

The following is a conversation with Michael Malis.

This is a special holiday episode and it is made extra special because it's announcing the release of Michael's new book called *The White Pill, A Tale of Good and Evil*.

Michael and I disagree on a lot of ideas in politics and philosophy and we have a lot of fun disagreeing.

But there's no question that he has a deep love for humanity and puts his heart and soul into his work, especially into this heart-wrenching deeply personal book.

So I ask that you support him by buying it at whitepillbook.com that should hopefully forward to the Amazon page.

As always, we each dressed up in a ridiculous outfit without coordinating for the chaos that makes life so damn interesting.

This episode is full of humor, darkness, and love, which is the best way to celebrate the holidays.

And now, a quick few second mention of each sponsor.

Check them out in the description, it's the best way to support this podcast.

We've got House of Macadamias for delicious macadamia-based snacks, Inside Tracker for Biological Monitoring, NetSuite for Business Management, and Simply Save for Home Security. Choose wisely, my friends.

And now, onto the full ad reads.

As always, no ads in the middle, I try to make them interesting, but if you must skip, please still check out the sponsors in the description, I enjoy their stuff, maybe you will too.

This show is brought to you by a new sponsor, a delicious sponsor, House of Macadamias, a company that ships delicious high quality and healthy macadamia nuts directly to your door.

I've gotten a shipment, what is it, two weeks ago?

Two weeks ago, and it brought happiness to my heart.

I won't mention which episode, perhaps you might know, but it was a very stressful episode,

I was getting attacked a lot online, and I was just very stressed, and I was feeling lonely, I was feeling, you know, out of it sometimes, sometimes your heart, sometimes your mind could take you to some low places, so I was sitting there on the couch, and I got this shipment, the doorbell rang, and I came outside, and it was a mysterious box, and I brought it in, like it was the holidays, but it wasn't the holidays yet, and I opened it up, and there was like a variety of delicious snacks, they're extremely healthy, and extremely delicious, and I partook in the snackage, and it was glorious, I immediately felt better.

It's just for many reasons, obviously it's delicious, but also brought joy to my heart that there's people out there that really care about crafting, like culinary art, essentially crafting out a snack from really good ingredients, that you could just tell a lot of love went into it, nutritionally, there's a lot of nice things, like I'd say it's 30% less carbs than almonds, let us not debate how I pronounce almonds, or almonds, I think I'm horrible with this, I forget which is the right way, it's the only nut rich in omega 7s, this is basically the healthiest nut, I feel like there's a good joke in there, anyway, go to the house of macadamias.com slash lex to get 20% your first order, you will not regret it my friends.

This show is also brought to you by Inside Tracker, a service I use to track biological data, what I want to know is the data that was coming from my heart and mind during the partaking of the macadamia snackage, the great, the glorious, happiness, I wonder how the body communicates happiness, short term, like moment by moment, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, weeks, years, so the progression of human life, the ups and downs, there must be signals in there, and I think that's a really promising direction to take health advice, to take medical advice, to collect the full raw set of signals your body provides to help you determine the different turns to take in life, whether that's lifestyle or diet changes, all that kind of stuff, I think that's obviously the future, that's why I'm excited about Inside Tracker, they're taking those early big leaps into that future, you can get special savings for a limited time and you go to [insidetracker.com slash lex](https://insidetracker.com/lex).

This show is also brought to you by Nutsuite, an all in one cloud business management system, they manage everything, your financials, human resources, inventory, e-commerce, if you're that kind of business, and many business related details, they automate the messy, the difficult, the challenging processes that are required to run a business.

For me, the idea of running a business is really exciting, not for all the things I just mentioned, but for the idea generation, for the design, for the engineering, for the mass production, achieving scale, for all the challenges of bringing down the cost while bringing up the quality, all of those trade-offs, and all the different people involved getting to work with and getting to be inspired by them, rethinking how things have done in the past, doing things that are totally in your way, taking huge risks, all that is super exciting. And ultimately, you do that to help some aspect of the world, in my case, the dream is to add a little bit of love to the world with things that create, and I mean, that's super exciting to me.

Now, there's a bunch of messy things that are required to make all of that happen, and financials and human resources and inventory, all that is extremely important, so you should use the best tools for the job of running a business, go to [Nutsuite.com slash Lex](https://nutsuite.com/lex) to access their one-of-a-kind financing program.

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Go to [SimplySafe.com slash Lex](https://simplysafe.com/lex) to get a free indoor security camera plus 20% off your order with interactive monitoring.

Part of me wants to have a nearly infinite number of cameras in my house, so I can do full 3D reconstruction, and at some point, transfer myself into a virtual world and not know it, like somebody else sets it up, so I'll be living in a virtual world with the

exact same experience as I have in the physical world, and I wouldn't know it, and it'd be some fascinating experiment, and in that place too, there would need to be security, and it would be a perfect reconstruction of the SimplySafe system, but in a virtual world, that would be incredible.

Anyway, it's SimplySafe.com slash Lex.

This is the Lex Friedman podcast, the supported, please check out our sponsors in the description, and now, dear friends, here's Michael Malis.

Since this is a Christmas special, a holiday special, have you been a good or a bad boy Michael this year?

Well, that's interesting, one of the people in the book, Granville Hicks, his autobiography starts with, I was a good boy, and he wasn't a very good boy.

At a scale of 1 to 10.

I'm trying to think of what bad things I've done.

Oh, okay, there's that, okay, wait, that's not, that was, that was not, that's all right.

I would say 9.

9?

Yeah.

I try to do the right thing.

Okay.

What are you?

Is it going to be 1 or 0?

Yeah, no, I'm extremely self-critical.

I pushed the 0.

Okay.

I reached for the 0.

Well mission accomplished.

So this, this episode is announcing the release of The White Pill, a book you wrote, which is, I've gotten the honor, the privilege, the pleasure of being one of the first people to read it.

You're the first, so I'm really, I don't know if nervous is the word, but you are the first person who has read it that I am speaking to about it.

My first, my last, my everything.

Yes.

All the girls, but all the fembots, all the fembots, but yeah, it was a truly incredible book.

It's basically a story of evil in the 20th century and throughout it, you reveal a thread that gives us hope.

And that's the idea of the White Pill.

So there's the, the blue pill and the red pill.

There's the black pill, which is a kind of deeply cynical, maybe apathetic, just giving up on the world, given that you see behind the curtain and given that you don't like what you see, given that there's so much suffering in the world, you give up.

That's the black pill and the white pill, I suppose is, even though you acknowledge that there's evil in the world, you don't give up.

Yes.

So if you're listening to this and you're a fan of this podcast, you go to whitepillbook.com and it'll go to it.

Whitepillbook.com.

And if you don't know how to spell, we'll probably have a link that you can click on.

So for people who also don't know, Michael Malis is not just a troll, not just a hilarious comedic genius who hosts his own podcast, but he is an incredible, brilliant author, dear reader, the unauthorized autobiography Kim Jong-il.

So that's a story of North Korea, the new right to journey to the fringe of American politics.

That's the story of the extremes of the United States political movements and then the anarchist handbook that's talking about the ideologies, the different flavors of ideologies of anarchism.

But on top of that, you're now going in, going into the darkest aspects of the 20th century with the Soviet Union and the communism with the white pill.

So let me ask you, let's start at the beginning.

At the end of the 19th century, as you write the term socialist, communist and anarchist were used somewhat loosely and interchangeably because the prophesied Marxist society was one in which the state had famously withered away.

There was a great disagreement about what a socialist system would look like in practice, but two things were clear.

First, that socialism was both inevitable and scientific, the way of the future.

And second, that the capitalist ruling class were not going down without a fight.

So what are the key points of disagreement between the socialist, the anarchist, the communists at that time at the beginning, at the end of the 19th century, at the beginning of the 20th century, the possibility of the century laid before us that eventually led to the first and the second world war?

The idea when the industrial revolution came and Marx was very much a product of industrial revolution or a thinking was, okay, now that we have technology, now that we have science, we can scientifically manage society.

We saw this very much with Woodrow Wilson and this kind of idea of progressivism that we could use technology and not capitalism.

In their view, unfettered capitalism was wasteful.

You're making too much stuff.

You have surpluses.

You have shortages.

If we produce just exactly what we need and you have these people, engineers, they're engineering society, then everyone will be happy and you don't have to have any suffering or waste.

So socialism at that time was used as a broad umbrella.

It's not used in the term that it means today of necessarily state socialism.

It just meant the idea of having societies scientifically run.

So you had a huge argument, there are different wings.

You even had it from the beginning with Marx versus Bakunin because Marx was for obviously state socialism, the absolute state running everything, although even with Marx and Engels,

it was a means to an end.

After man is remade in his very nature, then the state withers away and everyone's equal and you have this kind of heaven on earth situation.

Bakunin was the opposite.

He regarded the state as inherently immoral and wanted to have kind of like workers' collectives and things like that and ultra localized control.

So the end was always stateless.

It's just that some people viewed the state as a convenient, effective, intermediate state.

Well, I think at least Marx and Bakunin, there were plenty of others who just regarded it, have the workers control the production via the state.

By the way, how does my hat look?

It looks great, festive.

It's good.

Is this side better than the other side?

I think you want it on this side so people can see you.

Oh, no, no.

I want to...

You know, like when you have hair over your head?

It's called Veronica Lake, I think was her name.

And then I just glance flirtatiously toward the camera sometimes.

Well, I've got to state no going in here, sure.

Yeah, put on gloves.

Oh, no glove, no glove.

The bad aspect of white gloves is the blood stains them.

You have to get new ones every time.

And now I glance flirtatiously after that.

I'm sorry.

Okay, Bakunin and Marx, go ahead.

So there were other socialists who did not regard this kind of end times where the state went the other way at all.

And there are various strains in between where you'd have some capitalism and some socialism.

The concept of a safety net came out of socialist thinking.

The Labour Party came out of the Fabian Socialists in Great Britain.

Their logo was a wolf in sheep's clothing.

And then when that was too on the nose, they changed it to a tortoise meaning we're going to get to socialism slowly in the sense of either gradualism or boiling a frog.

And also the big part of this thinking at the time, this is again the late 19th century, is the idea that there's going to be a worldwide workers' revolution.

It wasn't going to be that in one country it was going to happen and then all the other country would be capitalist.

The idea was, all right, the workers in Germany have more in common with the workers in America, than the workers in Germany have with the capitalists in Germany.

So the idea is, all right, like the working class all over the world at one point they're going to be like, we're being exploited.

It's getting worse and worse for us.

We can't feed our families.

We're getting injured and so on and so forth and there's no compensation for this.

We're just going to overthrow our chains and we're going to run everything ourselves.

We're the ones running it already anyway.

And this was doing all the work.

And we're doing all the work.

So why should we be getting all the benefit?

What's the role of violence in all of this?

So this was a big source of contention.

So the Fabians, for example, in Britain, who are all socialists, they were very heavily of the idea that we can do this through the ballot box.

We can advocate and agitate and get the people to be voting for their own self-interest and furthering the state at the expense of the capitalist class.

And there were the people who were the hardcore anarchists who were voting changed anything that wouldn't let us do it.

And the only way to have a revolution is to have a revolution, to kill, to overthrow, to seize these factories.

And this was a big argument.

And it also fed into the idea of where does free speech end?

Is it legal to be giving speeches advocating for violence and revolution?

Is it legal?

Johann Most, who I discussed in the book and in the anarchist handbook, he published a book in the 1800s about how to build dynamite and how to build bombs.

And this is a big free speech concern at the time, because now anyone in their own house can make a bomb and kill lots of people.

And this is something that was happening with enormous frequency at the time.

And people tend to think, because we have these prejudices, or we only remember what's happening now.

But World War II, World War I got started with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

There were lots of people, McKinley is another one who I discussed in the book, his assassination.

There was lots of violence happening very regularly.

And with the creation of dynamite, it exponentially became more dangerous and threatening.

Even now, on Wall Street, there was a bomb that went off, I think, in the 1920s.

And the shards of shrapnel are still in the JPMorgan building, I believe.

Do you ever think, if you were alive during that time, what you would be doing?

You think of yourself as an anarchist, would you be, where would you be?

Would you be a socialist, a communist?

Which parties would you attend, figuratively and literally?

Well, the thing that was so interesting back then is there was a woman named Mabel Dodge Lujan, and she ended her days in Taos, New Mexico.

She found an artist colony.

And she had an apartment on 9th Street and 5th Avenue in Manhattan, a shadow salon.

And everyone got together and talked, and you'd have Emma Goldman, who's an anarchist,

Margaret Sanger, who invented Planned Parenthood and advocated for birth control.
And you'd have the people from the Wobblies, the hardcore labor unions.
And everyone kind of, Ed Shell-Mengen didn't attend, but he was friends with them all.
So there was this very weird, with the birth of modernism in art and in kind of modernist thinking, there was this idea of, like, all right, this was the first time where you could be intellectual as a class, where there really was this space for people who were thinkers.
And they just sat around being like, all right, what are we going to do with ourselves?
And you had it in modern art, you had it in literature, you had it in politics.
So it was a very exciting time where people were like, all right, like everything is now on the table, what are we going to do with this?
And they very much were aware that this was a break with, you know, the pre-industrial revolution kind of farmer labor era.
Do you think for you, violence would be compelling?
No.
First of all, I'm just too small.
But second, I just- Dynamite doesn't care about your size.
Yeah, but I mean, retribution does.
And I think, I don't know, but to me, violence is the kind of thing where you think you're running it, but it's running you.
Once you, you know, cross that line, you know, violence sings its own song.
So whenever I hear even contemporary times where people are advocating for, you know, violent actions, it's like, when you start a fire, you're not like, I'm just going to burn down this house, you know, and there's many cases over and over of people who are building bombs or trying to assassinate someone or things like that.
And it ended up literally, literally, literally blowing up in their own face.
So and violence doesn't really work necessarily because, you know, if you have an assassination, you're not assassinating the presidency.
You know, if you take out, you know, a president, there's another president instantly there.
So what have you accomplished?
Someone's husband, dad is gone.
You replaced him with someone who now is in a position to crack down and retaliate with even more violence.
So it's, the calculus for me isn't there.
Would I be advocating for then?
Who knows?
But I mean, I don't know if I'd be able of the space to be, I certainly wouldn't have the space to be a podcaster or like a media personality.
That wasn't really a thing.
To some extent it was in the 1920s with the Algonquin round table and all the people from the New Yorker magazine, but they were all drunks.
You know, it was very much a weird kind of situation to be a thinker.
What would you think you'd do?
Work at a carnival?
You look good in lipstick.

So.
Well, thank you.
I look good in anything.
What would I, I don't know.
I mean, you're not building robots.
I mean, you could have been a Tesla, right?
Okay.
I didn't mean a car.
I meant the person.
I understand.
Oh, thank you for explaining the witty comments to me.
It wasn't witty at all.
Because you wouldn't join Einstein because your name, he was an immigrant.
So I wouldn't work with an immigrant.
What does that even mean?
No, you would have been a Tesla like figure.
There's already a Tesla.
So you wouldn't literally be Tesla.
That's why I said a Tesla.
Oh, a Tesla.
Okay.
So, all right.
I take you for the explanation.
See, Michael doesn't only make funny things.
He also explains them for you.
It wasn't funny.
Man's plays them.
It wasn't funny at all.
That I agree with.
Okay.
Okay.
So yes, when, when you achieve.
See, this is why I didn't like you.
It's this.
All right.
I'm, I'm downgrading you from a nine down to an eight.
And if you keep talking like this, a five is a real possibility.
All right.
So vacuum is the kind of vacuum that's created with violence is, is usually filled with like
a, with a harsh, with a harsher figure.
So, so you don't think violent revolution ultimately leads to positive pro, to positive
progress in the short term.
Well, sometimes it does the American revolution, I think was a positive example and overthrowing
the czar, which was done peacefully, was a positive example.

But again, when violence happens, people get scared and they want the violence stopped immediately.

And that's a call for authoritarianism and you see it time and time again.

And they also want retribution.

They were like, bring this back to normal.

And they don't really worry about things like civil liberties or things like that.

It's a very, and then it also creates this space for invasion from foreign sources or demagogues, you know, like, oh, look, they're killing us in the streets.

Now you got to support me.

It's a very deadly game, obviously.

I remember somebody told me that, I forget where it was, but they told me that from the very beginning was obvious that communism is an evil system that would, or a system that leads to evil.

And to me, at least that's not, if I had to put myself in the beginning of the 20th century at the end of the 19th century, that's totally not obvious.

They are trying to elevate humanity, the basic worth of a human being, of a hardworking human being, of the working class, of the people that are doing the work and the striving and just really trying to build up society with their own hands.

It seems like a beautiful ideal.

So I guess the question is, can you see yourself believing in that, in the ideas of socialism and communism?

Yeah, let's say if you were living in Russia.

Oh, yeah, easily.

So first of all, I don't think anything is obvious in politics.

It's not obvious that, you know, humans have rights.

It's not obvious that liberty is better or the market's either, either whether you're for, you know, a welfare state or you're for more free markets, not that those is obvious.

Both of them involve an enormous amount of thought and background information.

So when someone says something is obvious in politics, they really mean something is apparent.

Well, it's not apparent on its face that if we all get together and promote a society based on equality and we all chip in that it's going to really be good for everyone.

I mean, that to me is the promise of communism.

And it was also very appealing to many people because it was new.

So the idea was, all right, we've tried it these other ways.

There's all these negative consequences.

You have all these slums.

You have people getting, you know, fired and then they have no recourse.

You have women with 10 kids and they can't feed their kids infant mortality.

You don't have sanitation.

You don't have food, you know, everyone's illiterate and uneducated.

And then you're saying, look, if we all chip in together, everyone will have clothes.

Everyone will have food.

Everyone will be educated.

Everyone will do their part.

It's going to be rough in the short period.

That's a very compelling case to be made for communism.

It's really easy in many ways when something hasn't been tried to make it sound compelling because you just talk about how great it's going to be.

And then no one, you know, people are always arguing about how like Venezuela and Sweden, you want democratic socialism to be like Sweden, you don't want to be like Venezuela.

The Venezuelans didn't vote for Venezuela.

They voted for Sweden.

They ended up with Venezuela.

So it's, I think, and the thing with communism, especially at that era, it was very much a correlated with people who were too smart for their own good because they had the idea that if we're just put in charge instead of these like business for people or these heirs to great estates, if the people who are smart and get it like us, I don't mean you and me, like the people at the time who are advocating for it, once we're in charge, since we're good people and we want what's best for everyone, we're going to make sure everyone's taken care of.

And, you know, they always talked about how much they cared about the little guy.

And so I'm sure some of them meant it a lot and like, look, if the guy in charge is very much concerned with the little guy, he's not going to slip between the cracks.

And it's just going to be absolutely great.

And we don't have to worry about, you know, you know, the capitalist class just basically exploiting people and having these huge estates while these people can't even feed their own families.

Since we have a little bit of momentum, can you still make the case for socialism at that time and even today?

I don't know if it's, I don't know if there's a rhyme and a similarity to those, to socialism as implemented at that time and what could possibly be implemented today, but maybe you can dance between the two.

The steelman argument for socialism is if you have everything up to private industry, you do not have a guarantee that someone won't fall between the cracks.

And the other concern is in any other context, if someone is, let's suppose, mentally ill, right, through no fault of their own, or someone's handicapped, you know, they can't feed themselves

or mentally disabled or something like that.

If you have everything up to charity, some, if you see this with like endangered species, right, these species that are cute, it's easy to raise money for them or protect them.

Some weird kind of frog somewhere that no one cares about, you can't raise money for it.

Their interests are to what they find interesting.

So if someone is someone who's like not socially appealing in some way, whatever capacity, they're going to fall between the cracks and they're screwed.

Under socialism, if you have a government taking care of everything, no one is left behind.

You are guaranteed that the lowest of the low and the worst of the worst are still going to make sure that they're not starving the street or just left behind.

So that is a big moral case to be made for having the state running everything.

In terms of economics, it's a lot harder, but the argument there would be it's why it's not fair, a term which in my view does not actually have a good meaning, but it's not fair that because you were born a Rockefeller and I was born in Poland that you never have to worry about food for the rest of your life, whereas I have to worry about, you know, paying for a doctor for my kid.

Like you just won this lottery when you're born and now I have to be screwed and I have to respect all your property, why?

So that is another strong argument to be made for socialism.

And the other argument is if you have a media apparatus that is operated under profit seeking principles, it is going to feed into people's worst qualities, most basic animal like qualities and sensationalist qualities and will be used as a mechanism for capitalist control.

Whereas if the government, which represents all of us, all of us is running things, then everyone will have a right to have their voice heard and won't be manipulated.

That's the argument.

What about the reaching towards the stateless version?

Sort of because you espouse the ideas of anarchism, it kind of has the same conclusion, which is reaching towards the removal of the state to where we, I guess, have some distributed reallocation of resources that are, quote unquote, fair.

But the thing is, the Marxist vision of the state withering away and becoming anarchism, it's really kind of like the underpants gnomes because it's like...

Tell me more.

Well, step one, you have Marxism...

Tell me slowly.

I'm sorry.

You have full communism, the state's running everything, including education.

Step two, question mark, step three, anarchism.

So their idea was that after enough time, the nature of man himself was going to change.

And then the government would be superfluous because we would all be equal and we would all naturally or socially, whatever term they would use, want to act the part that we would need to do.

And in fact, Reagan had a great joke about this where there were two commissars, I think, in Moscow, and one of them, they're walking around there going, is this it?

Is this full?

Have we done it?

Have we reached full communism?

The other goes, oh no, it's going to get a hell of a lot worse.

So that's kind of the counterargument to that.

Do you think culture, society can change the nature of man?

No.

So no matter, you don't think this idea that, for example, America has been founded on, that all men are created to equal, that that idea can't permeate the culture and thereby

change how we see each other, how we think of the basic worth of a human being, and thereby change our nature?

That's not the nature.

That's epigenetic.

I don't think that that changes the nature of man.

I think, for example, if I say someone, which I agree with, that someone is innocent until proven guilty, they're not literally innocent.

They're regarded in a legal context as innocent, but that person is or is not a murderer or thief or so on and so forth.

So we can legally and ethically regard everyone as equal.

But as Thomas Sowell pointed out, a human being isn't even equal to himself over the course of a day.

Twins who are genetic clones are not equal to one another.

So it is an important thing legally, and it's a good yardstick, but it's not literally true.

But don't you think that law becomes ethics?

So that idea of justice starts to internalize it, the way we behave, the way we think about the world.

No.

I think it's a complete red herring because no one is-

No, you're a red herring.

Okay.

Let's see what you did there.

Sellovka.

Because people are still going to always prefer their family to strangers or their in-group to out-group.

So in terms of if you're going to have equality, that means it's going to not matter to you whether someone is your mom or someone down the street, and I don't see how that will ever become the case.

Do you think it would be possible if you were an intellectual like you are at the beginning of the 20th century, would you be able to predict the rest of the 20th century?

No.

I don't think at all.

I think there were so many out of nowhere turns that no one would have seen them coming.

And as an example, Lenin seizing power and making the Bolshevik Revolution a reality was regarded as utopian and insane.

The fact that he pulled it off is close to miraculous and it was quite literally unprecedented.

The fact that- so that's a very big one.

Which aspect of it, sorry to interrupt, which aspect was hard to predict that a singular figure with just some ideas would be able to take so much power?

And maintain that power and remake that society so drastically, so quickly, despite such opposition?

Also not just a set of temporary protests by hooligans that lead to turmoil in the short term, but then stabilizes, but literally changes the entirety of the society.

Yeah.

Ludendorff, who is the German general, he's like, all right, we got to get the Russians

out of World War I.

He's the one who's like, all right, let's get this lunatic Lenin who already tried and failed to have a revolution in Russia.

Let's send him back there and he's just going to cause problems to everybody and it's going to be great because it's going to weaken Russia and then our Eastern front isn't going to have to be a problem.

And then to his surprise and everyone else's, including anarchists and communists worldwide, they pulled off this October revolution.

And then for a while, it's like, all right, I mean, I think my understanding is even people at the time in St. Petersburg and in Moscow were like, what does this even mean?

No one took it seriously.

And then very quickly, you had the Cheka and the secret police and all these other kind of implementations of the communist state and people are like, oh, they're not messing around.

But they're like, all right, this is not going to last for long.

And the USA, the US&A, we didn't even recognize the Soviet Union's legitimacy for a very long time.

There were no diplomatic relations.

And at a certain point, it's like, if you don't recognize Lenin and Stalin's government, who's the government of Russia or the Soviet Union, is it the Tsar?

Like you have to recognize that it's just, they're not going anywhere.

So that was something that was not, I think, very predictable.

The Great Depression, in retrospect, there were certain things that were predictable, but it was not at all the case that it needed to last as long as it did in the States as FDR made it do.

So there's all sorts of things.

I mean, if they fought Germany's remilitarization, World War II could have been prevented.

If you didn't have the Treaty of Versailles, would you have the hyperinflation, would you have Hitler?

Because they're all, I think, choose your own adventure moments where things could have gone in other directions.

I don't believe this kind of idea, this is a very Marxist idea that history is inevitable.

And once you start with certain premises, the contradictions kind of unfold, I think it's ridiculous.

I feel there's power in the Santa Claus outfit.

Yeah.

I mean, it's a fundamentally communist idea, right?

How?

Santa Claus.

Arbitrary redistribution of wealth?

It's not redistribution.

Well, at least I decide who's good and bad, only I know this.

And I mean, I am somehow getting funding from someone, right?

No.

Okay.

Listen, I have so much to teach you.

You have a workshop.

Little Michael.

Workshop.

Yeah.

And how many people do you think are employed in this workshop?

They're slaves.

Yes.

I don't know.

How many elves are in the workshop?

I think the rest of you are going to have to look into it.

You know, anyway, in the red colors and everything, is that the biggest holiday of all time, Christmas?

Like just in terms of the intensity of the festivities?

No.

I think Christmas is a very recent phenomenon.

I think historically it was not a big deal.

No, I know.

Historically it's not been, but in terms of how much it captivates, how intense it is, I guess from a capitalist perspective, like how much is going on, how visual it is, how intense it is, how it grabs a whole population.

I think it's because the idea of Christmas is probably one of the most powerful holiday ideas.

Easter's probably up there.

Easter's obviously up there because you have Christ dying, his resurrection.

So that's kind of a big one.

But Christmas is this symbol of brotherhood and kindness and magnanimity.

You know, one of the things I despise about our culture is this glory and something I'm fighting very heavily with this book, or at least attempting to, is this glorification of cynicism, this kind of like, oh, you like this song, that's cute, it's stupid, whereas Christmas is the one time of year where you could be happy, and joyous, and kind, and people don't get to roll their eyes at you.

They get to stop being too cool for school, and they get to be like, you know, I enjoy your friendship, you're my sister, my brother, my dad, my mom, whatever.

And it's the, you know, I was Ayn Rand's favorite holiday, I adore it, especially Christmas in New York.

And it's just this idea of like, even though we're cold, and it's dark outside, you know, it's still this kind of like, it's still cozy, and you, and the next, let's hope the next year is, because with, with, with Russians, Diedmeros, Santa comes on New Year's.

So it's kind of like, let's make this next year an even better one.

So it's very much the holiday of hope, and joy.

And like, love for family, for friendship.

And kindness, and benevolence, yeah.

And like, almost the whole, that whole rat race of chasing material possessions, and all that gets put on hold for a beef moment, and just all goes quiet.
But it's also about giving people material possessions, like here, like I value you, this is something that brings you joy, yeah.
Yeah, you write in the book, which by the way, people should go get, buy it right now. If you support this podcast, or if you support the Ridiculous Office that Michael's wears, the more books you buy, the more outfits he is going to wear.
I've got two, my next two appearances on the show, assuming I don't burn this bridge. I've got some good ones.
This bridge has been burning for a long time.
We've been going across the road by canoe at this point.
Next time we're going to be swimming.
How the hell are you going to swim?
You're made out of lead.
That's true.
Sink to the bottom, get dragged across by rope.
Okay.
You write in the book, cynics like to lie and call themselves realists, hoping for positive outcomes can thus be dismissed as being naive or utopian.
Can you elaborate on this point?
Just like you said right now, it seems like a, I don't know if it's a fundamental characteristic of our society today, or just societies throughout history, but there is a cynicism.
You write in the Soviet Union, it was really, there's a deep cynicism.
That was good at the end, yeah.
But there is a cynicism today as well, at least in public discourse.
Why does it happen and how can we fight it?
I think it is easy to be like, everything sucks.
I had my friend Lux, she was a blogger, she was an author.
She had this great line, because we worked in media, and she's like, if you ever had a party and someone starts talking about a new app or website and you don't know anything about it, just say, oh, I was on that for a while, it sucked, and that's all you need to say.
I'm like, Lux, that's a great line.
But I think it is, and especially, I'm sure you experienced this as well with your family, I certainly did with mine, there is this idea, especially in Russian culture, but in American culture to some extent as well, where if you have aspirations, I remember there was this show called Russian Dolls, it was, oh, I just got it, like the Matryoshka, okay, I just got it, that's the name, okay.
The show is called Russian Dolls, it was about Brighton Beach, which is the Russian Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, it was supposed to be their version of Jersey Shore. It was on Lifetime, and it had no ratings, and I remember the last four episodes, they had to burn them, so they just ran it through like 8am to 10am one day.
And there was this one scene where one of the girls, I forget her name, probably Natalia, and she had been in college, and she had been wondering what she wanted to major in, right,

and this story was so perfect, I'm sure I've told it before, and she took an aptitude test, and she went with her mom to get like Manny Petty's or something, and she goes, mom, you know, I've had like 80 majors, I didn't know what I wanted to do, and she goes, I took this aptitude test, it really made sense to me, I am going to go to law school, I want to be a lawyer, and there's something I enjoy, and the first thing out of her mom's mouth is how you're going to pay for it.

And the girl, and I really related, because if you didn't have this Russian upbringing, you watched it, you would think her reaction was completely insane, she just lost it, just screaming, she's like, people pay for law school all the time, I'll figure out a way, why is your first reaction to look for a problem, why is your first response to be like, oh, are you sure you've thought this through, I have been struggling with one problem for years, what I wanted to do for a living, and now like as soon as I solve this one big problem by identity, your first reaction is like, let's find a new problem, why is that you're a, instead of let's figure out how we're going to pay for it.

And that kind of approach is so deadly, and it, it gnaws at you, and I always, I don't like giving people advice because I'm cool with the hell am I, and also if I don't know the context of the problem, I'm not informed enough to give advice, but this is piece of advice that I do feel comfortable giving.

If you are someone who has around you, people who as soon as you have any accomplishment or any hope that their first reaction is to be like, well, what about this, you have to get rid of them or sit them down, maybe give them a chance, because that is something that is so demoralizing, and it drains you, and it's like, you know, the example I've used all the time, all the time, all the time, I say, if you want to be an author, right, you can go to any bookstore and look at all the shitty, shitty books like The White Pill, and you could say to yourself, I could be this shitty author.

You don't have to be Hemingway.

So people should buy your book just to know that it doesn't take much, it really does not take much.

But shitty writing is all about.

And boring.

Yeah.

You could just pick a random, random period in history and just write a bunch of crap about it.

Yes.

And put a pretty stamp on the cover and just go.

It was pretty.

Yeah.

But I mean, like, like for you, right, like not, you don't, I don't mean you lex, but I was raised by the wolves, the wolf bots.

There's lots of standard comedians who aren't Jerry Seinfeld, right?

If you want to be a podcaster, you don't have to be Joe Rogan.

You could be someone who's got a medium audience and are enjoying it.

So like the idea that like something has to be, you have to be a massive superstar or your failure is also ridiculous, but that's cynicism.

I mean, you can even be a failed comedian like Dave Smith.
Yeah.
I don't.
There's a generic name that came up with as an example.
I think he has like a podcast of some kind.
He's like, yeah.
Not very funny.
I don't know why he would call himself a comedian, but he's being ironic.
Don't you think?
Yeah.
So even, even then you could do something special.
I remember what you did with me in the movie theater.
What's that?
I don't.
Oh, you continue.
Can you explain the jokes?
Cause I can't.
I'm not explaining jokes.
I'm wearing lipstick.
It's not enough.
Now, I remember what you did to me in a movie theater and you wore lipstick that night too.
Not what I was done.
People for sure will think this, this feels like a gay porn, like a very long intro.
Cause we're not wearing pants.
Yes.
There's many reasons why this feels like this and the outfits and just everything about this.
How would you know?
I, my friend, I have stories.
I thought I don't have friends.
They're all suspiciously named either Lex or Lux or something like you lack complete creativity just like in the writing.
Or Lux.
Yeah.
It's like you, you didn't even use like a thesaurus for your book.
The same words over and over and over.
The sad thing about the cynicism is like, I don't think it's just the Russian thing.
I think the people, let me interrupt you because I didn't finish what you were saying earlier.
In America, it's not just a Russian thing.
In American culture, if you have like a sitcom or a musical, it's regarded as less legitimate than a drama, right?
Like if something's got to be about someone struggling or someone's suffering, whereas this is like a joyous, happy story, like maybe something like Pixar, right?
Like sure they have conflict and they're going for something, but it's overall the background

the universe is taking in is very joyous and happy.

That is regarded artistically as less legitimate than something which is dark and the background is despair.

And that very subtly sends a very to me pernicious message that what's real is despair and happiness

is the aberration.

And I think if you have that as your mindset, you're setting yourself up for maybe not failure, but certainly not happiness.

Yeah, but that's in the figures, the ideas that the culture elevates, but at the local personal life of parents and teachers, that still happens a lot in Russia and here just my whole life, especially because I'm a weirdo, I've been kind of told to basically be less weird.

There's a kind of sense in where there's a certain path you're supposed to take in life and every time you have a little bit of success on those very specifically defined paths, you're pushed to do more and more and more on those paths as opposed to celebrating the full complexity of the weirdo that each one of us is and I certainly am.

And I just teachers, even friends and certainly family have constantly been very cynical about my aspirations, my dreams and so on.

I think that actually created a deeply self-critical engine in my brain that I think ultimately was productive because it was also balanced by just an internal maybe through genetics thing I have of optimism about the world, of just seeing the beauty in the world.

But it is weird looking back how much people that love me were trying to bring me down.

It's so strange.

It's also very hurtful for me because when I graduated college, it was important for me to be self-made and not take money from my family.

And I remember my grandma, this was a huge argument, an ongoing argument.

And one time she, as she was leaving my house, she slipped money in under the door and I threw it out.

She was maybe so angry or one year for my birthday, she gave me \$500, which was a lot of money when you were like 22 or 23.

And I was so pissed because that told me that they didn't believe that I'd be able to feed myself or make it on my own.

And I understand their mindset, but it's like I'm not, I wasn't, I was never hungry.

Maybe I couldn't, I remember I'd have to wait on the subway because I couldn't afford a cab, but that was a sacrifice I had to make, you know, I had to wait that half hour.

So it was a huge source and remains a source of enormous tension and contention.

And I think also I'm sure speaking to your upbringing in their minds, unless you're going into an office, you can't pay the rent.

It doesn't make sense.

So-

But there's just like you said, forget the office, forget all that.

No matter what, there's always, whatever you accomplish in life, you always do, you're always negative about your current position.

You always come up with another problem, just like you said.

It's always like a self-generating problem box.

Yeah.

I remember I didn't speak to my dad for a few years that I'm like, let me give this guy another chance.

And in that time period, Harvey P. Carr, the author of a subject of American Splendor, the movie and author of the series, comic books, he and I became friends and he was writing a graphic novel about me.

And when I met with my dad, I'm like, oh, someone's writing a book about me.

And he goes, I know, so.

And it was one of those moments where I'm like, wow, you're an asshole and not the kind of asshole I am.

You're just like not a good person.

And I don't know or really at this point care what the motivation or if there was no motivation with the visceral emotional reasoning for that.

But that kind of thing is something I much later now in life have absolutely no tolerance for.

Well, in my own private life, I try to forgive and love those people.

But there have been a few in my life like this.

And I think they are incredible people if you allow yourself to see it, but they're flawed.

And so I tried to forgive them.

That said, it is true that the people that are close to you, especially family, have a disproportionate psychological effect on you.

So you have to be very careful having them in your life too much.

Like one thing is to love them and the other is to actually, you know, allow yourself to flourish, surround yourself with people that help you flourish.

And like you said, the advice there is really powerful, especially early on to have people that believe in you in whatever crazy big dreams you have that pat you on the back and say, you got this kid.

And here's the other thing.

If you try and you don't make it to that Rogan level, it's okay.

Like I have several books that I've written that are on my hard drive that have not been published.

And there were a lot of work and it was really disappointing when they went out and no publishers were interested in it, maybe I'll publish it and maybe I won't point being it's fine.

I tried.

Is it a romance novel?

One is one is a gay romance novel.

Does that have a Santa guy in a Santa outfit in it?

Can you please stop asking me to send you gay pornography?

He's calling me up all hours of the night.

I need more gay porn.

I need some ones.

I only have zeros.

Yeah.

Uh, never.

No, I never enough.

This one almost got a book deal, this would have been 16 years ago.

It was a ladlet novel.

What kind of novel?

Ladlet.

It's like Nick Hornby.

What?

Nick Hornby about a boy.

So there was a little mini genre of these books about young men trying to struggle their way through is a whole little, there's a whole little series of them, Fight Club is adjacent to that.

It's not literally Ladlet.

I feel like you would write a great Fight Club type novel.

No.

Fight Club is much, and Chuck Paul and his mind are standing admitted this, Fight Club is one of the few things where the movie is better than the book.

Oh, that's interesting.

But the movie is so iconic.

Yeah, for sure.

But still, isn't there a deeply philosophical, it's kind of like David Foster Wallace novels, doesn't Fight Club capture some moment in time?

Well, I was hanging out with Kurt Metzger a couple weeks ago, comedian, very failed name.

Name drop.

Yeah.

Hey, Kurt.

He had this great story.

He was hanging out with Patrice and he had all the late comedians.

Name drop.

With the great comics of all time.

And Patrice goes, Kurt was talking about how much you liked the book or the movie Fight Club.

And Patrice is like, that is the whitest book on earth.

He goes, your problem in life is you don't have enough violence.

Your problem in life, you need someone to beat you up.

That's not a problem for me.

Yeah, well, I mean, but still, it is a very white book, but it still captures a kind of anger and an angst and a certain subculture in society.

Yes, yes.

That's really powerful.

That probably led to, in some part to the thing you wrote about in the New Right.

Oh, for sure.

I mean, it was this kind of like, there's that line in the movie where Edward Norton

says, I'm a 30 year old boy.

This kind of question of what is it, sorry to be Matt Walsh, but what does it mean to be a man?

Right?

What does masculinity mean?

Why are so many men at such a young age feeling so lost?

This idea that like, if I fill my house with nice furniture, that's still not going to be fulfilling to anyone.

Matt Walsh is...

He's from the Daily Wire.

Daily Wire.

He just did a documentary called What is a Woman?

Can you explain?

I don't know who he is.

So Matt Walsh is someone who works with the Daily Wire.

Yes.

And he just recently did a documentary called What is a Woman, I think it was called.

And he went out to lots of people working in gender theory and that's the thing.

And he asked them to define, he went to the Maasai in Africa, the tribe, and to talk to people about transgenderism, non-binary, which is a word I know you hate.

And the documentary was surprisingly well done.

Is that like a passive-aggressive compliment?

Surprisingly well done.

Well, because Matt is very aggressive on Twitter, we follow each other, and there was a lot of opportunities in this film for him to really be like, and instead, to his credit, he let the people speak.

And it's possible it was edited a certain way, of course, it was obviously edited.

But when he just asked them, can you just define a woman for me in playing dumb?

We're not playing dumb.

Just saying, what's your opinion?

A lot of the people he was speaking to were getting extremely agitated.

So it worked in that kind of context as well.

It was not his usual style.

Speaking of which, do you ever regret your behavior on Twitter?

There were a couple of times, but very rarely.

Can you describe the big strategy before we dive back into the October Revolution?

My strategy?

Do you have a strategy, or does it come from the heart, or does it come from the brain?

It comes from, I want to have fun.

That's literally what it comes down to.

Girls just want to have fun.

Are you drunk?

What is it?

What is in there?

I'm very cheeky.

I have the holiday spirit, even though it's not the holidays.

That's eggnogging.

Delirious.

I did not sleep much last night, which is, I think the second time we talk, or the third time, the second time, I stayed up almost all night.

Oh, I know.

I keep track of when you come and go.

Yeah.

So my door camera points at your garage, so I know when you're leaving or coming home.

My camera points at your bedroom from the inside, but I shouldn't have told you that now.

Let me ask you this, because this is something that's been bothering me.

There was a chair that you threw out.

It's broken.

And I was looking at my camera and I'm like, let me see when he threw this out.

And then one time you went to the garbage and you adjusted it to make it stick out of the garbage even more.

What were you doing there?

To make sure that people know there's a chair in there.

Is that really what you do?

I don't like the garbage person, so they know it's a chair, so they don't get, I always think I don't want them to get hurt or whatever.

They open the thing, it's like, ah, a chair.

I don't know what I was thinking.

Okay, it was really odd.

I didn't know how to get rid of a chair.

It was broken.

It was cracked and it was a problem.

So Twitter for me, my point is to have fun.

It's also fun to smack down people who I regard as bad actors and also to promote news that I find interesting that maybe isn't as prominently part of the culture as it might otherwise be.

Do you think sometimes you draw too broadly the category of people that are bad actors and thereby sort of adding to the mockery and the cynicism in the world?

I don't think mockery and cynicism are at all synonymous.

I think cynicism means everyone sucks.

I don't think everyone sucks.

I think it is undeniable that a lot of people suck.

What if I told you most people don't suck, could you steal me on the case that most people don't suck?

Sure.

I can do it in a cynical way, honestly.

It's quasi-cynical way.

I think most people are neither here nor there.

Most people just kind of go with the flow.

They're amiable.

Human beings are social creatures.

They want to get along.

They don't want to cause problems.

They don't have the capacity to be the target of a problem.

Most people, if most people sucked, then going anywhere would be excruciating ordeal, literally.

The airport's annoying, but if most people sucked, it would really be annoying.

Going to the supermarket would be really annoying.

I don't think most people suck, but I do think that in public discourse, there are lots of people who are dishonest about their agenda.

For example, if I could be someone who has promoting a certain ideology, but I'm in the payroll of a candidate, or my think tank needs this to happen, or I'm being paid for something like that, so that sort of thing I think happens all the time.

There's the line I have in the book, Upton Sinclair.

I forgot how he worded exactly, but it's very hard to convince someone of something if his payroll depends on him not being convinced of it.

I think things like that are... The thing I'm really excited about with what Elon's doing with Twitter, and I'm just ecstatic about this, is to have the context now.

You'll have a politician making a claim, and they're going to word it in certain ways.

My favorite example is when people are like, if you look at the years 2002 to 2020, terrorism in America, it's like, did anything happen in 2001?

Is there a reason you just coincidentally started in 2002?

Things like that.

When people are manipulating things to force an outcome that they want and to promote an idea that they want disingenuously, to have that underneath that in Twitter now, where the audience provides context, I think is something extremely useful, and it's a great way to nip propaganda in the bud.

Propaganda pervades the entire political spectrum, of course.

The interesting thing about Twitter is also the discussion about free speech and so on.

I think it's interesting to discuss free speech and the freedom of the press from the context of the Soviet Union.

Sure.

Let's return to the October Revolution and Lenin.

What was the October Revolution?

Who was Lenin?

What are some interesting aspects of this human being and also this moment in history that stand out to you that are important to understand?

I think the interesting thing about Lenin is he was a zealot, and he was a visionary, and he really kind of meant it.

I'm skipping ahead a little bit, but Lenin also was someone who was strategic.

At a certain point, when they were trying to advance communism throughout the Soviet Union and the costs were outweighing the benefits, he did a strategic retreat.

He did the new economic policy.

You had a rise of kind of these small capitalists coming back.

You could hire people again.

For the hardcore people in the Soviet Union, hardcore communists, this was a huge betrayal.

To step back, he didn't do it because he was some kind of crypto capitalist.

He did it because he's like, all right, we know where we got to get to, but we have to go at a certain pace and we have to adjust as we go along.

To have someone who is that much of an ideologue and that much of a visionary, but still to have any element of pragmatism to him is, I think, a very rare combination.

That pragmatism, do you think that's ultimately where things go wrong?

That's where you sacrifice the ideas.

Pragmatism in this case was good because by taking a step back, he kind of gave himself some breathing room to allow the revolution to continue to win the Civil War.

There was a big moment where Germany, it's just, there's lots of funny anecdotes that I learned while researching this book.

They were Germany and Russia, they were negotiating a ceasefire because Germany wanted Russia out

of the war and basically Germany was like, all right, we'll let you leave, but you have to sign this treaty and basically hand over all this land that we're currently occupying.

It was just parts of Ukraine, parts of Poland, and Lenin tells Trotsky to stall.

He's just run the clock because he was of the belief that now that they've taken power in Russia, you're going to have a worldwide work as revolutions, just stall them.

He stalled, he stalled, and at a certain point, Germany's like, all right, you're signing this tomorrow or we're invading, and Trotsky basically said, yeah, so we're leaving the war, but we're not signing anything.

The Germans are like, what?

He's like, yeah, well, that's what we're doing, so hey.

Basically, eventually he had to sign the treaty and cede huge parts of the land and a lot of money, and this was a very precarious moment for him to maintain control of Russia, and people were telling him like, you've lost huge amounts of territory, you've blown it, you should be in jail, and he's like, watch your mouth, because if you look for the future, it'll be clear which one of us is more likely to be the one ending up in jail, and he was absolutely right.

This was Trotsky or Lenin saying this?

This is Lenin saying this to Karl Radik.

So who are these figures here?

Who's Trotsky?

Who's Lenin?

Who's Stalin?

What are some interesting aspects of all of this?

Would it sort of just to linger on it, the personalities, the ideas that were important?

Well Trotsky came late to Bolshevism.

He was really the brains in many ways of the October Revolution.

He was an amazing strategist.

He never forgot that he was an amazing strategist, had a very high opinion of himself. And by the way, the October Revolution in 1917, that's a key moment.

Of course, the Russian Revolution lasted a long time, but this was a key moment of a face shift towards success of the Bolsheviks.

Well that was the moment.

That was like, all right, we are the government now, and now we have to make, you know, like Thomas Jefferson said, I think it was Thomas Jefferson, or no, it's been Franklin, a republic if you can keep it.

It's like, all right, we've made our own kind of government if we can keep it, because that was the big question.

You had an international blockade, you had the white armies, the Tsarist forces who wanted to restore Tsarism, or at least the parliament from right before Lenin took over. So this was a big kind of, no one's, you know, in some ways it was like the 2016 election. It's like, all right, we vote in Trump, well, what's this going to look like?

Like no one had any idea of what a Trump presidency was going to look like.

All we knew was this guy's on Twitter, running his mouth, he's insulting people, and he's had all these views somewhere over here, somewhere over there.

And the funny thing is the Russians hacked both elections.

That's true, it was Putin and the gremlin.

So Trotsky was, you know, Lenin's right-hand man, and he was, you know, enormous.

And to this day, he remains this kind of figure who is supposedly a less authoritarian, anti-Stalinist version of communism that people can endorse.

And Stalin, of course, was Lenin's successor.

At first there was a triumvirate running Russia as Lenin was recuperating from strokes.

Then very quickly, not very quickly, but gradually and then suddenly Stalin became an absolute dictator and he had a series of purges and so on and so forth, which solidified his control over the country.

And of course, for Stalin, Trotsky later, but throughout, as you write, seemed to almost take on a supernatural character, wherein everything that went wrong in the USSR was due not just to his views, but to his direct orders from abroad.

And of course, George Orwell brilliantly, my favorite book of his, which is Animal Farm, and also in 1984, portrayed Trotsky as a snowball in Animal Farm and Emmanuel Goldstein in 1984, is this embodiment of this evil that will always have to be fighting.

And you need that in order to hold onto power.

You always have to have that enemy.

Right.

I mean, that's something I talk about in the White Pill as well.

When things start going wrong, they always have to have scapegoats, right?

And there's this Russian anecdote, you know, what the Russians like to do is you can't say things out loud, but if you make jokes, you can say unspeakable truths.

And there's this one anecdote where there's a Russian leader and things are going bad and he looks in his drawer and there were two letters from his predecessor and he opens the first letter in a panic and the letter says, you know, for advice and the letter says, blame everything on me.

So he goes out there and he's like, oh, my predecessor sucked.

He was terrible.

Blah, blah.

It's his fault.

And everyone's like, okay.

And then there's a calamity again.

And he's like a crap.

So he goes back at his desk and he reads the second one and it says, sit down and write two letters.

So when things start going wrong as they constantly did throughout the history of the Soviet Union or any, you know, totalitarian, authoritarian country, it's someone has to be the blame.

Since we know that our ideology is true and scientifically true, if it's not working in reality given the perfection of the ideology, someone must be intentionally undermining it and causing the disconnect between thought and reality.

And in the Soviet Union, there were, it was the Kulaks at one point, then it was the Wreckers, the doctors.

It was just different.

There was always someone, and Trotsky was called a fascist and was accused of plotting with Hitler and all this other stuff.

And you also write, the problem with communism is that eventually you run out of possible escape boats.

Escape boats.

Escape boats.

You run out of boats.

You do run out of boats.

Who's going to carry them?

Eventually you run out of possible escape boats.

It's my second language, this English thing.

I'm a failed podcaster, I'm a failure.

Eventually you run out of possible escape boats for failure, at which point acknowledging or even noticing that something was wrong itself becomes a form of treason.

Yeah.

So I saw that in North Korea, right?

Wherever you went in North Korea, something was wrong.

So if you have four buttons for the elevator, one where you mismatched, every wall had a crack, every floor had a stain, the bathroom would be rusted through when you wanted to flush the urinal.

But if you are someone who points this out, you're a troublemaker.

And you're saying something's wrong, you're criticizing the operation.

First of all, you're threatening the person who's in charge because now they're incompetent and now that's a big red flag for them.

But second, if you're just going around saying this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, even if it's objectively true, you're a troublemaker and you're counter-revolutionary.

So at a certain point, everyone just has to put on blinders and pretend that everything

is fine.

One example I used in the book, an extreme example, was there was a photography professor and he pointed out to his class, and he was an older man, that before the revolution, the quality of photographic paper was better and he was, I think, executed for this heresy. So yeah, you have to pretend, I'm reading a book right now about the Chinese cultural revolution and there was an academic, I forget his name, Huxi, I think, and he points out that in these countries, not only do you not have freedom of speech, you don't have freedom of silence, you can't just sit there quietly, you have to say how great things are and how much you're enjoying and how wonderful they are, instead of just keeping quiet, because if you keep quiet, that's suspicious.

Yeah, those, they're always singing those songs about how happy they are and how great everything is.

And if everyone else is singing, who are you to not sing?

Yeah, those pictures, especially when, you know, when it's Stalin giving speeches and everyone is applauding, any dictator, and you don't want to be the first person that stops applauding.

Stalin had to have a button, is my understanding, at a certain point to tell people to stop applauding, because they're, like you said, if you're the first one to stop clapping, people are going to notice, and why'd you stop clapping?

You don't like Stalin?

Just imagine being one of those people clapping.

That's the thing, they always had a sword over their head, but they all had a lot of blood on their hands, too, it's a very, very precarious life.

But there's also, I mean, 1984 does a good job of this, what is that, like two minutes of hate or something like this?

You like lose yourself in the hysteria of it, in the hysteria, so there's some level of which at first, it's you're sacrificing your basic individualistic ability to think, but then you get lost in this kind of wave of emotion, and you give into it.

You allow yourself, it's like a mix of fear, and then anger, and then you direct that anger towards like snowball, or Trotsky, or whoever, and like, what is that?

You're also losing yourself in the crowd, because you're like, it's not just I'm angry, everyone I know, we're all angry together, so you really are becoming a part of something bigger than yourself, and having this kind of communal, very primal, emotional experience. It's like the opposite of Christmas, right, Christmas, we're all together, everyone's sharing their joy, everyone's sharing their love.

This is the opposite, literally the opposite, like everyone's together sharing their hate and anger and rage, but you're all kind of having a mind meld.

But I wonder what it's like to be an independent thinker in those moments, like allow yourself to think.

Well, we know, because there were a lot of them, and they were all punished enormously. So, they can be noticed, you can notice them.

Oh yeah, you even noticed it in America, America's a free country, but when people start asking too many questions, it's like, where are you going with this?

If you're in an office, even in a corporate setting, you're a troublemaker, you're making

a promise to everyone, why can't you be normal?

Why can't you be just like everybody else?

So, people do not like having to be made to think, and they certainly despise having to be made to justify themselves, because that's a threat to their status and to their power, and this applies into totalitarianism or applies to, you know, Dunder Mifflin.

I still can't believe you're wearing lipstick.

I'm not.

Goes to show you can pull lipstick on a pig.

It's like a snowball.

I think you've just been on a bender, that's what I think.

It's been rough.

It's been rough.

I feel kind of, I feel like I can be myself in this outfit.

Like, I honestly feel like I could just go around in this outfit and just be weird, because everyone will accept you if you're wearing a Santa outfit.

Like, you can say anything in a Santa outfit, right?

Have you seen Bad Santa?

Yeah, Bad Santa, exactly.

I gave her comedy.

You can't say anything.

My fuck stick.

How did Stalin come to power?

If we return back to those early days, post the October Revolution, Lenin Trotsky and Stalin, how did he come to power?

So what Stalin did very cleverly, Stalin was, you know, he worked the system.

He was, you know, but he was very much in the background.

And what he did better than Trotsky is he was much more a politician.

He was a glad hander.

He made friends within the party.

He made people feel respected and appreciated, and Lenin trusted him.

After Lenin's stroke, Stalin was basically the one who was keeping track of him, Lenin asked Stalin at one point to kill him, because after the strokes he was incapacitated, Stalin talked him out of it.

But at the same time, Lenin was like, if I need someone killed, this is who I need to talk to.

You know, Stalin, if you look at photos of him when he was young, he was a stud.

He was a gangster.

He was a bank robber.

And you know, he basically worked the system, and you had the Trotskyites on one hand who were much more to the left.

Stalin's big, I would call it a heresy, was he put forth the idea of socialism in one country, whereas we're just going to make it work here in what became the Soviet Union.

The Trotsky idea, and this is really kind of the Marxist idea, is that the worker's revolution has to be worldwide.

This is just a worldwide kind of new era of humanity, where Stalin's like, no, no, we're just going to make it here, and then later, behind what became the Iron Curtain. But this was, sure, this was an ideological division between the two, but what happens in totalitarian countries, it happens in any kind of like, you know, when you have intermingling of like religion and government, things that are like ideological disputes, like the Aryan heresy, the Aryan heresy in Christianity is that Christ is subordinate to God the Father, right?

Whereas the contemporary Orthodox version, it's one God and three person, excuse me. So they're all co-equal aspects of God in heaven.

But that was an excuse to be like, you guys are evil, you're on the side of the devil, we're going to kill you.

So these little disputes about ideas are often a convenient cover for people to have a power struggle in the guise of being like, it's not that I'm about wanting to be more powerful, I'm just on the side of the truth, and you're speaking lies, and that's dangerous to the revolution or to the true faith.

So he squeezed, but the thing is Trotsky had the seeds of his own defeat because per Trotsky, the party is always right, you cannot be right against the party, right?

So if you have this kind of party structure and the party is saying you're wrong as an individual, you are wrong because the collective is what makes decisions.

The collective, the workers are who have the knowledge and the information, and it is important for you to kind of subordinate your selfishness, your individualism to this greater good.

So he kind of set himself up in many ways.

Is it clear to you why Trotsky lost that power struggle?

So you just explained that he set himself up, but you can see how different ideologies can be used to achieve different ends.

Is there another alternative possible trajectory where Trotsky could have been the head of the Soviet Union?

It would be very hard because he was Jewish.

So when they were seizing power, Trotsky explicitly said, I can't be in charge of Jewish.

So the Soviet Union remained extremely anti-Semitic.

One of the reasons so many Jews became communists in the Soviet Union because the promise was once the communists took over, we're not going to have programs anymore.

Program was you had these Jewish ghettos, and under the permission or encouragement of the Tsar, just gangs of people go through killing, raping, robbing, stealing, rioting for days, and just a complete massacre, and the idea is like, under communism, everyone's going to be equal.

We're not going to have this anymore.

They still had it, but to a lesser extent, but since Trotsky was Jewish, his real name is Lev Bronstein, it was almost impossible to have a scenario where he was going to be in charge.

So all in fed into that, to some extent, also this kind of idea of Jewish internationalism.

It's like, okay, he doesn't really have loyalty to Russia.

And many of the people who were Jewish, who were high up in Stalin's government administration, they very much had to prove their loyalty to communism as opposed to Judaism.

Throughout the 20th century, what was the relationship between communism and Jews in the Soviet Union?

In terms of anti-Semitism, the ups and downs of anti-Semitism, it seems like it was lesser and greater in different parts of the 20th century.

Well, it's the kind of thing where if something was bad, there's this Russian rhyme, like, if there's no water in the sink who drank it all, the Jews.

So if something goes wrong, there's just a convenient historical scapegoat, it's the Jews fault.

So this is something that's towards the end of his life very much, and this was after World War II, Stalin was getting ready for another kind of series of programs.

All these Jews were getting kicked out of their jobs, Jewish doctors were getting sent to the Far East instead of being in cities.

The newspapers started talking about rootless cosmopolitans, which was a term the Nazis also used to kind of regard Jews as others or as aliens, and this was going to be, and they were very clever about it.

In Pravda, they would, and I talk about this in the White Pill, in Pravda, there were articles and letters to the editor, they were like, you know, things are getting so anti-Semitic, we really should round up all the Jews and send them elsewhere for their own safety. So they were kind of setting the ground rules or the basis to have this sort of program come back, but a spoiler alert, Stalin dies, and immediately all of this gets reversed and the new administration rehabilitates the doctors who are accused of trying to hurt him and all this other sort of thing.

What is it about the scapegoats in society?

Are we always going to be looking for scapegoats?

What do you learn from human nature that this seems to keep happening?

I think there's a book called The Nurture Assumption, and I discussed this in the New Right, and what the author learned is that humans define themselves by opposition.

So if you have a group of people and it's kids and adults, the kids will see themselves as kids because we're as opposed to adults.

If the adults leave, the kids see themselves as boys and girls because I'm not a girl, I'm a boy, I'm not a boy, I'm a girl.

So they divide.

So this idea, which is a very lefty idea, that human beings naturally all get along is not accurate.

And the best example of this is look after 9-11, look where there's a war.

Nothing unites a population.

It's not like when times are thriving that everyone's all working together.

When things are bad and there's an enemy, the Japanese are Pearl Harbor, it's al-Qaeda, that's when everyone really comes together because now we have someone to be against.

So there will always be, someone has to be the outgroup, and we have to be the in-group as opposed to them.

But there's a viciousness to the actions you take towards the outgroup that varies throughout history.

Yes.

The degree of viciousness can cross the line towards atrocities, towards genocide. Right.

That's the question of why does it sometimes do that?

Why does it sometimes cross into genocide?

I understand it's a useful thing to have the other to blame in this world, especially when times are rough, but why does that sometimes lead to sort of action that says, I'm going to murder, I'm going to torture the other?

I think the question really is why sometimes it doesn't.

And one of the things I learned when I was doing the new right is a lot of the Nazis, using that term loosely speaking, neo-Nazis, they make the point that like, oh, when the Holocaust happened, it really wasn't that big of a deal, and that only became a big deal in the decades later.

And this just shows the power of Jewish influence.

And I'm like, this to me is a great thing.

It's a great thing that we sat down pretty recently, historically, and we're like, wait a minute.

Guys, when we have a war or we have conquest, you don't have to just start killing everyone. This is something that's bad and wrong, and certainly in the last 60 years, 70 years, this is something that people have come to take for granted.

But that wasn't the case before.

It would always be, or not always, but often, if you conquer, you just go wild and just start slaughtering masses of people.

Who's the guy from Harvard?

Stephen Pinker, sorry, I forgot his name.

So he just talks about like, we know this is one of the reasons also why there was so much skepticism when the Holocaust started, because this was regarded as something that was barbaric.

This is from the Middle Ages, from the biblical times.

We don't do this anymore.

We're civilized now.

So genocide is historically the norm.

I think it's also harder to pull it off emotionally when you have the visuals and when you have the audio and when you have the voices of the people being slaughtered.

We don't know if this was 2,000 years ago and people in the Bible go kill this group, go kill that group.

We don't have their names.

We don't have the visuals.

We don't have anything.

But when you see someone being like, there's a book about, I think, the Rwandan genocide, and the title is, We Regret to Inform You That Tomorrow, We Will Execute with All of Our Families Like a Telegram.

And when you get a telegram like this, it's very different than reading some history book about the Assyrians killed the Phoenicians.

It's like, I don't know who this is.

I don't know who that is, right?

So I think this is something that has changed very recently.

There was this kind of interesting moment just that speaks to the way technology has liberated people from violence.

Kristallnacht, which was a moment in the lead up to the Holocaust, were basically with Hitler's blessing, you had a nationwide burning of Jewish businesses, synagogues burnt down, and Kaiser Wilhelm, the Kaiser, he said, for the first time in my life, I'm embarrassed to be a German.

But that was a moment where worldwide, even plenty of people who did not think very highly of Jewish people were like, this is a wrap.

This is a complete nightmare.

But 200 years ago, 100 years ago, maybe not literally a Kristallnacht, but there's an outgroup, and we hate them, and we're going to kill them, and it's fine.

And you think it's even more difficult now with the internet to do that kind of thing?

Yes.

Now, more difficult doesn't mean it doesn't happen, or it can't happen.

I'm not saying that at all.

But I'm saying, we know a lot about what's going on in North Korea, probably the most secretive country on earth.

There's a lot of atrocities in Eritrea, which is kind of known.

So if you think about it, how many years ago, 300 years ago, you only know the people in your village, and they're all probably going to look like you, so on and so forth.

Whereas now, if I'm on social media, and there's someone from any country, and maybe their picture looks a little different, they use the same anime picture as somebody else, but they're putting forth their ideas, you do see the humanity in them, and you do see a sense of familiarity and a familial bond with them.

And when you hear about these things, again, when I did Dear Reader, no one, and I was on Al Qaeda and I was on Alex Jones, no one pushed back about like, oh, the North Koreans. They were all like, this is horrible, if I had a magic wand, I'd give them food, I wouldn't have them live in fear.

And this is something that I don't think was the case a couple of hundred years ago.

As I said, I'd love to get your thoughts about what's going on in Iran, the protests.

It seems like the regime there is able to crack down with violence.

My thoughts about Iran, let me just, there's something else about Iran which I think is interesting.

This whole idea of care for what you wish for.

Because people have this, and something I kind of, one of the reasons I have the white pill is Americans really are very naive about the nature of evil, right?

They really think that a dictator has a weird mustache and he's banging the table and he's like a crazy person.

And it's often not the case.

But they also think if something is bad, therefore the alternative is going to be better.

So you had the Shah of Iran and he was kind of authoritarian and no, he's not a good guy.

So in 1979, there were a lot of people like, this guy's horrible.

He's oppressed in the Iranian people.

Let's get him the F out of there.

He's so bad that whatever comes after it has to be an improvement.

And it's like, no.

If you think, I mean, this drives me crazy when conservatives are like, Joe Biden's the worst president we ever had.

This is destroying America.

I'm like, you have no idea how bad things can get.

The fact that you are in a position to complain means we got a ways to go.

Yeah.

Every time you say that Donald Trump or Joe Biden is the worst president ever, that warms my heart because you're allowed to say that.

Yes.

Yeah.

It's like, I just let it, it's like music because you're allowed to be pretty, in response to a president's tweet, you couldn't write that.

And it still lives there and nobody arrests you.

Which is a rare thing in human history and still rare thing in the world.

It does seem that Iran, the current regime is able to crack down on communication channels.

It's still, it's surprising to me how much power a government can have.

Like, they could use violence to control the population and nobody's going to do anything about it.

Well, the rest of the world just watches.

But here's the thing, right?

Because if the rest of the world starts doing too much, then they have a justification to crack down even more.

This protest are not legitimate.

This happened constantly at the Soviet Union.

These are foreign provocateurs.

This is meddling in our country, curfew, lockdown, mandatory searches, everyone's a spy.

So that narrative is a very convenient one for people who are authoritarian.

I know a lot of people who are Persian, as I'm sure you do as well.

Very hardworking, very bright, great people.

And all you could do is hope for a peaceful liberalization of, people don't realize how liberal Iran used to be, Andy Warhol, Andy Warhol used to be friends with the Shah.

And if you read his diaries, he talks about how he knew things weren't going well for the Shah because they had less caviar at the table.

But he was really kind of, there's, I think, a poor understanding in America.

And I'm not sure why of what these liberal Muslim countries are like.

I gave a talk in Bodrum in Turkey, which is like a resort town in Turkey.

And I had thought previous to that, or I had suspected, if push comes to shove and they have to choose people in Turkey between the West and like al-Qaeda, not al-Qaeda, but like, you know, hardcore Islam, they're going to choose hardcore Islam.

You go there and you're like, oh, this is like Los Angeles.

These people are so liberal, so, and they're the first to be killed.
They're the first targets.
So people like that in Iran are who my thoughts are.
And I got to tell you, like, nothing makes me more of a feminist than seeing the women in countries like this fight for the right to education, the right to dress as they please.
Maybe we don't need them driving, but, you know, that's okay.
There he is with that characteristic, brilliant humor that you're so loved for and should probably be banned for on Twitter.
I'm doing my best.
Every time you tweet, I just report, report, report, please stop this man.
You don't have like a script to just- Exactly, well, funny enough, I do, but I don't abuse my power, I wear the ring like Frodo and I respect the power.
But you look like Gollum.
That's not what your mom said last night.
She said you're hung like Gollum.
I'm not going down that road with you.
I'm not holding hands one- another time.
I learned my- fool me once, okay.
My close childhood friend is from Iran.
Oh, wow, okay.
And I talked to him a lot.
I wanted to go to Iran.
But it's so far away.
I can see it from my house, my friend.
I'd love to take that trip, even now.
It's just culturally, so all the different little pockets of local cultures that make up Iran.
I just heard so many amazing things.
Yeah, my friend Paul went there, he had an amazing time.
He just absolutely loved it.
He thought the people were awesome.
It was so interesting, very developed.
Just like Tehran is, I mean, this is the history and Tehran is insane.
Yeah, I would really love to visit.
Now we return back.
I don't know how we ended up in Iran, but let us stroll back to Stalin taking power.
What role did the suppression of speech, the censorship, the suppression of the freedom of the press have in Stalin taking hold, taking power, in Lenin, in Trotsky, in Stalin having power?
Well, it was a very useful mechanism to direct public opinion and inform public perspectives and everything.
So, first of all, there was a lot of news about how great things were.
You have a bumper crop here, grains, never been better.
There's another anecdote where President Kalinin is talking about how on Karl Marx Street

in Kharkiv, there's all sorts of new skyscrapers being built and it's just absolutely amazing and some of the audience gets up and goes, comrade, I work on Karl Marx Street, I walk there every day.

There's none of these skyscrapers.

It goes, see, that's your problem.

You're trusting your eyes instead of reading something and learning what's in the papers.

So there was this kind of disconnect between, you probably know the joke, like pravda-nipravda is vesta-nisvestia, like pravda means truth, but there's no truth to be had in pravda, it's kind of the Russian line.

The point is, very much, and the other thing, this is, my mom wasn't particularly politically motivated, but she talked about how you didn't have to be smart to realize how dishonest it was because one day someone is the great hero of the Soviet people and the next week he's been a traitor and a class enemy and the worst and then sometimes they reverted and it's like, okay, like they couldn't even keep their story straight.

And in fact, at a certain point when they, Gorbachev liberalized, they had to cancel tests because the history books had to be rewritten so quickly.

So and the thing also with these newspapers is there was a lot of, it was very monotonous because you had the same message over and over, a lot of these papers were about kind of speaking to the lowest common denominator, Stalin's great, everything's great, overseas bad.

So it very much was about not informing but creating a certain perspective in the public at large.

And also you were educated as a citizen on what you're supposed to think and say.

So you have, a lot of this was this kind of private truths, public lies situation.

So you could read the paper and at your factory, you could be like, oh my God, this guy Karl Radek is great.

He's like, oh my God, yeah, he's amazing.

You knew what to talk about and you knew how to look at it as well.

And then when you get home, you could just kind of be more honest with family.

But the question is, to which degree does this propaganda and this ideology infiltrate your actual thinking?

You give examples of this like scientists in infiltrated science.

Oh yeah.

So basically, you know, Lysenko is the textbook example, Lysenkoism and biology.

So because Marxism is materialist, they didn't like the idea that genes pass on, you know, from one generation to the next.

So Lysenkoism kind of was a rejection of Mendel and that kind of genetics.

And if you reject genes, you're really going in a bad direction in terms of biology.

The Soviet Union's biological program became an international laughing stock.

At one point, Lysenko claimed he crossed a tomato and a potato.

You had things where they said they had nuclear, which we have fish in, but they said they invented fusion or heavy water or hard water or whatever it was, point being, in cultures like this, your way to achieve status wasn't necessarily about your accomplishments, but about your loyalty to orthodoxy.

So if you were saying things that got to a result that was congruent with the broader ideologies as a whole, that was much better as a means of furthering yourself in the arts or in the sciences than if you had something that was innovative.

Because if you're innovative, it's like, well, how do I fit this in with the broader ruling ideology?

The problem with totalitarianism, one of the many problems is everything, literally everything has to be perceived through the lens of ideology.

So and that is, you know, there were scientists who were arrested or at least fired because of their theories about sunspot developments because it was regardless on Marxist.

There was just, there was an epidemic and all these horses got sick.

And because the vaccine didn't work on the horses, the bacteriologists were arrested because they were regardless of records.

It's like, we gave you a job, you didn't do it, you're undermining the social estate.

So it's kind of a backwards series of incentives and it's designed to maintain at all costs the ruling ideological superstructure.

But you draw a small distinction between the ideology and the ideological superstructure and the propaganda.

Aren't those kind of intermixed together?

Well, the ideological is like in the sciences and what's true in genetics or what's true in astronomy.

That doesn't really percolate out to the masses, right?

So the, the, the Provedas nut is maybe covering this scientist is great or these discoveries are great, but it's not necessarily the same as day to day or glorifying political leaders.

But Provedas is a manifestation of the idea that truth can be conjured up.

Yes.

It can be constructed and it could be altered quickly and then I just, I wonder, sort of 1984 caricatures that I wanted to a degree.

It really could control the way you think that like how many people it affected.

I can give you an example, a very easy one.

So again, with regard to North Korea, Kim, the great leader Kim Il-sung, who was the founder of North Korea, had a tumor on the back of his neck and it was too close to the skull, the spinal column, so they couldn't operate on it.

And throughout his life, it got bigger and bigger.

And I got mixed messages in my research about whether North Koreans knew about it because they always photographed him from this angle.

And I met a refugee and I asked her, I'm like, did you know that he had this tumor?

She goes, yeah, yeah.

When people played him in the movies, they would, you know, you'd make up there and she goes, it was an old war injury.

And I go, why would a war injury get bigger throughout your life?

And she just stood there and she was like, holy, but she never questioned it.

But it was the kind of thing where they put the idea in her head.

And since there's no reason to question it, she just kind of went with it her entire life until I talked to her, Audrey, his name.

Hi, Audrey.

Hi, Audrey.

I wonder what percent of the population is like that.

Here's the thing, if there is a cost to me questioning Lysenko as a great scientist and there was no benefit, why wouldn't I just go with what's going to keep me, my family safe?

But I also mean just the psychological, there might be a very local psychological cost. So not a cost you go to jail, but a cost like you're going to kind of ruin the conversation by bringing it up.

Kind of like, yeah, I don't, I'm just trying to, it's like Debbie Downer, right?

Yeah.

Yeah.

But there's also the whole metaphor of like, there's two fish in the river and one says, well, man, the water's really great today.

And the other one goes, what's water?

Yeah.

So a friend of mine, Adriana, her mom came to the West and they went to a supermarket and the mom just in front of all the Fanta, so it was just crying.

She was like, what's going on?

She goes, they told us we had more food than you.

And when something is, you can underthink this, this guy's an enemy of the people and he was the hero, he just offended someone, this is bullshit.

It's almost impossible psychologically to think I'm living in the Truman Show and that everything in the media is not just wrong, but a carefully constructed narrative and a lie.

Like what they're never going to tell the truth that how you, you know, like what?

Like you, and even if that, even if you do understand that, how would you even read between the lines to deduce what the truth is?

Yeah.

It must have been a strange experience.

The stories of soldiers, the Red Army soldiers throughout World War II, as they go to different countries, even Romania, but in Europe, just to understand that people live much better than they did, than the soldiers did back in the Soviet Union.

And that's why a lot of times when they went back Stalin had them killed because they saw too much or sent to the camps.

So just to linger on this idea of free speech.

So there's constant discussion about free speech and this modern debate about social media and all that kind of stuff.

What's your take on it?

Grounding it not in some kind of shallow discussion of free speech we have today, but more in the context of Pravda and the suppression of speech in Stalinist Russia.

I hate the term free speech because it's used in many different contexts.

Some I agree with entirely, some I disagree with at all.

I don't think everyone has something to say or something to add to the conversation.

And I have my local community and it used to be, I think the boilerplate language is come support free speech and free discourse and I changed that because I don't like that term because people will tell you with some reason that, oh, if you block me on Twitter, you're voiding my free speech.

So I don't like that term as a whole, but one of the points of the white pill and something I see enormous parallels with today, if you have one news outlet or three news outlets with identical ideology, you're not going to be able to get to any kind of truth or any kind of useful information.

It's all going to be pre-filtered for you.

It's like a baby bird and you're eating the mother birds vomit, right?

But if you have what we have increasing now with technology, if you have a world where everyone has a camera on their phone, if you have a world where anyone can put their ideas out there, maybe they're banned from certain outlets, but they're not literally vanished like they were in the USSR, that is very healthy.

That is something I'm enormously supportive of because back in the day, if you only had the TV crews with cameras, you can only see what they're capturing and they could edit it.

Whereas now, we saw this recently during COVID, right?

You had these reporters with masks on and they're talking, but the cameraman wasn't wearing a mask.

So you'd have the people on the street being like, look, they don't believe it.

Or as soon as they would start filming, the guy took the mask off and they'd film them.

They go, you are lying.

You don't believe this, you're putting this on for some purpose, whether you're leaving the efficacy of masks or not, that person clearly does not, is only putting on for show.

So that's, or crimes, it's people, you know, are anti-police.

They say, okay, the cop said this, did he draw the gun in the sky necessarily so on and so forth.

It is so much better when everyone has access to as much of the information as possible and can make that informed decision themselves.

Now there certainly is space for informed people to be like, no, no, no, this isn't what it looks like.

If you look here, if you look there, it's cropped here, so on and so forth.

But that's still much more useful than just having that 20-second clip that someone has decided to edit for you.

So like truth has a way of, because everything is so interconnected, truth, no matter what, has a way of finding its way to the populace.

And also, there's a big asymmetry in terms of trust.

So if I tell you a hundred truths and one lie, that lie is equal, I'm screwed.

Because once you catch me in a, like, you don't have to kill someone every day to be a murderer, right?

You don't have to do it once.

So if you catch me in a brazen lie, you're going to look at everything I say after that with an enormous grain of salt.

So that is another big asymmetry in favor of truth.

If someone trusts you, you have to be honest all the time and you're going to make mistakes.

You can own those mistakes and be like, hey, this is why I made the mistake, this is why

I said such and such.

Okay.

But the flip side of that, which has been disheartening to me, is that people on the conspiracy side, conspiracy theory side of things, I've noticed how easy it is to just call something a lie.

Yes.

And then that becomes viral.

For some reason, there's a desire for people, yeah, for anyone who points out that they amper is not wearing a clothes, even when the emperor is fully clothed.

So I don't know what that is, but that really seems to mess with this truth mechanism.

So when, when it becomes viral to call people a liar, whether they're a liar or not, it's like you feel like on unstable ground because to me, that idea of revealing a lie that somebody told is a really powerful mechanism to keep people honest.

But when you're like misusing it, crying wolf too much.

It seems, it seems to break the system, makes me nervous because there's also like, if someone is a liar, that doesn't mean literally everything they say is a lie.

No, but what is a lie and what isn't?

I just noticed that there's money to be made in calling out something as a lie.

It's just the conspiracy theories straight up.

The first thing, some traumatic event happened, given explanation, that's not the mainstream explanation.

No matter what, whether it's true or lie, there's a lot of virality and money to be made in that.

And that makes me nervous because it doesn't matter if it's true or not.

It becomes anti-establishment ideas are viral, whether they're true or not.

Sure.

But I think establishment ideas are powerful whether they're true or not.

So I think-

On the whole, I think, you're right, on the whole, it's good to test the power centers, but it just makes me nervous in our attention economy that the sexy thing seems to be the anti-establishment message.

And then it feels like that becomes a drug where you, everything, anything the establishment says, anything institutions say, anything the mainstream says must be wrong because it comes from the mainstream.

I have that line that you're supposed to take one red pill, not the whole bottle.

I am certainly one of those people who is of the idea that they are dishonest, far more open that they're honest.

That said, there are people who are of the belief, let's use an extreme example, that Trump is still the shadow president and there's going to be these QAnon mass arrests.

I thought this was something that the Daily Beast made up to make fun of MAGA, but I was just in the phone with my buddy last night and he was like, no, no, if you go to Troth

Central, they're like all over there and if you disagree with them, they call you a controlled opposition or a grifter or so on and so forth.

Is it unfortunate or where?

Troth Central, Trump's social media outlet.

Oh, truth, no, truth.

He forgot the name of it himself, so he's like, that's why I had to create a joke.

You got to explain the jokes, you got to explain the jokes.

You do like the way Twitter puts that context, you got to do the joke and then pause and turn to the camera and explain it.

I'd have a laugh track.

Yeah, so people know where the jokes are, that's how, that's real humor.

Yeah.

And then we just clapped.

And then everybody clapped.

I think for the last two years, especially vis-a-vis COVID, the overwhelming message was the experts know what they're talking about and if you are questioning this, you're a vax denier and you basically should be read out of polite society.

And one obvious counter example to this was social distancing.

If social distancing was efficacious, why were there no attempts ever to bring it back when you had different waves?

And if it wasn't efficacious, why was it so insistent that we do it, all do it at the very beginning?

In fact, in many places you'll still see the signs on the floor where it's six feet apart.

So there's an incongruity there.

And I think we are forgetting as a people the intensity and understandably to some extent, if you have this worldwide deadly plague, it's going to go where the leakiest hole is.

So you really got to kind of get everyone on board.

But to the vehemence with which we're told, we know what we're doing.

This is the way to solve it.

If you don't do it, you are causing mass death.

That I think fed in very heavily to people's enormous sense of skepticism toward establishment sources.

Speaking of the plague, you opened the book with that quote from Camus.

It's a strong, strong quote.

Camus brings me to tears.

And it's funny because I reread The Myth of Sisyphus, which I had been recommending to people and like this book is not good, but his ethos is my favorite of all the philosophers.

It sounds like The Myth of Sisyphus was a myth.

He says after I cut, all I maintain is that on this earth, there are plagues and there are victims and it's up to us so far as possible not to join forces with the plagues.

And why I have that as the introductory quote to the book is I think morality and ethics are very, very complicated subjects.

There's lots of gray areas where you don't know which way to choose.

But at a base level, he has another quote that's ascribed to him he never actually said,

but something about is the duty of thinking people not to be in the side of the executioners. If you are, we should do whatever we can not to have blood on our hands, not to be murderers, not to want death.

And that in and of itself is a big pill for a lot of people to swallow.

We're all brought up, taught that war is a last resort.

And yet when it comes to international affairs, it's always often a first priority and people are champing at the bit to start going in and killing people.

And what war means isn't good guy soldiers versus bad guy soldiers.

My concern is always with the civilians, with the kids who become orphans, with the wives who become widows and things like that.

And then communities which are ruined forever.

So I love that quote of his.

I mean, the book started, it was going to be a recontextualization of Camus's thought.

I was going to rip off my old buddy Ryan Holiday, what he did with the Stoics and do about Camus.

And then when I started rereading Camus, I'm like, oh, I've read more into him than is really there.

And then it went into a whole other direction.

So you wanted to do almost like an existentialist manifesto.

So like one must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Well, more like Camus for today and what his philosophy can teach us like Ryan did with his many books about the Stoics.

And it was going to be called The Point of Tears.

Live to the point of tears.

Yes.

But the title is giving me the point of tears.

No, I know.

But that's from that line.

That's a good line, right?

Yeah.

He has so many good lines.

Yeah.

Maybe it's not.

Probably shitty in bed though, right?

Well, no.

He was a big, he was a big Lethario.

He was probably pretty good.

Letharium.

He got around.

What?

What percent of the audience of humans on earth do you think know the word Lethario?

What percent of them have a computer?

Look it up.

Lethario.

It's not some weird term.

Lethario.

L-O-T-H-A-R-I-O.

Lethario.

Lethario.

A man who behaves selfishly in a response to being in a sexual relationship with women, they're seduced by handsome, in quotes, they're seduced by handsome Lethario who gains control of their financial affairs.

Oh, I didn't think, I always thought of him more as just someone who's like a stud.

Like a player.

Yeah, player.

Yeah.

There's a malevolent.

Oh, I didn't realize that.

Okay.

Well then he's selfishly.

Okay.

That's not him.

Irresponsibly.

Um, although Ayn Rand would be proud selfishly.

What's wrong with selfishness?

She wouldn't like that kind of selfishness.

That's what he is.

Behaves?

A man who behaves selfishly and irresponsibly in his sexual relationships with women.

Huh.

Yeah.

Okay.

So he was, he was just a player.

No, not a, maybe a stud, I don't think he was promiscuous particularly.

Nietzsche didn't get, he got, he didn't never get laid, right?

He had syphilis.

He died of syphilis.

Oh, like from prostitution.

Was it?

Absolutely.

Yeah.

You're asking me like I knew the guy.

I, I heard it's from, um, it, he never had a deep loving fulfilling relationship.

He had a very skewed understanding on, uh, the way he wrote about women, although somebody wrote to me and said, that's a mischaracterization, that he was actually very respectful of women.

Yeah.

But he had that line, if you're going before women bring a whip, wasn't that him, was that your open heart?

If I were to quote you from your Twitter, I think I could make a very convincing argument

that you're a sexist racist and probably a Nazi.

Well I do own like some of Hitler's stuff, exactly.

I, I got the-

I rest my case.

I feel like I'm a Nuremberg.

I'm going to be hung by his own tie.

This isn't a tie.

It's a noose.

You should have thought about that when you were saying all those things.

Okay.

What do you think of the leak of the Twitter files?

I was so happy that Elon gave the information to Matt Taibbi and Barry Weiss, who are both by any metric lefties, who are both professional journalists of long standing with great resumes. And overnight now they're, they're doing PR for the world's richest, all the way the party line was.

The fact that you had all these corporate journalists now having to play catch up and not having control of the microphone to me was just absolutely amazing.

I think transparency is what brought down in many aspects of Soviet Union and what will bring down what negative aspects of the regime we have here.

When you see the machinations behind the scenes and then when you see the rationalizations after the fact, you realize, oh, these people are not acting in good faith.

The fact that, for example, the New York Post article about the Hunter Biden laptop and how the New York Times covered it as well.

They didn't mention any kind of dick pics.

Twitter made it so I couldn't even DM you the link to the New York Post article, which was a tool they had previously used only to prevent child pornography.

So that shows to what extent they were willing to put their thumb on the scale.

But it also shows that for any layman when they're looking at this to realize what you are perceiving as news or information is very much sculpted, edited and guided by powerful people who have a vested interest in maintaining their power.

I think to me the important lesson is this is not a left to right thing.

Oh, not at all.

Power versus powerless, yes.

And also the important lesson there, I think at least in the case of Twitter in our society, it's a slippery slope.

You don't get there overnight.

You start using those tools a little bit, a little bit to slow down this information to just a little bit that you start sending emails to each other a little bit and it becomes more and more, you start forming justifications, you're still getting a little more and more comfortable kind of talking about the stuff.

I think there are several ways to fight that.

One is having hardcore integrity up front.

So don't even open the door.

But I think realistically human nature is what it is.

And so I think the only way is through transparency is this is why the nice, I hate the fact they got politicized.

I really hate that the right have run with it, like look, the left is planning the rig elections and so on.

To me, it shouldn't be left to right, it shouldn't be about politics, it's that transparency is good.

Other companies should do the same.

Facebook should do the same.

And in fact, that transparency will protect Facebook, it will protect Google.

Look, this is our situation, tell us what to do and we'll do our best.

I remember when I was writing the new right, Twitter's line was, we're not going to tell you guys what the metrics are by which we ban or censor people because then bad actors are going to navigate around them.

And it's like, what are you doing?

Just tell people in any establishment what are the rules for which behavior is permissible.

If I go to a store, if I return the sweater, is it cashback?

No refunds or if I get store credit, you know what I mean?

So that they were having this place which is presented as a huge international space for public discourse and they're not telling you ahead of time, this is what we will tolerate, this is what we'll warn you about, this is what will kick you out overnight.

That to me was crazy and outrageous.

And I'm really pleased with to what extent Elon is being open with their policies.

And what I really want to commend him about is, now I'm triggered, because one of the things that he took over, he's like, our first priority is getting with a child pornography and child exploitation, right?

That was, he's like, like racial slurs, homophobic slurs, anti-Semitic slurs, yeah, yeah.

That's cool.

Kids, kids getting harmed is number one.

And you know, he fired the old task force because they weren't doing their job, Eliza Blue, who you know, you know, she had been on this for a long time about people who were victims of child pornography, child exploitation, were emailing Twitter being like, these are my images, get them off.

And they're like, too bad porn is allowed on Twitter.

He starts trying to crack down on it.

This is a very hard problem because these bad actors have mechanisms to evade, you know, being banned.

They want to get there for lack of a better term product out there.

Forbes magazine, who is an agent of the devil, had a tweet and they tweeted this nine times.

You know, now that Elon's here, Twitter's child porn nightmare has gotten much worse.

They tweet this nine times.

I looked up, anyone listening this can look up, look at Forbes and do a search.

They never mentioned this problem before.

So now that Elon is doing something about it, now it's a problem for you.

No, it's a problem.

Elon's the problem.

It's not the child porn that you guys had a problem with.

And that to me is like, yeah, I understand that you think that Elon is a bad guy because he's upset your Apple cart.

This isn't a political issue.

This isn't a gotcha moment.

This is, all right, here are some tips.

We talked to 10 experts, digital experts.

And here are some techniques, Mr. Musk, that you might want to take from us free of charge that will help you solve this.

That would be a great article.

And I just want to use this opportunity to say quite clearly and strongly that even though Twitter and other parts of the internet are interpreting some of my statements to me and I'm right, in this case, meaning leaning right, right wing.

And in other cases, leaning left, left wing, I'm not, I'm apolitical, or at least I tried to be in my thinking, take one issue at a time.

I do take an opinion on each issue at a time, but I hate camps.

I try to avoid political camps in general.

It just, it sucks that promoting transparency in this case or celebrating transparency is somehow connected to being right wing.

No, it's being made into so supposed euphemism for being right wing.

It's just, it sucks.

It sucks, even though I'm wearing a red suit and this is a very red themed conversation.

Well, that's, I mean, the revolution was the color of blood.

I'm just going to let it sit on that for a second.

Okay.

You mentioned New York Times bestseller list.

You chose to self publish.

Yes.

So we just linger on that decision.

What are the pros and cons of self publishing?

The cons are it is acceptable in our current business climate or cultural climate for corporate media outlets to pretend the book doesn't exist.

So basically, and there's reason for it, I can make the case to them pretty easily.

If someone's doing it themselves, who is this guy, some crackpot writing crazy stuff from his basement, right?

It's a little different, I think for me, because I'm an established author, C-SPAN gave me an hour on book TV.

It's still a crackpot, but yeah, established for dear reader.

I think I was the first one to get an hour on book TV for a book that I did myself.

So there is space for that.

It didn't go through a vetting process the way a book going through a corporate publisher did.

So those are the minuses.

The pros are I can drop it and publish it immediately.
If you go through a corporate publisher, you have to wait a year, you can do what you could have the book you want instead of getting past the editor.
And some editors are very, very good and there's a whole spectrum.
Some of them not so good.
Some are good.
Some are not so good.
I know the best.
The real killers.
All right.
Let's beat that.
There's good people on both sides.
Yeah.
There's plenty of good people on both sides.
And I don't mean the white nationalists who I condemn totally.
But the thing is, in terms of money, you get six times as much profit when you're self-published than when you go through corporate publisher.
The buck stops here.
In one of my books that I co-authored, I won't even mention the name.
There is a typo and they don't care.
They didn't fix it for the paperback edition.
Here, since I'm going through Amazon, if there's a typo, I can fix it live and it updates.
Oh yeah?
Yeah.
You can just update it.
Yeah.
So that's very useful.
You can insert like a dick pic in one of the pages.
Okay.
Why are you so...
Why do you keep texting me to send you dick pics?
I didn't know.
Talk about North Pole.
Justin, you're right.
All right.
I get it.
That's why I'm not the editor.
I get it.
North Pole.
I get it.
Yeah.
The other advantage, just socially, is I think people are...
Like I found this with the Kickstarter I did for Dear Reader.
People are much more excited to buy it and promote it and talk about it when they know

you're doing it yourself instead of you're getting a big check from St. Martin's, Harper Collins, Penguin, whatever.

Are you also trying to use some kind of service to get it distributed to bookstores or you just going to do Amazon?

No, just Amazon.

Yeah.

And that's probably where most sales happen anyway.

The vast majority, yeah.

So it's not going to be in bookstores.

So what's...

How difficult is the process of getting it on Amazon?

So I'll tell you a funny story about how Amazon works and because this was a...

I always plan for...

Because everyone...

People's...

Here's another piece of advice I will give people.

Your life will be a lot easier if you realize that the majority of people in every industry are bad at their jobs.

Like once you have that realization, everything else makes sense and your life will be a lot easier, right?

So when I did the Anarchist Handbook, which was a collection of essays from various anarchists throughout history, when I submitted it to Amazon, there was a lot of copyright issues because they're like, do you have the rights to this essay?

Do you have the rights to this essay?

I had to go back and forth with them a lot to make sure I had copyright or everything was public domain.

And the thing is, you forward it, you update it, you give them the information, three days.

There's another problem, it's not three days, so it's weeks.

The other thing with their CreateSpace program is the paperback and the ebook, the Kindle, are approved independently.

So just because it's approved for one, it's not approved for the other.

After I published Anarchist Handbook and it was a big success, they unrolled a hardcover edition program.

So I'm like, oh, great, I'll put in hardcover.

They're like, sorry, this is too similar to Murray Rothbard's Anatomy of the State, which is a pamphlet or short book that Murray Rothbard wrote, I go, well, wait, I have the entirety of Anatomy of the State in here, I have permission from the Mises Institute in writing, which I'm giving to you to reprint it, and you guys already have it been published for a year as a paperback and ebook, and they're like too bad, blocked.

So it's not available as a hardcover on Amazon, even though it's available, maybe now it's going to be pulled as paperback and ebook.

So with this book, I was anticipating, all right, this is going to be some whatever.

The thing with how it works is you have to upload it and hit publish, and then you got to wait for the approval.

I'm like, okay, this is going to be who knows.

I just wanted to get it as fast as possible.

4 a.m., less than 24 hours, I get a notification, congratulations, your book's available for sale, and after run downstairs and pull it from publication, because otherwise it was out, and I didn't finish editing it.

So that's the situation there.

Oh, that's fascinating.

But that's powerful, it's all in your hands, it's all on you.

Yes, and I think the program is great.

It charts just like any other book.

The quality of the books is great.

I am very happy with, I have no contact with them.

My buddy Tucker Max, he had a company that did this, and they basically helped people sell, publish their own book.

They did Dave Goggins book.

I think you've talked to him, haven't you?

Yeah, maybe they emailed me or something.

And he said, I have done dozens, maybe hundreds of books with them.

I have never been able to get someone on the phone, so I don't know what's going on over there.

But guys, if you want to reach out to me, please call me.

It's michael at lexfreedman.com.

Freedman is spelled wrong.

Yeah, if you ever have any complaints, please just add me at Twitter about Michael, no.

Why do you think so few established authors self-publish?

I mean, it seems like it makes perfect sense in this modern society to be able to, when you finish the book, to publish it within a few days, a few weeks.

I think, I talked to Jordan Peterson about this at length, and Michaela, his daughter, who I'm also good friends with, she's actually named after Gorbachev, who's the big hero of this book.

Also a friend?

Michaela, you know, I was in talks to interview Gorbachev and then COVID hit, and that's one of the big regrets of my life that I didn't get, I think if I met him, I would be on my knees, literally kissing his feet, crying, because of, I mean, one of the big points of the white pill is there were so many moments when they were calling him up, sending the tanks, we want another Tiananmen Square, and he's like, fuck you.

So when you have anyone who has the capacity to murder thousands of people and chooses to withhold that power, like all I could do is applaud.

He resisted the cynicism.

Yes.

Wait, so the authors, why don't they publish all of the books?

I think they're still in the, you know how there's this whole idea about how if you're a movie actor, you don't go on TV, because that kind of ruins your brand.

And that's kind of going away, there's a lot of shows where the lead is now like a former

movie actor, and this is kind of like a big thing, like Matthew McConaughey, you know, he had a TV show on HBO, I believe.

So I think there's this kind of like, wait a minute, what's that?

And here we said, I said, all right.

You see, all right.

All right.

All right.

All right.

Matthew McConaughey.

All right.

All right.

I don't know what that is.

Sorry.

Just, I'll explain it.

Look at the context below.

Okay.

So I think for them, it might be A, a loss of credibility to some extent, but B, they're agent whose job is to sell them and get a big advance, wouldn't be encouraged to self-publish because they're agent, you know, so I don't think it's percolated to powerful people yet how feasible this is, and how profitable it is, and how they'll still be able to reach their audience.

And I feel if, you know, I don't, if Annaric's handbook wasn't such a gigantic success, I would be much more nervous about the white pill, but the fact that it was and that I saw it from start to finish, and I know the ins and outs, now I'm like, what are you guys bringing to the table?

So that's taking a year of my time and introducing edits that I would not otherwise agree with.

I think for some people, a book is a, is a sort of beacon of reputation.

So like, so it's really important to not, there's somehow not as much, you know, as much reputation associated with a self-published book unless it's successful.

And then, and then like the, its success outshines the actual, however it was published.

I think David, I guess David Goggins self-published his book.

Because it used to be you self-published when you can't get a book deal.

So it's like an admission of failure.

Yeah.

So you would recommend it as something for, for authors?

No, I would recommend it as something for authors of a certain stature, for lack of a better term, because it is still, in terms of your resume and your experience, it's better to get a crappy advance and have a book with St. Martins that goes nowhere than a self-published book that goes nowhere.

So the other thing is you have to make sure you have enough of an audience that you can move some copies.

What about only fans, would you recommend authors?

How much money do you think you and I can make if we're doing like bathtub scenes in only fans?

No, just chilling.
Just reading.
Like reading like Animal Farm.
Just like while sitting in the bathroom.
Yeah.
I don't know.
Okay.
Snowflake.
Snowball.
Sorry.
Snowball.
Okay.
Snowball.
All right.
What was his name?
Snowball.
No.
The horse.
Boxer.
I'm hung like a boxer.
I will work harder.
That guy, I think about that guy a lot.
Boxer?
Yeah.
His model was I will work harder.
Anything that happens.
So like the pigs would take advantage and his response to everything.
He was inspiring to me because he never gave in to the cynicism.
Right.
And they killed him.
Yeah.
Spoiler.
Sorry.
But that's a good way to die, never giving in.
Well, yeah, there's a lot of that in this book about the people who were like, I'm not,
you're not going to break me.
Like I am bigger than this.
Did you ever believe in Santa?
I remember the day I woke up on New Year's and there was a president under my pillow
and it was like, holy shit.
Because dead Maroas left it.
That's the whole thing.
He leaves your president under your pillow.
Right.

So you believed, but what I thought the story was going to be when you first realized he's not real.

I don't remember when I realized he wasn't real, but that story was, I did think it was real.

I was like, oh my God.

And okay, there's this, because I did too.

And I don't remember.

I don't think I can put myself in the mindset of the kind of person that believed he was real.

Because what did I think, what was my worldview that allowed like a giant person in a red suit to be real?

Although I do remember, I think the first time a Santa Claus showed up to our, like lived in this very small apartment.

And when he first showed up to our apartment, I just remember, because he was really drunk and smelled, it was like a party, it was like a New Year's party or whatever.

So one of the, one of the people dressed up as Santa Claus, I just remember this, wow, this got like real fast.

Of course, like I remember like thinking, of course, of course it would be like, what was I thinking?

What was I thinking?

It was going to be some perfect, like being a perfect being, like better than like the best of humanity.

It was just a regular dude, kind of fat, but like not sexy fat.

It was like, not really that jolly and kind of exhausted and I really have not showered in a while, but also funny.

I remember, I love telling the story, how old I was and I must have been five or six.

And it was just that age where you distinguish between what's real and what's not.

So like Vikings and Knights and Ninjas are real and Dragons and Mermaids and Elves are fake.

And I was on the corner of Shore Parkway right before the park in Bensonhurst in Brooklyn and around the corner wearing a denim vest was a little person, a dwarf.

And I saw him and I was like, all right, back to the drawing board.

Like, I don't know what's real or not anymore because I just saw a dwarf, so I don't know what's going on.

And since then, given your relationship with Alex Jones, you've continued the journey of not knowing what's real or not.

That's correct.

All right, let's talk about the next steps.

After Stalin took power, he started to actually implementing some of the economic, some of the policies in this idea of collectivization.

What's the story of that in the 20s leading into the 30s?

What was this idea?

What was the relationship between the regime, the ideology and the farmers?

Well, there's always been, and obviously very much this day, an enormous amount of enmity,

for lack of better term, hatred between Ukraine and Russia.

I mean, this is centuries in the making, if not more.

And the Ukraine, or Ukraine now, but at the time, I'm speaking of the region, and still is the bread basket of Europe.

It was very fertile lands.

This is where the food comes from.

And this was an issue also for Lenin, as I discussed in the book, because when you had famines there, you have famines throughout what later became the Soviet Union.

And the problem is, this happened in North Korea as well in the 90s, when they don't have food, if you let in foreigners and feed your people, all of a sudden you as the government are either superfluous or downright deleterious to their well-being, and that's a threat to your power.

So Lenin led in an American organization, the early 20s, which was actually headed by Herbert Hoover of all people.

And after a while, Hoover left because he found that the Bolsheviks were just taking the grain that the Americans were giving to feed the people and selling it for export while the people suffered.

And one of the people who grew up in these starvation times was a young Mikhail Gorbachev, where he had, I think, a quarter or a third of his village starved to death during one of these periodic famines.

Stalin's idea, this was a good mechanism for him to break the idea of Ukraine being an independent nation within its own identity.

And he had this kind of liquidation of the kulaks very famously, which thankfully is much more discussed now than it was maybe when you and I were kids.

And a kulak, the real meaning or the literal meaning is kind of this wealthy landowner. But very quickly, it's kind of like it becomes outgroup.

So there was a big incentive to call someone you didn't like a kulak and then good luck to you because now the eyes of the state are on you and you have to prove that you didn't hire people, you didn't have four cows or how many acres or so and so forth.

They took a huge percentage of the population, the kulaks, and they just deported them.

These are lands that they had for generations and they just spread them throughout broader Russia.

And many of them never made it and many of them were killed.

This was by design.

And the dark thing about the kulaks, like you said, when it becomes abused, when it becomes the outgroup, the kulak is supposed to be wealthier than sort of the general farmer peasant.

And so basically it gives you a mechanism of resentment and anybody that's better off must be better off because they're a kulak, let's get rid of them.

And it has just from an economics perspective, even leaving ethics aside, it basically completely de-incentivizes productivity.

It wants you to fail because if you succeed, you're a kulak and you're going to be tortured, you're going to be deported, you're going to be derided, all that.

And also you're poor because he's rich.

That's a big part of it.

So while this was going on and food was becoming a problem because you had, you know, for weather

conditions, there was a campaign about, oh, the reason you're hungry is because the kulaks are hoarding all their grain.

And if you're somewhere else in the Soviet Union, how are you supposed to know any better?

Because you're being told every year, the crops are bumper crop, bumper crop, bumper crop.

And now there's no food.

There's no bread.

And so, you see, we produced all this bread.

It's not getting to you because the kulaks are hoarding the grain.

So they came like, in what became known as the Haldemore and Applebaum, who's a great historian who, unfortunately, I disagree with a lot of contemporary politics, but who's done so much great work about the Soviet Union that I pretty much give her a blank check and whatever she wants to say.

Nowadays, you know, she wrote a great book about this called Red Famine.

And these activists descended on these villages like locusts, and their job was to requisition as much food as possible.

And they would come back, you know, at all hours of the night to make sure you weren't hiding food.

And this is what was so pernicious about it.

Your own body would betray you.

They could look at you and see that you're not losing weight.

You've got those chubby cheeks.

That means you have food, and that's the government's food.

That is the food of the people.

And if you are keeping food for yourself, you are stealing from the people.

You're an enemy of the people, and you deserve whatever comes to you.

And it got to a point where they didn't have grain to plant for the next harvest.

And what was even sicker is, you know, one of the big criticisms of the Tsar was his internal passport system, that I can't go where I want within Russia, the Russian Empire, without permission.

Stalin reintroduced this.

So if your village was targeted, you can't leave.

Some people got away, they tried to get to the cities and so on and so forth.

But you get to the city, and you're starving, you have no clothes, you're a kulak.

I'm hungry because of you, and now you're too lazy to work, get the F out of there.

And there were stories, you know, I have them in the white pill of this starving teenage girl, and she's begging for food, and the guy knocks the shopkeeper, knocks the food out of her hand, and she dies on the spot, and everyone in that line knew not to give her any food or any sympathy, because she's a kulak sympathizer.

And very quickly, if you're a kulak sympathizer, all that has to happen is someone has to call, I think it was the NKVD at the time, you know, the different names for the Cheka, the secret

police, and they had to be like, oh, you see, whatever her name was, Zhenya, she was a kulak sympathizer.

We saw a kulak who was trying to shake us down for food because too lazy to work, and she felt so bad for them.

So you might want to check in on Zhenya.

So yeah.

But in 32 and 33, Holodomor, it wasn't just small injustice here and there.

It was mass starvation and suffering.

Yes, millions starved to death in the Ukraine alone, and by design.

So you mentioned Ann Applebaum's book, Red Famine, Stalin's War on Ukraine, but another excellent book on the topic, and by the way, thank you for recommending that to me.

So it was...

Her work's amazing.

Yeah.

It's a really, really powerful book about not just about Holodomor, but like the context of Ukraine, basically the history of Ukraine that's relevant for today, to understand, understand the relationship between Russia and Ukraine.

But another great book is Bloodlands Europe Between Hitler and Stalin by Timothy Snyder.

I don't know.

I think you also recommend that to me at some point, or maybe not.

I haven't, but I'm familiar with that and read it.

So he does quite a bit of, it's brief, but extremely well researched writing about cannibalism there, and that it was not uncommon during the Stalin-imposed famine in the Soviet Ukraine for parents to cook and eat their children.

He writes, quote, survival was immoral as well as a physical struggle.

A woman doctor wrote to a friend in June 1933 that she had not yet become a cannibal, but was not sure that it shall not be one by the time my letter reaches you.

In quotes.

The good people died first.

Those who refused to steal or to prostitute themselves died.

Those who gave food to others died.

Those who refused to eat corpses died.

Those who refused to kill their fellow man died.

Parents who resisted cannibalism died before their children did.

And there's stories in there about, yeah, cooking, cooking your children.

The other thing about cannibalism, about famine in general, that stood out to me that unlike a lot of atrocities is the people that are starving are exhausted.

They're basically unable to think.

So they don't even have the energy to protest.

It's a strange kind of way to kill thinking in the populace.

That it kind of, I suppose it was obvious, but there's something fundamental about starvation where it slowly removes your humanity.

Yeah, there's a, there was a scene in the book where a lot of times people literally go crazy and there's a scene where mom, it's some nursing train station was nursing her

kid and she was going mad from hunger and she starts beating the crap out of her baby and kicking it.

And then she just reverts to normal like nothing had happened.

Yeah, madness, like you lose your mind.

And I mean, I don't know what the physiological cause of this, it's not, I think it's, if someone has dealt with glycogen depletion, it affects their mood, things like that.

So taking to an extreme who knows what happens when parts of the brain start functioning and start imploding.

But yeah, it's what I wanted, what just happened, this is something that's really cool regarding the Holodomor.

So there was one Western journalist, Gareth Jones, who was like, all right, something's not adding up here.

So he was supposed to take a train through Ukraine and he got out early and decided to start walking through the countryside to go from village to village.

And I'll get to his story in a minute.

Right before we started recording, I got this book in the mail, I ordered it on November 28th from Great Britain.

It was the only copy available on the whole internet.

It's called Experiences in Russia in 1931.

It is anonymous and it's Gareth Jones wrote the introduction.

It was published by the Alton Press in Pittsburgh.

It was self-published.

And it just says forward, it's just says by the author.

So it was the author who went alongside Gareth Jones was summoned by the name of Henry John Hines, who was heir to the Hines fortune.

And you only know that if you start looking at the internet because his name is not in this book.

So I opened this book up right when I got it right before we're taping and it's signed by him.

And it took me a second.

I'm like, wait a minute.

Who's this signed by?

And it's H.J.

Hines because his name was Jack Hines, but it was Henry John Hines from.

So this is, I'm very excited that I had this little miracle in the mail, but Christmas miracle.

It's a Christmas miracle.

He traveled.

They traveled together.

They traveled together.

So this book's a diary of their travels.

Why do you think so few journalists, they was able to do what he did.

So there were several reasons.

First of all, if you were a Western journalist in the Soviet Union, you were under very strict

circumstances.

First of all, you could be deported at any time.

You had no, there was no pretense that you have a right to be a journalist in, especially as a representative of a capitalist by which they met Western paper.

Second, it was a complete nightmare getting your papers, your articles filed because you had a censor that you had to go through and the censor's job whose life depended on it was to make sure that your story was advantageous to the Soviet Union or at least neutral. And they had all sorts of techniques, you know, they could spy, they spy on you all the time.

They censored you around because, you know, you're a foreigner, but also that censor had to answer somebody.

So all the censor has to do is be like, look, I having trouble with my supervisor and the reporter could be like, well, can I talk to the supervisor?

It's like, well, I'm sorry.

That's not possible.

It's a deadline, but it's too bad bureaucracy doesn't recognize the needs of deadlines.

So there was a big pressure, a lot of pressure on Western journalists to have to get through this net.

And that's literally constant, you know, every story, it's going to be a fight.

So at a certain point, you're just going to be like, all right, and you're going to pre-censor yourself.

You know, if you know, all right, if I include this, it's not going to get through.

What are you supposed to do?

I think human beings are naturally, and also a lot of these journalists were pro-Soviet.

They thought this is the society of the future.

At least everyone's trying to make it a better country for everyone, not like back home where the poor slip between the cracks.

We got to do what we can to make this work.

And you know, there was a lot of, I don't want to say conspiracy, but within the industry, there was a consensus that the Stalin was the good guy, and we were, if not the bad guy, certainly not as good in certain regards.

So when this news of the famine started percolating, all the other Western journalists besides Gareth Jones and Malcolm Muggeridge were saying this isn't true.

It's nothing that they haven't seen before.

The paper that took the lead in this was in New York Times with their guy Walter Duranty, who would previously won a Pulitzer and had interviewed Stalin, which was an enormously rare honor for a Westerner.

And he, because he has so much experience covering Russia and the Soviet Union, he basically took the lead and other people followed his lead.

He was kind of the dean of the press corps in Russia, and the thing, there's so many quotes I have from him where he's not only denying that this mass starvation is happening, he's also going after journalists who are questioning the narrative.

And he says things like, look, this is nothing that the Russians haven't experienced before. They're simply tightening their belts.

And it's like, you only have to tighten your belt when you don't have enough food.
It's not like they started a new exercise regimen and now their body fat's dropping.
That's why would someone tighten their belt?

So that was one.

And the New York Times had a 13-page article, big headline, Russians Hungry Not Starving.
And he went after Jones, he went after Margarige, I believe, no, he did go after Margarige.
But the point being that this is just propaganda from people who want the Soviet Union to fail.
They don't understand what they're building here.

He had so many excuses, like, oh, the reason all these Russians are supposedly leaving
their villages to go to the cities isn't because there's no food.

It's because they're nomadic.

It's tradition.

They go from town to town looking for new experiences.

And it's just at a certain point, I think it was 1941, where he was eventually like,
or 51, rather, I don't remember, he was like, oh, well, I guess I was kind of wrong.

And it's like, any journalist worth his salt can admit when he's wrong.

And it's like, well, were you worth your salt?

Because he explicitly said, there's no point in sending out journalists to look for themselves.

I've been through the countryside and everyone's fine.

And it's just that the loudest people are making noise, whereas everyone else is doing
the work and trying.

And this isn't about famine, but it's about Western skeptical about collectivization,
which is just simply a new way of farming.

And yeah, it was a new way of farming and the results were by design and also accidentally
absolutely catastrophic.

How hard was it to see the truth at that time, do you think?

Do you think that was a mistake that's understandable to make as a journalist?

If my job as a journalist, I have two bosses, if I'm in Moscow, I've got my reporter in
New York or London or whatever, but I've got my sensor here and he is making sure I have
a house, the department, he makes sure I have food, he makes sure I have access to dignitaries.
He's my lifeline.

If I piss him off, I'm on the next plane out of town.

So is that enough?

Is that enough to slowly suffocate the integrity of a journalist?

I don't think it was slow at all and it was clearly enough.

And because what are they going to do?

I disagree with that.

I think the failure of integrity has to come from the American side that it's just the
flock of fish or whatever that all move in the same narrative.

I think journalists would like to be the kind of people that have integrity.

So if they are conscious of sacrificing their own integrity, they wouldn't do it.

If they're conscious of an act that's doing it, they wouldn't do it.

So it has to happen like a lobster slowly boiling.

No I think it happens when everyone else is, it's a Greek chorus, right?

It's a chorus, but that's exactly, that's right.

So it's not about the act, but they will, I mean, I've talked to journalists where

I get the sense that they will sell their soul for access.

Because that's their job.

Is it though?

Because what they do, what journalists do, I've seen American journalists.

They take a huge amount of pride for having gotten the interview, whatever that is, the Putin interview.

And first of all, they're glowing with pride.

It seems like they're always showing off to the other journalists back in America.

So they're showing off like, look, I got the access, you didn't.

And second thing they're doing when they show up to that interview is they ask all the questions that signal to the other journalists that we're on the same side.

They ask the most generic, aggressive questions to which they know the answers to, they just, they want to basically get the access and ask the quote unquote, heart-hitting questions that they know will not be answered.

And this is the entire machinery of it.

It's not, it's, that's modern journalism.

And I suppose at that time, it was worse.

It was worse.

They weren't even doing the heart-hitting, the, the display of heart-hitting questions.

Right.

Because think about, think about what high status that is.

If I'm an American journalist in Moscow, I'm allowed in this secretive country, I'm in a, I'm the, I'm the guy who's very privileged to have access to live in Moscow and tell Americans which are all fascinated about this new society, the future, what it's like.

And as soon as I kind of start questioning the narrative, I'm going to get kicked out and humiliated very publicly.

I thought you were in Moscow.

What am I supposed to say?

So, you know, they, Eugene Lyons was, you know, he's one of the heroes in the book.

He was a young communist and I think it was United Press.

He was working for, they sent him there.

And when he went there, he's like, oh, this is not what I thought it was going to be like.

This is horrible.

And he turned very heavily against it, but he talks about how they would write one thing and say another thing and then think another thing.

And each of those steps was just more and more like kind of lying in terms of maintaining your sanity and maintaining your narrative.

So you reference Ann Applebaum and say that quote, starvation was not simply a consequence.

It was the goal and it was the law.

Stalin intended to break the Ukrainians once and for all.

It thus became common for villagers to spy and inform on one another, turning in a neighbor for having a sack of grain might be the easiest and safest way to procure food for one's

family.

Yeah.

To what degree was this the intention?

To what degree did Stalin anticipate this kind of suffering as a consequence of the collectivization policy?

I don't know that he intended the suffering to be a consequence of the collectivization, but it was quite apparent and I think there's a pretty heavy consensus nowadays that his goal was very much because Ukraine again, you know, resented the Tsar and had this kind of very contentious relationship with Russia, which obviously very clearly remains today. I mean, the hatred of Ukrainians for Russians preceded Putin's war.

I mean, this is even when I was a kid, you know, I obviously don't remember it, but my parents just told me like the hatred that they had.

And understandably, I mean, they're basically under foreign occupation, what they regard as foreign occupation for.

So your parents talked about a hatred by Ukrainians towards Russians?

Oh, yes.

Oh, yes.

I mean, I, you know, I certainly haven't visited there this year because of the most recent invasion in February, that hatred is nationwide and very intense, but I don't know, I think the feelings, the emotions were much more complex before.

But at the same time, they were under occupation before, right?

And they couldn't speak Ukrainian, they had to speak Russian.

So this was a thing.

But because of the forced intermixing, it's a, it's a more complex story.

Okay.

I mean, they weren't certainly fans.

Yeah, but there's people that came from Russia that are living there, they're marrying, they're falling in love, they're working with each other, so like there is a, the bigger atrocity of the genocide of it, but there's also the reality of intermixing of the peoples, right?

Well, sure.

I mean, there's the atrocity of slavery in the United States, but then there's also a reality that there's now an intermixing of a, of a peoples and now they fall in love and they live after slavery is abolished.

It's just the, like a, after the genocide, proceeds a kind of generational integration that still remembers, like the suffering reverberates, but they're still, it's a different culture that's created.

And now I think, I mean, I have complex story, I mean, most of my family is from Ukraine, so I have a, and my understanding is grounded in Soviet Ukraine, but there's something in the last 30 years that's different, where now after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there's a true, maybe renewed fight for independence, and that's a different thing.

But there's also a difference, like, you know, if I go to North Korea as an American, right, they're very friendly now, right?

They don't perceive me as part of the Yank devils, they're like, okay, you're an American, but you, you know, you come from America.

So yeah, there's going to be intermarriage, but that's a big difference between the perception of Russia as an entity, as opposed to some individual Russians.

I just, that wasn't the, the, the experience I've had talking to a lot of friends and family in Ukraine until the war started.

Really, so they really didn't have this kind of low-key animosity towards Russians?

No.

There was a lot of factional conflict inside Ukraine.

Okay.

Now, the whole country is united.

I think, I think there's a clarity now.

The war gave a clarity that wasn't there before.

No, this is, I was saying earlier, how humans define themselves by opposition.

So now that there's a war, it's like, okay, this, all this little stuff doesn't matter.

We are all united because we have a common enemy.

But there's also, as you know, there's regions and there's, there's just groups of different people that, and then one of the big divides, of course, is the city versus rural.

And then in the case of Ukraine, it's, it's Eastern Ukraine and Western Ukraine.

It's very difficult to know what the truth is because my personal experience is sampled.

Right.

You know, I don't, I don't know how many Ukrainians I know, maybe like 30 or 40 before this trip, like 30 or 40, and then I'm close with just a handful, but then it's hard to know because you get a lot of Western press perspective and you get the Russian perspective and you got other perspectives.

And it's very hard to know how much hate there is outside of this conflict.

So my, my, my primary question is, and this is what I asked a lot of people when I visited Ukraine is, will you ever, will you ever be able to forgive the Russians?

And a lot of people said, never, never.

So this isn't just about assuming, assuming we win, they would say, assuming we win was still would not ever forgive, never, never forgive.

And, and they said it in a way where like, not only us, but our children will never forgive.

And that, and it wasn't just, you know what, it wasn't just about Russia or the Russian leadership is about the Russian people.

But a lot of people also said that this is, this is our feeling currently.

We understand.

Like you, you're lost in the, the rage of war.

Yeah.

Because you lose so much.

I mean, if you asked Americans, would you ever be friends with Germany or Japan?

It'd be like, are you kidding?

After Pearl Harbor?

Yeah.

But of course, most Americans didn't feel Pearl Harbor is different.

It's a good point when it's your own land, but when, when imagine it wasn't just Pearl Harbor, but it was New York and Chicago and, and Dallas and all these cities being, being

bombed.

Yeah.

Yeah.

It's, it's just a linger on this war in Ukraine currently.

Does it break your heart to see what's going on there now that it's on the same land as the same cities, the same stories and now like brought back to the surface, like the, the generational pain as it was in the, in the time that you're writing about.

Do you think it's a fundamentally different country, different war, different situation, or does it, do you, do you hear echoes of the same?

I don't think it's the same because I think there is no one, I mean, there is no one who is like, I'm glad this is happening to the Ukrainian people, right?

So even the people who are for Putin and for the invasion and whatever justification they might have for his war, no one is like, yeah, let's get those, you know, darn Ukrainians.

I think there was that sense in America after 9-11, when we invade Afghanistan and Iraq and there was like Eftos, Iraqis, Eftos, Afghan people.

Whereas now, I think it's completely opposite.

I think, I don't, I also think a lot of Russians, I'm sure if I ask them, they're not thinking like, let's wipe the Ukrainian people off the map.

I think whatever reasons they have, it's not kind of going out to this, even if you have to kind of rile up people against the citizenry, it's not to that level of the hatred of the Kulaks, hatred of those villages.

There's still a belief though, amongst the soldiers outside of the big cities, their belief that the Ukrainian people, who the Russian soldiers believe are their brothers and sisters, are occupied by an evil regime, so you need to save them from the evil regime.

That's also very different from, you know, the Holodomor.

And also, there is dispute in the press about the causes, the consequences, the victims, the villains of Putin's war.

But when it came to this, no one, no one is denying that the war is happening.

The New York Times isn't saying everything is fine and the only reason people are saying it's a problem is because they hate Putin or they hate Zelensky, that's not a thing.

The fact that we have so much footage of what's happening in Ukraine, it takes two seconds to go on Google and you have a map of Russian advancement, what parts are they occupying, what parts are not of their control.

I did a little live stream, I raised money for Ukrainian refugees to feed them, because that's my concern, just keeping people fed.

There was none of that.

And the two people who kind of spoke the truth, Gareth Jones, was shot, I think, the day before his 30th birthday while he was undercovering us, I think it was in Mongolia, Malcolm Margaridge had problem finding work when he exposed this.

And I think, like we were talking about earlier, the ubiquity of things like cell phones and camera phones would make something like this, I don't know, I wouldn't say an impossibility, they could still do it, but it would be really hard to cover it up.

Well, to push back on that, if you just look at Iran, I would draw a difference, I agree with you mostly, but I would also draw a different distinction when the atrocities

happening to your own people versus there's a war.

Ukraine is a sovereign independent nation, there's now a war between two nations.

It feels like it's easier for journalists to somehow reveal the truth in that.

When the atrocity is happening within the Soviet Union, for some reason, that's easier to hide.

That's easier for journalists to deceive themselves and easier for the authoritarian leader to hide the information.

I agree with you.

And so that's the dark, I mean, that's why people, maybe you can educate me on this, but this is why I think people don't talk about Haldemur and other atrocities, the Great Leap Forward, because it's inside the country versus the Holocaust, that's part of a war.

Why is that that we, there were two almost like afraid to polite to what is it that we don't want to cover the atrocities because side the country, like it's their business, so we don't want to touch it.

What is it?

I think it's that what we refer to as the news is in the business of selling narratives, right?

And the narrative of the Holocaust is a very powerful one, which is if you let hatred of a subgroup in a population get out of control, this is the ultimate consequence.

And this is something that we all have to be scared of and do everything in our power to avoid in the future for any group.

Whereas what's the narrative of the Haldemur?

Sometimes governments kill their own citizens.

There's nothing you could do about it.

There's nothing we, I mean, they wouldn't have let us send food, they wouldn't acknowledge, like the newspapers, even Russia weren't acknowledging it.

Like what's the, like this is some of the issues I had with regard to trying to advocate for the North Korean people.

The reporters would be like, well, what can I do as an American?

It's a very natural question.

And I'm like, I don't know.

All I know is how to speak to what is happening.

But in terms of next steps, I don't have a good answer for you.

So that is where the news kind of does break down if there isn't a story or a call to action, the kind of, you're kind of almost like having a movie with a cliffhanger and there's no sequel.

It's like, what am I supposed to do here?

Like this is not scratching that itch, which for me, as a consumer of news, you know, layman is like, okay, here's the story.

There was a bad guy and the cops shot him or they took him to jail and now the bad guys caught beginning middle end.

Here it's just like, Mao did this, a lot of people were executed and starved.

Isn't that awful?

Well, and Mao's still in power and now Richard Nixon is raising a toast to him.

Like that story is just like, how am I supposed to feel about this?

Yeah, it feels like when there's tanks and there's war and there's military conflict and it's more actionable.

You can cover it.

Yeah.

And it did seem like Nazi Germany, I don't know if the Holocaust was the thing that made it most coverable.

I think it was that this is a threat to the entire civilization.

Well, yeah, we were at war with them.

Yeah.

That's what makes it coverable.

And if the Holocaust was happening just inside that country, inside of Germany, or even if it didn't expand beyond Poland.

Yeah, it would be like a footnote.

It wasn't many ways of footnote.

Like many of the early steps toward it was like, they didn't cover it.

It's just like, all right, they're being oppressive toward their own people.

Okay.

You know, some of the, maybe if you negotiate certain peace treaties with the Soviet Union and with Germany, like you're too, the basic, the pacifist imperative, oh boy.

Sorry, Santa.

So we say every time you masturbate, no, after you're done, you know, I'm sorry, all right.

All right.

Now see, I hate it when you don't yes and because it leaves me in a hole I dug for myself.

And I sit there in a hole in my sadness.

How long have you been writing this book?

I mean, two years.

Mentally, it was like two years since you spent time with it.

What?

No, almost three, two and a half.

Yeah.

And I suppose it stages you much longer, like you said, your family.

So in many ways, this is a book you've been writing your whole life.

I think that's fair that all my work's been leading to this.

Yeah.

It's certainly the most, in my opinion, the most important thing I've done.

What stands out to you about Hallinmore?

What moments, what aspects of human nature stand out to you?

I don't know.

I think that story is, I don't want to say story, but I mean, like that incident is,

I mean, I was familiar with it before, you know what I mean?

So I kind of knew about it in part thanks to kind of the North Korean work and coming from Ukraine.

The thing that was also kind of insane about it is that they were taking all this grain

and not using it even to feed the Russian people.

They were selling it for export for hard currency.

I think what the takeaway there, and I think, again, this is something Westerners and especially Americans don't appreciate.

They think that evil often has like a logic to it, right?

And it's like, because it makes no sense to them, like why would they kill their own people?

Therefore it probably didn't happen, right?

There's that thing.

They really think like, okay, they can understand country A, Congress, country B, and slaughter as a bunch of people, country B as a means of conquest.

That kind of makes sense to them.

They know that thing.

But like, why are you starving all these people?

What are you gaining out of it?

That doesn't make sense to them.

And because it doesn't make sense, there's kind of like, well, it's probably more the story that I'm hearing.

And a lot of times there's not.

It's just like evil for the sake of power.

And we don't really have that, certainly anywhere near that scale and never have, certainly, you know, since America has been a thing.

I mean, the fact that this is like the 30s, you know what I mean?

This isn't that long ago.

But I think also the narrative in some ways is how, you know, technology is also something that kind of people have mixed feelings about.

Like I said this before, and this is something I really believe very strongly, the ability of information to be captured and spread easily is such an effective tool in exposing humanity at its worst.

Because it's one thing if I sit here and tell you what I saw in these villages.

It's another thing I sat you down and showed you a YouTube and, you know, you and I don't know what it's like to look in the eyes of someone who's thinking about eating their own kids and you see that face and you know it's not something some CGI, it will haunt you forever.

Just looking at the different mechanisms that made all of this happen.

So this is not just one guy Stalin having a policy, there's a whole system.

I mean, one of it is just a system of fear, but how do you implement that system of fear?

Well, there's a giant bureaucracy of fear.

Yeah.

And what he implemented with the great terror is...

That's in the 30s, in the late 30s.

It's throughout the 30s, but yeah, like it starts in the mid to late 30s.

Basically, you know, communism was based on the common good and the public good.

And anything private, which was bourgeois, was a problem.

When they were started, you know, when the revolution came, the October revolution,

they wanted to recreate society entirely.

And that included like, okay, let's make it so everyone eats in like cafeterias.

So they're eating by themselves.

Let's design buildings so everyone has to share bathrooms.

Like their whole plan was to have eliminate any kind of concept of privacy at all.

They also had this bizarre kind of radical idea of like attacking shame.

So many of these, you know, before the 1917, people were also very involved, like free love because the idea of like having this private bond between husband and wife was also bourgeois in old fashioned and, you know, we're the society of the future.

That changed relatively quickly.

But they were talking about things like raising kids communally and so on and so forth.

So for Stalin, if you and I are friends, we have a bond that's a threat to him.

The family's a threat.

Any kind of organization is a threat because it's a power center that is not between a relationship between you and him.

Now you have a relationship with somebody else.

So he systemically went through that whole society and, you know, it became, there were certain things that became a crime.

Then it became a crime to be a spouse of the enemy of the people.

Now right away, I as a child become an orphan because my dad was the name of the people.

My mom is married to an enemy of the people.

Now I don't have parents.

They get arrested or executed or whatever.

But now I know where to go, but I can't go to my friend's house because their family doesn't want to take in a child at the enemy of the people.

You had this culture where everyone was very much encouraged to turn people in.

And if you're arrested and tortured, you're like, okay, who are your accomplices?

And now you just got to name names people you knew.

And then it becomes this whole chain and it's like, how am I going to protest my innocence if Lex just said, you know, I worked with Michael and we were working with Trotskyites and we were plotting to overthrow Stalin, Lex testified to this, he signed a confession.

What am I supposed to do now, right?

So it worked its way in a most viral fashion through the whole society.

There was this amazing moment where these poor people, peasants, because obviously the power lists are often going to be caught in the web, they were going to jail for being Trotskyites and they had to ask themselves, what's a tractorist?

Like they didn't even know who Trotsky was.

And the other thing is ethnicity was a problem, right?

If you were an ethnicity, you have more in power with other members of that ethnicity than you have with this kind of broader Soviet culture.

So he would just deport entire populations from their ancestral lands to other parts, A, to spread the population around, but also to break that link between the peoples and their lands.

There was this 1937 NKVD order against Polish people where it's just like, if you had come

from Poland or had just this whole list and basically people were being arrested because they had Polish last names and I think it was a million people were killed, like some astronomical number.

So there was this, anything that was a bond was a threat to him and it went systemically. So after he had all these kind of executions of people who were like Lenin's people, the old Bolsheviks, then he went after, he started arresting the secret police.

He arrested all the cops.

He arrested all the judges and all these prisoners got to see the judges who yelled at them for being counter-revolutionaries and spies.

Now they were in the jails.

If you were a foreigner, if there was a huge push from the Soviet Union toward African Americans, right?

Cause they're like, look, you were living in a racist country.

We have no racial inequality.

Come live here.

A bunch of them went and they were all vanished, you know, anyone who knew information about the outside world, if you were a foreigner, Andre Babel, I forget his first name.

He had a French writer he was friends with.

He was arrested and shot because he's a spy because you're friends with Melrose and that means, if you know a foreigner, you're a spy.

Speaking of Esperanto became a crime, having a pen pal, literally anything that was some kind of chain between yourself and someone else was a threat and it was grounds for arrest.

It was the Russians would joke about how relieved they would be if someone knocked on your door in the middle of the night to tell you your house was on fire because it wasn't the NKVD coming to arrest you.

And of course, most of the accusations probably were completely false.

So not only could you not do all of those things, you were also a victim of just being late to work became a felony and also not doing your job became a felony because now you're taking food or product away from the people and you're supposed to be there working for the people.

There's this one story which, you know, I was doing the audio book and this is like I still try and get through without crying.

This was 1920.

They were a bunch of kids in Moscow who were pickpockets between ages 11 and 15.

They rounded them up and they're like, all right, point out your accomplices and they would take them in the trams and you have to point out people.

And they would take them back to the cellar, beat the crap out of these children and then they'd take them out again.

And if they didn't point out to anybody, they'd beat them and they're like, all right, so they just start pointing at random.

And the thing that was really sick about this story, if that wasn't sick enough, is that the screams that the other criminals, the adult hardened criminals had to hear from these children as they realized they were being taken back to the cellar.

It was just horrifying.

And so they tortured people, they tortured confessions out of people at scale.
And the dark aspect of this is it's all, it's like this weird, it's a bureaucracy of torture.
So like it's not like there's, what is it?
The torturer is afraid of, like does it so that he doesn't become the prisoner.
Right.
And then it's like, oh, you couldn't get a confession out of him.
Are you an enemy of the people now as well?
And the thing that was even crazier is that a lot of these interrogators were frustrated
because they're like, look, we both know you're innocent.
Just sign this confession to make my life easier.
They knew it was crap.
Stalin joked about, Stalin joked about this.
This is one of his little jokes.
There was a kid who was arrested and he was said, oh, it was forced to say, you wrote
Eugene O'negan, which is a play, goes, that play was by Pushkin.
And they tortured him.
They tortured and tortured him.
And then his parents are walking down the street and they run into a secret police and
they go, congratulations.
And they go, for what?
They go, your son wrote Eugene O'negan.
Like he admitted to it last night.
Like it's just like they could get you to say anything.
And what else was really, really sick, which they understood is they lower the death penalty
for kids, I think to either 14 or 12, I don't remember the top of my head.
And what Stalin's head of the secret police did is when you were interrogating someone,
you either had to have some of your family members, of that family member's possessions
on the desk or a copy of the decree that saying that they can go after your family and the
amount of people who would confess to anything when they saw their family was in danger.
And they knew this wasn't a bluff, was astronomical.
And then it becomes a chain.
Because if you confess and I have your confession, how hard is it to get your neighbor?
What do you make of the, for a time, for most of the time, the NKVD was about the head
of NKVD, Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria.
Oh, Beria.
Yeah.
So I have a death warrant signed by him hanging in my kitchen that I acquired.
He was one of the most evil people who ever lived.
The thing that Americans don't appreciate is how clever some of this sadism is.
So there was one actress, I think he took her back to his house and he asked her to,
he tried to get her to sleep with him and he promised her that if she did her father
and either her husband or her grandfather, which one it was, is going to be released
from jail.
Well, they were already dead at that point.

He had them executed.

They're still finding the bodies of the women he murdered in the grounds of his dachets and embassy now.

And the thing is, Stalin knew, because at one point Stalin, there's a picture of Stalin's daughter in his lap, you know, and she was at his house one day and Stalin calls up.

He goes, get out of there immediately.

So he, like a good bureaucrat, he had a, he kept a list of all of his sexual partners.

It's still sealed, but both him and his bodyguard had this list.

So just to clarify, yeah.

He headed the operation that did this whole giant mechanism of forced confessions.

He was part of expanding the Gulag, so he was in the head of the Gulag, but he was part of this giant machine.

And his famous quote was, show me the man and I'll show you the crime.

But on top of that, what you're describing is he was also related or not, was also just a mass rapist.

Yes.

And there's some dispute about whether he went after kids with his rapes, but there's plenty of adult women that were targets for this.

There was also another little joke about him, about how Stalin is looking for his pipe and he can't find it and he calls Beria.

And he's like, okay, I can't find this pipe.

And then the afternoon he calls Beria again, he's like, oh, I found the pipe.

He goes, but come at Stalin, we've got four people to confess the steal already.

So you have to laugh, but then you think about the nature of how it operates.

Well, it also the fact that this kind of person was allowed to run.

I mean, I suppose it's all different kinds of evil and rape was just a part of the story.

His own personal willingness to oversee torture and commit torture himself and rape.

But it's also what happens when you're in a country where it has no rights of any kind.

And by the way, I should mention that people should get your book and audio, when is your audio book coming out?

It's in a couple of weeks, so it'll be out shortly.

You gave me the great honor of voicing this man.

That's for the promo.

Yeah.

For the promo.

Yeah, the video.

Excellent.

I appreciate that.

For a moment, I actually, it was really difficult.

Really?

Yeah.

It was just a sentence.

I understand.

I understand.

Because it takes you to that place.

Oh yeah.

I told her, scream if you want, doesn't matter.

And he was right.

That's the thing.

He wasn't bluffing.

These women could scream their head off.

No one's going to come help him.

He would drive around Moscow at night in his limo looking for victims.

But somehow me saying those words was tough.

I'm sure.

It was tough.

Because this is where we came from, do you know what I mean?

This isn't just like some kind of Tolkien villain.

But it also was tough because I could see myself being somewhere in that machine somewhere.

Somehow that put me right there.

Any cog in that machine is committing evil.

Yes.

That's the dark thing.

I think the higher you are to the top, the closer you are to the top, the more ability you have to stop it.

But the less, the more freedom you have to stop it, I suppose.

To a point, yeah.

But like the little things.

So Beria had the freedom to commit rape or not to.

And so he chooses to sort of increase the amount of evil he's putting out into the world.

Because then you have to counterbalance that as dark as this calculus is.

After Stalin dies, that week they start making the gulag shrink.

They start pulling back on the concentrated, the labor camps.

That is a big plus in his side.

You start liberating, having this mass amnesty and freeing people from work camps.

That's not minor thing.

So it's crazy.

It's like, I'm not Saint Peter, right?

I don't know.

I'm not saying he's a good person, but it's kind of insane that someone can do things that everyone listening to this would regard as pure evil.

And at the same time, this guy also, when the time came, saved tens of thousands of lives.

So in some sense, Stalin is the kind of cancer that permeates all the Soviet minds.

And once it's gone, you almost like wake up, wait a minute, what the fuck was I a part of?

And Khrushchev was a 56 when he gave a secret speech behind closed doors.

And he's just like, all this criticism of Stalin was true.

This is complete on one Marxist, he tried to salvage the system.
This is not what Marxist is about.
We can't have a personality cult.
Stalin killed all these top generals.
And when Hitler turned to betray the pact and invaded, Stalin didn't believe his buddy Hitler was going to do this.
And as a result of this, we lost a lot of territory and lives.
This is not a military genius.
This was Stalin being an idiot or a moron, whatever term you want to be.
So yeah, but the thing is, Khrushchev also was a butcher.
He had a lot of blood in his hands.
You don't become the thick-stalin seat without having overlooked a lot of murder and chaos.
So it's such a, that's why it's called subtitled books, A Tale of Good and Evil.
There's so much malevolence to go around.
What do you think was going to Stalin's mind in the 20s and the 30s?
Did he directly allow himself to acknowledge the reality of the suffering he was causing?
What does it take to be that human?
I'm almost interested to extract lessons from that for leaders of today.
How hard is it?
Is it that Stalin is evil or can you just delude yourself gradually into where you don't have a sense of the effect of your policies and the populace?
You're not deluding yourself because you have around you an entire government of people telling you 24-7 how great you are, how thankful they are for you, how awesome you are, you're the best.
So that's certainly going to play into it.
I've asked myself that question as well.
Do these people believe they're on bullshit?
I think the receipts are when Elena Ceausescu, who's one of the four women on the cover, when she's being taken away to be executed in 1989, she's yelling at the soldiers, how could you?
I raised you like a mother.
So she at least believed her own bullshit.
With Stalin, he was obviously extremely intelligent.
I think it's kind of easy for us to kind of psychologize and say he's a sociopath, he's a narcissist, he's this, he's that.
But at a certain point, if you're surrounded by a culture dedicated to glorifying you and everyone you meet is so happy to see you, and oh my God, all your pronouncements are so good, and if you make a decision that's wrong, the people around you, it's their job to tell you why it's not your fault.
It's the fault of the Wreckers or it's the fault of Hitler or whoever it is, the Kulaks.
And at a certain point, the human mind wants to believe how great it is, especially someone in that vaunted position.
But he had his, there was this one funny, I'm using the word loosely, quote, when Hitler invades Russia and he couldn't believe it and he's just missing in action for days because

how could Hitler betray me?

We had a deal, birds of a feather, and he had this quote about like, we've taken Lenin's legacy and shit it out of our asses.

I think he was very aware, that's no question that he was aware, that in terms of being a philosopher or a thinker, he wasn't on Lenin's level, right?

So that was, I'm sure, played a lot into his psychology.

He never quite lived up to the, like, everything he tried.

I mean, there's some sense that the collectivization, that this idea was a failure, the way he responds to the economic policy being a failure is to lean in and basically torture anyone who says it's a failure and double down on the policy.

That says something about-

But it wasn't a failure, it broke the Ukrainians.

You don't think he believed early on, that's what it turned into, but you don't think in the very early days, there was a thought that collectivization is the right mechanism by which to enact communism in the nation.

But I think his goal was to break their spirit and getting them fed was secondary, right?

And given the fact that they stopped complaining, because they're dead, he got what he wanted.

He got a compliant population.

I mean, that's really interesting.

I didn't- I wonder how much disagreement there is about, because if that was the goal from the beginning, that's a different level of evil.

I think that was clearly the- So his- Like I said earlier, he broke with Lenin because he wanted socialism in one country, right?

That was his vision, right?

And he was also very aware that what became the Soviet Union was extremely diverse, first of all, it's a gigantic country.

It's a big country on earth.

It's not always gigantic, you had all these peoples, these nationalities within it that have had historical enmity, and they're not gonna have loyalty to Moscow.

He's a Georgian himself, this was always a big problem.

So that was what he wanted to do as well, is to homogenize and have them be standardized.

And I don't see how you do that without either massive reeducation, which is only gonna go so far, or really just crushing people's spirits.

So like a forced homogeneity.

Yeah.

And the other big thing, a big element of Soviet culture and the Soviet mythology, I mean he called his name with- He changed his name to Stalin, I can't even pronounce his Georgian name, Drogos really or something like that.

It means man of steel.

So a large part of it, and this still remains in Russian culture to this day, I see in my family too, and like other Russians I know, there is this pride in ruthlessness.

And this kind of like, I'm so tough, like nothing's gonna affect me.

Like yeah, we're gonna suffer, but it's for a greater good or for the long term, and not to be kind of sentimental or squeamish about things.

That was a big part of it.

Don't take that away from me too, Michael.

What do you mean?

Taking everything.

Am I wrong?

I admire not stoicism, but that kind of hardness, I look forward to myself, there's nothing to do with Stalin.

But not to the extent that like, for example, like if you see someone suffering, and that's being used as a mechanism to get you changed your opinion, you're like, they're not gonna get to me.

Like that is very much part of that Russian psychology.

Right.

At least at that time.

Yes.

I still largely know.

I'm not gonna be manipulated by someone else's suffering or weakness.

That kind of thing.

I think that's really part of it to this day.

I don't know.

I don't know how much of his character, how much of his reality.

Sure.

Sure.

I remember, I knew that, I knew as someone who was, him and his fiance were Russian, and they had this big fight, she took off the ring, right?

And she's like, he's like, that's it.

And just like the way he told the story to me, she's like, what do you want me to say?

Oh, don't leave me, baby.

I can't live without you.

Like that nasty cruelty, which I don't know, I know, I know you're, I don't know if there's a Russian thing.

That's just, that's just the people thing.

I don't think it's an American thing.

I think there's all kinds of flavors and they're different by region of the way that people are cruel to each other.

Sure.

In America, New Jersey is different than Texas, is different than California.

You don't think Americans are a higher trust, more kind society than Russia even today?

Higher trust.

Listen, I'm not going to, so first of all, I have a very complex feelings about Russia today.

I'm talking about January before the war, I'm talking about nowadays.

I think it's a complex psychological dynamic of what trusting means.

I think Russians are generally less friendly, but have more intimate friendships.

Yes, I think that's true.

So it's just a different.

It's not different.

It's just one is more trusting.

Which is more trust.

Americans.

But then let's define trusting different.

Okay.

I'll give you an example.

If someone's having a party in America and people come over, okay, that's fine.

That's welcome.

If it's in Russia, it's like, who's that?

Who'd you bring?

And there's much more of a like, let me be sure that's okay, this person's here.

I don't know.

I may be.

You don't have parties.

I have never been in a party.

And you don't come to mine.

Then ask if it was very sad.

Well, I love that.

I love that.

Well, you should have showed it by showing up.

Man, I hide from the world and I'm afraid of social interaction and I just lay on the ground instead and feel sorry for myself.

It's not bad Santa, it's sad Santa.

While I can serve, I can serve my emotional energy towards this one day of the year.

Okay.

Or I can intensely spread my joy.

All right.

Speaking of which, you tell a Christmas story in the book.

Are you spoiling that chapter?

It's called Die Hard.

All right.

Well, I'm not going to spoil it.

Okay.

It's really good.

I was very proud of that chapter.

Why?

Because the ending that's a Christmas story is just like, I know everyone reading it's going to go Google it be like, he's can't be real, but it was real.

Then it was on Christmas yesterday.

Yeah.

I mean, this has to do with the bigger picture.

We don't have to do the big reveal, but the bigger picture of there was an iron curtain

and it was coming down in complex ways.

How would you define the iron curtain?

There's a set of ideologies, a set of countries united by an ideology and a set of countries united by a different ideology and there's a curtain that divided them and it eventually came down.

How would you describe how it came down?

I hate that I can never remember, ever, ever remember if this was Hemingway, no, it was Hemingway.

It was Mark Twain.

No, it came down two ways, gradually then suddenly.

The thing with the iron curtain and the Warsaw Pact, these were a bunch of nations under communism, but they were almost all under the sway of Moscow.

If they were going to make big changes, Moscow had to prove it.

It was in the 50s when Hungary decided to rebel or not rebel liberalize and they were thinking of leaving the Warsaw Pact and the Russian send in the tanks.

You had the development of what was called the Brezhnev Doctrine, which was the idea that it is the duty of all the Warsaw Pact nations if another country tries to, and this was also in 68 in the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, if a nation wants to leave socialism, it is incumbent of those socialist nations to do whatever is necessary to make sure there is an account of revolution.

They were very much under Moscow's thumb.

One of the big ways it changed was one man, and that was Mikhail Gorbachev.

He was the first Russian leader to be born after the October Revolution.

He grew up and his grandfather was arrested for being a Trotskyite and the other one was arrested for this or that.

He saw his village starve as a result of Stalin.

Even though he was a very committed communist, he also was very and increasingly skeptical of authoritarianism.

In Poland, for example, you had the Solidarity Movement, and this was a labor union movement, and the government didn't know what to do.

They were getting a lot of support from the peoples.

They had strikes in the Gdansk shipyard, and basically Moscow told them, either you crack down or we're cracking down on you, and they're like, all right, and they declared martial law and the rest of the leaders put them away.

But then when Gorbachev was in charge, there wasn't a gun to their back, and it was the communist leaders themselves who were like, you know what, there's this really funny moment where Lekvalse is meeting with Margaret Thatcher, and he's telling her what Solidarity the movement wants, and she had been meeting with the Polish government as well.

And she's like, look, tell them, because they wanted, the government wanted her to tell them that we want to negotiate and work with them, and she goes, all right, tell the government what it is that you're asking for, and he just points to the ceiling, and she goes, he's like, oh yeah, our meetings are bugged anyway.

But they then had the freedom, because they knew that Gorbachev wasn't forcing them to drive Solidarity underground.

So they had the idea of like, let's work together with these people.

And as a result of this, you know, Poland liberalized and freed itself fairly easily and with a minimum of bloodshed in 89.

And there was this whole argument for the Vietnam War with something called domino theory, which is if you lose Vietnam, then you're going to lose Laos, then you lose Cambodia.

One by one, the countries are going to turn communists to the dominoes.

But people didn't realize the reverse was true, because after Poland liberalized, then you have Hungary, then you have Czechoslovakia, then you had East Germany and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

So it's a great thing, because as this is happening, the people are looking around, and they're like, wait, that's it, this has got to be a trick.

And it wasn't a trick.

So one of my favorite books, which was a big inspiration for this one, was by my favorite historian.

I apologize to David Petrusca and Arthur Herman, my second and third, they're tied.

But Victor Sebastian wrote a book called Revolution 1989.

And he just talked about that year and how all these countries, one after another, liberalized.

And it's just such a beauty, and none of them thought this was possible.

One of my favorite, favorite moments in this book is Helmut Kohl, who was the head of West Germany, is in Warsaw with Lech Walesa discussing the Berlin Wall.

And Lech Walesa is like, I don't think it's getting around for another few years.

And Helmut Kohl laughs in his face.

And he goes, look, you're young.

This isn't how things work.

This is going to take some doing.

It fell the next day.

And Helmut Kohl literally says, I'm at the wrong party.

They got in a plane and got out of Warsaw.

So there are why this book has a broader message than the actual stories of these incidents is that as these wonderful things are happening, the universal consensus at the time is it's never going to happen.

Or if it does happen, it's going to happen only through an enormous amount of carnage and blood.

And when it doesn't, then everyone's like, oh, it was inevitable.

You didn't say it was inevitable at the time.

He only said it was inevitable after the fact.

And the other thing that was really brought me a lot of joy is there are so many moments of men with guns saying, we're not shooting anyone because they wanted several Tiananmen squares.

They wanted it in East Berlin.

They wanted it in Romania.

They wanted it in Moscow.

And these strong, tough, trained men with guns were like, no, we're not shooting the civilians.

And then everything else was history.

Yeah.

Just as surprising as the mass violence committed by police and the army on its own citizenry, equally surprising as when they choose not to somehow.

And what is that?

How do you explain 1989?

How do you explain this progress that happened so suddenly?

How do you explain that at the beginning of the 20th century, so much revolution happened that created communism?

And how do you explain then the collapse of that across so many nations at the same time?

I think a large part of it had to do with the closer interconnections between people like Gorbachev and Thatcher and Gorbachev and Reagan because both of them visited Red Square and in the years before, these are enemies.

They want to invade.

They want to kill us.

The Americans thought this about the Russians.

The Russians thought this about the Americans, obviously not so much the British.

And they got on really well when Gorbachev came to checkers, which is the prime minister's countryside estate.

Thatcher sat him down and she's lecturing him about human rights and she's lecturing him about economics and she's lecturing about this and that.

And then she's lecturing him about why he's in eating while he's yelling at her.

And he goes, Mrs. Thatcher, I know you have a lot of strong opinions.

I do too.

I haven't been sent here to recruit you to the Communist Party.

And she just started laughing, but right away there was such a sense in the air of we can do better.

We're spending all this money on missiles.

We're spending all this money on the military.

It's expensive.

And for what?

We don't have to be looking at each other as enemies.

We can try to work together to kind of at the very least lower the volume and the heat.

How much credit do you give to Gorbachev, the man?

So meaning how much power does a single individual have?

I could not give him more credit.

I had a tweet last year where I said, who do you think is the greatest person alive right now?

And my answer by far would be Gorbachev.

Then he died.

I don't know who it is right now.

But it's just funny because Gorbachev also had a tweet, but he said, oh, sure.

That would be a good.

Now I wish I interviewed Gorbachev and asked him the famous question of what would you

like best about Michael Malys?

Look, the transition after the Soviet Union fell to Russia and Yeltsin was not a smooth one by any means.

You know, as I say at the end of the book, it's not like they lived happily ever after.

But my point, broader point is you take the wins when you can get them.

People now had access to passports.

They don't have to have, they can leave the country, they have food, they have access to information.

It's somewhat censored, but it's certainly nothing like it was under the Soviet Union.

And they didn't have to live in this kind of constant fear.

And they had opportunities and it's such a step forward.

And there was this one great moment and I'm good.

There's a super Boris Yeltsin became president of Russia.

He's also mayor of Moscow at one point or the equivalent of mayor.

And he came here to visit NASA in the capacity of one or the other.

And while he was there, he went to visit a supermarket.

It was a Randall's then I think it's a food town now.

It still exists.

I'm going to go there.

I'm going to start bawling.

And as he's looking around, like he had never seen so much food.

And this is food that like even wealthy people in Russia don't have access to.

And there's pictures of him just like this, like what?

And the scene that really was poignant to me is on his flight back.

He's sitting there on the plane like this.

And he's like, they had to lie to the people because if they knew, they wouldn't have been able to get away with it.

And that's the moment where it's just like, oh, this wasn't like skewed propaganda.

You know, this was like, they knew, and it was a lie from A to Z.

And he was just like, holy crap, just like, and you can just imagine him on that plane, his brain reprogramming.

Because if you're taught since you're a kid, and he was an older man, he was no dummy, you think, okay, the Americans are starving and poor, and they're lynching people every day.

And then you go to a supermarket, the most banal place on earth, and you see like, I think when the article said like, they couldn't believe how big the onions were or something like that.

And you're seeing this, and you're seeing these like janitor school teachers, these aren't dignitaries, and they're regular people just picking whatever they want.

And you're just like, it's like the equivalent of having a stroke.

Yeah, I do think that that's one of the most powerful things is the grocery store.

In terms of drawing a distinction between the two systems.

Yeah.

Because, you know, you can have like technology, you can show off technology and so on, but

you can kind of sign up right off technology is like, okay, that's the mechanism of the devil.

But when you look at just fruit and veggies, and like very big fruit and veggies, and like, yeah, and fruit in particular, like certain kinds of fruit, they're just not available in Russia.

I mean, it's, yeah, that really shows, wait a minute, yeah.

It's interesting, like when you're older and you have to face the reality that what you believe to be true, like your whole life has been based on a set of lies and stuff.

Not mistakes, not like a little bit like blatant lies from top to bottom, start to finish that I don't know what that's like.

How much you've, you start the book, I think you start the book with Iran, yes, yes, yes one does.

So before the revolution, she was born in Russia, and she witnessed the revolution and moved to the United States in the 20-

26, 1926.

1926.

I remember like it was yesterday.

Anyway, she, you write that she spent a lot of her life trying to convince Americans in the world that the negative effects of totalitarian government, just, you know, maybe using her as an example, but also this question, can we draw a distinction between authoritarian regimes and communism?

Is it possible to still make the case that not all implementations of socialism and communism would lead to the atrocities we've seen in the Soviet Union and in China under Mao?

Or like when you, in studying all of this, how much blame do you put on the ideologies, on Marxist ideologies versus the particular leaders and dictators?

Well, you have to blame the leaders a lot because they had different leaders in different countries were different from each other.

Dubczyk, who took over Czechoslovakia and he tried to introduce socialism with the human face in the Prague Spring of 1968, he was like, all right, we got to do away with authoritarianism. We got to have more free speech.

He was thinking of introducing elements of democracy.

Now then the Russians sent in the tanks.

But the point is he certainly was someone who was like, all right, this, this has got to stop, this is just absolutely crazy.

Khrushchev and Stalin were not the same animal at all.

So I think the problem with communism in the Marxist sense is that you're going to have an introduce an element of authoritarianism simply because you can't have economic planning.

If I don't have a price mechanism, I don't know how price is what is being known as a consumer or a producer, what should be produced or what had there's a shortage of as prices increase.

That's a signal that we have a shortage here as prices decrease.

That means that there's a surplus here.

But if I'm setting the price, I don't really have know how much weed I need to produce if I'm compared to corn as compared to shoes as compared to Santa costumes.

So that is a big problem.

The other issue is if you have one agency, the government having a monopoly on let's suppose the news, like you were talking about earlier with Twitter, it's going to be really hard to have any kind of objective discourse because everyone is going to be working for the same organization.

That is going to cause a problem in terms of having a feedback mechanism, even in the best scenario in terms of this is a problem, this isn't a problem.

And when you have a monopoly, which is what a government is, I think people are very familiar with what the problems happen with monopoly, this lack of accountability, bureaucracies are faceless and then no one's to blame and yet everyone kind of suffers as a consequence.

So it doesn't necessarily have to be as authoritarian as Stalinism, but you can't have it a government which is authority by its nature be this pervasive without a strong amount of oppression.

The same thing with even if you just have like let's suppose socialized healthcare, you're going to have to make it illegal for doctors to practice privately.

You're going to have to have rationing, so on and so forth.

Now that might be a price that people are willing to pay because you can't have infinite spending on healthcare, right?

So something's going to have to give somewhere.

So there is an element of authoritarianism there and people are comfortable with that and I can wrap my head around it.

But if you're going to have one organization running literally everything in society,

I don't see how you do that and have any measure of liberalism.

Why do you think Ayn Rand had so much trouble telling people the danger of Soviet Stalinism?

Well, I think a more pertinent question is why did Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman have so much problems?

So they were hardcore-

These are anarchists.

Yeah, they are.

Emma Goldman's on the cover.

They were deported from the US, J. Edgar Hoover saw them off at Ellis Island.

They were sent to Russia.

They were bloodthirsty revolutionaries.

They had no shortage advocating violence when necessary.

And when they went there, they were just like, this is a complete nightmare.

They both individually had meetings with Lenin complaining about political prisoners, complaining about lack of free speech.

She told them, you know, this is a revolutionary time.

You could do that later.

And when they both left, she wrote a, her memoir was split into two books, My Disillusionment in Russia and My Further Disillusionment in Russia.

He wrote The Bolshevik Myth and she was in England and she gave a speech.

And she's just like, if you guys think this is for the workers, this is the biggest live ever heard.

Like they're oppressing the workers like no capitalist has ever imagined.

And you know, as she described it, like people just shifting their seats, they were interrupting her.

And when she opened her talk, she had a standing ovation.

And when she was done, you could hear a pin drop.

So they didn't want to hear it because this was this kind of, and Eugene Lyons talks about it later.

This was like the guinea pig theory of the Russian people.

Like we're going to experiment on them over there.

If it works, great.

We're right.

If it's wrong, it's their problem.

And sure, these animals squeal, but they're beneath us.

And of course they're going to make some noise, but you know, this is a noble experiment, but they're experimenting on a country, several countries.

So I think an ideology like this, which appeals to intellectuals because you know, if it works or if it's implemented, they're the ones who are gods in effect in a society that their status cannot be higher.

They really want this to work.

Like they want a society where they are the new aristocracy, the most important people.

And their criticisms of America, if they had a binary worldview, if America is bad and this is the opposite of America, they're my definition, it's good.

And the other binary that they bought into is the Nazis and the fascists hate the communists and the communists, it's true, up to a point, hated the fascists and the Nazis.

Okay.

Well, Hitler is evil.

So this guy is against Hitler.

We're with him.

So that's an argument that's still made in schools growing up when you talk about World War II where they're like, we've seen it with Stalin and they don't really talk about Stalin being a bad guy, but it's like, you know, we worked with him to fight Hitler because Hitler was a unique evil.

Now that is certainly true that Hitler is a unique evil, but that doesn't mean or even imply that Stalin is somehow an angel or a saint.

Do you think some of the lessons of history are forgotten here in our modern political discourse that are important to remember?

I was so triggered because I was in the supermarket and there was like a company that's selling Russian ice cream because it meets these high level Soviet standards.

And I'm just like, you think this is some kind of joke?

You think this is some kind of kitschy punchline that you had decades of people who were taught in school to turn their parents into the police if they were hoarding grain, even if it cost them their own lives, where it was a crime to be married to someone who was an enemy of the state, where you had torture being the norm, where people institutionalized because they were politically disadvantageous and they were called insane?

Like this isn't just like, oh, this hammer and sickle is this cool wacky symbol.

Like the amount of blood under this symbol was just enormous.

And so yeah, I think the lesson has very much been forgotten.

How did the ice cream taste?

It was fine.

Okay.

I'm a Baskin Robbins guy to be honest, but Van Luen's does some great work.

Baskin Robbins doesn't have any Soviet flavors?

No.

Um, those, those are dark jokes, dark, dark jokes.

I'm going to, I'm going to self publish a book of jokes coming out in a grocery store near you.

Okay.

Uh, what was the hardest part about writing this book?

Spent two years writing it.

So when I write books for celebrities and I was co-authoring them, I did it kind of like method acting.

I tried to get into their head as much as possible to kind of speak in their voice.

And when you're dealing with children being tortured, harmed, starved, and you're trying to empathize with the characters, it's, it's hard to take.

The other big part I had, like I was saying earlier is just, I was just very, very concerned that I told this story and did it justice because I think this is something that is,

I still don't understand and I'm kind of angry about it.

That it's fallen on me to tell this story.

This isn't some minor incident that happened in some random town in Pica State.

This is half the world for, you know, 70, 80 years.

And the fact that it's, this is the 80s.

This isn't, we were, I mean, you and I are old enough to remember the 80s.

There's a show, I remember the 80s.

The fact that all these things have just kind of, we have this collective amnesia.

And even amnesia, I think a lot of this stuff, even I like was not known even at the time or was kind of obscured.

This is, I remember I was at the Blaze, which is a network run by Glenn Beck and they're conservatives and I have a lot of fun there.

And I'm just sitting there and you know, sometimes Dave, you're off, they're like, oh, Biden's the communist.

I'm like, okay, Biden's the communist.

But I'm like, we talk so much about, you know, slavery and the civil war, the atrocities.

We talk about World War II and the Holocaust.

I'm like, how is no one talking about this?

And this was, can very easily be portrayed as like conservatives and big victory because Reagan and Thatcher were so instrumental in guiding this to a safe landing.

And I'm like, how is no one telling the story?

And then one day my brain is like, you know, you write books for living.

This is kind of your job.

And I'm like, all right, but I still don't, I still, I got to tell you.

I'm kind of confused that I'm the one who has to do this because this should be, they should be, you know, this should be a dirty books like this.

And this is a model to follow.

Yeah.

And it's also, that it's such recent history.

Yeah.

But it also kind of makes you realize that there might be other fights for progress going on right now.

Oh, yes.

I don't know about.

So you wrote about North Korea.

I don't know to what degree there could possibly be fights there for progress, but there could be, they could be boiling up in China.

They could be boiling up battles for progress in other parts of the world, Russia that could be.

And in America.

In America.

And these are all different kind of battles for progress.

And now sometimes, sometimes I, you know, we sometimes tend to criticize these battles for progress.

Like if it's on the left, we'll call it like wokeism or whatever, and we pick extreme elements of it and show how silly and ridiculous it is.

Not realizing it, not acknowledging that there's a more civil battle going on underneath for actual, for, for respecting human dignity from all, for people for walks of life.

And the same, we tend to call anybody who questions mainstream narratives, conspiracy theories would dismiss them immediately.

And they're ultimately fighting for progress.

So people who criticize Fauci and everybody else, I don't know if they're, I think they want institutions that serve the public.

They're fighting for progress too, and we tend to dismiss them, like each side tends to caricature the other.

But the battle for progress is happening.

And I guess that's what you're, that's the hopeful message with the white pill, right?

Is that there's progress being made.

Somehow we're all making progress here.

I think more of the hopeful message is that it's not possible that we have to lose.

Like if someone tells you the straight face, you can't win, the enemy is too impressive and strong.

I'm like, what are you talking about?

We, I mean, look, this was the Soviet Union.

And it happened, you know, relatively quickly and, and relatively peacefully, I mean, again, and it wasn't because the Hanukkah in East Germany was like, oh, I just got to, I'm just going to vacate my seat.

He was like sending the tanks and the military guy said no.

So they wanted blood.

There were plenty of people who wanted blood and would have been happy to have it.

So to you, the, maybe if not the fall of the Soviet Union, then the, the fall of the Iron Curtain is a great leap of progress in the 20th century.

I don't see how anyone can argue against that point with a straight face.

So that gives you hope that we, that we humanity were able to do that.

Yes.

And at the same time, we were told at the time, give it up, be realistic.

It's utopian to think this is going anywhere, maybe in a hundred years.

Look, there's a reason Chekhov was on Star Trek, because the idea is even the far future, you're going to have America and you're going to have the Soviet Union.

Like this is the reality.

It was called real politic.

We're going to have Daytona because it's, you know, it's this permanent stalemate.

We had the Vietnam war.

We got our asses kicked.

Russia's not going anywhere.

America's not going anywhere.

We've got to learn to live with each other, blah, blah, blah.

And Reagan said, you don't want to hear my strategy for the Cold War.

Some people might say it's simple or even simplistic.

Here it is.

We win, they lose.

And the people who won were the Russian people and the Ukrainian people and the Lithuanian people and the Polish people and the Romanian people especially and the Hungarian people.

And it's just, there's so many moments of great joy that, you know, just tears coming down my face because you're like in Prague when Dubček, again, who tried to liberalize in 1968.

And then when they send the tanks, they deport him to Slovakia somewhere to do some forestry job.

Like he appears in their big squares, just waving from the balcony like this ghost from 20 years prior, being like, look, you know, the spirit of 1968 is still alive here in Czechoslovakia.

And it was like a matter of weeks, the entire government resigned and then they liberalized.

It's just so many things about just overnight, just change for the profound better.

And you know, people are so committed to making sure you don't have hope.

And if things get better, oh, it doesn't really matter because the broader picture never gets better.

And there's lots of data to the contrary where that's happened before.

And this isn't some magical faraway place.

This is the opposite of magical faraway place.

It's Eastern Europe.

And to me, I think one such narrative that people assume will always be true or just

to a degree will always be true, like in American politics is the extreme levels of division. And it seems to me like that too, we can overcome.

So the division in American politics that seems to be counterproductive, I think that can be overcome.

And I think the division in geopolitics currently with Russia, China and the United States, particularly China and the United States, can be overcome.

And I think that requires great leadership that galvanizes the populace to the better angels of their nature.

Like I have hope for that.

People have become really cynical on social media and elsewhere in the way they talk.

The liberals are destroying this country.

The conservatives are destroying this country.

This kind of language is becoming more and more popular.

I think that's, I have hope that that's temporary, at least that's my white pill.

I don't know if you have that kind of hope for like, what does hope look like for you in American politics?

Forget American politics, American, the nation, the country, the people.

My hope, which I don't think is an unrealistic one, is that the next generation has a better life than you and I have had in this country.

And I think anyone who thinks that America is over or is one president away from being destroyed cannot in good conscience call themselves a patriot.

Because if you think America is so weak that it takes a Biden or a Trump or an Obama to irrevocably destroy it, then it's already a wrap.

And I think that's just absolutely ridiculous.

If you look what this country has survived, Great Depression, World War II, the Civil War, I mean, my God.

So we've been through worse before.

It wasn't always easy, certainly not.

But I am, it's so hard for me as someone who's a hopeful person, not by my nature.

I'm not, you know, Michael Kindness, who does work for Random House, or at least he did last time I talked to him.

I look at, even like, the thing is when you speak positively, it sounds corny.

That's how it screwed up our cynical culture.

Have you seen my Twitter?

Oh, you're verified now.

That's good.

But even like something like Etsy, like you couldn't go on Etsy.

I paid eight dollars for that verification.

I earned it.

It's an opportunity for independent artists to create something special and cool.

And I've bought a lot of stuff from them.

That in and of itself is something that's pretty awesome.

There's so much, I meant the shaving soaps, right?

Of course you are.

The point is there's like dozens of artisans every day when you have a shave, it brings you some joy.
So there's just so many things that are wonderful.
And I know there's people listening to this, rolling their eyes.
How can you talk about shaving soaps when my daughter or when my wife or when blah, blah, blah.
And I'm not disparaging or dismissing what you're regarding as a problem.
My point is hope means the belief that it's not at all a certainty that this problem will be insurmountable.
That's all it means.
What do you look forward to in 2023?
Since this is a holiday special?
Honestly, like if I look forward to a lot of young people realizing that they still have lots of opportunity in this country and taking control of their own selves and realizing they can be a better person tomorrow than they are today, that the entirety of their identity is not a function of a culture which may they may not identify with or like or think is deplorable and realize, you know what, I have it in me to improve and find joy and happiness and also the fact that that is so compelling and contagious.
That is what I would want in 2023 and also for New York to get nuked.
So those two things could be accomplished.
Can I go back and switch the order because I think New York won.
Oh, the jokes, the jokes.
And one day friends, if you work hard enough in believing yourself.
You too can nuke New York.
You know, you too can spend your days dressing up, grown men dressing up in a Santa outfit and putting on lipstick and having hours upon hours of conversation with each other and loving every second.
Thank you for writing this really, really important book.
Please buy the white pill.
I love you, brother.
I love you too.
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Listen to the never has then listen close to me.
Anything can happen, child.
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Thank you for listening.
I hope to see you next time.