

Gaslit Nation Transcript

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“American Civil War: Then and Now”

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[opening song, [‘First They Came for the Queers’ by Mr. Madam Adam](#)]

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:59):

Hey everyone, welcome to *Gaslit Nation*. I am your host, Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine. And the story of that, of course, is repeating today under Putin, who consolidated power with his anti-gay laws. His buddy Orbán did the same in Hungary. And Wedgie Face Ron DeSantis in Florida copied that dictator's playbook with his Don't Say Gay law. That's the pattern. Fascists scapegoat gay people, queers, to try to consolidate their base of straight up bullies. Never forget: bullies are all cowards. They're all cowards who hate themselves. We're not going to let them win. So shine your light. Be beautiful. We need you now. And all of that is to say, the song you heard at the top of the show was ‘First They Came for the Queers’ by Mr. Madam Adam.

Andrea Chalupa (00:01:58):

Adam sent us this bio: “Adam, AKA Mr. Madam Adam, is a queer White mid-Westerner, a multilingual environmental educator, musician and activist. He uses music and art to connect people to each other and the land.” Thank you so much for doing that. Adam provided this statement about the song: “I've been a listener since 2018, I think, and have watched as anti LGBTQ sentiment has been growing in this country. I know my community has often been the target of colonialism and authoritarianism and worry where we are headed if resistance does not increase.” Agreed. “I originally wrote the song in 2022, and the amount of hate through both rhetoric and legislation the LGBTQ community is getting is the worst it's been in my lifetime.” Yes, and it's increasingly normalized. “I wanted to create a joyful song of resistance calling on folks to stand with the queer community and stand up to the Christian fascists.”

Andrea Chalupa (00:02:57):

Thank you so much, Mr. Madam Adam. We'll post a link to the song, ‘First They Came for the Queers’ on our social media feeds and in the show notes for this episode on our Patreon page. You can find more of Mr. Madam Adam's music on Apple Music, on Twitter at @senorhettler—that's S-E-N-O-R-H-E-T-T-L-E-R, on Instagram as @adamevanswest, and on TikTok at @ItsMadamadam. And thank you for being on several platforms. Thank you because you've got your options out there in case one gets snatched from you like our Twitter was taken away. Thanks for sharing your work with us, Adam. To our beautiful queer listeners, we love you. We see you. You're not alone. The *Gaslit Nation* community has your back. And with that, we're going to do some good old fashioned calling out the gaslighting. I don't know where this episode's going to go.

Andrea Chalupa (00:03:52):

I'm just going to let it rip, because we need to talk about Jared Kushner. We need to open up his massive wrap sheet. You can obviously go to the transcripts for that. There's a lot of episodes we've done, but the reason why we're bringing this up now is because back on October 5th, I did a livestream called ‘Fox

News Tea'. In that livestream, I was sharing how I had met someone who for a very long time had worked as an ad executive at Fox News and he would mingle and regularly talk to the big marquee names like Sean Hannity. And he said that in private, in the office, around the cooler, their personalities were different than the fake WWF wrestling that they were showing everyone on the screen, and that Sean Hannity himself would even say things to the ad exec guys like, "Hey, was that too far tonight?"

Andrea Chalupa (00:04:39):

"Do you want me to dial things down?" Basically what he was coming out with was that Fox is just one big outrage factory. It's a massive money maker. Yes, there's all sorts of genocidal hate and racism, just run of the mill White supremacy that goes into it. But they know very, very well that they are packaging crazy and selling it to crazy to build more crazy. They're throwing all that bloody red meat out there for their base. They're rating slaves. And so as soon as they see the ratings dip, they pump up the crazy. They pump up the steroids. They cover the baby oil on their big sweaty Hulk Hogan bodies and get back into the ring. And so that was his larger point. And so you can listen to that livestream. I'll link to it in the show notes for this episode. But in that livestream, I made this comment because at the same time I was hearing that there was a big juicy Kushner story coming out. So now you're going to hear from my October 5th live stream, this clip:

[audio clip from October 5th livestream, 'Sue Fox News and Stop Cop City']

Andrea Chalupa (00:05:34):

The Dominion lawsuit has had a chilling effect across cable news. I was meeting with a producer of a major cable news network who had an extraordinary bombshell story on somebody in Trump's family. It was like a smoking gun story. And I want to tell you what this story was on but there are investigative journalists at a credible newspaper that are working on the story, and I don't want to disrupt that work, and I don't want to send out a warning to the criminals... They know by now. They know by now that journalists are on the hunt of this big story, but it would've been broken by now already by a major cable news network that declined to break the story because they're now so lawyered after what happened with Dominion at Fox. So that massive Dominion lawsuit has had a chilling effect across other cable news stories that are now holding back and being ultra conservative on practicing journalism and talking themselves out of really important stories for the public good because of what happened with Dominion.

Andrea Chalupa (00:06:37):

So that's something that I heard firsthand from a producer who was at a major cable news network who was extremely frustrated. She had worked these sources. She had gotten this amazing story out. And ultimately what had to happen was because the cable news network passed on, it ended up going to a newspaper that's now developing the story. And if it doesn't come out in the next month, I'm going to just tell you what it is, okay? So the warning's out there. Get the story out there. You know who you are, get it out there. You know that a major cable news network passed on it. Now it's in your hands, newspaper—Pulitzer prize-winning paper—so get it out. It's within Trump's own family. It's stuff that I've already talked about on the show in terms of speculation, but it was confirmed by this cable news producer that it was true because it is obvious. It's basically a damning story of how the trumps were grifting off of the White House in their final days during the coup. Again, if that doesn't come out in the next month, I'll just say what it is because it needs to come out.

[end audio clip]

Andrea Chalupa (00:07:37):

Well, now that story is out in the *New York Times*, and you may have already read it. It's called, 'A Troubling Trump Pardon and a link to the Kushners'. Does it come out and say that Jared Kushner was taking money for pardons? No, it does not. It does cleverly stack some paragraphs together to make that abundantly clear that's what he is doing. And I could read from some of that. But not only does it just come out and point out the obvious because we've been hearing that for years. I've been speculating about it on the show. There's apparently text messages out there floating around that can be used in a DOJ investigation—hint, hint—or congressional investigation and so on. It even plays, of course, defense for the Kushners. There's a stupid summary of the article itself, which lists the three key takeaways, including the massive big takeaway that the Kushners were involved in the pardon process.

Andrea Chalupa (00:08:33):

I kid you not. The headline is, "The Kushners were involved in the Pardon process." That is protection for the Kushners. That is straight up gaslighting, as we say on the show, because the Kushners were the White House. The Kushners were the 2016 Trump campaign. The Kushners were the criminal mind of the whole Trump operation. That was the Unholy Trinity: Ivanka, Jared, and the father. Just to illustrate this with some not too long ago history that I think our trauma and our collective abuse that we've been under has maybe made us forget, it was Ivanka and Jared who chose Paul Manafort, who said, "Dad, this is the guy to run your campaign." It was the Trump transition team, which was run by Ivanka, that told Michael Flynn to go talk to the Russians to calm them down when Obama was releasing all these pardons and did an investigation and did their attack on our democracy in 2016.

Andrea Chalupa (00:09:27):

It was the transition team under Ivanka's leadership that told Michael Flynn, "Go talk to the Russians, deal with that for us." And then that of course led to the massive investigation of Michael Flynn, him being pushed out of the White House, and so on and so on. It was Jared Kushner who approached the Russians, wanting a back channel of communication with them. "Thanks for getting us elected, guys. How can we talk to each other securely? Is WhatsApp okay?" You know what I mean? And he would go on to have that same relationship with MBS; late night slumber parties. MBS bragged that he had Kushner in his pocket. MBS bragged that he was getting all this intelligence from Kushner. Remember, Kushner did not get his security clearance. His dad, his father-in-law, had to push that through. He did not pass that security clearance ever. It was just a straight grift. And in all their time running that White House, pushing out their rival Bannon, they enriched themselves to the tune of \$640 million.

Andrea Chalupa (00:10:20):

And when they got out of there after helping MBS clean up his butchering of a chief critic, the *Washington Post* reporter, Jamal Khashoggi, Jared was then awarded with a \$2 billion fund by Saudi Arabia. That is notoriously discerning when it comes to all financial matters. I've talked to people that have worked in Saudi Arabia with the Kingdom itself, and they said they know that, you know, they're extremely rich and made of money, and as a result, they'll push back on you. They will scrutinize you. And there are of course reports confirming this in regards to Jared Kushner, that there are reservations over Jared getting a massive payload of \$2 billion. But of course that had to go through because who controls the fund? His murderous millennial best friend, MBS. So that money was his, in his pocket. And all of this ties into Jack Smith's ongoing DOJ investigation with the classified documents—the treasure trove of intelligence for our enemies—that were being kept in the Viper's den of Mar-a-Lago.

Andrea Chalupa (00:11:19):

So Jared Kushner, the father, and Ivanka were all over that. They were central. And why they're still walking free, why they themselves haven't been indicted is just a sign of the deep systemic rot and

corruption and just the long history of America's own story, obviously. And we're going to have some guests on very soon to talk more about that. But the larger point is that the New York Times came very close to pointing out the obvious and then they held back. And so let's go through the story. So the story focuses on Jonathan Braun, who was a drug dealer and ruthless loan shark out of Staten Island. He had personal connections with the Kushners. He was a founding student. He was in one of the earliest classes, not the first class, of Yeshiva that was built with massive financial support from the Kushner family.

Andrea Chalupa (00:12:12):

He was in the same class as Kushner's sister, Nicole. And Mr. Braun was on the wrong side of the law because he was going around threatening people and their families and their children through his loan sharking, and he was just destroying people's lives, fleecing them for money. And the DOJ kinda did some weird shady things with their case, which isn't surprising because it's the DOJ, but they did manage to finally get him after he had escaped to Israel. And they got him back and they had him on the ropes. They were getting him to flip. It was a very sensitive case. He was going to lead to a lot bigger sharks, a lot bigger targets. And instead of vetting that pardon through the system and following any proper channels and protocols, Jared Kushner and the longtime family ally, family lawyer, Alan Dershowitz, a longtime friend, along with Trump of, you guessed it, Jeffrey Epstein.

Andrea Chalupa (00:13:07):

And so Dershowitz was basically the go-between for Jonathan Braun's pardon. And it was one of many that were shoved through in the final moments of Trump's time in the White House. And I want to just point out that by pardoning Braun, Jared, Kushner, Trump, and Ivanka undermined the DOJ's operation to try to not only nab this guy but nab larger fish around him who were destroying people's lives and by allowing him to go free with this pardon, he then went back out into the wild and continue to do what he got caught for doing; feeding off people and destroying them financially and so on. And he's out there doing that. If you read about the pardons up close that Kushner and Ivanka and Trump were allowing to go through, a massive amount of them, it reads like that Batman film where all of the villains are running amok and taking over Gotham. And they're out there now.

Andrea Chalupa (00:14:09):

And of course it includes the long list of the Kremlin Clown Kar who got them all into power in the first place. The Kremlin's longtime man of war who fucked up Ukraine, Paul Manafort. Then you have Roger Stone. You have Michael Flynn, and of course Bannon. And Bannon is especially delicious here because he hated the Kushners with a passion. They were a famous feud. And very opportunistically, the Kushners were able to finally push Bannon out when his hate movement led to the murder of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, Virginia against that whole, the big counter protest against the tiki torch wielding Klansmen, the Brooks Brothers Klansmen. And even though Bannon and the Kushners were destroying each other back and forth in the press in tell-all books when 2020 rolled around and it was looking to be Trump's final year in office, the pandemic was coming up, the vultures were circling trying to push him out, Bannon knew that he had to start working on securing his pardon. So what did he do, knowing full well who ran that White House? Bannon did a charm offensive on Ivanka. This is very important that we understand why Bannon had to eat a lot of shit doing this—because he hates Ivanka with a passion. He has famously said she's dumb as bricks and he's right. And so here he is now, this is Steve Bannon begging for his life here, essentially. This is him, a clip, from the *Firing Line* show.

[begin audio clip]

Interviewer (00:15:38):

Who carries on the populous agenda after President Trump?

Steve Bannon (00:15:41):

Oh, I think now you're starting to see a whole type of populism evolve, hopefully, in the Republican Party. I think the whole direction is there. Look. Look at Ivanka. Ivanka's taken her time to focus on women's empowerment. So I think you've seen throughout the administration, I think young politicians are starting to talk. Nikki Haley. Everybody's now focused on working class people and the concerns of the middle class and working class, and this is why I think it's been good. I think our democracy is more vibrant.

Interviewer (00:16:06):

I smiled because it's hard to think of Ivanka Trump as a populist.

Steve Bannon (00:16:09):

If you look at her actions. Okay, Ivanka and I have had a lot of fights, okay? But if you look at her actions, she's talking about women's empowerment.

[end audio clip]

Andrea Chalupa (00:16:17):

And lo and behold, Bannon gets his pardon. So all of that is to illustrate that this *New York Times* reporting, which just is more of the same sort of reporting, it does add by painting this whole disturbing picture of a criminal that was allowed to go free to commit more crimes, this Braun character, and that's very much on brand for the Kushners, but it really is shitty in how it essentially downplays how essential the Kushners were, not just to the White House but the pardon operation itself. Now let me point out where it does try to get you, dear reader, to read through the lines. And if you're not a *Gaslit Nation* listener, this might go over your head. And I'll read this. So here we have the closest they get in the *New York Times* to spelling it out for us that there was a cash grab by the Kushners and Trump with this pardon operation. It's this quote from Mike Pence's former chief of staff Marc Short, who ran the VP office for Pence.

Andrea Chalupa (00:17:15):

He said that his office, their office, refused to join Jared Kushner's pardon cash grab, saying "'The pardon process at the end of the administration was so unseemly it would make the Clinton's blush,' Mr. Short said, referring to the final days' pardons issued by President Bill Clinton, including one to the fugitive financier, Mark Rich, whose ex-wife donated \$450,000 to Mr. Clinton's presidential library." Yeah, we get it. Kushners were selling pardons. That's why you're bringing up this example here. It's happened before. It was likely happening then. Why not just come out and say it? Who are you afraid of? Who are you paid off by? What type of access journalism shenanigans are you playing at here? I mean, the *New York Times* likes to claim it's the newspaper of record. It's the newspaper of proximity to power. And the Kushners have long been very juicy in giving sources to the media; financial sources for all various interests.

Andrea Chalupa (00:18:23):

From oligarchs to, of course, Netanyahu and his family going way back with the Kushners themselves. Their power strings are very deep, very long, and spread across both parties. It was Nancy Pelosi that would've been the one when the Democrats had the House to allow these investigations that were being called for, including by members, Democratic members of the House, publicly calling out, saying, "We

want to see what connections Jared Kushner had to MBS' murder [of Jamal Khashoggi]. There need to be investigations.” Nothing ever happened, even though that would've been juicy, juicy television. We were calling for that all the time in real time. And so the Kushners are entrenched in the power structures of DC. They're desperate for a comeback. Jared had that memoir. You saw Jake Tapper and others rallying around by it, cheerleading for it. They're now firmly in the camp of Nikki Haley, Nikki Haley, who casually uses genocidal language against queers.

Andrea Chalupa (00:19:15):

And she's somebody that I think a lot in the establishment are putting their hopes on to be the anti-Trump to come out and bring back the old Republican Party and making things good again. I'm going to keep beating on this drum because I see the storm clouds. And yes, we all worry about Trump getting the nomination for his party and possibly winning. Yes, that's bad. What's equally bad is Jared and Ivanka back in the White House again, cash grabbing galore, thanks to Nikki Haley, alright? So that is my rant for today. And I want to just tell everyone, if it smells like fraud, it's fraud. Put that on a T-shirt. Alright, and one more thing. When you read this *New York Times* article, keep this in mind: One of the reporters is—unsurprisingly—Maggie Haberman, whose mother, Nancy Haberman, works at the powerhouse PR firm, Rubenstein, whose founder was the Kushners' longtime family publicist.

Andrea Chalupa (00:20:12):

And it shows. Alright, so we're going to go back to some announcements. I know that there's a lot happening and we're going to cover more in the bonus episode coming out Saturday. We're going to cover more on Saturday. To help everyone stay grounded, to protect your mental hygiene in these times, we have the Make Art workshop that is out, and I'm so thrilled from the response from our community of listeners. One listener wrote, “OMG, thank you so much for this. So good. So right on time for me at this moment. So good, in fact, it made this old curmudgeon use OMG. This might be my all time favorite episode, which is saying a lot since they've all been outstanding.” Thank you so much. So if you want to check out our Make Art workshop, look for it in the show notes. I've gotten questions, comments about this workshop.

Andrea Chalupa (00:21:00):

So we're going to be doing a follow-up early in the year so everyone can look out for that. And then we have a new community feature we're going to try soon at the start of the year in January on Patreon. It is a chat group. We're going to introduce a chat group where folks can get together and talk about ways to save democracy, running for office, share policy ideas, art actions, mental health advice or resources, articles/books they're reading, whatever you need, whatever you're going through to help sustain yourself during this time. We're going to have a chat feature open where folks can share all that in real time, go back and forth, chat away, because we've had a very, very active community on our Patreon. And so we want to sort of help with that. And so we're going to wait until January to launch it to give ourselves some time internally to understand how that will work so we can help facilitate that.

Andrea Chalupa (00:21:49):

And then finally, we're going to have a social media workshop on the evening of Thursday, January 18th. It's going to be a live virtual event featuring the wonderful Rachel Brody who's leading the charge to replace Jay Jacobs as the head of the Democratic Party here in New York State. She works with a lot of great human rights groups in the US to fight for healthcare, to fight for expanding access to the ballot, to drive out the vote and so on. She's a wonderful voice for human rights and democracy in our country, and she's going to be there to talk us through all of the wonderful alternatives to Twitter. It's basically going to be a big old wake for Twitter, and we're going to just share, ask the stupidest questions in the

world about all of our social media alternatives out there and how to use them, how to get our voices out there in a very big way, heading into the fight for our lives yet again in 2024.

Andrea Chalupa (00:22:41):

I'm really excited for that workshop. I'm going to be bringing a lot of dumb questions. I hope to see you guys there. Look out for info on that. I'll be sharing it closer to the event. And again, you can mark your calendars: January 18th at 8:00 PM And then finally, our dear Hamish Smith who gave us the original logo of our show is back with a wonderful design called 'Tis the Season to Prosecute Treason. He created a wonderful design saying that, that we've slapped on t-shirts and mugs that we're selling to support the show. You can grab yours for the holidays or year round because there's so many damn traitors out there and it's going to take our generation to wrangle them all in and reform the structures that allowed them to come to power in the first place. So yeah, these are going to be collectors items.

Andrea Chalupa (00:23:27):

So 'Tis the Season to Prosecute Treason by the great designer, Hamish Smith. Look out for a link on how to find those T-shirts and mugs in the show notes for this episode. And now, our wonderful guest for this episode... I'm so thrilled. It's Heather Cox Richardson, the historian and the author of the new book, *Democracy Awakening*, which President Biden was just spotted picking up a copy of on his recent vacation. And hopefully he gets a lot of ideas there to replace Merrick Garland with somebody who's actually going to meaningfully fight for civil rights in our democracy during this extremely critical make-it-or-break-it period for our country and therefore the world. In this conversation, you're going to hear Heather and I discuss what very much feels like, in my view, a slow moving civil war, obviously, with all the genocidal hate towards LGBTQ+ people.

Andrea Chalupa (00:24:19):

Of course the abortion bans, far-right Christian fascism putting people's lives in danger, destroying lives with these abortion bans, and the NRA being allowed to sell weapons of war and enrich themselves and no one seems to be stopping it. That is a preview of what AI will be like, what robot soldiers and robot police and robot police dogs will be like. If they can't stop the NRA, what makes us think that in this world today, they're going to be able to protect us from AI and killer robots? They won't. It's going to be the same thing. "Oh, but we're making money." And now without further ado, here's Heather Cox Richardson in Part Two of our discussion. This interview was recorded September 19th, 2023. The warnings and insights remain urgent. Part Two did not run sooner due to the Israel-Hamas war. [The first part of our discussion](#) can be found on the transcript page of our website on gaslitnationpod.com or in the show notes. And now, welcome to Democracy Awakening.

[transition music up and under]

Andrea Chalupa (00:25:26):

Do you think we're headed towards a civil war or that we're already there, like a slow motion civil war?

Heather Cox Richardson (00:25:35):

There are two really big different questions there because when people ask if they're going to go to a civil war, they often are thinking of a shooting war like the previous one we had in the 1860s. And of course that was a theme that was pushed by Russian operatives on social media from 2014 onwards. So we know that that was there being salted in the American population. And I think it's also something that the cos players like to think is going to happen, that they're going to be out, I don't know, running around like they're at Antietam. But there's a really big difference between the 1860s and the present in

many obvious ways, but in a way that maybe people haven't thought about. And they forget that the way we got the American Civil War was that it happened really quickly. So in 1860, in November of 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected president and in South Carolina, South Carolina is the only state in the union at the time that chose its presidential electors by the state legislature.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:26:34):

So the state legislature was sitting when they discovered that Lincoln had been elected. That group of legislators who were supporting the far-right southern candidate, the one who wanted to have enslavement all over the nation, they instantly turned from being supporters of that candidate, John Breckenridge, and became supporters of secession. And so they take the state of South Carolina out of the union very, very quickly. Now, this is winter, right? It's Christmas. And across the south there isn't farming going on, there isn't planting going on. And instead, people who have money and who have political connections are going to fancy balls and they're drinking a lot of punch and a lot of whiskey, and they're boasting to each other about how they would whip those shopkeepers up there in New York in a single battle, and drinking a lot and talking about how wonderful and easy it would be to win a civil war.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:27:30):

So by spring, some states have gone out, but nothing's happened. Remember, this is Lincoln's strategy was simply to let things play out. And when he takes office in March of 1861, he's expecting that if he can just drag this out, planting season's going to come and southerners are going to say, "Oh, that was kind of silly, and we're not really going to do that," which is one of the reasons we get the firing on Fort Sumter in mid-April is the Confederacy recognizes that it's falling apart. It's got to do something really quickly. And the whole reason I just gave that entire long spiel on the coming of the Civil War is because it happened fast. Now, if you think about the attempt to create authoritarianism in the United States, the moment was first Steve Bannon and Stephen Miller really try and spark a crisis in January of 2017 when Trump first takes office with the travel ban.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:28:23):

They had a couple of executive orders that were extraordinary, and then we got the travel ban, which threw us—people may forget it now, but—into extraordinary confusion because literally there were planes coming into the country with people who suddenly were not supposed to be here and they were already on planes, they'd already gotten all their visas and everything, they were ready to come. So there was a crisis in the airports, if you remember, where all of a sudden there were people running around and nobody knew what was going on. And that I think was an attempt to create instability in the country and to reinforce the idea that we needed a strongman to come and protect our borders and to keep out the Muslims, although it was a weird list of countries that you couldn't travel from. Saudi Arabia was not included in that.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:29:03):

Although, of course, the hijackers of 9/11 were associated with Saudi Arabia, not some of the countries that were kept out. Anyway, I think they tried then, but their real moment was January 6th. And if January 6th had gone even slightly differently, you and I would not be having this conversation today. Because imagine what would've happened, and I'm sure you have, but for your listeners, if in fact the rioters had gotten Mitt Romney, which they were very close to doing—and we know they were calling for his death because he had voted to impeach Donald Trump on the first impeachment—if they had gotten Mitt Romney or if they had gotten Mike Pence, whom Trump was quite obviously aiming for. He was really trying to get them to go after Mike Pence. And people were saying, "Well, he didn't really mean that." I'm like, really? He didn't? Really? Imagine if rioters had gotten Pence or the other two people who were in the hall that day; Nancy Pelosi or Chuck Grassley, who was the Senate pro temp leader that day.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:30:07):

Imagine if the rioters had injured, or God forbid, killed any one of those people. Do you think for a minute that Trump would not have called out, you know, invoked the Insurrection Act and tried to bring troops behind the protection of the presidency? That's one scenario. Or imagine if counter protesters had shown up, which appears to have been part of the plan on the Trump side, that he would use that as an excuse to use the Insurrection Act and call out troops on his behalf. I don't think for a minute that if either of those scenarios had happened, we would not have seen at least an attempt but I think quite possibly a successful attempt for him to take power because what does that look like? If somebody has incapacitated the Vice President in—clearly—a coup, or the Speaker of the House or the Senate president pro temp, what does that look like if the President doesn't call out the troops?

Heather Cox Richardson (00:31:08):

How would any of us have jumped? What would that have looked like? We know that all 10 of—at the time—living defense secretaries had warned the military not to get involved, but clearly they were afraid of it. They were afraid that that was going to happen. So that moment... I think when people downplay it now and say, "Oh, it never... Nothing bad ever happened. It was just some people who got carried away." I think that was the moment that needed to happen for a coup really to be successful. And what's happened in the wake of that, of course, is that Trumpers, especially at the state level, have seized a number of the nodes of political power. But at the same time, what's happened is that the American people have woken up and they've recognized that their democracy is under siege. It is in peril. And people who say to me, you know, "They're going to take over," I always think, Tell me what that looks like.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:32:03):

Do you take a majority of Americans who are accustomed to being able to make decisions about their own lives and their own government, take that away from them and have them say, "Okay, this'll be fine," because I don't see that happening. I see that becoming a truly ungovernable nation, and I would prefer that we not get to that place, but I think it would be a very hard thing to impose authoritarianism on the United States. Now, the slow-walked civil war you're talking about, I'm going to put a little bit differently and say that I think we have been in a violent crisis now for a long time. And of course we look now at mass shootings, especially school shootings, but I would suggest domestic violence is also one of the truly astonishing things that doesn't get nearly enough attention. And if you look at the fact that more than 50% of our mass shootings are domestic violence, they are partners killing their significant others and their children.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:33:07):

That's an epidemic. It's just an epidemic. And if you think about, when we talk about the 1880s, we say, "Oh, it's a period in which there's extraordinary strike activity, there are strikes every day, you cannot think about this period without thinking about all the strikes and about how much it says about the roiling of the community." And I always think, in this moment, no historian is going to be able to look at the moment we're in and not look at the extraordinary gun violence and not say that we are already in a battle of some sorts. And it's not necessarily a civil war about politics so much as it is about who should be the people in charge in this country in terms of gender, in terms of race, in terms of class. And that I think is where we already are. Will that continue to go on being politically motivated? Yeah, I suspect so, but it's not coming. It's here.

Andrea Chalupa (00:34:02):

Yeah, absolutely. It's here. And obviously to that point, losing reproductive healthcare rights and just having these states where women have to suffer and risk their own lives and doctors are too afraid to even help them go to another state where they could get an abortion. And now you have Poland, which is overseen now by a Trumpian government that has captured state media, the courts, very much like what we're up against here with the Fox News and so on in the Supreme Court and all of it. So now Poland has created a pill that can tell whether a person has used an abortion drug, and you know that's going to come to the states across the US, in Florida, that have passed these essentially abortion bans, even if it's early week pregnancy. They're abortion bans. So that is authoritarian. That is something where you mentioned, well, what does it look like?

Andrea Chalupa (00:35:04):

You no longer make decisions over your own life. That's an example right there. And so yeah, it's here. It's now. I do agree that... My whole feeling on it is that one of the things America has going for it is that we're decentralized, right? So you're going to have a lot of unruly pockets of resistance that it's going to be hard for any sort of Trumpian government to draw in. And there's going to be pitch battles in the street between their forces and ours. It'll be a very difficult authoritarian regime to manage, especially given how massive the US government is. And I do believe there's enough wokeness, if you will, in our massive military, that it'd be difficult for an authoritarian to get the military fully behind them. I do think there's some morbid pockets of hope there. I want to ask though, with the Supreme Court being fully under the far-right majority and being backed by super donors like Nazi memorabilia enthusiast, Harlan Crow, that's taken away affirmative action, reproductive healthcare rights, and it's chipped away at environmental regulations and they're just getting started.

Andrea Chalupa (00:36:18):

And so my question to you is with some of these so-called Red states taking full advantage—they can now ban abortion and so on and so on—and the so-called Blue states having to become sort of sanctuaries and underground railroad hubs for people in the so-called Red States, do you see America in the next decade/decades essentially splitting apart in a way because the states just completely pass each other in terms of quality of life even more extreme than what we have now? Do you see an eventual splitting apart of America? Maybe these courts get packed again by another Republican president and Americans living in states like New York and California say, “We don't want to be stuck under the Supreme Court anymore. We're going to vote for independence.” Do you see the potential for this hyperpolarization that we might be headed towards a breaking up of the states into separate countries like in the EU?

Heather Cox Richardson (00:37:12):

Well, it's certainly possible, and let me speak to that, but first, let's take up the issue of abortion rights because, and I should say the pockets of resistance. I would suggest that we're not even looking at pockets yet. I mean, one of the things that really jumps out to me in the last few weeks before you and I recorded this podcast is the degree to which even far-right Republican candidates are backing off on their stances about abortion. And they're trying to make those stances look more moderate. They're not. I mean, they're talking moderately but perfectly well this is a wedge in the door for making a federal ban at 15 weeks, later on became a federal ban at 6 weeks, which is probably where they'll leave it because most women don't know they're pregnant at the time they're six weeks pregnant. The fact that they're backing off on that... If you remember right after Dobbs, they were all having signings and handing out pins and all that, and now they're backing off on that embrace of abortion. It's because ever since Dobbs went through, Democrats have overperformed by about eight points in every election that they've had since then.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:38:15):

And there's a recognition, I think, that there is still the power of voters to say, "We're not going to put up with this." Now, it's also important that voters don't get hoodwinked and say, "Oh, yeah, Mike Pence is now moderate" because Mike Pence is not moderate. He's talking more moderately, but this game is not over yet because the voters still—now they may not always, but they still have a say. And turning up in huge numbers does matter. And there's a recognition, I think, among a number of people that abortion rights, which are still you know, at least two thirds of Americans believe that abortion should be available in all or most circumstances. Only 9% believe that it should be illegal in all circumstances. So we're not there yet in terms of authoritarianism in its full form. It's certainly a threat, but we're not there yet. Now, one of the things that you say though, in terms of breaking up the country is really interesting to me, and I play this out a lot.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:39:13):

When you think about the American Civil War in the 1860s, one of the things that is central—and again, we don't talk about a lot—is the fact that in the 1860s when the war broke out, in 1860, it was the American South that was the one that had all the money. The institution of human enslavement and the cotton it produced was solid gold. I mean, there's a reason that they said, "Cotton is king." They were some of the richest people in the world and the north was not. I mean, industrialization was just taking off. There wasn't really a financial system that supported it yet. The country after 1857, in the North especially, was in a depression. And so I've never actually seen a politician talk about this. I've never seen that, and I've read all their papers and all that. So this is me looking back on this.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:39:59):

I think there was a sense that the North couldn't let the South go. The United States couldn't let the South go because that's where all the money was. And the reason that I think about... And of course that's not how it played out at all. I mean, the North ends up being the side that industrializes and has a much more effective government that managed to make people more productive and on and on. The North ends up with all the money forever from there on, right? But in the moment we're in now, those states that are talking about dissolving the union are the ones that are reliant on the Democratic-dominated states to survive. Literally, the red states depend on the blue states with a possible exception of Texas and Florida, although I think that's negotiable when you think about how much money goes into Texas for mineral rights and all sorts, and NASA and all sorts of things. And Florida similarly.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:40:46):

And for all that the people like the far-right extremists talk about breaking up the union, they couldn't because they really need the money that comes out of Democratic-dominated states. So what we're seeing now is less of a call to split up the country than we are seeing a call to dominate the country so that they can, as Mike Pence said recently, make sure that in Massachusetts they have to live by the laws that Mississippi legislators want them to. And so that dynamic is reversed, that those who want to essentially rule everything are the poor ones now, and the ones who are saying, "We want people to be able to live their lives the way they want" are the ones who have all the money. So that's a really important reverse dynamic. And will the country break up? There is of course the issue of nuclear weapons; who takes charge of the nukes?

Heather Cox Richardson (00:41:42):

And that's no small thing, as we know from the breakup of the Soviet Union. But there is something to be... Obviously if the United States continues to be the United States, it has enormous advantages that it would lose if it fell apart. And those are probably at the end of the day the overriding concern that

everybody will have, that it's not, you know, you don't go from being top dog by choice. Although the extremists, of course, are trying to destroy that by continually undermining our finances, which is the reason that Fitch downgraded our credit rating. It was over the debt ceiling crisis. And now of course they're doing the same thing again, as you and I are recording this, over the budget. But there is something about the reality that because in 1929, Congress capped the number of representatives we have in the House of Representatives because they recognized that more people lived in cities in the census of 1920 than they lived in the country.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:42:38):

And so in order to protect the votes of rural Americans who at the time were much whiter than the people who lived in the cities, we got the cap on the House of Representatives. And what that has done is all the things we know about at the federal level, it's made it easier to manipulate the electoral college. It's made rural states much more powerful than they should be and all sorts of things like that. But what it's meant at the state level and at the local level is that if you think about when the Constitution was first written, what the framers did is they put a cap, a bottom level on how big a congressional district could be in the low tens of thousands, but they never put an upper limit. So in the early Republic and until 1929, every time a population got to a certain point, they got another representative.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:43:27):

And what that meant was that you knew your representatives, you knew what was happening in the government, and you felt personally related to it. So, for example, I was walking to a wedding the other day in that terrible tropical storm we had here. And one of our state representatives that I know not because I'm involved in the state legislature in the state, but because we live near each other, drove by and waved and said Hello and wished us a good time at the wedding. You can't imagine that happening now in California, for example, or in New York. And so one of the things that we've seen since 1929 is the huge growth of the size of congressional districts. So the average congressional district now is over 700,000 people, I believe. That number is not at my fingertips. And what that means is that people don't understand their government as part of themselves, as their neighbors, as people who are just trying to do the right thing.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:44:17):

And I think that really matters. And I think that one of the things when we talk about going forward in our democracy is the reality that scholars like Danielle Allen point out to the fact that we must rework our representation so that people really feel and are represented in a way they're not when you are one of 700,000 constituents. When you're one of 30,000 constituents, there's a decent chance you know at least some of your representatives in your state legislature. When you're one of 700,000, you don't. And so when you talk about turning the country into a number of smaller units—five or six of them—you bring back the idea of a representative government in which people really feel like supporting their government. And while I think that would be for the United States, a tragedy, a true tragedy, I understand that impulse and think that in some fashion we have to figure out a way to make it a reality, even with retaining the idea of the larger United States of America.

Andrea Chalupa (00:45:24):

People do want to roll out the guillotines. People are losing their patience. People are justifiably fearful for their future, for their children's future, and they want to shake their elected officials—physically, verbally—wake them up, get them to act with greater urgency when everything's quite literally on fire. So I understand where it's coming from, but I also understand that we cannot repeat 2016 again. I don't think we will survive if Trump gets in because we saw that there's no meaningful effort to stop him in the

first place when it's very clear that it came to power with the help of a foreign adversary. And he knows where the triggers are. He knows where things are now. He knows his way around, so there'll be just as much chaos but a high efficiency chaos. So I'd love for you to speak to that.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:46:14):

Well, just to clarify Trump or someone like him, because one of these days, a Big Mac's going to do that guy in, and that's not going to mean everything's good again.

Andrea Chlaupa (00:46:25):

I just want to say I made that same exact comment in the previous interview where I was like, a Big Mac's going to find him and that's going to be it. But we're still left with Trumpism. But yes, go on.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:46:35):

He is 77 years old and he eats, one of my sons did when they were 12, and he doesn't exercise and he must be under stress. I worry about my health that I'm not doing enough to stay healthy, and I'm looking at him thinking, Really? You know? [laughs] But I want to start with a story on this, and that is that one of the things... You know, I was not really politically involved, and especially when I was an early college professor, I've always been fascinated by history and by the concept of human self-determination and what one believes affects what one does. And I made that sound very distant. But image and reality. When I was a waitress in Oklahoma during the Reagan years, I watched Reagan gutting everything that my fellow waitstaff needed and them talking about how terrible the Democrats were, and I just couldn't wrap my head around... I mean, it was important, obviously.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:47:32):

They were voting according to their beliefs, not their reality. So I really cared a lot about that. So from the beginning, when I taught the American History Survey, especially the first half of the survey, I emphasized the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and voting and how citizenship worked and what it meant to belong to a political entity. And at the time, early on, I had real, real haters who said that I was a shill for the right wing. As the years went on and I continued to teach a very similar syllabus, I became accused—literally accused, I was one of the first people on the professor watchlist—of being somebody on the left wing, and it was the same damn material. The reason that I mention that is because I care deeply about the system of democracy. I have personal beliefs about where I stand in that, but the system of democracy requires that we have two (at least) healthy political parties.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:48:36):

And that's not necessarily because I believe in what each one of those parties would do, but because in order to have a successful democracy, you need to have oversight of the other party, which obviously we don't have in places like Texas. That was illustrated recently by the acquittal of Ken Paxton, the attorney general who was impeached by his own party. But another wing of the party was like, "We don't care so long as he does what we want." You need to have oversight of the other party so that they don't become thoroughly corrupt and they don't become a one-party state, and also so that individuals believe that they can participate in that system and have a realistic chance of changing policies. So you're not going to continue to believe in your system of government if you feel like your people can never be in power.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:49:20):

And one of the reasons that third parties have a problem in the United States is it's very hard for a third party to advance a slate of candidates that you are confident can not only handle climate change, but can also handle the railroads or finances. Our government is big enough and complicated enough that

it's hard to field a new party that has that many different elements. There are other reasons it's a problem as well. But, so, I care a lot about the existence of democracy because I believe that it is the system of government most likely to make it possible for most people—or more people than other systems can—to have the right of self-determination. And one of the things that worries me on the left as well as the right, and this is not including the center/left or the center/right which I would describe as liberal, is the idea that tearing down democracy would—because it is not good, it has never fully reached its potential and it's got so many flaws in it—is that I have never seen anything that could replace democracy and offer those rights more effectively to people.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:50:30):

The right of self-determination. You get generally on the left or the right when it replaces democracy an authoritarian system in which a few people get to determine the way the rest of us live. So the key to democracy though is that you must have institutions and you must have nonpartisan institutions full of people who just don't care who the president is. They want to take their paycheck home and go play tennis or watch Netflix or whatever they do, because I always think of them as the ballast in the ship. It's inert. It doesn't care whether the wind is blowing from the north or from the south. It's just getting to port. And we need those people who are just getting to port because without them and without those nonpartisan systems, we're utterly at the mercy of whatever strong person, strongman, is in power. And you can see this in countries where you have a coup and the coup gets overturned and you think, Oh, great, there's going to be democracy, and it's not.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:51:28):

You just simply have the insertion of a new strongman. So in this moment where it certainly looks like we're on fire in a number of different places, the participation in preserving those institutions by demanding that they hold people accountable before the law, and I mean people at the very top as well as people at the very bottom, and by that I mean our police officers should not be judge and jury. Even if they're arresting people who are clearly guilty of whatever, they have no right to become executioners because we need to preserve the system of trial-by-jury because that's one of our guardrails. So insisting on people being held equal before the law and insisting on the right to vote, as well as insisting on a nonpartisan civil service, which is the first thing that Project 2025 has said in writing it's going to gut, is crucially important.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:52:26):

Now, if you break that down, insisting on the protection of those elements of the liberal consensus; the idea that we have a right to regulate business, which we could talk about for hours, but I just don't see how that's arguable, I really don't; we have the need for a basic social safety net. Same. I don't see how that's arguable; the fact that we need the government to preserve the elements of our system that we can't do ourselves. That's articulated first by Abraham Lincoln. This is not a radical idea that we need the government to put broadband in places like where I am now, where I don't have cable, so I'm actually in a shack that doesn't have heat, so I'm using an electric blanket to stay warm. This is the 21st century in America. I think that our government should do this because private companies won't, obviously, or I would have cable. And the idea that the government should protect civil rights is an inherent part of our constitution, not only in its beginnings, but also really spelled out in the 14th amendment.

Heather Cox Richardson (00:53:26):

Protection of those individual pieces might very well be what's the piece that's in your lane that you can do to hold that democratic guardrail of those institutions in place so that even if we end up with a president who doesn't do what you want that president to do—and no president will, by definition—we still have the recognition that we could get somebody in there who will move that particular ball forward

a little bit more effectively for us, seems to me to be the act of the moment, certainly to protest where we are in any number of ways. But the preservation right now of the guardrails of our democracy and the insistence that we will not turn those guardrails over to politicians who have already vowed to destroy them is I think the task for 2024. And in our history, when we have been faced with such a task in the past, the American people—the ordinary American people, especially women and people of color, marginalized communities—have always managed to reclaim it.

[closing song, [‘First They Came for the Queers’ by Mr. Madam Adam](#)]

[outro theme music - roll credits]

Andrea Chalupa (00:57:34):

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