

Gaslit Nation Transcript  
28 April 2021  
GOP Death Wish  
<https://www.patreon.com/posts/gop-death-wish-50567071>

Music clip from “Break Me Down” by JanaeSound: <https://soundcloud.com/janaesound/break-me-down>

JanaeSound:

Once I’m in motion, you can’t stop me  
You can’t slow me down  
Total devotion, I’m focused  
I’m gonna take your crown

Once I’m in motion, you can’t stop me  
You can’t slow me down

Sarah Kendzior:

I’m Sarah Kendzior the author of the bestselling books, *The View From Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*, which is now available in paperback.

Andrea Chalupa:

I’m Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker, and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin’s genocide famine in Ukraine.

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

And our opening song was Break Me Down. The artist is JanaeSound. “JanaeSound harnesses an unforgettable voice”—as you just heard—“that is known to stir the soul. The powerhouse rock singer hails from St. Louis—”

Sarah Kendzior:

Woohoo!

Andrea Chalupa:

“—where she began cultivating her love for music at the tender age of nine”—wow—“through the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.”—How cool is that?—“Known for her laser focus and unshakeable drive, JanaeSound was unsurprisingly tapped to open for FloRida for NOW 96.3, NOW Night Out.”

Andrea Chalupa:

“Currently based in Portland, Maine, she is known for producing the most diverse showcase in the state, BeyDay, which featured 38 people of color, 38 women of color and 31 Black/African artists. During the pandemic, she produced, curated and performed in a groundbreaking showcase of Black artists called Juneteenth!, which was pre-recorded live at the empty State Theatre and raised \$10,000 for local organizations that empower Portland's Black community.”

Andrea Chalupa:

“JanaeSound is also the founder of Coded by Young Women of Color, a non-profit that educates, empowers and engages young women of color in computer science and emerging tech like AR/VR.” I'm guessing that's Virtual Reality. “Learn more at [cywoc.org](http://cywoc.org), [C-Y-W-O-C.org](http://C-Y-W-O-C.org).” JanaeSound sent us this statement on the song you just heard, Break Me Down, from JanaeSound: "I was in a time of my career where lots of true colors were revealed at the same time, and none of them were pretty. I was being used by people I thought I could trust. I realized that the negativity might not stop, so I'd need to change how I let it affect me." Ugh, been there.

Andrea Chalupa:

"I forgave a bunch of people who never said, “sorry”, and wrote this war anthem."—I love it.—"I want anyone who listens to my music to feel powerful, even when they're faced with insane obstacles. I also wrote this song as a giant middle finger to the angry Black woman stereotype. Of course, I'm angry! As James Baldwin put it, ‘To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in rage almost all the time.’"

Andrea Chalupa:

You can learn more about Janay, follow her on Twitter [@janaesound](https://twitter.com/janaesound), Spotify, SoundCloud, we'll link to these in our show notes for this week's episode. [Janaesound.com](http://Janaesound.com) and [cywoc.org](http://cywoc.org). So, thank you so much, Janay for all your work and your music. We're grateful for you and to share it with the world.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes. Well timed, because we need an anthem of sticking the middle finger out at the world. This is a hard time. This is a vulnerable time. This is a time of deep insecurity. Everyone is waiting for the other shoe to drop while trying to ignore the boot that's stomping on her neck, which is the threat of autocracy barely defeated in January and that is barely gone underground.

Sarah Kendzior:

We're struggling to end the pandemic while seeing an almost total lack of accountability for some of the most serious crimes in our country's history. And again, this is the rundown of crimes for which there is no punishment or recourse; the Capitol attack for which none of the ringleaders, including Roger Stone, Michael Flynn and of course, Donald Trump—have been held accountable. We have the 2016 and 2020 Alyssa attempts to interfere with the election where you see those exact same individuals, Roger Stone, Michael Flynn, Donald Trump, along with Paul Manafort and other Trump crime cult members.

Sarah Kendzior:

They have not been held accountable. There is the litany of crimes committed by the Trump administration from obstruction of justice, to abuse of migrants, to the attempted destruction of the U.S. Postal Service. And you see the individual behind that, Louis DeJoy, still retaining his position. What is going on there, Biden and the board of governors?

Sarah Kendzior:

But worst of all, there has been no accountability for the Trump administration's handling of COVID, which included profiteering off death, purposefully letting the virus spread, withholding PPE from States and cities whose officials they didn't like, and lying constantly about how Americans could protect themselves, which has led to the public health disaster we still have now.

Sarah Kendzior:

And there have been some flickering signs of life within the Biden administration that indicate some accountability may be coming. We discussed some of that in regards to Russia and the sanctions that were imposed in our show a couple of millennia ago... I'm sorry, a couple of weeks ago. It's been a very long month. And we will discuss more flickering signs of life later in the show.

Sarah Kendzior:

But one that has been exacerbating the problem is a massive change in how we access information that has taken place over the past few months or so. Our ability to find out what's happening, let alone analyze it, has been greatly marred by changes in technology and publishing. This is an ominous development for a battered democracy already scrambling for truth and transparency.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so I'm going to go over some of the changes, which you've probably noticed, but I'm not sure they've been laid out in one place very well. If they did, I couldn't see it, and you're about to find out why. All right. So as we know, the Trump money train has crashed. Trump was a boon for cable news, for print news. Les Moonves of CBS notoriously said Trump is bad for America, but great for CBS. That was the attitude a lot of people embraced.

Sarah Kendzior:

The fact that you're faced with an existential threat from an incredibly verbose madman—who is also a Kremlin asset, sadistic psychopath—every single day as the president meant that news ratings and viewership and readership all went up. Trump is now underground. I keep comparing this time to his time in the early 1990s, after he went bankrupt multiple times, was immersed in divorce scandals, and his associates—people like Ivan Boesky, Michael Milken and so on—were being arrested.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so Trump does what a good mafioso does in times of trouble: he laid low. And he's lying low now, although all of his acolytes are still running amok and causing great harm, which we're going to talk about more. So anyway, he's gone. That means everybody is scrambling. They're like, "How do I get money?" And one of the ways they've come up with is paywalls. You may have noticed that now, if you go to a mainstream news website, odds are pretty good you're not going to be able to read beyond the headline or beyond the tweet because it's paywalled.

Sarah Kendzior:

And, you know, I worked in print journalism during the exact transition period from print to online from 2000 to 2003. I was at the New York Daily News. I've seen people scramble around this problem, trying to stay afloat and so forth. This is a very poorly timed initiative to paywall everything, to say the least. We're living in a disinformation crisis. We're living in a public health crisis. We're dealing with

information warfare and the most accurate places—or at least semiaccurate, more accurate than average—have information that we cannot see that gets screenshotted and taken out of context, or people interpreting things based on tweets.

Sarah Kendzior:

And this has an effect not just on interpreting the present, but the past. And there's that Orwell quote about, "Whoever controls the past controls the future." Well, we're losing access to the past. We have said over and over that Trump and his cohorts' long history of criminality is in the public domain, but that is no longer true. Had we had the current situation with paywalls and so forth in 2016, I'm not sure that Andrea and I would have solved these crimes—which is unfortunately what we've been doing for five years—or been able to predict a lot of Trump's actions, because the context is blocked. You need to pony up for it, you need a lot of money to get it. We do not have that much money.

Sarah Kendzior:

And then to continue from there, we have reporters increasingly going independent, just like we did back in 2018, because corporate journalism allows limited freedom of speech and it also pays incredibly poorly. So, to survive, you connect directly with your audience. That's understandable. But if you're a journalist, disconnected from a journalistic institution, you're now suddenly locked out of reading other people's journalism, unless you pay up. Even wire services like Reuters are charging hundreds of dollars, and the average journalist can not pay this, which means journalists are more poorly informed.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is very reminiscent of academia, which has insane paywalls where you have to pay, like, you know, \$50 to read an article, which means that no one reads it beyond people who are already in that small institutional order. It moves everything into irrelevance, and now I'm seeing the pattern of academia playing out in journalism. We have old problems which linger; local news continues to be gutted. This is a trend that began in the early part of the 21st century. It accelerated rapidly after the 2008 financial collapse. It's had a terrible effect on society.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think had there been popular local newspapers still being read in 2020, the pandemic would have played out differently all over America because people trust who they know, they mourn who they know, those sorts of local institutions are seminal to keeping up democracy. They're already dying and that problem continues. Part of fighting autocracy is not just getting information from the media, but understanding how the media manipulates information and then deciding who can be trusted.

Sarah Kendzior:

The best way to decide who to trust is to examine a reporter or an outlet's record over time and see how it holds up. This is now impossible because it is unaffordable and inaccessible. And then you have what's maybe the most dangerous problem of all. So what's left? What remains free? Well, you've got Fox News, you've got cable TV, you've got all the local stations that have been hijacked by right-wing media corporations.

Sarah Kendzior:

You have Breitbart, you have other right-wing websites, you have White supremacist sites, you have Facebook memes, you have tweets from paid operatives, from paid trolls, you have social media gossip,

you have decontextualized pieces of text with no date, no author, just floating all over the place. Disinformation is free and it's filling in the gaps while nearly every other source of information has been paywalled or put out of business.

[begin advertisement]

Sarah Kendzior:

This episode of Gaslit Nation is sponsored by Best Fiends, a puzzle game you can play on your phone. Best Fiends has something new every day. There're always new levels, events, and challenges to keep you entertained. With Best Fiends you can collect cute characters, solve puzzles, and play alongside your friends and family. There are literally thousands of levels to play and tons of characters to collect.

Sarah Kendzior:

My family members love it, and they've already passed Level 350. Best Fiends is made for adults, but it's bright, colorful, fun and approachable for everyone. Engage your brain with fun puzzles and collect tons of cute characters. Trust me, with over 100 million downloads, this five-star rated mobile puzzle game is a must play. Download Best Fiends free on the Apple App Store or Google Play. That's friends without the r, Best Fiends.

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Sarah Kendzior:

Now that we've arrived at a year of the new normal, it sometimes feels like we'll never get our old lives back. The uncertainty of not knowing when this will end is frustrating and a little scary. We all miss our old routines and being able to easily see friends and family. Now more than ever, therapy is a way to find our way out when things feel especially dark. Just talking through fears and anxiety can make you breathe easier and feel hope again.

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Sarah Kendzior:

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Andrea Chalupa:

So I'm just going to take from the conversation Sarah and I just had for an hour when we were not recording, the highlights of that, I'll share that private conversation with you all. Simply put, we had this big giant orange pinata, and as emotionally exhausting and abusive as he was, it was a pinata we could all rally around and beat up.

Andrea Chalupa:

But when we finally cracked open that pinata, all these mini pinatas fell out and they spread across the country. And it's now a game of mini Trump Whack-A-Mole that we're playing with all of these far-right extremists in these state legislatures, deciding the gerrymandering for our elections for a decade to come, amplified, empowered by an extremely well-funded and organized far-right propaganda empire, with the crown jewel being Lachlan Murdoch's Fox News.

Andrea Chalupa:

Lachlan Murdoch who makes his father, Rupert, seem like a backpacking European hippie. Lachlan Murdoch won the successionist wars and now America is entering the reign of Lachlan Murdoch, who is an apologist for Tucker Carlson. We're going to talk about Tucker Carlson on this show because he's someone that I could see the Republican Party running for president in 2024.

Sarah Kendzior:

Absolutely.

Andrea Chalupa:

Because Tucker Carlson is the Republican Party. He is the Republican Party base. What the far-right has done in America with the help of their allies—their far-right allies around the world, like the Kremlin and Netanyahu—is they've consolidated the toxic personalities in our nation against us. And what they're ultimately doing is furthering the decline of the United States into an actual shithole country.

Andrea Chalupa:

And what that happens is the 'intelligentsia', which is always on the front lines of resistance—the leading thinkers, the scholars, the experts—they're going to start looking elsewhere for employment, being attracted to other stable democracies where the quality of life is better, where the government programs are better. And when the brain drain starts and when the brain drain accelerates, that's when a country enters a black hole that is very difficult to come out of.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, one of the most effective things that Putin has done to weaken Russia's great adversary, the United States, is get their Kremlin asset elected. Remember, when we're talking about modern day Russia under Putin, we're talking about the Russian mafia. There's no difference between Putin's Kremlin and the Russian mafia. They're one in the same. They work in tangent. It's a mafia state.

Andrea Chalupa:

And Donald Trump, with a long history of his properties around the world laundering Russian mafia money, Trump tower in the heart of Manhattan being a Russian mafia dorm with the big Russian mafia gambling done right beneath his own apartment and all of that long history of Trump having this long history, with not just Russian mafia players, but also Russian government officials themselves.

Andrea Chalupa:

All of that, getting this Kremlin asset into power is like a death now. It's like driving the stake harder into the heart of the great nation of America that the Republican Party for decades had already driven into decline, from Reagan and his war on the poor, from Reagan exploding the income inequality gap through his gaslighting of trickle down theory, which is just pure gaslighting. Potent gaslighting, just the abuse there against the poor.

Andrea Chalupa:

And now we have all of these billionaires who are trying to out-billionaire each other because money is power, money is information. Money is buying up newspapers and TV networks so you can satisfy your ego. And you don't have to run for office, you don't have to deal with the messiness. You don't have to earn people's votes. You don't have to knock on doors and earn people's trust. You don't have to do community building. You don't have to care about somebody's sick child.

Andrea Chalupa:

You can commit genocide against people you don't like, including the poor because you think their lives mean less than yours. You don't need to do that if you're a billionaire. So that's why we're in a very dangerous situation here in the United States. The poison is homegrown and the poison has been made more potent by hostile actors abroad, and we talk about that all the time on this show. We'll get into that in detail more later in this episode.

Andrea Chalupa:

So now I'm going to speak to people in Canada, in France, in Germany, in New Zealand and Australia. Don't think for a second what has happened to the United States can't happen where you live. Your idiots may be idiots today, and no one might be taking them seriously because of the things they say are so outlandish, but they have very powerful allies abroad—including here in the United States, including in the Kremlin—who would love to amplify them, who would love to give Mark Zuckerberg their money to amplify that disinformation, to consolidate the toxic personalities in your society, bring them together.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, they become a weapon, a potent weapon that starts building political power and starts using that political power against your democracy and weakening all the protections that you hold great and dear. So, watch America and the decline that has been accelerating here as a warning for what could happen in your own nation and know that nobody is immune to the far-right virus.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes. Exactly. And I think our British listeners already know this because they've been living with Boris Johnson. They've been living with a lot of the same problems that we have. And I'm hearing increasingly from Canadians that they're now relating to our show, especially in Alberta. So, we have your back and watch it. It's a frightening thing to happen to your country, obviously, and my sympathies are with everybody who is in this boat.

Sarah Kendzior:

We've managed to partially kind of mitigate the worst damages of Trump by... well, we voted him out. And then, of course, as you know, he took it to the courts and then attempted to stage a violent coup,

which people are refusing to discuss, and now we're in the aftermath. And it's obviously good that he's gone. This is incredibly rare. It's incredibly rare for a country to vote out an aspiring autocrat, especially during a pandemic, especially one who has already rearranged the rules of courts, of voting, of the postal service, of everything, in order to ensure his win and longevity.

Sarah Kendzior:

And I kind of wonder what went on behind the scenes those last two weeks that actually got him out of office, because that was truly one of the few things to surprise me. However, we're still dealing with the aftermath because this was not about one man. This was about the corrupted institutions who enabled Trump to stay in power, who bended to his will, and who he purged and packed with White supremacists and extremists, and mafiosos, and supplicants, and all horrible people.

Sarah Kendzior:

And there's been very little accountability. We talked previously about how the Treasury was infiltrated by Russia in 2015. We've been talking about that since 2018 when it was first revealed. Now the Treasury seems to be sort of enforcing some kind of accountability. They're at least enforcing sanctions on nations like Russia that have attacked us in our elections and our finances and computers and cyber warfare and so on.

Sarah Kendzior:

We haven't heard too much about an internal cleansing of these malevolent anti-American elements within our own government—fellow Americans who have turned on their country and are working within institutions to bring this country down. The first time I've actually heard something about this happened yesterday when the Secretary of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas has announced a 'domestic violent extremism review at DHS.'

Sarah Kendzior:

And so I'm going to just read this brief statement from him. And I will emphasize, the key word to listen to for here is, "*within*." So, "Today Secretary of Homeland Security, Alejandro N. Mayorkas announced an internal review to address the threat of domestic violent extremism *within* the Department of Homeland Security."—DHS.—"Secretary Mayorkas has made identifying, addressing, and preventing domestic violent extremism across our country a top priority."

Sarah Kendzior:

"Domestic violent extremism poses the most lethal and persistent terrorism-related threat to our country today," said Mayorkas, "As we work to safeguard our nation, we must be vigilant in our efforts to identify and combat domestic violent extremism, both within the broader community and our own organization. Hateful acts and violent extremism will not be tolerated within our department."

Sarah Kendzior:

"At the direction of the Secretary, a cross-departmental working group comprised of senior officials will immediately begin a comprehensive review of how to best prevent, detect, and respond to threats related to domestic violent extremism *within* DHS. This internal team, which will be led by the department's chief security officer will produce the report with recommendations for the Secretary on how best to identify and respond to threats related to domestic violent extremism, including those based on racially or ethnically-motivated violent extremism."



Sarah Kendzior:

And so this is no surprise in terms of content. My only surprise—and I'm glad for this—is that they're finally acknowledging the problem. I mean, first of all, DHS has always been terrible. DHS did not exist for half my life and I'm not confident that it needs to exist now. I agree with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez when she suggested abolishing the institution in light of abuses of migrants on the border, in light of what ICE has been doing, and in light of all of these violent, often White supremacist extremists who are working with utter impunity *within* DHS.

Sarah Kendzior:

We also saw them ramp this up in 2020. They were detaining protesters in Portland, Oregon. They were detaining them violently. Even Tom Ridge, who was the first DHS secretary, condemned this kind of behavior. I believe they've been sued by the ACLU. Many have called to dismantle them. They also went through a little phase where they were sending out dog whistles, like White supremacist dog whistles that were pretty blatant.

Sarah Kendzior:

They were sending out statements like, "We must secure the border and build the wall to make America safe again," that were 14 letters long. And then saying within them that "about 88% of people agree with this." They did this over and over while, especially, Kirstjen Nielsen was in charge of this. And then they would do what they always do, which is a big, "Ha ha just kidding. Why in the world would you think that we're violent White supremacists?"

Sarah Kendzior:

This is back in 2018. They then went on to commit violent White supremacist acts, whether abusing migrant children and families at the border, abusing protesters fighting for Black rights. People who suspected this were absolutely valid in their suspicions. They were vindicated. And so now we're having an internal review, and that's good. I hope they update us with the results.

Sarah Kendzior:

But I am worried about, one, time running out—that we have all of these people already in this institution and they've already been acting with impunity for years and years. This precedes Trump. And I'm also worried that this is the only institution, to my knowledge, that has come out and spoken openly about this problem. We've brought up the FBI and their problem of White supremacy, of protecting criminals, of having former heads of the FBI go on and work for the Russian mafia, like Louis Freeh and William Sessions did.

Sarah Kendzior:

Or protect the Russian mafia, like Mueller and Comey did. We've seen their euphemistic way that they frame "informants", where basically the "informant" is a way for the FBI to help carry out criminal activity under the guise of fighting it. That is unfortunately where we're at. Christopher Wray has continued this tradition. He needs to be removed. You may have noticed that we don't get updates about the Capitol attacks that the FBI, of course, like all of us knew about the Capitol attacks because they were announced on the internet beforehand. They're now pretending that they had no idea, they couldn't have possibly seen this coming.

Sarah Kendzior:

This needs to stop. The Biden administration needs to do for every institution what they're doing for DHS. They need to look for malevolent, anti-American elements—people who are not there in any way shape or form to serve the public good—and they need to be removed. Trump packed them that way on purpose, and if you see their behavior in action, your evidence is right there. It's not very hard to find. So, I don't know. What are your thoughts?

Andrea Chalupa:

Well, we did an entire episode on how Christopher Wray needs to resign, how there needs to be rapid efforts to clean house. The reporting goes way back that the military in this country, law enforcement in this country, have been infiltrated by White supremacist terrorists. And the reason why these murders by police—these assassinations, just casual assassinations—keep happening are because there's no leadership, there's no prevailing culture to make them stop.

Andrea Chalupa:

And it's not normal. It's not at all normal. And the fact that you see Americans trying to rationalize some of these police killings... let me give you an example. The story of the murder of Ma'Khia Bryant, a 16 year old girl who was shot and killed in Columbus, Ohio by police. People on social media, even people I would assume are well-meaning because they tend to be on the right side of a lot of issues, they were trying to rationalize it as, "Well, Ma'Khia had a knife in her hand, she was attacking a young girl."

Andrea Chalupa:

Let's just stop for a second. What is at stake here is that children of color, Black children, aren't allowed to be children. That's the danger here. That's the human rights crisis. Ma'Khia Bryant was a foster child in a pandemic trying to live in a horrific situation. All of us are struggling right now being in lockdown from this pandemic. It's really stressful to share space with people that you might not feel safe with for whatever reason, and she was in a situation like that, and that would stress anybody out.

Andrea Chalupa:

And she wasn't given that space and that time that she needed, clearly, and it created a mental health crisis. No one should be killed when they're undergoing a mental health crisis. And the fact that a Black child was casually murdered, who was undergoing a mental health crisis, that is not the work of just one single police officer, that is the work of the entire prevailing culture of White supremacy that justifies that and can get well-meaning people—Black and White, that I've seen on social media—try to rationalize that because we are right now a frog in a pot of boiling water. We don't even recognize on a mainstream level how far gone we are.

Andrea Chalupa:

This is not normal. This is not normal, what happened to her. Just to share a personal story, when I was growing up, I had emotional issues. I was super angry. I, as a young girl, grabbed a butcher knife from the kitchen and chased my sister around the house with it and carved the hell up her door. I went nuts. But I was White and I had a supportive family that was around me and I was able to overcome that. If I was in a vulnerable situation, like a foster child in a pandemic, where the people that should be supporting me are also greatly stressed and scared from all the pressure and uncertainty we're living under, I don't think I would have survived. I think I would have been with a knife as well, given the wiring that I was born with.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, I feel for this child and I feel for a nation that tries to rationalize something that simply cannot be rationalized because it is an urgent human rights crisis.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. Absolutely. And I think the thing that links everything that we've been discussing is this feeling of impunity. It's White supremacist impunity, it's elite impunity that was the guiding principle of the Trump administration. It continues to take shape. We have seen numerous parties—not even directly linked to them but widely loathed—not punished for their crimes.

Sarah Kendzior:

There's a new book out about the Sackler family, for example, the murderous billionaire family that killed millions of Americans with opiates. There's no punishment here. And punishment isn't even what we're seeking, exactly. That's not the point. The point is to remove dangerous people from positions of power where they abuse it over the most vulnerable, which is what happened when that officer killed Ma'Khia Bryant. And I assume he thinks he will walk, because until Derek Chauvin, it was very, very rare for any officer to be punished, to even be charged.

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, that's what the Ferguson protests were about, was to just get Darren Wilson charged for murdering Mike Brown and leaving his body on the ground in the sun for four and a half hours. It's very rare. And that is the dominant culture. And I think younger people, maybe they see this more clearly. I think they worry they'll become victims to it. You know, we have an entire generation that's grown up, not just with police shootings, which have always been there throughout American history, but with school shootings, with just incredible levels of gun violence, and even with civilians who decide that they want to be vigilantes, walking. People like George Zimmerman when he murdered Trayvon Martin and was let off.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so I think we could probably talk about the new gun case at the Supreme Court now. So, there's a new case that's headed to the Supreme Court regarding a New York State gun law that allows residents to carry a concealed handgun only if they can demonstrate a special need beyond a general desire for self protection. The court has agreed to hear a challenge to this from NBC News. It says, "The law 'makes it virtually impossible for the ordinary law abiding citizen to get the necessary license,' says, Paul Clement, a lawyer representing the challengers."

Sarah Kendzior:

"The court's conservatives had thus far been reluctant to take up the gun rights issue in the past because they couldn't be certain of finding a fifth vote in their favor, but with Amy Coney Barrett, they very likely will have that six to three ruling." And so, I read this and part of me is like, "Right, right. Other states have gun laws," because I live in Missouri, one of the most violent states in the country. And I live in St. Louis, which is the most violent city in the country. And I'm used to constant gun violence. I mean, I'm used to hearing gunshots in the distance and I go outside and I look for the shells and it's just part of life here, and it's an awful part of life here.

Sarah Kendzior:

And these aren't school shootings or something like that, this is just regular day to day violence, including gun accidents. I remember one guy blew his brains out going through Steak 'n Shake, going through the drive-through. We have rolling gun battles, that's a term that was coined in Missouri for when people shoot at each other on the highway. And now they've had to close down parts of the highway because so many people are shooting at each other on the highway.

Sarah Kendzior:

That's what life is like here. And unfortunately I am used to it, and as I wrote in my book, in *Hiding in Plain Sight*, Missourians leave their home expecting fully that they might not make it back alive. And I wrote that before the pandemic. But with this on a national level, that they're basically moving to get rid of this for New York, for New York City, one of the most densely populated places in the country, where I think they want to have, God what is that movie? That Charles Bronson movie from the '70s *Death Wish*, they want to have-

Andrea Chalupa:

*Death Wish*.

Sarah Kendzior:

*Death Wish*. Thank you.

Andrea Chalupa:

That can even be the name for this episode.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes. Yeah. That should be the name for the freaking law if they pass it, because that's what it is, it's a death wish and they want White people to be able to kill with impunity. I do think that that's what's behind it because I'm viewing this in tandem with other developments that are going on. For example, in Oklahoma, a law has been passed that basically legalizes murdering protestors. I'll quote a little bit here from, I think this is from AP: "Governor Kevin Stitt signed House Bill 1674 into law on Wednesday. The new law criminalizes marching on public streets and highways, but conversely grants criminal and civil immunity to people who drive through crowds of protestors in roads and 'unintentionally' injure or kill them."

Sarah Kendzior:

And this directly addresses an incident in Tulsa last July in which a truck drove through a group of Black Lives Matter protestors, three people were seriously injured, including a 33 year old man who fell from an overpass and is now paralyzed from the waist down. So, they want to legalize this. They want to legalize you getting into your car and running over protestors at your discretion and walking away just like George Zimmerman did, just like most police did.

Sarah Kendzior:

It reminds me also of Kyle Rittenhouse, who was indicted but who has become this GOP mascot after murdering two protestors at Black Lives Matter protests last summer. He's unrepentant. He's received a lot of money. His supporters are unrepentant. They are trying to legalize and normalize right-wing

political murder, and they're trying to make that murder as easy as possible, which is one of the reasons that they want this country so heavily armed. And we're already heavily armed.

Sarah Kendzior:

Already in 2021, gun sales are through the roof. You should go look at charts of what gun sales were like in previous years. We're four months in and we've already out done every year this decade, including 2020, which I believe was the second biggest year. So, these are fascism's shock troops. And so I'm very worried, one, about the police instigating a backlash, as we mentioned, because of the Chauvin verdict, becoming more violent.

Sarah Kendzior:

But also, we're about to "re-enter society"—again, this is a place where everybody is different. I keep hearing, "Oh, the outdoor mask mandate is lifted." I'm like, "What mask mandate?" Because I haven't worn a mask outside all year, never really occurred to me to do so, unless I was in line or something, like when I was in line to vote. But anyway, every place is different. That's something to think about as we all as one collective nation try to decide, well, what is safe behavior? What is good behavior? What is respectful behavior?

Sarah Kendzior:

And we've seen the mask politicized and weaponized by people on the right, most notably and most horrifically Tucker Carlson, who is trying to get Americans who don't wear masks outside to attack children who are wearing masks. And this is one of the most revolting things I've seen thus far, to go after people's kids. He's saying that to have your child wearing a mask is equivalent to beating someone in a Walmart, and that parents of those children who are wearing masks should be called by Child Protective Services and have their children taken away.

Sarah Kendzior:

Keep in mind, Tucker Carlson is friends with a number of people in the GOP who are alleged to be pedophiles, so this is really not who should be making decisions about where children should go. But this is disgusting, even for him, it crosses a truly horrific line. I, as I said, do not wear a mask outside. I really don't care if you wear a mask outside. It's not any of my business. It's not any of my business if your kids are. There are some kids who are wearing them because they have allergies or because they have an immunodeficiency disorder or whatever, maybe they're just like wearing a freaking mask.

Sarah Kendzior:

Kids do what kids do, and it's not hurting anybody. It's not a problem. And it's very frightening that he's risen to this level of rancor, because as Andrea said before, this is who I think will probably run for president in 2024. Tucker Carlson is a money loser for Fox News. His show loses money because no one wants to advertise on a show that is this disgusting. Even other companies that are willing to advertise in other Fox News shows, they do not want to be associated with this maniacal, sadistic, bigot who is now attacking innocent children. And I think that this is just a platform.

Sarah Kendzior:

And the thing is about 2024, is that who they choose as the candidate matters less that time around than it did in 2016 or 2020, because the main way that the Republicans are trying to ensure their win is through voter suppression, is through new laws that allow GOP legislatures—state legislatures—to

literally throw out ballots if they don't like the results. They're going for a structural rigging and whoever the actual president is, they're just a body. It doesn't matter per se. It doesn't matter in the way that it did before.

Sarah Kendzior:

They're going to have less influence because it's an operation, and so somebody who's a Trumpian demagogue-type figure, like Tucker Carlson, despite a total lack of policy experience and so forth, that makes sense for them. And so I could easily see them doing this. But anyway, just to conclude here, what I'm worried we're about to relive is the Red Summer of 1919. That was the summer after the Spanish flu had finally ended in America and people were allowed to go outside and congregate and be with each other again. And so what happened? Massive, massive White mob violence, targeting Black Americans, targeting immigrants, and this turned into growing anti-immigrant and racist legislation that was passed throughout the 1920s.

Sarah Kendzior:

And I know everyone thinks of the 1920s as fun and flappers and F Scott Fitzgerald and jazz, and all that happened too. But for the most marginalized Americans, this was a deeply traumatic period that also helped shape the groundwork for the 1930s and for fascist movements worldwide, obviously most heavily in Europe, but they were on the rise in America as well. And so I see everything headed this way. It's a cultural moment. It taps into deep fear, and I understand that people are afraid. And I understand why the right-wing is afraid, why people in my state of Missouri who voted for Trump, that they're afraid, they don't want freedoms taken away. The kind of conversations that Andrea and I have, where we express our fear of the GOP, I hear people in Missouri expressing that fear of the Democrats or Fauci or so forth.

Sarah Kendzior:

And some of those fears I think are rational. I don't trust big pharmaceutical companies either. I don't like the government encroaching on my life either. If Trump was in charge right now, giving out vaccines, I'd be really freaking wary of that vaccine, given his track record. And so they're wary. It's very hard to reestablish trust. And I hope that we reach a point where we can.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think the way to do that—I've always said this—is to be as honest about our failures as possible, failures across the aisle, failures that don't have a political spectrum, failures like what the Sacklers did to America. That's a prime example where unfortunately we could unite. Because if we don't, if we don't get rid of these manipulative vicious elements, then we're just going to take it out on each other, which is what's been happening for years and years on end. And I don't think that that's inevitable, but I think it's likely, given the refusal to enforce accountability or to even discuss these problems in an honest and empathetic way.

Andrea Chalupa:

Very well said. Going back to the Second Amendment case that the Supreme Court is going to take up. Kavanaugh, who, of course, his appointment to the Supreme court was supported by groups like the National Rifle Association; the terrorist group, the NRA, which was a cutout for the Kremlin in the 2016 election, funneling their interests and money, pollinating connections between the Trump camp and the Kremlin camp.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's a terrorist organization. It's working against our democracy. And this case just holds up, yet again, how a hostile, xenophobic mass murdering mafia state helped bring a destructive weapon of mass destruction to power. And that weapon packed the courts, transforming 30% of the courts, transforming the Supreme Court, getting three judges on the Supreme Court, including the least qualified judge ever to come up for consideration, Amy Coney Barrett. So when I heard of the Second Amendment case that Kavanaugh, reportedly, is excited about—he wants to see a Second Amendment issue soon, this was reported, I believe last year—I immediately thought of you, Sarah.

Andrea Chalupa:

I immediately thought, "Wow, so this is what it must feel like for Sarah to live in Missouri, this feeling of cage bars, that it doesn't matter what the people vote for, it doesn't matter what the people want," because this law is coming from super majority democratic, bright blue New York State, with an extremely well-organized grassroots engine for progress.

Andrea Chalupa:

And the fact that this law for gun control can die in the hands of a far-right court, packed by a Russian mafia asset, installed with the intention to further weaken our democracy, that made me feel like this is what people in Missouri must feel like, that horrible cage bar feeling. So I'm really upset about this, I'm extremely angry and it just shows how we're going to be living with Trump for a very long time to come.

Andrea Chalupa:

Now, the second thing I wanted to comment on was Tucker Carlson. Anybody that's studied authoritarianism sees him for what he is: he's a propagandist, he's there for a reason, he's extremely important to the far-right winning back political power in 2022 and 2024. That is Tucker Carlson's sole purpose. They all know it. They all love him. But one thing I want to point out is from a New Yorker profile back in 2017, I'm going to read from it now, "Tucker Carlson's mother, a Bohemian, left the family when he was six and ultimately settled in France. The boys never saw her again."

Andrea Chalupa:

So I almost wonder on some level how much Tucker Carlson is working out his mommy issues on the rest of us, just like Trump could never live up to pleasing his... being Fred Trump, the abusive patriarch. It's like we're getting abused now, right? Doesn't it seem like that?

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. And he also, of course, is an heir to a vast fortune,. He's an heir to the, I think it's Swanson Frozen Foods, to that.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. His father remarried into that family.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. So he grew up a multi-millionaire that lives like really a billionaire and still has that, doesn't need to be working at all. And yet he rails on and on and on about elites, which is what all of these elites do. It's what Donald Trump, who was born wealthy and became wealthier through fraud did. It's what Donald

Trump Jr. does now. They're always reeling about the elites, and they *are* the elites, or they wouldn't be able to have these jobs on Fox News.

Sarah Kendzior:

We've talked about this many times, about nepotism and elitism in media, about how it's often the sons and daughters of CEOs and politicians and, of course, of other journalists who are bringing the news, who are keeping that circle closed, keeping it insular, keeping power away from everyday people. Fox is just as much a part of that as all of the liberal outlets that they decry. I mean, it's an across-the-board problem, yet again, that hurts ordinary people.

Sarah Kendzior:

And I hope that opponents of Tucker Carlson—and you should oppose him because he wants Child Services to snatch your children—I hope that they realize this, that this is just manipulation. It's to get money. It's to get power. It's sadism. It's cruelty. It doesn't serve the people who they claim that it serves. I hope this is obvious to you by now, because I don't think anybody deserves to live under a Tucker Carlson administration.

Andrea Chalupa:

Right. And so what is the anecdote to all this? How are we going to fight back? Well, we have to keep doing what we've been doing all along as a community. We have to slow them down. We have to fight like hell and keep showing up for each other. One of the most important things you can do is recognize that you are far more powerful than you realize. I know we're all exhausted. I know the pressure of all the uncertainty, and the difficulty of trying to even imagine what is the future like? Everything is changing and we're up against a period of guaranteed rapid changes coming for us because climate change is accelerating.

Andrea Chalupa:

Something has to give when it comes to these historic levels of income inequality. That is increasing political instability. So things are really tough for all of us right now. We're all feeling this way, this pressure. But please, in these moments, it's never been more important to stay grounded in your own power and do not let yourself give your power away.

Andrea Chalupa:

What I mean by that is, know that we need you right now. The world needs you. And what these Tucker Carlsons want, is for you to succumb to their flooding the zone with shit. They do that on purpose to demoralize you, to force you to check out, to exhaust you. So instead you are going to claim your power and you're going to take yourself very seriously and do things like make art. Make art to create some breathing room for yourself.

Andrea Chalupa:

Go out and run for office, educate yourself on what that means. There are so many books and organizations now that want you to run for office and will hold your hand on how to do it. Do it just for the hell of doing it, or support somebody else. Recruit other people to run for office. The point is that the anecdote is to replace the Tucker Carlsons with good empathetic people who know that we must turn to science now. That is the whole answer, is to flood the system with empathy. And you are an important part of that. Never, ever, ever forget that.



Break Me Down by JanaeSound: <https://soundcloud.com/janaesound/break-me-down>

JanaeSound:

Once I'm in motion, you can't stop me  
You can't slow me down  
Total devotion, I'm focused  
I'm gonna take your crown

Once I'm in motion, you can't stop me  
You can't slow me down  
Total devotion, I'm focused  
I'm gonna take your crown

You took me under your wing and I thank you for that  
You tried to sabotage me, I won't forget that  
You underestimated me so I'm coming for you baby

You tried to break me down  
You don't want me around  
I bet you wish that I'd just fold, pack it up, take it home  
You tried to break me down  
But I'm still standing

Once I'm in motion, you can't stop me  
You can't slow me down  
Total devotion, I'm focused  
I'm gonna take your crown

Once I'm in motion, you can't stop me  
You can't slow me down  
Total devotion, I'm focused  
I'm gonna take your crown

You helped me conquer a dream, I thank you for that  
But you turned your back against me, I won't forget that  
Tried to interrogate me so I'm coming for you baby

You tried to break me down  
You don't want me around  
I bet you wish that I'd just fold, pack it up, take it home

You tried to break me down  
But I'm still standing

Andrea Chalupa:

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

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

We also encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria. Donate at [rescue.org](http://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 the [orangutanproject.org](http://orangutanproject.org) and research ways on how you can cut out Palm oil in your life.

Andrea Chalupa:

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