they are some of the most inconsistent people that you can invest in. What Republicans do very well, particularly in the case of Florida, is that they appeal to the Puerto Rican and Cuban communities there and speak to their issues. And many of them are coming from communist countries that they despise, and they always bring up Castro and they bring up—

Andrea Chalupa (35:19):

Socialism,

Terrell Starr (35:20):

Yes, and they bring up socialism. A lot of this rhetoric is bullshit, but it's pretty effective. Now, nationally, the average Latinx voter is Mexican, right? And so we know that. And Florida is a unique situation. But

their messaging is really good. Now, the Republicans speak to the lowest of the low. They speak to the depravity of people's illnesses, which is what makes them effective. It is racism, fascism, white supremacy. It's a cocktail of hatred, but it's an effective tool that brings people out. What are Democrats' response? And the thing is that they feel it. What Latasha Brown does is she goes to what people feel. Who makes us feel anything in a Democratic Party? The last time someone made me feel anything as a Democrat was Obama with "Yes I can." And we can have a whole lot of critiques about his presidency—

Andrea Chalupa (36:18):

His foreign policy.

Terrell Starr (36:20):

Yeah, all that stuff. We can have a conversation about that. But let's be honest, how many Democrats made you feel anything? This was a Black man that people said was a frickin' Kennedy in his aura. And he was! Who now makes us feel anything? Even as Democrats, Republicans make us feel a whole bunch of things. It's bad, but they make us feel.

Andrea Chalupa (36:46):

I would argue... So Elizabeth Warren, Senator Elizabeth Warren just called on investigating Elon Musk for serving the Kremlin's interests and turning off Starlink at a critical moment when Ukraine was doing an operation working towards liberating Crimea, where people have had their homes taken from them, where Crimean Tatars just had their homes stolen, and now Russian families are living in Crimean Tatars' homes. Journalists, religious minorities and so on, indigenous groups are violently oppressed in Russian occupied Crimea. It's a dystopian nightmare there. That's why Crimea must be liberated. It's Ukrainian. It was invaded. And so the fact that Musk deliberately sabotaged a military operation there by Ukraine to liberate it, Elizabeth Warren is saying, "We must investigate Musk." And Musk is like... He's up there with Tucker Carlson as being a global ringleader of this fascist right. He fucked up our home. Twitter was our home. I met you through Twitter.

Andrea Chalupa (37:50):

Our community, our sense of security, our safety, our protection, our power came from Twitter. Anyone who's mourning the very real loss of that community, that's real grief. And the work we have to do now to rebuild elsewhere, because staying on that platform frankly is not sustainable in the long term because he's running it like an authoritarian regime, and that's leading to self-censorship of critical issues like Ukraine and trans rights and so on. But Elizabeth Warren calling Musk out, that's my president. When she ran for office—

Terrell Starr:

I voted for her.

Andrea Chalupa:

When she said what needed to be said, I slept like a baby at night. So, she does light my soul on fire. And when I was making phone calls for her, I was talking to a lot of people that wanted to vote for her, but they wanted a winnable candidate. And that's how Biden got through.

Terrell Starr (38:38):

That's what people told me when I was covering her. I covered her campaign in 2020. And I went to California. I went to a number of states where people thought she would at least be competitive, right? And I spoke pretty much to Black voters, particularly Black women. And I'll tell you, and this is anecdotal because it's not like I was using the instruments from a Pew Research, but I spoke with hundreds of women, Black women, and they all told me—I would say 80% of them told me—that, “I want to vote for Elizabeth Warren, but I don't think the white people in Iowa...” All of them told me that. So going back to your point, they see something in her. Or saw something in her but didn't see her as winnable. And I think that was the primary issue. I think that there was a certain degree of sexism that was playing a role in it. And you remember she took on *Bloomberg*?

Andrea Chalupa (39:36):

Oh, she bounced him out of the race.

Terrell Starr (39:39):

Yeah, but the problem was that a lot of people... She had some of the same issues that Hillary Clinton faced; being too masculine, right? So that was the same thing of her being an attack dog. There's a It-factor that candidates need more or less. And Elizabeth Warren needed a lot of that. And so for a national appeal, she just didn't have it in this particular cycle. Now, in the next one, once Biden—pray to God he wins and there's a next cycle, we'll see how she'd be able to resurrect herself. I think that she should definitely run again. But going back to Elon Musk and Twitter, this has taught us a very valuable lesson. So with our community that was destroyed here with this bullshit X statement—and I'll never fucking call it X—and the government, there are two issues. One, I think the lesson that we've learned as building a community on Twitter is that these systems are not sustainable because they are subject to being bought by a Looney Toon, or a tech fascist in the case of Elon Musk

Terrell Starr (40:45):

And with the US government, there has not been enough investment in supporting engineers and technology where we could be independent of the private sector. And so it's just one of the ills of capitalism. And you brought up Elizabeth Warren, I found it interesting. And before we get off the call, I'm going to send you all an article where she said, “This is how capitalism works and this is how I'm going to make capitalism work for Black people.” And I really want you all to read it. This just made me think about it and it's important and germane to what you brought up because this is the result of an unregulated economy.

Andrea Chalupa (41:28):

Absolutely.

Terrell Starr (41:29):

So that's the primary issue. And so she says not that capitalism, it has its weaknesses, it's bad, and she acknowledges the history of it, but she says that the main issue is regulation. And if we don't have a regulated ecosystem... Because she wants to regulate Facebook, she wants to regulate all social media. And as it pertains to Starlink, we need to have more investment in government because ultimately, who's going to take care of us? That's the real question. How do we think that our society ought to be taken care of? And when I think about Europe, I think about across this continent here, is that there is a sense of communalism here in these countries in various degrees that doesn't exist in the United States. And it's because we live in a capitalist winner-takes-all type of system where the people who are weak and vulnerable—in this case, us and our community on social media. Or in Ukraine, you have one person

who has the power to determine if you can strike an enemy that's committing genocide against you and the US government doesn't have an alternative, which is why the Secretary of State Antony Blinken didn't have anything to say when he was pressed behind, I think it was Jake Tapper who was asking, "Do you don't see a problem with this?" And he couldn't say anything.

Andrea Chalupa (42:56):

Right, about what Musk did.

Terrell Starr (42:58):

Because Musk has him by the balls!

Andrea Chalupa (43:00):

Capitalism has our leaders by the balls. Exactly right. That is how it was during the rise of Hitler where the business elites helped bring Hitler to power to protect themselves from a rising organizing Left that wanted to make the economy fairer and bring in protections for workers and so on.

Terrell Starr (43:22):

Yeah, and that's really the issue. But that comes down to messaging. Now, I think that the person who could best articulate that is Elizabeth Warren because of all the people who are running for president, she ultimately was saying, "What type of society do we want to live in?" That's ultimately what she was saying. And with the advent of Elon Musk, who's making more money and more money by the minute, while we are continuing—

Andrea Chalupa (43:45):

Thanks to government subsidies and thanks to socialism.

Terrell Starr (43:49):

And thanks to the government. Yeah, so basically they privatize their profits and they socialize their losses, ultimately. And so essentially Elizabeth Warren asks us, "What society do we want to live in?" And unfortunately, the current slew of Democrats running aren't asking us that. But you know who's asking their constituents, "What society do we want to live in?" Republicans. Do you want those—and I'm just using their language—"Do you want these migrants coming in and messing with your daughter and taking your job?" They speak to the society that their constituents wanna live in. Who's doing that for us? And that's the question.

Andrea Chalupa (44:34):

Very good question. So let me bring you to the G20 summit that just happened in India. I want to get your thoughts on this. India is one of the financiers of Russia's war machine because they're buying up all of Russia's deeply discounted oil. The oil's discounted due to sanctions, and India will take that oil and resell it. So therefore, India is one of the major—like China is doing the same—is a financier of Russia's war machine. The G20 of the world's 20 largest economies, which is held in India, and the global superpowers were having a hard time coming up with a unified, strong statement in support of Ukraine and its existential fight against Russia's genocide. And they produced this horrible, mealy-mouthed statement, which was very watered down compared to the one they produced in the last G20 summit. And this was seen as a disinformation victory for Russia because it showed that Russia's close ally

partner, India, had its back. And it also validated some of the positions, the same sort of both-sidesing coming out of Brazil with leftist hero, Lula, basically blaming both sides in the genocide of Ukraine and so on. And so this was very demoralizing. Ukraine, of course, was furious with the both-sidesing statement. Jake Sullivan, Biden's National Security Advisor, and Antony Blinken, Secretary of State, both were proud of this statement, claiming that it was, "Look how unified we are." I just felt like it was just a stab in the chest of Ukraine. What were your thoughts?

Terrell Starr (46:13):

I have another perspective. As a person who lives in Ukraine, who supports Ukraine, I feel you all the Ukrainians, I feel you. But the way... When you think about the G20, which also includes China, right? And you're talking about Brazil, and you're talking about India and South Africa. I look at these countries and today, I compare them to the Dream Team of 1992. So the US Olympic team and the FIFA tournament came up fourth place. The world has changed and the competition has gotten greater. And the countries that the US could beat with its second best players or third best players have come up. And we know that the Canadian team that beat the US for the bronze medal, I think they had something like seven or eight NBA players on their team. You have to look at the emerging economies of South Africa and Brazil and China and India in a similar way.

Terrell Starr (47:16):

They're power brokers. And so I don't think that there was much in regards to leverage that the US and these other countries could have done to change it. And the analogy with the Dream Team is that you're not as powerful as you used to be because these countries are not as weak economically in their influence as they used to be. And if we want to have an honest conversation, we have to recognize that. And another key thing you have to consider is that when you think about China, you think about India, for example. China... When was the last time, I mean the Communist Party has been in power for God knows how long. And you have Modi, who's a freaking ethnonationalist. And so a lot of these countries, and you can't say the same thing for Brazil because they actually do a better job of prosecuting their criminal leadership than the United States does.

Terrell Starr (48:10):

But my point is that these countries are in a position to push back against somebody considered Western hegemony in ways that never happened before. And the United States does not have a response to "What type of influence in the world do we have?" because we still have a neoliberal model, which is what these countries are challenging. And going back to one of my favorite politicians, Elizabeth Warren, she was one of those people in her own way who was really thinking about neoliberalism and how do we adjust that? And so if we are not thinking about how the world that we want to live in and how we want to shape it and articulating to our fellow Americans what that world ought to look like, then this statement—which was lukewarm—is just going to be the tip out of iceberg because the Chinese, the Brazilians, the South Africans are articulating, "What type of world do we want to live in? We want to be in a world where the United States is not dominating and telling us what to do." What is our response to that? And given that we don't talk about foreign policy virtually ever in US Democratic debates in any meaningful way, there's no answer to that. And so that statement—which was lukewarm—was to be expected because the US and its allies in the West don't have an adequate response to it. Those are facts.

Andrea Chalupa (49:41):

Absolutely right. Yeah, no, you're right. And also China... Climate scientists are pointing to China because they're leading the way on technology to try to build a more sustainable economy. And so a lot of these

more progressive or aspiring progressive governments, like in Brazil, are looking at China as a partner they have to work with if they want civilization to stand a fighting chance. So it's harder for the US to carry a big stick when it's the US that's expanding oil exploration and production. Even though Biden did just roll back some leases for pristine wilderness, it's still the US leading on that front.

Terrell Starr (50:19):

And the thing about it is that these other countries don't have any problem working with Brazil or cooperating with North Korea because they don't operate by the same rules of allyship as we do in the West. Or you can actually, in fact, they can challenge America in that regard because of the US' relationship with Israel or the United States' relationship with Saudi Arabia. Right? And then another key point is that these countries like Iran, North Korea, their governments have been in power for decades. And unless something goes and changes in Iran where there's an ongoing revolution to top its power, those countries will have the ayatollah, they'll have the [inaudible] family. And these countries that are undemocratic have the same types of leadership, the same type of practices that go on for decades where in the United States or across Europe, democracy does not assure political consistency. And America is Exhibit A of that, for better or for worse.

Terrell Starr (51:28):

And again, that goes back to the main question, how are we articulating to our people these dynamics and these challenges because the rest of the world is thinking about this. Their people are thinking about this. The person that's in the cafe is thinking about this. The person in America is watching Kim Kardashian thinking about... Or whatever is happening on live or reality television because we are in the comforts of the US while the rest of the world which sees us as a neoliberal bully is uncomfortable, and they want to achieve that same comfort that we have in our own way, and we are being complacent. Here's the thing, and I think this is important. People like us, we need to build our own communities. We need to create our own ecosystems where we talk to each other so that our voices and our messages can reverberate around our country to tell 'em about what the hell is going on in the world. And if we don't do that, we're fucked.

[outro - theme music]

Andrea Chalupa (52:38):

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

Andrea Chalupa (52:46):

To help people in Maui rebuild, donate to the Maui Strong fund at hawaiicommunityfoundation.org. And if you or a friend want to go to Burning Man next year, instead donate that money to the Ali Forney Center, the largest community center in the US helping homeless LGBTQ youth. To help humanitarian aid in Ukraine, donate to Razom for Ukraine at razomforukraine.org. In addition, we 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 theorangutanproject.org.

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