

Hello, and welcome to the pilot episode of the Free Press Roundtable Podcast, where we discuss, debate, and pull apart the news of the world beyond the headlines, and do our best to counteract the confirmation bias that is making us all duller and less informed.

I'm your host this week, Eli Lake.

I'm a columnist for the New York Sun, host of the Re-Education Podcast, and a contributing editor at Commentary Magazine.

And this week, I am joined by Shadi Hamed.

He is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute and a writer for The Atlantic, as well as honestly host and Free Press editor, Barry Weiss.

Barry and Shadi, welcome.

Hi, Eli.

Thanks for having us.

Thanks for having us, Eli.

It's a pleasure to be here.

Okay.

Two coquet, that is the theme of the first few stories.

It's a Latin phrase, and it roughly translates to, and you.

It's a kind of rhetorical maneuver to turn around an accusation on the accuser, and once you know to look for it, you really find it everywhere.

Just consider the issue of politicians and state secrets.

In 2016, Hillary Clinton was on the hot seat because some classified material was found on her private e-mail server that she used for official business when she was the Secretary of State.

U.S. intelligence officials called for 305 of her e-mails to be reviewed for potentially classified information.

Hillary Clinton is disqualified from being the commander-in-chief of the United States.

Hillary Clinton's e-mail scandal made clear we have only seen the tip of the iceberg.

Then we learned last summer that Donald Trump improperly stored and would not return classified presidential records that he took with him to his estate at Mar-a-Lago.

Former President Trump had more than 300 classified documents on the premises after he left office.

This week it's Joe Biden.

This morning, ABC News has learned President Biden's legal team has found a second batch of classified documents.

Just days after the White House confirmed classified records were found at Biden's former D.C.

office last November before the midterm elections.

It can't be that we have two tiers of justice in this country.

It can't be that there's one rule for Republicans and a different rule for Democrats.

You know, Mary Garland said, oh, we have to have a special prosecutor for Trump.

So that means we've got to have one for Biden.

Now two cocaine is slightly different than the typical political charge of hypocrisy.

I mean, let's face it, everyone in politics, pretty much, is a hypocrite to some extent or another, which is to say that politicians like the rest of us usually don't meet the

high moral standards that we espouse.

Also, two cocaine is not quite the same as the technique of whataboutism popularized in the Cold War by Soviet diplomats as a way of explaining away Stalin's gulags and the lack of political freedom because of America's enduring legacy of racial inequality and slavery. No, the two cocaine is when the exact thing that you were accused of doing is done by your accuser.

The classic example of a two-coke is from this partnership for a drug-free America P.S.A. from the late 1980s.

It's yours?

No.

Your mother said she found it in your closet.

I don't know when I died myself.

What's the what?

Look, dad, it's not.

Where did you get it?

Dad.

Answer me.

Who taught you how to do this stuff?

You are right.

I learned it by watching you.

Parents who use drugs have children who use drugs.

There are a few things to notice here.

Strictly as an argument, two-coke fails.

It is more of a deflection because whether this adolescent's father was doing drugs or not is immaterial to the cigar box of paraphernalia that the parents found in their son's closet.

In other words, a two-coke does not answer or justify the initial charge.

Rather, it places that charge in context, in a courtroom, two-coke gets you nowhere.

But in the court of public opinion, well, it's very effective.

And the reason gets back to context, because if the improper storage of presidential records at Mar-a-Lago was enough of a scandal to merit a Justice Department investigation, then it should merit an investigation into Biden's improper storage of his vice presidential records.

If the Speaker of the House can kick members of the opposition party off of committees when the Speaker is a Democrat, well, two-coke, when Democrats complain that it's done by a Republican Speaker of the House, as it just was this week.

If Governor DeSantis' decision to send migrants in his state to Martha's Vineyard is cruel and lawless when he does it in August, is it not also cruel and lawless when a Democratic Governor Jared Polis of Colorado does the same thing in January, two-coke?

Well, with that in mind, let's start the discussion.

As we all know, last summer, the FBI did raid Mar-a-Lago to retrieve classified documents that Donald Trump had apparently defied a court order to keep for himself.

And as I said at the time, this alone is not a story until we know what the documents say, as opposed to its level of classification.

And that's why, at least for me, I am resisting the urge to two-coke this story for the time

being because we don't know what either the Mar-a-Lago documents or, for that matter, the Penn Biden Center or the Wilmington Garage documents say. And we can't know by law, in some cases, what these documents actually say, because allegedly they are so highly classified, at least in the case of Donald Trump.

Okay.

With that in mind, I wanted to start off with you, Shadi.

Am I missing anything here?

Is this more than a question of hypocrisy or two-coke?

Or is this really the important angle?

I think this whole discussion around classified documents and targeting your political opponents on those grounds, I think it's time to call a moratorium on that.

I mean, the Mar-a-Lago gate, there was a lot of hype around it.

I feel it's been memory-hold.

People don't really talk about it all that much anymore.

And there were all these promises of revelations, and we're going to find smoking guns once there's more investigation.

But for some of the reasons you mentioned, Eli, we probably won't know for sure.

Then the question is, do we want to keep on doing this, where if a Democrat does something, then Republicans go on the attack, vice versa, and it just becomes an endless source of polarization?

The other thing that I'd say is, I'm of the view that if a president is democratically elected, there should be wide latitude to what they can do.

Obviously, if we're talking about clear criminal activity, so if Trump literally killed someone on Fifth Avenue, I would be all in favor of prosecuting that and putting him in jail if he didn't, in fact, kill someone.

But on things that are iffy and I feel like are more part of the inside baseball, Washington elite discourse, I mean, ordinary Americans don't really know, and I don't mean this as a negative thing.

They probably shouldn't know details about how classified documents are handled or aren't.

I don't fully understand some of the nuances as well.

So why are we obsessing over this when there isn't even really evidence of clear criminal activity that most Americans can get their heads around?

So maybe we should just stop all of this and next time classified documents are found improperly stored by a senior or former senior official, let's extend the benefit of the doubt.

Let's have some generosity there and not assuming the worst and not using it to delegitimize our political opponents.

But her email, shoddy, look, I think the main distinction and I spent the morning reading these sort of explainers in the AP and NPR that ostensibly were trying to show me the distinction between the Biden case and the Trump case.

And in the end of the day, it doesn't seem to me there's any real distinction at all beyond the fact that Trump wouldn't willingly turn over the documents and that the Justice Department needed to be brought in to sort of strong arm him.

So that is a real and meaningful distinction.

But I'm very much with shoddy, you guys live in D.C., you're in the belly of the beast, you understand this more than me, but from the reading that I've done about the process

of classification, what makes something classified, top secret, et cetera, we have an unbelievably enormous problem with overclassification.

And I feel a little bit in the wake of the steel dossier, the P-tape scandal that I sort of waited years with bated breath for it to come out.

I now have a kind of cynical response where, you know, I assume that a classified document is probably Hillary Clinton talking about the details of Chelsea's wedding or something like that.

Well, first of all, I'm so glad that you brought up the issue of overclassification with state secrecy because another thing that's happening this week is that we are seeing the formation of, I guess, a kind of church committee going back to the 1970s to investigate the weaponization of the federal government against the Republican Party and Donald Trump, and that in that context, it's not a good look for the Republicans to become suddenly the guardians of state secrecy.

In fact, what the purpose of this committee is, if it's going to be effective, which time will tell, will be is if it can cut through the secret bureaucracy and reveal information to the American people about various abuses of power at the FBI and the intelligence community.

So that's the first thing I would say is that, you know, as we are, you know, kind of maybe seizing on this delightful hypocrisy, this two-coke-ay with President Biden of your Republican, careful

what you wish for it because there's a bigger kind of, there's a bigger issue and there will be lots of fights between the executive branch and Congress and the House of Representatives in the coming months as this committee kind of gets going.

Now, as to your point, I think it's undeniable that, you know, the initial violation, if you will, which was the improper storage of presidential records is largely the same with Biden and Trump.

The difference, of course, is that Trump clearly looks like he instructed his lawyers at least to lie on his behalf about what documents he had, where they were stored, and he is responsible for drawing out a process that initially would not have been the first step would have been a raid, and we learn that in subsequent filings from the federal government in this process. And even the special master that Trump selected, you know, as in order to sort of delay this whole process, eventually ruled in favor of the government.

So in that respect, there's a sort of separate question of all these kind of process crimes that I think may or may not be prosecuted in the case of Trump that don't really apply to Biden, but the initial violation is the same.

The initial violation is the same, and also I wonder to what extent, you know, and I'm certainly no apologist for Trump, some of this just has to do with understanding how to use the mechanisms of power in a place like D.C.

We know, and Eli and Shadi, correct me if I'm wrong, that they knew the Biden team or at least the Biden lawyers, right?

Biden is saying he's surprised by the existence of these documents at all.

They knew about them on November 2nd.

So what did they do between November 2nd and now that we don't even know about?

Why did we just learn about them now, instead of before the midterm?

Exactly.

I think the spectacle of...

The president acknowledged yesterday that he had been briefed, that those documents had been found.

When was he briefed that those documents had been found?

So let me just lay this down a little bit, because it's some...

An AP reporter in a black mask grilling the press secretary on how did they know when these documents existed, just basic matters of fact, and she's completely obfuscating and avoiding the question.

He said he takes classified documents and information seriously.

He was surprised to learn any records had been found there.

He doesn't know what was in them.

He said this just repeating...

So I guess I wonder if it's a matter of Trump's style is just boorish and bluster and taking a stand against the deep state, but you sort of wonder, is it just the Biden team knew how to handle this in a much more sophisticated way than he did?

So I think that part of this is about intent.

So when I compare Biden and Trump, and I hope I'm not being too unfair to Trump here, but when I see the sorts of things that Trump did that led to the Mar-a-Lago raid, I feel like there's a lot of mal intent and just bad behavior reflecting the fact that Trump is a bad person.

And obviously this is not relevant to a court of law per se, but just in terms of how I observe something from afar, Biden, I think, is generally a good man.

He does wanna do the right thing in his twilight years and seems to have a moral core, but that also leads to a problem that if you read these various explainers that are comparing and contrasting Trump's situation to Biden's, they can't help but incorporate the...

Trump distorts your analysis because you can never get him out of your head.

It's always going to affect your objective assessment of what he's doing.

So let's say that you have something exactly like the Mar-a-Lago raid, but it happened to someone not named Trump, we'd all probably react to it a little bit differently, even if all the details and substance were exactly the same.

And that's gonna make it hard for us to follow these cases going forward, because as human beings who are writing about this, there's no one left in America who I think can really suspend their personal dislike for Trump or the other way around, their personal dislike for Biden and the Democrats.

Kevin McCarthy has removed Democrats that would be Adam Schiff, Eric Swalwell, and Elon Omar, removed them from the Intelligence and Foreign Affairs Committees.

This week, we saw the House vote on a new rules package after a 15-round fight over Kevin McCarthy's efforts to become the Speaker of the House.

And one of the first things that Kevin McCarthy did as the Speaker is he expelled Adam Schiff and Eric Swalwell from the House Intelligence Committee and Elon Omar from the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Here's a clip of Representative Byron Donald on MSNBC's program with Joy Reid as he acknowledges

that this was payback for Nancy Pelosi's norm-busting decision to banish Marjorie Taylor Green from all committees in 2021.

Look, what we told Democrat leadership when they went down this pathway of removing members from committee is basically saying, you should not do that because if it's good for the goose, it's good for the gander.

So you did it?

So now this is what happens.

This is the response.

Let's get back to the status quo of you pick your committee people will pick ours.

You're saying it's literally for vengeance.

You're now admitting it's just for revenge.

Was this a tactical mistake on the part of Republicans?

Is it a fair argument, I guess, from Joy Reid that this is purely an act of vengeance?

What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

What do you say?

Yeah.

Is it a pure power move?

Absolutely.

But there was nothing about this story to be frank that surprised me.

She was on the other foot.

You know, so expelling Ilhan Omar from the Foreign Affairs Committee, actually, I feel like some Democrats would have welcomed that.

I mean, she was sort of a thorn in the side of the Democratic establishment, doesn't have a lot of experience on foreign affairs.

So you know, actually, like I'm not, you know, that's maybe for the best, although obviously I don't like the idea of like vengeance and kind of returning the favor.

But as we're talking about here, once you put these things into motion and you set that precedent, it's very hard to get out of that cycle of polarization.

And then no one can remember who was originally to blame for setting the bad precedent.

And but the problem is, when you ask Republicans, like, when did all this polarizing bullshit start?

They'll point their finger at something that happened like 25 years ago and like, that's what radicalized us, then Democrats will find something that happened even before that from the Republican side at some point, one, one party because there's only two.

So someone at someone at some point has to make the choice to stop that cycle and rise above.

So to speak, obviously that's not very, that's not popular in our political climate now.

The idea of what Michelle Obama used to say, you go when they go low, we go high.

Yeah.

Like even saying that now is now we just all go low, all go lower and lower.

Also, like Michelle's comment sounds a little bit naive, like we're in the rough and tumble contentious politics were extremely polarized.

If you show weakness to the other party, they'll take advantage of that.

That's the fear that no one wants to be weak.

Everyone wants to kind of push hard.

And but I just don't know how that ends.

You know, Shawty, I largely agree with what you've said.

And I think you're absolutely right as sort of a general principle in how norms work.

That's certainly true.

And this is a kind of a norm.

I would also add that when in the case of Ilhan Omar, I think that she's a menace and

I disagree with a lot of what she has to say.

I also don't think that there's much harm in having somebody with radically different views and most of Congress when it comes to U.S. foreign power, foreign policy on a committee.

I mean, let her ask her questions.

I mean, it's not the first time that we've had oddballs and cranks in Congress on committees.

It's happened for, you know, more than 200 years.

But I will say this, I slightly disagree, and even if this wasn't framed as payback for the banishment of Marjorie Taylor Greene, I think in particular Adam Schiff should be kicked off of the very powerful House Intelligence Committee because when he was the chairman and the ranking member, and you have to understand that this is a select committee.

So the Democrat and the Republican, even if in this case the Democrat is not the chair, has access to more state secrets than almost anybody else in Congress except for the leadership in the House and the Senate and the Senate Intelligence Committee chair and ranking member, that he abused that position throughout the Trump years to make it appear that there was classified evidence of Trump's disloyalty to the country, that he could not share with the public for security reasons, but in fact was there.

And that was kind of a typical move that we actually associate with Senator Joe McCarthy, where he would say, I have a list of names of Communist officials in the U.S. Army.

Well, Adam Schiff is the new Senator McCarthy.

And then we recently found out that in his position as the chairman of that committee, he instructed his staff try to get Twitter to suspend the account of a journalist named Paul Sperry for real clear politics that was writing stories that he didn't like and that were negative to him and outing the name of the so-called whistleblower in the original, the first impeachment about Ukraine.

Those in my opinion is such an abuse of his sort of power in Congress that even if the Marjorie Taylor Greene had not happened, I would have supported Kevin McCarthy kicking Schiff off of that committee.

As for Eric Swalwell, there was a well-known scandal that he had a fundraiser who he may or may not have slept with named Fang Fang, who was also a Chinese spy.

Wait, what?

That's a delicious two-coke.

Oh, yeah.

That's an incredible story.

Serve that to me over ice cream.

I love it.

Wait, how come this hasn't been a bigger story?

I think I heard something on Twitter vaguely about this, and the name Fang Fang is memorable, so I guess I remember that.

But I'm surprised that wouldn't have gotten more attention from...

It's a shoddy.

It's a little bit like the Twitter files in that half of the country knows everything about that story and thought it was enormous, and the other half of the country didn't even know it existed.

Right.

And I should say that Swalwell is so shameless that he continues to go on television and act as if he is some sort of paragon of American patriotism and respect for whatever. So in that respect, I do think that there's a substantive argument on that stuff where, oddly, even though I find Ilhan Omar's positions and things that she has said before as anti-Semitic, I don't necessarily see why we...

I think in kicking her off of the Foreign Affairs Committee, it shows a lack of confidence in the arguments for, I don't know, a traditional American position in the world, or support for his US-Israel relationship or so forth.

Meaning they're too scared to have the debate about whether or not...

Yeah, if you feel that somebody's positions are so radical that you can't allow them to have one seat on a committee that has like 35 people on it, that she gets to occasionally ask questions of government officials, I'm not worried about that, and I'm an ardent Zionist, so I don't understand the...

I mean, at that...

So I have a different view on those two things.

Ilhan, I'm glad you pushed back on that.

Maybe I was a little bit unfair in how I described Ilhan Omar's situation earlier.

Now that I'm thinking about it, yeah, I mean, there should be at least one out of the mainstream consensus voice on a committee.

I think it's just good for people to be challenged.

I do worry that Ilhan Omar isn't the best representative of the pro-Palestinian position.

I think there's a better way to make that argument, and that's generally where I am on the spectrum in that debate.

So I worry about that, but I think, yes, just because someone has what seem to be fringe views on a contentious issue, we have to be careful about using that as a justification, because that's about substance...

That's about substantive...

And by the way, I don't know that it's necessarily justification.

I mean, it could very well be that you could justify it on the grounds that somebody like Steve King, who was kicked off of committees actually by Republicans, this is before all this stuff, because of really racist stuff that he said about Latinos in the United States.

And you could say, well, listen, Ilhan Omar has repeatedly said really anti-Semitic things about Jewish power in Congress and its influence and so forth.

And for those reasons, she's a toxic figure.

I guess I kind of think that that's not as effective either, even though I would agree that what she said was anti-Semitic and that she is a toxic figure.

I just, again, I think it sort of shows a weakness that you're afraid of.

I mean, I remember when the Republicans kicked Steve King off of those various committees, I thought that was a fantastic thing to do, just forgetting from a moral or ethical perspective,

but also just from a strategic perspective in their party.

I was kind of shocked.

To be honest, I was shocked when they did it.

Yeah.

I mean, I don't have a problem when the party does it to their own.

My problem is when the Democratic Speaker does it to the Republican Party, but I see your point, and I think that's okay too.

And if that's where the Republicans want to go with Marjorie Taylor Greene, it's fine.

In my view, again, if you do it too often, it is a way of sort of saying, even though you voted for this person where she's going to be treated differently because she said these things that we don't think are right, it's a little bit different than saying you're not going to come on CNN if you have these views.

Totally.

Which I think is fine.

I want to add one thing that, I'm not even sure I fully agree with my position here, but I do, this doesn't sound a little bit identity politics-y, but I don't love the visuals of pushing out the only head scarf wearing black Muslim woman on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

It's not that it's the most important thing, but I don't know, maybe I'm just speaking as a Muslim who just feels a little bit worried about some of the Islamophobic potentially undertones of focusing on particular people and making those subjective judgments when there are a number.

I don't know.

That's just something that comes to mind, and I'm just slightly nervous about it.

You know what, Shadi?

It's a fair point.

It's good to have that perspective out there.

We have another governor is planning to bus migrants to major cities like New York and Chicago, but not from a border state.

They'll be coming from the middle of the country in Colorado's Democratic Governor Jared Polis.

In the last three weeks, more than 3,500 migrants arrived in Denver from the southern border.

Finally, let's just close the loop on our two co-keys today, and that involves Colorado Governor Jared Polis.

Now, let's set the stage in 2022, illegal migrants crossing the Southwest border surged to a record 2.76 million, and that's roughly the population of Chicago, Illinois.

That's America's third largest city.

That eclipses the previous annual record by more than a million.

The situation has long been described by conservatives as a crisis, but like most of the rest of our politics, it's also been subsumed by culture wars, of course.

For the past few months, Republican governors of border states have been busing these migrants to sanctuary cities, earning them the usual epithets from Democrats, charges of racism and xenophobia, and maybe most memorably when Florida Governor Ron DeSantis chartered planes full of migrants to the wealthy elite island of Martha's Vineyard a few months ago.

He was, quote, heartless.

He was cruel.

He was using people as political pawns.

Anyway, just when we thought, busing migrants to sanctuary cities with some cruel right-wing political stunt, two co-kays, again, it's just too irresistible, Democratic governor Jared Polis did much the same thing, busing illegal immigrants from Colorado to Chicago and New York City.

And Lori Lightfoot and Eric Adams in a joint letter to Governor Polis said sending migrants to our cities is wrong and further victimizes these most vulnerable individuals.

So what is it, guys?

Is this xenophobic or is it a natural consequence of too many migrants flooding into the border?

What say you, Barry Weiss?

I just think it's really smart politics.

I think there were a lot of people, and there was actually a lot of debate inside the free press when DeSantis bussed the migrants to Martha's Vineyard, and Eli, maybe you have a Latin phrase to describe what this is, to force people who have in this house we believe signs in their front yard who claim to be a sanctuary city and all of the rest of those statements to come face to face with them and to see, oh, you can't even withstand having 50, 100, I forget exactly how many there were in that first tranche of people that got to Martha's Vineyard, they can't live on the vineyard for 24 hours, and you have to kick them out.

I mean, I just thought it was, as a piece of political theater, extraordinarily savvy.

Now the Jared Polis camp, and he's someone I'm extremely interested in, and I feel like he has done a pretty fantastic job of maintaining sanity, I guess, in an era where most people become extreme and polarized, and he just seems very pragmatic and practical.

He claims that there is some kind of major distinction between what he is doing and what Governor Abbott is doing, but I'm not sure I understand that distinction, and I wonder if you guys can clarify it for me.

Barry, I can tell you what the distinction is.

I think there's a key difference, and I think we should just be straight up about this.

When a Democrat does something, it has different implications.

I mean, the message and the messenger can't be completely separated.

We know that Jared Polis isn't doing this to kind of rile up sentiments around a particular issue that relates to our immigration policy, and look, that's not a justification.

I just think that's what's going on here.

When I think about how the kind of a normal left of center person will approach this, they'll see it as fundamentally different, because when our side does it, it's understandable.

When the other side does it, they are doing it for bad or even evil intent.

Maybe we shouldn't even try to come up with some coherent explanation for why people are hypocritical and inconsistent in how they apply their principles.

The principle in question is my tribe above all, because we're in an existential battle in American politics, so you just got to be on side.

I mean, so I see your point that the one will see events through their identity and their tribe, and that's true, and it devils our politics today.

These little moments like this, in some ways, they kind of, I think, illuminate maybe lessons, in this case, for Democrats, which is that you cannot have what I mean, I love this idea of the luxury belief.

There's a luxury belief to say that we can have an open border, if you're not willing to at least provide the resources for settling lots of people who say who will come to this country because they're fleeing a terrible economic crisis or political repression or whatever it is, and that we sort of have had policies from the federal government, especially under Democrats, that want to get the credit for believing in open borders, but are unwilling to pay the cost of sort of absorbing them into the country.

It's much like the group of people that were in 2020 banging on about defunding the police, but could escape into their high-rises with doormen to protect them.

Meantime, the neighborhoods where the police were actually pulling back and actually were being defunded just became so much more dangerous for those people, poor, often minority to live.

I see this as very analogous to that kind of situation.

It makes me think of my favorite white liberal elite view that you see, it's not like I'm not exaggerating, I think it's a real thing that I've heard, which is crime is an efficient means of economic redistribution in the absence of state intervention.

That if the state is not living up to its end of the bargain in terms of strengthening social safety nets, then people shoplifting at your local Walgreens and Target is actually a kind of pro-justice sort of thing.

I actually heard this pretty recently.

Shadi, where are you hanging out these days?

You know who was way ahead of his time on this argument is Morrissey of the Smiths, the great song shoplifters of the world you had to take over.

I didn't know that.

So what's been out there is what I'm trying to say.

So Marxists have been saying this forever.

My wife is the sixth generation Californian, and that means that she believes that everything needs to be organic and recyclable, including our baby diapers.

Now I won the war on that one.

But now that I live in LA, I become a tree-hugging sustainability icon too, and you can be as well by discovering everything that you need for a sustainable home at Grove Collaborative.

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The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression is stepping up to protect your freedom of expression, no matter where you're from or what you believe.

After more than two decades spent advancing the rights of students and faculty on college campuses, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, or FIRE, is expanding its mission beyond the campus.

Now, FIRE stands ready to defend all Americans' rights to free speech in our courtrooms, in our campuses, and in our culture.

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Because FIRE knows that free speech makes free people.

Join the fight for free speech at www.thefire.org today.

Okay.

This is a story that feels like it could either come out in like 2006 or possibly the 11th century.

In Minnesota, an art professor was fired for showing art.

Yes.

Even though the professor of art history had told the class ahead of time that she would be showing these works, and even though these works are historic and generally agreed to be masterpieces, after word got out and spread around campus that she had shown artwork that depicted the Prophet Muhammad, a familiar outrage campaign began that eventually led to the university's associate vice president for inclusive excellence, declaring that showing this art was quote, undeniably inconsiderate, disrespectful, and Islamophobic, and thus she was canned.

Shadi, please tell us what you make of this.

I think it's absurd that you have a non-Muslim president of this institution, a certain Dr. Miller.

I'm also just looking at the statement that she released more recently to the New York Times.

And she says, to look upon an image of the Prophet Muhammad for many Muslims is against their faith.

It was important that our Muslim students as well as all other students feel safe, supported, and respected in and outside of the classroom.

Now this is interesting because she's making a determination on what Islamic orthodoxy is that images of the Prophet Muhammad are un-Islamic.

Now where did she get the authority to kind of make a judgment of that?

There is a diversity of views among scholars of Islam, and it's just really an ultra-conservative view that bans pictorial depictions of the Prophet Muhammad.

In some ways the painting in question is actually better described as Islamophilia, not Islamophobia. This was a painting done by a Muslim artist from the 14th century for Muslim audiences, for Muslim patrons.

It was a way to honor the Prophet and what this particular image depicts is the beginning of the Islamic revelation when the angel Gabriel says to Prophet Muhammad recite.

So in that sense, it's a very powerful moment in the Islamic tradition.

So how could that be Islamophobic?

And I'm glad to see that in recent days, a number of scholars of Islam and most of them Muslim, but also some of them who just focus on this issue from an art history perspective, there have been a lot of paintings and illustrations of the Prophet Muhammad.

They're not as common now, but historically, especially in Persian, Indian, and Turkish culture, it was much more common, Arabs historically have not done that as much.

But it is part of the Islamic civilizational story.

So to now jump in and say, oh, this is Islamophobic, it's ahistorical.

But the second thing, just on the issue of safety, that Muslim students are almost like these little children that we have to protect, there's something just very condescending and patronizing about it.

And college, and I'm sure we'll all agree on this, college should not be the place to feel safe.

You should feel uncomfortable, God forbid, you even feel offended.

Yes, dealing with offense is a useful life skill.

So I think this is not just about Islam, it's about a broader tendency on the part of university administrators to avoid anything that might make a student feel uncomfortable.

So on those grounds, I think reasonable people of any faith tradition should be like, whatever you think about images of the Prophet Muhammad, this is also about the American campus and how our expectations of what students can withhold is just so distorted right now.

Shadi, I just want to drill down on something that you said, which is, I think a very important point, which is that why is it that a university in this particular case is acting as though the most ascetic and extreme interpretation of Islam is speaking for all Muslims?

I mean, that to me is almost in addition to your superb points about the nature of a college campus and the need to be offended and openness in universities, there's a separate question of the kind of loudest and like most literalist voices in a very large religion that has a lot of different interpretations is taken to be speaking for the whole.

Yeah, well, it's a common assumption and I wouldn't say that it's extremist per se, it's just more strictly oriented Muslims who don't want, they don't want to introduce too much nuances, they want to be on the quote unquote safe side and avoid certain depictions. The idea there is that idolatry is one of the major sins in Islam and the fear is that with a lot of visual images of people like the Prophet Muhammad or others who might be kind of raised on a pedestal or seen as divinely inspired that you see them as more than mere human beings.

Of course, the Prophet is more than just your ordinary human being is the last Prophet, you know, from the Islamic standpoint, but he is very much a man.

There isn't any of this idea that he himself is partly divine or something like that.

So that's where the concern around images comes from.

And it's also just, I think, a stereotype that a lot of people naturally have because pictures of the Prophet Muhammad are not very common, it's not something that most people see on a regular basis.

And even I don't have a clear, like I visual in my own mind of what the Prophet looks like, compare that to say Jesus Christ, you know, I sort of picture him as like this white dude with blonde hair, that's obviously not what he looked like, you know, it's from Palestine. But you know, it's interesting that certain traditions are much more upfront about the visual aspect in terms of people's faces and others less so.

So I just think it's a stereotype that's been built over and some of it's also Orientalist or Orientalist scholars in the 19th and early 20th century were sort of portraying Muslims as irrational as being intolerant.

So they themselves, in a sort of counterintuitive way, would encourage these types of strict interpretations as a way to say, oh, look at those Muslims, they're not as enlightened as the rest of us are.

And then just lastly, the cartoon controversies in Europe that I think people still remember and then the issues around Charlie Hebdo and the cartoons of the Prophet.

So I think people are making a mistake in associating the cartoon controversies with images of the Prophet when they're completely different things.

I mean, I would just say on my, I don't know where you are on this, but on my strict free speech grounds, I think that they are pretty much the same that like you do not have a right, especially in a country like Denmark, which is not a Muslim country, to demand or riot in response to, you know, cartoons.

And there's an element of it also where there were people who were looking to stir up trouble in 2006 where they were, they took these cartoons and then distributed them widely in the Islamic world.

So it would create this kind of backlash and a response where it's a little bit like when people find someone's, you know, off-color tweet from 10 years ago and then retweet it and then say, isn't this person a monster?

When you have, by retweeting it, have called more attention to these supposedly offensive material.

Well, I think there's, I would just draw a distinction a little bit.

I think that the question of mockery and then what Muslims who are angry about it actually do about it.

So rioting and doing anything like that is completely unjustified.

And some of that did happen, obviously, in these European cases, but I think it's okay.

I think that Muslims can feel like this is something they don't like, that it is making a mockery of their faith.

And that was actually the intent of some of these cartoons, which is very different than what we see in Hamline University, where there was no desire to mock, no desire to cast Islam in negative light.

So that is a qualitative difference in what these situations actually entail.

It's also worth noting that the instructor in question offered up a disclaimer saying that there will be an image of the Prophet Muhammad.

So there was a heads up and no student raised objections at that point.

So this is someone who went out of their way to make the students feel comfortable to give them a quote unquote trigger warning.

So that also tells us something about the intent here.

Okay, Barry, what do you make of all of this?

I mean, I'm no longer surprised by this.

I'm no longer surprised by American campuses, whether it's one in this case that I hadn't really heard about or some of the most elite schools in the country genuinely and boldly declaring that the pursuit of truth and academic rigor is sort of at odds with the new sort of professed contemporary mission of many of these schools, which is to create a place of so-called safety and inclusion and progress.

And if that is the new mission of the American university, which it is implicitly in many cases and sometimes explicitly as in this case, they're saying it.

I mean, what's so incredible is that a lot of the bureaucrats in power at this university are saying explicitly like we have a job to protect our students from this kind of disrespectful and considerate Islamophobic imagery.

Since when did that become the mission of a college or university in America?

It is in direct contradiction to academic freedom and the ability to look at, in this case, a beautiful piece of art that was, by the way, and Shadi was just speaking to this. I knew nothing about the art, so I went to go read about it, commissioned by a Muslim king to honor the Prophet Muhammad.

Now the other part of this that I found really interesting, I don't know if you guys noticed this.

The Times was the one, I think, that broke this whole story open.

It was really interesting.

When you're scrolling through the piece and obviously wondering, where's the art?

As a reader, you're thinking it must look like one of these crazy cartoons.

You get down to the part of the story where the art should be, and rather than the art just being embedded in the piece, which is typical, you actually have to click an arrow to look at the art.

There's almost like a trigger warning subtly inside the New York Times, which is quite unbelievable, especially when you look at the actual content of the piece of work.

The other thing I was thinking about with regard to this story is that Greg Lukyanov and Jonathan Hyde in their book, *The Coddling of the American Mind* and their broader research, show that when you actually, like that trigger warnings don't actually protect or help the person being warned, it actually makes them more susceptible to being triggered.

I wonder in this case, if all of the sort of hand-ringing on the part of this highly sensitive, surely progressive adjunct professor actually made the situation worse for her.

It's also funny that someone who was representing the Council on American Islamic Relations Care made a comment about the trigger warning saying that the trigger warning itself was a trigger.

When someone gives you a trigger warning, you know something bad is going to happen afterwards. Which is an interesting point and obviously I don't like their position.

I think they're taking a very pretty bad position by saying these images shouldn't have been displayed in the classroom.

But there is an interesting point here that once you buy into this trigger warning, safe spaces, all of this kind of campus culture stuff, it becomes very hard to figure out where the lines are and the boundaries keep on shifting.

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Now back to the show.

Okay, well now we are going to do a deep dive into a free press story that's not like anything else that's out there.

I'm going to bring on special guest writer Suzy Weiss, and the topic is raw milk.

I highly recommend this piece, which gets through the sort of history of alternatives to cow's milk in the last 30 years, and then describes what is really a kind of gray market for people who want the real thing, raw milk that hasn't been pasteurized or heated and zipped up with additives and so forth.

So Suzy, I want to thank you so much for being here today, and in a nutshell, tell me what's going on right now in the world of raw milk, and why is it something that you think that we should be thinking about?

Thank you so much for having me, I'm so honored, Eli.

So I think that every era has a type of milk that defines it.

Before the turn of the century, if you'll allow me to nerd out on milk for a second, you had 2%, 1%, if your family was lame, skim milk, but all milk pretty much was from the udder of a cow, it was homogenized, which means it was mixed up with the milk fats and

the cream, and it was pasteurized, which means it was boiled and treated for all sorts of germs.

And then soy milk came onto the scene, and that was total marketing, soy milk does not have to be refrigerated, but the brand silk put it into the dairy aisle, and then you kind of, the Pandora's Box is open, right?

So around the Obama administration, almond milk comes onto the scene, and then it's like a Portlandia sketch, then it's macadamia, it's hemp, it's pea, it's cashew, it's hazelnut. And has like these crazy specific types of milk and dietary restrictions they're trying to account for.

And then I think the peak oat milk was definitely during the Trump administration, like 2017 to 2021 with oat milk, which at that point it was like, okay, is it anything milk?

Like we're gonna have wood milk next, and there was an oat milk shortage, and then Oatly, the big Swedish brand, did an IPO, and it was valued at \$10 billion.

And now after all of that coming down from the pandemic, we have raw milk.

It's back to the bovine.

Instead of the red and blue gallons we're used to seeing, the newest milk is the most basic type of milk there is.

It hasn't been treated, it hasn't been pasteurized, it hasn't been homogenized, which means when they shake up the milk solids and the liquids.

And it hasn't been tested for things like E. coli, listeria, and salmonella.

It, it's raw.

So I have so many questions, Susie.

Please.

My first is that is this driven by the kind of collective prejudice that our guts have for lactose?

Or is it something else that tells us about our kind of like lifestyle or like a new environmentalism or the mysticism about like, you know, how we have to distinguish our diets and the elites or something like that?

You know, I think it's both.

I think raw milkers will tell you that you're not really lactose intolerant.

It's just that you're having a reaction, I think probably to A1 milk.

No one should take anything I say as medical advice, nor should they probably drink raw milk.

But yeah, on one hand you have the kind of crunchy people who want to go back to nature. They want to go towards a more traditional living.

And then on the other side, you have people, many of whom were kind of radicalized against things like the CDC or the FDA or the food pyramid over the past couple years.

And those are your more libertarian Bitcoin types.

And they're also reaching for raw milk.

So everyone's sort of reaching back because they're, they're looking at their options and they're saying, okay, I've tried every old milk, I've tried cashew milk, I don't feel good.

I can't pronounce half the things on the package.

Why don't I just go back to the beginning before any process was kind of mediated upon

the milk.

It's like milk is not a substance for nutrition in this case or in the case of this story.

It's like milk, milk is a political symbol.

It's an avatar of your lifestyle, an avatar of your beliefs and creeds.

And I think it works on a few levels.

And if you're kind of become suspicious of things like Amazon or Fresh Direct, it's, it's a little hard to get, which people like.

It's kind of like exclusive because you might have to drive to a farm or you might have to get a milkman and you can't just order it to your front door.

And then also it's, it is dangerous, even if it's just a little bit dangerous.

And people, I think like that, they don't want to feel insulated.

Maybe they don't want to be vaccinated against every germ that is floating around the world.

And they don't want something sterile.

They want something that could maybe potentially hurt them a little bit.

Susie, I loved your piece and I came out of it with a desire.

I'm like, oh, I got to try raw milk.

So I don't, maybe that wasn't your intent and you don't want to encourage people to do that.

You do talk about the dangers involved and how some people appreciate that danger.

But I was not familiar with this world at all.

I didn't even know that raw milk was its own subculture.

And I love that there was a description you had in the piece, which I just found fascinating, like just how creamy raw milk is.

And then one of the guys in your story actually needs to use a ladle to scoop the milk out because it's so thick.

I don't even know what a ladle is, but I like that.

A spoon.

Yeah.

Oh, it's a spoon.

Okay.

It's like a big spoon.

Yeah.

It's something appealing about moving away from our culture of efficiency and productivity that we always have to do things as quickly as possible because we need all the time we can get to actually work endlessly.

And people are saying, you know, let's take a step back and let's go through a lot of hoops to do something as basic as drinking milk.

It is like as, as, as you guys said, like the ultimate symbol of we're just saying no to the rhythms of modern meritocratic society, basically.

There's an appeal to that.

Hard no, Shadi.

Okay.

Because that can be taken to extremes.

We want to go back to outhouses.

Okay.

Or, you know, I'm just saying, it's like, how far do you really want to go?

I'm intrigued because it look, because you made it seem Susie, like it was delicious and that we were, we were missing out on a wonderful treat and that like actually pasteurized milk is kind of lame.

Yeah.

And I think, you know, Shadi, to what you were saying, it's like, it's sort of revolutionary, like a phrase that I heard recently about Bitcoin is come for the game gains, stay for the revolution.

And like, I think people might go to raw milk for the taste, but stay for the revolution and stay for this idea that they're out of the matrix now.

They're not reliant, you know, I remember, you know, I was with Barry a few years ago when COVID started, and we're like, okay, but what happens when they run out of eggs at this store?

Like, how do we do this?

Like we have no sense of providing for ourselves.

And I think that became really clear in the past few years, and now people are wanting to kind of like, secure those, those means of production, if you will.

There was an interesting character in the piece that really surprised me, the woman who had been the partner at the venture capital firm, Andreessen Horowitz, A16Z, who's now like gone from that world, like the world of the future to the world of the past, and has become a raw milk aficionado.

And I wondered, Susie, if you felt like she was an anomaly, or if she symbolizes a kind of a trajectory that a lot of people are taking.

It's like they've gotten to the edge of the tech, and now they're going all the way back around back to the outhouse.

Right.

That woman was named Preathy.

Her portal into raw milk was that she hadn't had her period in years.

She wanted to get pregnant.

She felt that the advice her doctors were giving her to go on this birth control and that birth control was nonsensical.

So then, as she told me, she said, I had to go down the rabbit hole.

So she goes down the rabbit hole of food as medicine, which is a big movement, and kind of lands in this world of, okay, let me eliminate everything.

Let me go back to basics.

Let me take out seed oils and xanthan gums and everything like that.

And she credits, among other things, raw milk with helping her get pregnant.

Do I think it's an aphrodisiac that's going to get everyone pregnant?

I don't.

But I think a lot of tech people have an attitude of, I want to see how that works.

Let me do it myself.

So it makes sense that someone like her would reach for raw milk.

And then, meeting her are the more hippie, Ayurvedic massage girls who are into like

tumor smoothies and stuff who also drink raw milk for hormone balancing reasons. So I think the portals, you can enter it through a lot of different angles. Someone like Kale Heider, who I also interviewed, came at it from a finance angle. Someone like Josh Rainer, who was a personal trainer and got really into CrossFit, entered it from a more personal health and fitness goal, journey angle. So, you know, there's some odd bedfellows in this world, I'll say that. All right.

I got to ask a sort of exit question here, Suzy.

Is there some FDA, Nanny State, bureaucrat, who is, are we going to see a backlash? Are we going to see a crackdown on all these like, you know, raw milk, this raw milk rebels, so to speak?

So like the ultimate enemy of raw milkers is Louis Pasteur.

He's dead.

John Sheehan, who was the head of the dairy division of the FDA, who famously said drinking raw milk is like playing Russian roulette with your health.

He is like the second ring on the dartboard, but I think kind of taking this into the real world, a lot of these people are going to vote based on who's going to give them what they call food rights, who's going to kind of deregulate the food industry and say, look, you don't have to buy this raw milk in Maryland as pet food.

You could buy it at a store.

I think a lot of people are going to push for it to go mainstream.

They want to deregulate the food industry?

Yeah, to deregulate the food industry.

I think Upton Sinclair would like a word.

I mean, I'm just saying it's like, let's not go too far.

Milk, milk, milk, yeah.

Guzzle milk, drink it all.

Make a milk waterfall.

Cookie milk, stack it all.

Milk with no rhythm at all.

Make you run fast milk.

Stay awake in class milk.

All right.

Well, Susie, it was a great story.

Please dig around because we are going to do our final segment here, and that is the stories that, you know, it's the beginning of 2023.

What's the big story that you're looking at in 2023, and then let's go through the round table?

Well, one of the stories that I'm watching is I feel like America is ripe for a kind of religious revivalism, and I feel that though people have convinced themselves that they are secular or not religious, it's really just that they have put those impulses onto other things, like politics or, frankly, food.

Milk might be one of those areas, and I'm really interested to see if that turns out to be the case.

Internationally, I would say the story, not just of the year, but of our age is China, and the questions about where that's going, and whether or not to some extent we already are subservient in many ways to China, and just not recognizing that, especially when it comes to the areas of tech and business.

So that's a story I'm quite interested in, the protesters in Iran, and whether or not this actually will be the revolution that we were promised at the Green Revolution, only more than a decade later.

So those are the international stories that I'm really interested in.

Shadi?

Yeah, so I'm keeping an eye on what I call the Brown rebellion.

It got some attention this past year.

There was that big Tim Alberta piece about Hispanics leaving the Democratic Party, but when I think about the vanguard against crazy wokeness, I think brown people are going to lead the way, because they can.

But also because I think that there's a sense of enough is enough, and we have been seeing signs of this, as I said, with Hispanics, but also Arabs, Muslims, black men to some extent.

And the question is, will the Republican Party be able to capitalize on this and actually make serious gains and sustain them?

As a Democrat myself, who's very critical of a Democratic Party, of course, but still, I would like Democrats to realize the risk that they are losing brown folks and to do a better job of keeping them in the tent by not being so ultra secular or by not being super woke on issues that alienate religiously conservative minorities, such as on issues relating to trans rights and gender identity and public education.

So we'll see what happens with that, because that could really contribute to certain realignments.

I mean, since 9-11, Muslims have been a pretty reliable component of the Democratic Party coalition.

They didn't always used to be that way.

I mean, my parents voted for George W. Bush like many Muslims in 2000.

So there's an interesting opportunity here, and people got to make choices about what they want to emphasize politically, but the brown rebellion has started.

It's also worth noting that I think it's not just brown people, but immigrants as well, who I think tend to be patriotic and comfortable with saying they love America in a way that many white liberals in the Democratic Party are not comfortable with.

And there, I think, you see an interesting distinction in how different parts of the Democratic Party coalition think about their country.

Hmm.

Susie Weiss.

I'm definitely, I think, AI will probably be the death knell to college.

I'm always looking at Gen Z and what they're up to, and I think it's going to start to get less competitive to get into college, because I think a lot of people will stop going.

Obviously, I'm looking for the next alt milk.

I've been told it's precision fermented milk, which produces dairy without any of the cows necessary.

I'm going to, you know, I think we're going to see a lot of changes and old debates resurface about reproduction.

A lot of people I see online are going off birth control and kind of reaching for, again, these like ancient techniques, like what was the one called seed cycling and just these sort of weird natural birth control methods.

And, you know, at the same time, you have like the tinder for surrogacy kind of launching and that's a billion dollar industry.

So I think the business of being born is about to get really shaken up and I'm really excited to follow it.

One more thing that I'm thinking about a lot is kind of what's going to replace effective altruism.

Now that SBF is like with that dog and his parents house and Palo Alto and just kind of hanging out in his cargo shorts, I assume.

I think that was a really meaningful thing for a lot of people.

And if it's not dead, it's dying.

So I'm curious about communal living, which a lot of effective altruism people were into and what's going to replace that kind of mode of giving and living.

Communal living like kibbutzim?

Sort of like kibbutzim.

I basically, there's a few effective altruist houses in Brooklyn where they debate all night about whether they should put mouse traps down because does the life of the mouse have more worth than the fear that you feel that it's going to be in your comforter?

So I think all of those communities are super weird and super cool.

And I think...

That sounds fun.

Yeah.

No, it sounds really cool, really good use of time.

But like what Barry was saying about the religious revival, it's I think partially going to be in churches and mosques and synagogues and it's partially going to be at the altar of if not effective altruism, something else.

It's like the return of the 19th century, like the transcendentalists and people would go out and find these like deliberate communities and stuff.

That's very interesting.

Well, my final thoughts, what I'm watching for in 2023, very much sort of piggybacking on Barry Weiss' view is that I'm looking at the New Year's revolutions.

It's not just Iran.

I think that we have to look at this often at the analysis of whether this particular people power movement has the wherewithal and support in the population to succeed.

And that is certainly one vantage point.

But another thing that we often don't look at as much as we should, and that is that all of these authoritarian dictatorships are fragile to a certain degree.

They lack something that we take for granted in our Western liberal republics, and that is the feedback that we get from regular elections and an atmosphere of free speech.

And they don't have that in China.

So we see these wild reversals in policies from zero COVID to more COVID tolerance. And we see it in Russia, where Vladimir Putin almost a year ago launched a disastrous war against his neighbor in Ukraine and hasn't gone well. And I wouldn't be surprised, or at least I could say I'm hoping for, more tinier kind of rebellions among a conscripted army that clearly doesn't want to be there. So for 2023, I guess the theme that I'm watching are these dictatorships and how they themselves have to cope with, in my view, what is ultimately an inefficient model. And it's something to remember that every tyranny always looks imposing and strong until the moment that it's about to collapse. And I hope that we are seeing those cracks right now. With that, that is our pilot episode of the Free Press Roundtable. Tune in next week. This is Brian Dean Wright, former CIA operations officer. By now, you've probably heard of my podcast, The President's Daily Brief. We travel around the world talking about the most pressing news of the day. And the goal is to take complicated issues, both here and abroad, and make them really simple to understand. We also talk about solutions to the problems that we discuss, just like the actual brief delivered to the president each day in the Oval Office. So download and subscribe to The President's Daily Brief, available on all major podcast platforms starting at 6 a.m. Eastern Monday through Friday. It'd be a pleasure if you joined us.