

#1371 Why Even Seemingly Normal People Are Falling for the QAnon Conspiracy Cult

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left podcast, in which we shall learn about the phenomenon of the pro-Trump conspiracy cult, QAnon, what it is, and why so many people are getting sucked into it; not just the people you'd expect. Clips today are from Deconstructed, Thom Hartmann, You Are Not So Smart, The Topical from the Onion, QAnon Anonymous, The Last Post, MSNBC, Folding Ideas on YouTube, Power Corrupts, and On the Media.

Be warned: today's episode contains satire. And unfortunately we live in a world in which that needs to be made explicit, because reality has a way of catching up with even the most outlandish satire.

Is QAnon the Future of the Republican Party? - Deconstructed with Mehdi Hasan - Air Date 8-28-20

RYAN GRIM- HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: In the fall of 1909, one of the nation's most widely read magazines, *Woman's World*, delivered a shocking exposé to more than two million doorsteps around the country. A few months later, a best-selling book, called *War on the White Slave Trade* became a national phenomenon. It sparked a moral panic that would reshape the country.

White parents across the country were warned that their girls were being snatched off the street and sold into sex slavery. The book, which was the collective work of Chicago clergy and prosecutors, warned that: "Ice cream parlors of the city and fruit stores combined, largely run by foreigners, are the places where scores of girls have taken their first step downward." The result, the authors said, was: "The blackest slavery that has ever stained the human race."

The conspiracy was vast, and for the "safety and purity of womanhood," federal laws were needed.

The panic set off by that book had been building for a decade or more. In 1881, the YWCA in New York started offering typing classes to women. Pretty soon there were at least 60,000 women working as typists; that number kept climbing. The typewriter, and the income that came with it, started to affect the role of women in economic and social life.

As you can imagine, not everyone was thrilled with that development. For some, the simple sight of women walking alone in the city was a shocking affront. Women, unaccompanied by men, going to dance halls and ice cream parlors, was simply beyond the pale. And most shocking of all, some of these newly liberated White women were choosing to date Black men.

Trafficking exposés like *War on the White Slave Trade* provided the public with the perfect outlet for their fear and rage. Whipped into a frenzy, they demanded that the government save the children, and the book's authors helped write and pass the White Slave Traffic Act of

1910. Better known today as the Mann Act, it banned the transportation of any girl or woman across state lines for any "immoral" purpose.

To enforce the Mann Act, the federal government needed cops. Two years earlier, Teddy Roosevelt had deputized a few dozen former secret service officers as "special agents" of the Department of Justice. Those agents were assigned the task of enforcing the White Slave Traffic Act, and they decided to call themselves the Bureau of Investigation. Within two years, there were some 300 special agents and as many support staff. Though no law ever officially authorized their existence, they're now known as the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The Mann Act passed on June 25, 1910. Nine days later, on July 4, Jack Johnson, the first Black heavyweight champion, fought former champion James Jeffries, dubbed the "Great White Hope." Johnson was a racial lightning rod, reviled by many Whites for dating White women, the highest crime of the Jim Crow era, and for unapologetically flaunting the wealth his boxing had brought him. He showed no interest in knowing his place. Johnson knocked Jeffries out, and Whites around the country rioted.

The real purpose of the Mann Act became clear pretty quickly. Federal agents arrested Jack Johnson under the new law for crossing state lines with his White girlfriend, who would soon be his wife. He eventually fled to Europe, not returning until 1920, when he was forced to serve his prison term.

The next wave of women's liberation came in the 1970s, and again it produced a panic, the so-called "satanic panic" of the 1980s, as Americans became convinced that satanic day care centers were turning children into sex slaves. The message was clear—their mothers should have stayed at home.

Then in 2016, with Hillary Clinton seemingly on her way to the White House, the panic surged back. This time, children were being trafficked not out of an ice cream parlor, but a pizza parlor, Comet Ping Pong in Washington DC, and the conspiracy involved people at the highest levels of government. When Trump took office, the theory went, he would expose and smash this conspiracy, and save the children.

In 2018, the conspiracy theory was given legs when the extremist anti-abortion group, Operation Rescue, claimed falsely it had damning new evidence about the evil deeds of Planned Parenthood. The next year, Jeffrey Epstein, at the center of a real-life elite child sex trafficking ring, was arrested and then died mysteriously.

It was up to an anonymous government insider, or maybe a group of them, known as Q, to end this evil. It was his followers' job to help prepare the country for this Trump-led counterrevolution.

Pro-Q video: The good guys, with control over the NSA, began the Q intelligence dissemination program to invoke an online, grassroots movement that came to be called, the Great Awakening.

RYAN GRIM- HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: This is QAnon, a movement that is now electing members of congress and threatening to infect the entire Republican Party. And it got its biggest boost yet when Trump was asked about it last week.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: Well, I don't know much about the movement, other than I understand they like me very much, which I appreciate.

RYAN GRIM- HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: This week at the RNC, Republicans continued their dance, exploiting the energy of QAnon but never explicitly embracing it.

QANON Is Antisemitism Hiding In Dangerous Conspiracy Theory? - Thom Hartmann - Air Date 9-15-20

THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THE THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM: I have some familiarity with the Nazis, having known real Nazis and having been there. And one of the things that consistently in talking with people that I knew who were Nazis or who had been Nazis, I'm talking real German Nazis now. This was back in the eighties, these people were in their sixties then.

And one of the things that I know is that one of their major influences was a booklet that was published in 1902 in Russia. It was written by the Russian secret police on behalf of Tsar Nicholas II because Nicholas was of the opinion, Nicholas wasn't a particularly good tsar, king, of Russia, and he was a kleptocrat, he wanted everything. And the institution, some of the institutions of Russia, particularly the banking institutions were pushing back on some of the things he was doing and so he had this thing drafted, it was called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, that said that Jews were trying to undermine and destroy Russia from within. And that what they did on the high Jewish Holy holidays, and we're heading toward one right now, was that they would literally drink the blood or drain the blood from children, from non-Jewish children, from White children, and use that blood to make motzah. Use it to make the unleavened bread that you would eat around Passover ceremonies and things like that.

This was a big deal. I mean, this was widely, and then Hitler came to power and in *Mein Kampf* references this, he ordered, he actually commissioned a children's book. There was a children's version of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. And had it distributed to every school in Germany. I had conversations with my friend Armin Lehmann about this who the 15 year old courier who brought Hitler the news that the war was lost, and was there when Hitler committed suicide. Armin wrote a book about it. I've talked about this before. Armin's been on my show. Armin's dead now, but back more than a decade ago he was on my show many times talking about these issues. And the kids believed it. Everybody believed it. It was a cult that they believed that the Jews were a cult that stole and abused, including killing, White children.

So Gregory Stanton published a piece on justsecurity.org that I tweeted over the weekend, you can find it on my Twitter at timeline if you're looking for that particular story or you can just Google it. It's titled *QAnon is a Nazi Cult Rebranded*. And he starts out saying a secret cabal is taking over the world. They kidnapped children slaughter and eat them to gain power from their blood. They control high positions in government, banks, international finance, the news media, and the church. They want to disarm the police. They promote homosexuality and pedophilia. They plan to mongrelize the White race so it will lose its

essential power. And then he said, does that sound familiar? This is pretty much the story that you get from QAnon right now. And he said it was called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It was written by Russian anti-Jewish propagandist around 1902. Central to his mythology was the blood libel, which claimed that Jews kidnapped and slaughtered Christian children and drained their blood to mix in the dough for matzahs consumed on Jewish holidays. The Nazis published a children's book, you know, he goes through the whole thing.

And then it goes through the history of this, and now you've got QAnon saying that the Jewish billionaire, George Soros and Jews who control the media and they'll point out, "Hey, Wolf Blitzer's Jewish didn't you know that?" that kind of stuff. This is QAnon, and they're saying, these people want open borders so that Brown children can invade America and mongrolize the White race. This is part of the story of QAnon. The so-called deep state is largely the Jewish deep state.

And now in Germany, as he pointed out in Just Security, over 200,000 of the new Nazis, the neo-Nazis, have now taken the QAnon pledge. They've embraced this. He says in the thirties, millions of Europeans were unemployed. Violent battles between Nazis and communists raged in city streets. Democratic governments were powerless. And today the American people suffer from a plague. Millions of Americans have lost their jobs. Angry mobs roam American cities, and battle militarized police and heavily armed militias. The American government seems paralyzed. Dictators rule Russia and China. Islamic fascists rule Saudi Arabia and the old Ottoman and Persian empires. The American president appeases Russia, scapegoats China, and looks the other way as Putin and Bin Salman murder their opponents. Now there've been a few Republicans who have called this out. Liz Cheney, Adam Kinzinger, Ben Sasse have all said no, wait a minute, we don't want that. But how did a Nazi cult get rebranded and have this much power in influence in America? This is amazing.

Team Human with Douglas Rushkoff - You Are Not So Smart with David McRaney - Air Date 1-13-19

DAVID MCRANEY - HOST, YOU ARE NOT SO SMART: I recently finished a project where I did a lot of research into conspiracy theorists and how they interact on online. Tom Stafford, a cognitive scientist, had told me that one of the elements of conspiratorial thinking that has -- the reason that it has risen to the top of our collective conscious here recently and even infected our politics at a new level, or at least the more salient level, is that, in his framing of it, when we're online -- you said that something similar in the book -- in that we have these evolved social mechanisms that, in this context, you can feel a certain way that can be algorithmically driven toward the ends of the corporation or whatever entity has us inside their walled garden.

And he was saying that it was -- these people are talking to each other in an environment, whether it's like a subreddit or whatever, where they feel like they're in a community, they feel like they're having an exchange of ideas and that they are coming to a consensus and they're figuring things out. And he said, but they're not actually in a community. They just are getting the feeling that they're in a community, but they're really alone and they're isolated, and so they're basically alone together, right? And doing so is not like a group of doctors who are like, someone says -- or scientists who say, this idea looks like it's not working out. The evidence is starting to point in the other direction, and they update. A

conspiratorial community doesn't update. Everyone's independent interpretation of the evidence is as valuable as anybody else's, as long as they stay collected.

And so, just the tribal aspect of it is what is being pinged. And it feels like -- that's a dangerous place. And it seems almost like a stop, a intermediary step toward the future that you're imagining, where, how do I remain an individual but also have community. I guess I'll just stick with these people who are like-minded. And then we have a community, and then that community is now antagonistic toward this other community. It feels like that's the space we're in right now. What's your reading of that?

DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF: You can look at online communities as subscriptions to particular conspiracies. And it's really the thing that the internet does, just like reality TV does it, is it decontextualizes everything. So. How are we going to interpret this picture? How are we going to interpret this sequence? And in some ways, the community that you pick online are the other people who put the picture together in the way that you do. So, okay. George Soros is a globalist Jew internationalist, something who's funding protests and that's my group, okay. Donald Trump's people are -- what did she call it? Irrascibles? What was the word she used? Intolerables?

DAVID MCRANEY - HOST, YOU ARE NOT SO SMART: Deplorables?

DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF: Deplorables! There you go!, Irrascibles. I think irascible is actually a compliment.

DAVID MCRANEY - HOST, YOU ARE NOT SO SMART: Your next book should be called The Irrascible.

DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF: Nobody uses that word anymore. Do you bring it back?

DAVID MCRANEY - HOST, YOU ARE NOT SO SMART: Bring it back.

DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF: There you go. And you know, and I could put Spanky on the cover because he was an irascible rascal. Perfect. Oh my god, that's an aside. So, if your online group were going to be the other people who put together the picture the way you do, then all you're using your online group for is to reinforce the arbitrary mosaic that you've assembled. That's weird. It's not community in the traditional sense, but it is serving a need. It's helping you reinforce or confirm your reality and unfortunately helping you see it as the way things are rather than as one provisional understanding. What I was hoping was that we would -- that the internet would help everybody see that their interpretation of reality is just one of the reality tunnels, more of a sort of Robert Anton Wilson perspective on the world where everybody is in their own tunnel. Everybody puts the picture together, and it's fascinating. Oh, how do you see it? Oh, how do you see it? How do you see it? We all see it differently. And the fact that we all see it differently helps us know that none of us is really seeing it. And what these little groups do online is the opposite effect, is it becomes your group's understanding of things, it becomes cultish, becomes **the** way it is rather than **a** way to understand it. And once we're there, then we're not human anymore. Then we're trying to interpret reality with the, again, with the almost historical validity, the literal historicity of the algorithm.

My friend Allister Crowe who writes about this kind of stuff told me once that on the internet if you say you want a grilled cheese sandwich, you're not actually presenting an argument for a grilled cheese sandwich or the value of grilled cheese sandwiches. You're saying help me find the grilled cheese room because that's really what I want. I want to find the like-minded grilled cheese enthusiasts. And so when you proclaim what you want, you're helping the machines find the group you want to be part of, as opposed to the machine helping you have a conversation in the group that you're already in. And I've thought about that because toward the end of the book, you really make this bold statement of saying . . .you bring back the statement of find the others, and a lot of the book is about our desire for connectedness and all of our biological proclivities for being good at being connected and getting the most out of being connected in the community. And the weird messiness of being people is being subverted by the very things we created to encourage that.

QAnon is totally true - The Topical, The Onion - Air Date 9-29-20

LESLIE PRICE - HOST, THE TOPICAL FROM THE ONION: The far right conspiracy theory, dubbed QAnon, has gained an alarming amount of traction in the lead up to this year's presidential election. And today we may have more of an understanding as to why. A new psychological study published this morning has found that the appeal of QAnon can be attributed largely to it being 100% true.

Top psychiatric researchers have concluded that when a certain type of person is presented with theories that our government is secretly run by a cabal of Satan worshiping pedophiles, they will have a tendency to believe these claims, due to the fact that they're totally real and absolutely can be backed up with hard undeniable evidence if you just read between the lines. Interesting. I may have to dive into my Facebook feed and do a little research on this for myself.

QAnon Makes Human Trafficking Worse feat Michael Hobbes - QAnon Anonymous - Air Date 9-15-20

TRAVIS VIEW - HOST, QANON ANONYMOUS: How exactly does law enforcement define child sex trafficking?

MICHAEL HOBBS: The central problem with human trafficking and what brings us all of these conspiracy theories and what makes it so easy to twist this issue into whatever you want it to be, is the vast gulf between the legal definition of the term human trafficking and the societal definition of the term. What people think when they hear human trafficking.

So when most people hear human trafficking, they think of Liam Neeson. They think of his daughter being kidnapped by Armenians, and they're going to put her in a shipping container, and she's going to be in this like shady international network that's being sent around the world. That is a straightforward moral panic. That is an urban legend, that form of trafficking, of children being kidnapped, sold into these vast international networks, that is fake. It's a conspiracy theory all the way down.

The problem is, the legal definition of trafficking. And when you hear about there's been this many confirmed human trafficking cases, or there's been this many prosecutions of human trafficking this year, the legal definition encompasses things like forced marriages in South Asia. It encompasses anyone who is doing any work of any kind to pay off a debt. So if a woman from Kenya moves to the United States and she has to borrow money to pay off her plane ticket, and she does that with her nannying job that is, under the law, human trafficking. And when it comes to children, human trafficking covers anyone who trades a sex act for anything of value. So a pimp is not required. Recruitment is not required. Coercion is not required. If you are a homeless teenager and it is cold and raining and you're desperate and you agree to have sex with somebody so that you can sleep at his home, that is human trafficking. Technically he is your trafficker. Legally speaking that as an act of human trafficking.

So we have this vast array of legal acts that are happening, none of which are good, but all of those get boiled down into this pop culture, Liam Neeson, understanding of the term, and they're just not the same.

TRAVIS VIEW - HOST, QANON ANONYMOUS: So it sounds like, the problem is that when law enforcement tracks this stuff, their definition is so incredibly broad it could encompass lots and lots of things that are bad to varying degrees, but when people's here sex trafficking, they go exactly to the worst case, most dramatic scenario.

MICHAEL HOBBS: Yes. I should say I have spoken to the two major human trafficking organizations in the United States that are perpetuating a lot of these sort of stranger danger myths of human trafficking. Neither one of them can provide me with a single example of a child being trafficked by a stranger on an airplane. This is something that we do not have a single confirmed case of, and yet, we have posters in every single airport being like, "look for children with these signs, make sure you call this hotline number". They're in every single rest stop in America and we don't have examples of this form of trafficking actually taking place.

JULIAN FIELDS - HOST, QANON ANONYMOUS: Isn't this something that John McCain's wife fell into? So she called somebody. Yeah, she saw a child and an adult in an airport and called security on them. So this stuff was already in the making man. The the Republicans were ready.

MICHAEL HOBBS: Yes. She literally saw an interracial family and she thought that it was trafficking, and she called the cops. And then even more disturbing, the way that we found out about this is that the next day she was on a local radio show talking about how she rescued someone from being trafficked. Even though all she did was call the cops, they confirmed it was just an interracial family, and everyone moved on with their lives. And yet in her head, she has rescued a trafficking victim! This is the problem with this is it's all this sort of shadows and a friend of a friend of an uncle of a brother, and then you get these wild stories that nobody can confirm.

I mean, it's like flash your high beams at a gang member initiation and you get killed. It's exactly like the fucking email forwards we got in the 1990s.

TRAVIS VIEW - HOST, QANON ANONYMOUS: What about the missing children? I keep hearing QAnon people talk about the epidemic of missing children. So I assume that every

time a child is missing, it means that they are basically on the plane, to the cabal or something.

MICHAEL HOBBS: That's very fortunately not the case. It's easy to get wrapped up in all this conspiracy stuff, but it is in fact, extremely good news that this is not happening in large numbers. And if it was, there would be many, many other signs of it, than you found, zip ties on your car in the Whole Foods parking lot. Right? So, the thing to keep in mind about every single statistic regarding missing children, and a lot of different ones that go around, is that these are not the number of children who disappear. These are not the number of children who "go missing". These are the number of reports of missing children in a year.

So one of the numbers that goes around a lot is 800,000 children. 800,000 children disappear every year. That's more than 1% of all children in the country, by the way so just on its face, we should be skeptical of these kinds of large numbers. Secondly, this particular number comes from a 2001 report from 1999 that the author of the report has now disavowed it and has instructed people not to use it.

So that's what that specific number, but the biggest it's problem with these large numbers in general is that more than 99% of missing kids come home. They come home within days. They come home within hours. More than half of reports of missing children are custody disputes. It's like dad takes the kids for the weekend. Sunday night rolls around. He hasn't brought the kids back. Mom freaks out. Mom calls the cops. It takes him a couple more days to bring the kids back. She has to threaten him. It's a really ugly situation. Eventually the kids get brought back to her. That happens extremely frequently in America, as part of custody disputes. It's really sad and it's really awful, but it's just something that happens quite a bit. They're called custodial kidnappings. It's very common in America.

Another really common thing is kids who run away. There's a lot of kids who live in abusive homes. There's a lot of kids who are queer or trans and their parents are rejecting them. There's a lot of kids in foster care facilities who end up running away because they're awful. And so these are things that happen most of the time. The cops are called and the cops find the kid and the cops returned them to the abusive situations. Like we do not have a good system for dealing with runaways. We don't have a social safety net to help kids in these situations.

So in some way they're highlighting a real issue, but they're completely missing the real issue and they're fast forwarding to this fake, shipping containers, Liam Neeson, version of the issue. In actual real cases, such as Epstein's, we actually had a lot of victims coming forward and we had a lot of the families of those victims coming forward and we had authorities not doing anything. Right?

So at the same time, it's this conspiracy theory, but it's also profoundly deferential to power in some ways. Right? It's questioning some forms of power, but it's also saying, "Oh, we should trust law enforcement." Right? As long as we come forward, everything is going to be fine. And what we've had in so many of these cases, like R Kelly is another one, Bill Cosby is another one. I mean, we've had people serially treating women terribly and over and over again, we've had people come forward, we've had people express concerns, and nothing happens. Because oftentimes they are blinded by the power that is making them not trust their gut or the authorities don't give a shit because it's a wealthy and powerful and connected person.

I mean, most of the actual prosecutions of human trafficking are people who have bought the services of a sex worker without realizing that she's under age or maybe he does realize that she's under age and doesn't care. Or, it's somebody who is a manager, sort of what is colloquially known as a pimp, who is actually managing a number of sex workers. But this is typically something that happens after people are sex workers.

And again, I don't want to minimize this. Like, these are all terrible things that are happening, but the extent to which actual trafficking is real, it is a problem that is concentrated among poor people, people of color, otherwise vulnerable people who are being exploited by someone who was manipulating the fact that they do not have other recourse to any other social services or support. It's a targeted problem among particular populations that the same people squawking about QAnon stuff do not give a shit about. Right? If you really want to end this form of trafficking, end homelessness. Having actual options for kids who are under 18 to go sleep in a shelter rather than sleeping on the streets, that would do way more to prevent trafficking than a million prosecutions.

So again, you don't want to minimize this and you don't want to take away anybody's individual experience because there really are some terrible experiences that people have, and this is a problem in the United States, but the conspiracy theory version of it puts all of that under the law enforcement system. Right? They think that we can prosecute our way out of it. They think that we can take the same approach that we took to the war on drugs, of let's mass incarcerate our way out of this problem, rather than solving the underlying vulnerabilities, which are mostly homelessness and the foster care system.

Mothers For QAnon w: Annie Kelly - QAnon Anonymous - Air Date 9-23-20

ANNIE KELLY - HOST, QANON ANONYMOUS: What I've got used to finding in the far right and anti-feminist communities I studied for my PhD was that there were usually a lot more women involved than it often looked like on first glance. We do tend to think of racism or nationalism as somehow less effective on white women than men when usually what we're actually seeing is the members of far right movements who are more likely to either be in leadership roles, or more alarmingly, actually going out there and killing people for their beliefs, both of which do tend to be men. But listeners of this show will probably already know that QAnon tends to be different here. For one thing, many of our familiar favorites with political ambitions like Marjorie Taylor Greene or Jo Rae Perkins are obviously women, but the stories that Julian's reported on too really interested me. So like Cecilia Fulbright of Texas, the woman who allegedly chased strangers in her car are under the impression they were pedophiles who had kidnapped children for human trafficking. Or Cynthia Abcug, who teamed up with several fellow QAnon believers to kidnap her own child from child services.

Now I cannot stress enough that this amount of women getting involved in political acts of violence is genuinely unusual for a far right movement. And while it's hard to get exact numbers, it does point to a disproportionate amount of women involved. I decided to talk to other extremism and radicalization researchers I know to see what they thought. One of them, Blyth Crawford who is a fellow at the International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, said this.

JAKE ROCKATANSKY - HOST, QANON ANONYMOUS: I've definitely noticed a lot of women showing support for the conspiracy, in particular, a lot of women I've seen on more mainstream social media sites seem to be very concerned about the "save the children" aspect of the theory. It's hard to say whether it's a localized or general trend, but I would say most of the women I've seen engaging with it online have been from the US or the UK.

I do think that there is something about the intense focus on harm being done to children and on the graphic nature of the images and videos associated with Q that is catered towards evoking shock and empathy. And it's possible that these are chiming with a lot of women in particular. I would also say that in many, although by no means all cases, the women that I'm seeing on these more mainstream sites often don't engage with a conspiracy at its deepest level, and many might be very strongly advocating for saving the children, but don't mention Q and don't seem to be aware of any deeper elements of the conspiracy.

So, anecdotally, it seems to me like this aspect of the theory is achieving a reach that previous narratives associated with Q might not have.

ANNIE KELLY - HOST, QANON ANONYMOUS: That final part really interested me because it gelled with what I had seen some save the children advocates saying themselves. Going back to that alt-right German woman, I was struck by how long she spent explaining that you didn't have to believe in QAnon to believe in save the children.

ALT-RIGHT GERMAN WOMAN: The premise on which I base my conviction, that's I have to import in this issue, is that if all of it or any of it is true, then it would be infinitely worse to stay silent about it. And just because some of the claims about these issues are made by a certain movement that you might not consider credible, namely the QAnon movement, that shouldn't deter you from looking into the evidence anyway. As of right now, I don't consider myself an active part of the QAnon movement, but I am on the side watching and evaluating for myself what I think is verifiable and what to me seems too far out there. This video will be about child trafficking and systemic child abuse.

ANNIE KELLY - HOST, QANON ANONYMOUS: So what's going on? I think there's two explanations, which don't necessarily compete with one another so much as reinforce each other. The first of these is the obvious one, women tend to be protective of children and similarly live with a much bigger fear of sexual assault and exploitation. So even perfectly legitimate organizations that deal with actual sex trafficking rather than mad conspiracy stuff will attract a lot of female supporters. By QAnon rebranding it "save the children", lots of women with the best of intentions become essentially hoodwinked.

I do think there's something more to it though, because pretty much all far right conspiracies make the same claim about protecting kids. It's one of the easiest ways to market what are some pretty heinous ideas to make them palatable to the general public. And if you were a far right figure, you'd pretty much be mad not to use the child protection angle.

So for example, conservatives in my country will often say they're protecting children from being brainwashed by making gender transition more difficult, because it's a scary prospect for parents. Similarly, neo-Nazis will often use children as a symbol of the innocence and purity they want to protect. It's why their 14 word slogan ends on protecting the future for white children.

QAnon News - The Last Post - Air Date 9-22-20

ALICE FRASER - HOST, THE LAST POST: Top story today is QAnon news, brought to you by the Ad Commando.

Wil Anderson, what's happening in the world of QAnon right now?

WIL ANDERSON: Alice, news today that the group QAnon is releasing its own range of popular children's toys to indoctrinate the next generation.

Now, I personally, as you know, I've had great success working with conspiracy theorists over the years. Who can forget my weight loss program From Fat Girth to Flat Earth?

And as I said to another group that I was working with, you don't need be an incel to be in sales.

I was actually the person who gave QAnon the idea to be anonymous. A lot of people don't know that. QAnon, which is of course is short for Quentin Anonymous. And I said to Quentin, it's normative determinism, Quentin. Your name is Anonymous, lean into it. I say, Quentin, it worked for Banksy and I think it will work for you too. Now that said, I was also the person who suggested to Banksy he should go into banking. So it doesn't always work.

Anyway, since then I've had Q's trust. Now I need to point it out, I don't believe in his ideologies, but this is advertising. And as I always say, I don't need to believe in something to convince you to believe in it. In fact, their slogan, "Where we go one, we go all" is based on the title of my bestselling guide to advertising, Where We Sell One, We Sell All. So the other day I had an idea. I say, Q, I know you're into #SavetheChildren and I'm into hashtag taking the children's savings, and I've spotted a synergy, two words: kids toys.

I spitballed the whole campaign to him on the spot, Alice. Are you sick of your child's first words being mum or dada? Want your toddler's first word to instead be: the storm? Don't care when your child goes to bed? More concerned about when they will wake the f*ck up? Then QAnon Kids is for you. QAnon Kids or Quack for short. You've heard of baby's first colors. Baby's first rhymes. Now we provide baby's first conspiracy theory. Worried your baby's too young? The good news is QAnon's trademark conspiracy theories actually work better on brains that aren't fully formed.

Let's start with the Mr. Potato Head, which now comes with an additional tinfoil hat. Let your child pass the hours playing with her Mr. Potato Head, as he sounds off about the Clintons at family gatherings, and shares antisemitic memes on Facebook.

For the little chefs, QAnon's version of the Easy Bake Oven, which only has half the power and will guarantee that all your child's theories will be half-baked. Each oven comes complete with a series of Australian chef and wellness influencer, Pete Evans, range of cookbooks with no recipes; every page just has a picture of what's trying to be cooked, and under the instructions that says, do your own research.

For the more advanced child, why not try Hungry, Hungry Pedos, where a group of Hollywood celebrities compete to see how many slices of pizza they can jam in their mouth.

Or maybe the Teenage Mutant Conspiracy Theory Turtles. Pizza is a code that's sure not to please; these ninjas are not into pepperoni and cheese.

You've seen her on the catwalk, fighting fires and getting married. But wait until you see your favorite blonde head doll do so much yoga, and drink so much bone broth, that she starts talking about how 5-G causes pandemics. Yes, it's the QAnon Barbie, not to be confused with the outdoor grill for adults, the BarbeQAnon. Perfect for flame grilling those steaks in the same fire as the pedophiles will burn in while they worship their Lord Satan.

ALICE FRASER - HOST, THE LAST POST: I mean, Barbie comes with every accessory, but QAnon Barbie doesn't come with a mask.

WIL ANDERSON: Mask sold separately.

ALICE FRASER - HOST, THE LAST POST: I think it's a brilliant idea to advertise QAnon to children. I mean, you can put them to sleep every night, counting the sheeple.

Reformed Neo-Nazi Explains How People Fall Prey to QAnon Online - MSNBC - Air Date 9-6-20

BRANDY ZADROZNY: Not even just a conspiracy theory, it's a cult and it feeds on insecurity, uncertainty and isolation. So nationwide protests, the coming election and a pandemic have provided just the environment to recruit and radicalize new members.

Mark Andre Argentino is a data scientist and he studies extremists. He made this chart for me using CrowdTangle which is a Facebook own tool. It shows the activity of hundreds of the largest QAnon groups. Do you see that spike? That's in March when states begin COVID-19 lockdown measures. But it hasn't just grown. QAnon content is reaching a new audience and in some unexpected places: anti-vaccination, anti-mask activists, have embraced the conspiracy theory. Instagram is riddled with Q Anon conspiracies spread and flashy posts by lifestyle influencers, mommy bloggers and alternative health pages. And in some 200 cities and towns across the US last month, moms, often with kids in tow, gathered in their main streets, holding signs branded with QAnon messages.

Now, after six months of rapid growth, Facebook finally took some action removing some, but not all of the Q Anon groups that were explicitly discussing violence. Twitter made a similar, stronger sweep the week before, and those moves have decreased but not eliminated QAnon activity on the platforms.

Allie.

ALI VELSHI - HOST, MSNBC: All right, so what do you do if you've got friends, you've got coworkers, you have neighbors who believe this QAnon stuff? Shannon Foley Martinez is, and I hope you're sitting down for this, and ex-neo-nazi and a current Yale professor who specifically works to deradicalize people who've fallen victim to online radicalization. Shannon, thank you for joining us on the show. Ben, kick us off.

BEN COLLINS: So Shannon, first of all, thanks for coming. And second of all, I look, we talked a few weeks ago, for a story about QAnon. And you told me explicitly, I don't know what I was thinking when I was going down that White supremacist rabbit hole. Was it I. . . Did I

lose empathy? Did I, what was happening at that time? And what you were saying is at that point, you didn't think you were becoming a bad guy, and that's really what's happening with these QAnon people, right. They don't think they're becoming a bad guy; they think they're becoming a hero in their own story, right.?

SHANNON FOLEY-MARTINEZ: Sure. I am not a Yale professor. I'm a consultant at PERIL at American University, just to clear that up.

ALI VELSHI - HOST, MSNBC: So, so you're accusing me of this information already. I'm 30 minutes into the show and I'm already provided this information. Don't clip that and put that on the internet. Okay. Sure. Go ahead, Shannon.

SHANNON FOLEY-MARTINEZ: Everybody already thinks that, anyway. So, one of the things that I didn't recognize while I was radicalizing into what I was doing was that I was creating an echo chamber for myself. In my case, it was a physical echo chamber. I ended up only spending time with people who believed what I believed only in spaces where this was all that was going on, and I didn't recognize that that was happening to me, that my brain was really hijacked into only framing the world around this ideology and these beliefs that I was immersing myself in.

One of the things that's very important is that these are still individual stories. It's important for us to talk about the meta, right? It's important for us to talk about this bigger, larger QAnon thing, but the people who are part of this are still individual human beings who all have a story behind how they got there. Most of the time, these stories involve some kind of trauma or layers of trauma in their lives. We know specifically when we're talking about women and moms from the Me Too movement just how endemic sexual assault and sexual violence is for women in the country, and that the world feels dangerous and out of control to these people and that they're looking for something, a meaningful connection to something greater than themselves that they haven't found elsewhere. When we start interjecting the idea that children are in danger, of course, moms in particular and women are like, Oh, we have to save the children. Why has no one told me about this? And so, when they hear and they start investigating and interacting with these ideas, that they're coming from this sense of deep disempowerment, that when you feel like you've found the true truth, the real facts which hitherto have been hidden from you, that that is very alluring and seductive and feels a lot like empowerment for a lot of people.

The QAnon folks tend to be older people as opposed to a lot of the further right-wing stuff, and esoteric Hitlerism stuff tends to be younger teenagers and young adults. But this. Is often middle-age and older people who feel like they're tech savvy but aren't actually really all that tech savvy. So, their ability to fact check is often really limited, and they think they are.

So one of the things -- I also work like helping people leave, radical violence-based stuff, and one of the things that I have found is that, when you're talking to people who are involved in conspiracy theories, the problem is that there really are conspiracies. Part of the explosion of QAnon is that it is being exploited by domestic and foreign influences to create and sow discord, but there isn't a single conspiracy, right? There isn't one driver. There are lots of people who have power who want to maintain and amplify their power, and there are conspiracies that are going on. But there isn't one singular conspiracy. So, how to talk about that in a complex way and how to interject that complexity into this worldview that they

have created to navigate the difficulty of feeling this world that feels dangerous and unsafe, and that they're losing security that they once had through multitudinous drivers. So, there's like personal things, and then there's everything going on in the world. There's recession; there's social change -- that we're watching the dismantlement, hopefully, of White supremacy. We're watching violence from far-right actors. And so the world does feel dangerous and unpredictable to a lot of people. And so this gives an explanation to why.

In Search Of A Flat Earth - Folding Ideas - Air Date

9-11-20

DAN OLSON - HOST, FOLDING IDEAS: If you want to cut through the noise, it's this. The unifying theme is a desire for a sort of restorative authoritarianism, for a strong man to come in and forcibly put everything back where it belongs. Everything else is aesthetic. Like flat earth, there is a sympathetic nugget in the anxiety that the world has gotten too complex, that things are spinning out of control.

But the Q analysis of the problem is that the fault lies with the people outlining the complexity. The purpose of cosmologies like Q, like flat earth, is to simplify the world. And I know that sounds ridiculous. The irony here is that this isn't all that far off base. Now, not this specific example, the QAnon map of global politics is almost pure nonsense, but the shape of it isn't. If you were to map out the political landscape of the world, it would look a lot like this. Thousands of political entities, big and small, all with their own goals, values, and incentives, navigating an equally complex series of conflicts, alliances, and rivalries in competition for power, fame, or limited resources.

So how is something like this making the world simpler? Because it takes all of this, the chaos of millions of individuals trying to reshape the world in their own way for good or ill and turns it into a single entity. All the world's complexity, all of the chaos, it's all the fault of one group. Not an ideology, not a worldview, not historical inertia, not anything so nebulous as the way we think about the world. A single, tangible, identifiable group with a written agenda. These types of conspiratorial beliefs, for all their complex cosmologies, exist in opposition to structural challenges, and a lot of people get involved because they resent structural criticism. Structural criticism poses that we are the way we are because of complicated forces, some intentional and many, not that have compounded and morphed over generations. There's no plan, no template, no goal. The world won't just magically morph into a better place as a function of its existence. We are responsible for confronting the past, fixing the present and shaping the future.

QAnon, and not just QAnon, many people, many, many people, want to believe that things are the way they are because someone has deliberately crafted it to be that way. That there is a natural order to the world and we need to just trust the plan. Climate scientists, trans and queer activists, women's rights, reproductive autonomy, racial justice, protests against police brutality, generational wealth equality, against the increasing transfer of the public good into the hands of corporations for privatization and exploitation. All of these are interlocking systemic issues. These are inarguably disruptions of the status quo, confrontations of deep rooted complexities that intersect the lives and futures of billions of people. And it's that disruption, not the underlying injustices, not the underlying conflicts, that make QAnon anxious, that make QAnon feel like the world has gotten too complex.

They don't want those complexities to exist, and by talking about them, you make them exist. It's a form of magical thought. Talking about police brutality, wills police brutality into existence. A disruption of the status quo is seen as a disruption of the natural order. The problem they see is that no one has made those people shut up. That is what they want someone to come in and make those people shut up and go away, to put things back where they belong. Now, this is not a philosophy unique to QAnon, it's the lifeblood of all reactionary movements. And they are of course, in conflict with facts. Global warming, to pull one example, is real and existential threat to civilization. That's just a fact. It wasn't willed into existence by people talking about it. It isn't over tuned leftist looking for patterns in clouds. It's the byproduct of dumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere on an industrial scale for 200 years.

And there is a temptation to engage on that level, to confront all the material ways in which they are just wrong, and it largely does not work. And what's unique about QAnon is the degree to which it doesn't work. The degree to which the movement is immune to evidence. All reactionary movements are in tension with reality, a tension that eventually results in a psychological crisis and belief systems like QAnon are the end point of that crisis, the point where reality itself becomes an enemy. Because ultimately it's not about facts. It's about power. QAnons are not otherwise empty vessels who believe one wacky thing, they have an agenda. QAnon, what it accepts, what it believes, is driven by the outcomes it justifies.

ARCHIVAL AUDIO: The democratic national convention is thinking about bringing Bernie Sanders back to run for president in 2020. Can you imagine? Like, what if he gets elected? I seriously hope not. Hopefully all this stuff goes down, and there is an awakening and everyone lines up behind president Trump.

I'm fed up with the attacks on President Trump. I think he's the greatest president that we'll have in our lifetimes that I'm grateful for all he's doing. And I'm proudly running for Congress in George's 14th district.

DAN OLSON - HOST, FOLDING IDEAS: The reason they aren't more bothered by Q constantly getting things wrong, why they aren't more bothered by the extreme inconsistencies and outright contradictions by the claims that are just materially wrong is because it gives them power over others who are bound by something as weak and flimsy as reality. They claim to be against corruption while hanging their hopes on an openly corrupt man, and that naked hypocrisy is the point. They will effortlessly carve out an exception because it makes them exceptional. They engage in wild hypocrisy as an act of domination, adhering to something demonstrably untrue out of spite.

Because they believe that power belongs to those with the greatest will to take it. And what greater sign of will than the ability to override truth. There will is a hammer that they are using to beat reality itself into a shape of their choosing. A simple world where reality is exactly what it looks like through their eyes dies. Devoid of complexity, devoid of change, where they are, right and their enemies are silent. They are trying to build a flat earth.

Conspiracy Theories - Power Corrupts - Air Date 5-1-19

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: Isaac Stanley Becker, that Washington Post reporter, he's spoken to followers of the movement. And he kindly put me in touch with one

believer, a man named Paul Burton of Atlanta, Georgia, and Paul graciously agreed to do an interview with me.

PAUL BURTON: I don't talk about this really with anyone.

My life is pretty simple. I'm a dad and I have a family life and I work and I take the kids to school, pick them up, and I don't have time to be part of any group. I'm not much of a joiner. Shall we say, my political affiliations mostly in the past was an independent in California. I'd say 10, 15 years ago, I joined the Republican party just 'cause it seemed to be more aggressive in the war on terror and all that.

But no, I've not been part of any group. I read a lot. I read probably too much, but that's kinda my hobby, I guess.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: So Paul, how did you actually first stumble across QAnon?

PAUL BURTON: That's a good question because I'm fairly sure I'm not absolutely certain, but I think I saw a link on one of my Twitter feeds and I clicked on it and I started looking at it. This was back in December. So, Q or QAnon had begun posting on 4Chan or 8Chan in late October of last year.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: That's October of 2017.

PAUL BURTON: So I just began reading posts as they came out.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: Paul does say, however that he doesn't let QAnon consume his life or define him. He doesn't browse 4Chan or 8Chan, those often-disturbing message boards where QAnon was originally born.

PAUL BURTON: I don't have the time or interest in getting into the a 4Chan or 8Chan or any of the dark web or anything like that. I'm sure there's others out there who do, but they could probably take you down the rabbit hole pretty deep.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: So how would you explain this to a friend, Paul? Like, if your friend said, who is Q, what is QAnon? What would you say to them?

PAUL BURTON: I'm not a hundred percent certain of what Q or Q is. However, it seems to be that it is a team consisting of Trump, a couple of civilians, and another seven or more military officers or military personnel. And from piecing together now, wow, 2200 posts over the last 11 months. Just piecing things together and putting the puzzle pieces together, it seems to be that it is US Army, military, intel, surveillance, whatever they do out of a base in Florida, they get the NSA feed and they have been tracking everybody and everything, all communications. Their mission is to take down the bad guys, shall we say, the black hats. Not only within the corruption in the DOJ, but also in the FBI, as well as other bad players in the United States and around the world.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: But Paul is really clear that he doesn't buy into the whole QAnon business, just bits and pieces of it. For him, he's much more skeptical about the whole global pedophilia ring than other QAnon believers are, for example.

PAUL BURTON: Supposedly the pedophilia thing is there's no one party that's involved in that. Apparently it's big in Hollywood and it's big in Washington. When I say big, I mean, it's there and it's not been uncovered, but apparently it's being routed out and uncovered over the last year. No, I can't speak too much of that.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: Paul is quick to say that he's not a disciple of Q or the Q team. Just that it's one of many sources that he uses to try to figure out what's really going on.

PAUL BURTON: I simply see it as a[n] information source, almost like a newsfeed. If someone says, do you follow Q? Not as a disciple, of course, but someone says, do you follow CNN or Fox News or a person on Twitter? Yes. It's one of my sources for news. But it seems to be a much more than that.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: When I asked Paul for evidence to suggest his beliefs were rooted in reality, he pointed to a few key moments, a seemingly correct prediction about Saudi Arabia, and a series of supposedly deep state figures that were being taken down by Donald Trump.

PAUL BURTON: Now we're seeing these dominoes fall and the FBI and DOJ one by one. This is all happening within, since Trump has taken office, which it doesn't seem to be a coincidence to me.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: I pushed back and pointed out that Trump fired several of those figures. People like former FBI director, James Comey, not because they were part of the deep state, but because they were involved in investigating President Trump and Trump wanted to get rid of them.

I mean, President Trump admitted exactly that motivation to Lester Holt on national television in 2017:

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: When I decided to just do it, I said to myself, I said, you know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made up story.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: But when I put that interpretation of events to Paul, it was a bit like we were living in two different realities.

PAUL BURTON: Hmm, no, I don't, I don't really understand your question, but I don't see that they were just simply investigating. They seem to be co-opted by Hillary Clinton, Clinton people, the Clinton money, the Clinton power. I think if you look at the history, anyone that has gotten close to Bill and Hillary Clinton, their lives end up in tatters. They either end up in jail, or just their careers sunk and they seem to stand above it all. The Clintons co-opted the Obama people to an extent. And what we're seeing is all the pawns and knights and rooks being taken down.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: This focus on Hillary Clinton is a unifying thread amongst QAnon believers. They still somehow see the vanquished former Secretary of State as this sort of boogeyman for everything that's wrong with politics these days.

But one of the starkest dividing lines that splinters QAnon believers into different camps is what to make of the special counsel investigation that was led by the former FBI director, Robert Mueller.

PAUL BURTON: Perhaps more interesting strain of the theory is that Trump only feigned collusion to create a sort of pretense for the hiring of Mueller, the special counsel, and that he and Trump are actually working together to take down these coup plotters and child sex traffickers, people like Hillary Clinton, people like Barack Obama, people like George Soros and people like John McCain, before his death of course.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: If all of this sounds crazy to you, you're not alone. It sounds crazy to me too.

But the thing is Paul Burton didn't sound crazy to me. He was calm. He spoke with caveats and nuance. And I think he's genuinely interested in the truth.

PAUL BURTON: I've always questioned things. I've always... I was the kid who, if he didn't know a word, he'd run to the 30-pound dictionary in the living room and look it up and see exactly what that meant. I try to question everything, question authority.

I don't believe everything I read and I try to form my own picture of things. Maybe it's just my curiosity and my way of thinking. I don't know.

BRIAN KLAAS- HOST, POWER CORRUPTS: Paul was nothing like what I expected him to be when I dialed his number. I don't know exactly what I was expecting, but it certainly wasn't him. And in a way, that actually made me much more worried, because of unhinged conspiracy theories are only shared amongst the basement dwelling, tinfoil hat people who only see light when it shines out of their computer screens, then it's such a small segment of society that you don't really need to worry about it.

But if a measurable percentage of a country believes in this stuff, including dads like Paul, who dropped their kids off at school and take their dogs for walks and read voraciously, then democracy itself is under threat. Because you can't solve problems or compromise or come together if you can't even agree on what is real and what is fantasy.

And it seems to me like we're careening towards that really scary precipice in the United States right now.

The Rise of "Conspirituality" - On the Media - Air Date 9-25-20

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: Seane Corn is a yoga teacher and influencer with long curly hair, a calming presence, and over a hundred thousand Instagram followers. Over the past several months, she began seeing a strange phenomenon pop up on her feed.

SEANE CORN: I started to get directed to these pages that look like any wellness branding. Someone young, healthy, in the first frame they were modeling yoga, in the second frame it was some delicious organic meal that they had cooked, and the next frame it was them running on the beach, perhaps with their family. And then there would be slide—pastel, beautiful font—and it would say COVID is a hoax.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: And from there, a torrent of conspiracies. QAnon's revelations come in the form of "Q drops", cryptic dispatches from a mysterious person, or persons, posting, supposedly highly classified, and pretty much universally wrong, omens about what lies ahead.

Q-DROPPER: Onto the next Q post. 2,232 dated September 20th. "Things are moving" and Q responds "faster than you know."

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: There are accusations of Democrats harvesting the blood of children. Predictions of the imminent arrests of high profile politicians and others. Against whom stands the peerless defender of the people, our current president. Suffice it to say it's nonsense birthed in the dredges of the internet, but in this restless lockdown summer, it finds purchase all across the interwebs and the streets, and it's dangerous.

NEWS CLIP 1: Parker police

NEWS CLIP: say a far-right conspiracy

NEWS CLIP 1: theorist was planning a

NEWS CLIP: kidnapping in Douglas County. Investigators

NEWS CLIP 1: say that she believed her child had been taken by a satanic pedophilia ring of Democrats that is being secretly battled by

NEWS CLIP: President Trump. Police say her child had actually

NEWS CLIP 1: been removed by Child Protective Services.

NEWS CLIP 2: Lawyers for the man accused of killing a reputed mobster on Staten Island say he was trying to make a citizens arrest. Anthony Comello's legal team says the 24 year old was obsessed with the QAnon conspiracy theory. Comello's attorneys say that he thought he was under President Trump's protection.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: Corn had been vaguely familiar with QAnon as a peripheral phenomenon, but when the pandemic started, it moved to the center of her field of vision.

SEANE CORN: Colleagues of mine started to reach out and they were circulating information. A lot of deep concern, a lot of talk about a deep state. That there was this great awakening that was happening and that we were all being duped.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: She knew that the "great awakening" is a QAnon term of art. So is: "do your research," "where we go one, we go all," "calm before the storm," "save our children." All these terms can be found on the pages of Instagram influencers.

INFLUENCER 1: And the reality is nothing as we know it is true. Yes, there is good in the world, but our world is being run by evil.

INFLUENCER 2: If you aren't aware at this point that we're at the precipice of the dawning of the ages, like then I don't know what you're doing but you're still asleep.

INFLUENCER 3: I'm not here to promote Trump. I'm literally following my gut because I know, I believe, I believe that something is going on.

INFLUENCER 4: I've been digesting information from my guides about what this light worker in human form looking like the name Donald Trump has been doing for the entire human collective.

INFLUENCER 5: I mean like, did you guys see the way he's doing for healthcare? I think that we're going to see incredible things within the next six weeks. I mean, I think that honestly, we might see a few cures for cancers coming out.

SEANE CORN: I started to push back a little bit amongst my friends and the more I pushed back, the more assertive, aggressive they were just referring to me as "sheeple."

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: The Community Corn is a part of it primarily oriented around yoga. So how did a shadowy conspiracy theory, initially embraced by the darker reaches of the internet and some evangelical Christians, make its way into her world?

TRAVIS VIEW: You saw people who are perhaps more into spirituality. You saw people who were simply parents who were concerned about children.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: Travis view is cohost of the QAnon Anonymous podcast.

TRAVIS VIEW: There certainly has been a sort of general demographic shift.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: When media cover the spread of conspiracies and disinformation, they tend to focus on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Far less attention has been paid to their slicker sister site, Instagram. But there too, and increasingly, communities are being swept up into QAnon. Mark Andre Argentino, a PhD candidate at Concordia University, coined the term pastel QAnon to describe this shift. Travis View.

TRAVIS VIEW: Pastel Q is kind of QAnon that's very attractive to lifestyle influencers or mommy pages, fitness influencers or diet pages, alternative healing, meditation, yoga, these sorts of things. You see the soft pastel colors, you see the sunset, very enticing images. Wellness messages are sort of interwoven with the Q and messages. The original QAnon fixated on the idea that the military was going to sweep in and fix everything. They believe that Q was military intelligence, that the military would round up all of the deep state pedos and send them to Guantanamo Bay. In pastel Q, there's less fixation on those sorts of things and more a general, vague, "save the children" message. Who doesn't want to help protect children? Of course, in truth, this narrative is really just a pipeline into the broader QAnon worldview.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: A worldview that stoked acts of violence, subverted our political landscape, and which can be lucrative for online influencers. In a recent episode of his podcast, Travis View dug into the content of a small scale influencer with about 5,000 Instagram followers.

TRAVIS VIEW: Ivy Rose was simply into alternative healing. She had an Instagram page where she talked about meditation and yoga. She had dreadlocks. She seemed like someone who you might find that at burning man or something. But because of QAnon, the benefits that it

provided to her as an online influencer, it seems like she just fell straight down this rabbit hole.

IVY ROSE - INFLUENCER: Q is teaching us morals and a vision of world humanism. Teaching us patriotism, and valuing freedom, and integrity, and unity, and honor, and transparency. Q is teaching us, or reminding us, of the energetic and value based morals of the foundation of what we're all going to need as humans going forward.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: What does QAnon potentially offer to somebody like that?

TRAVIS VIEW: If you are interested in building up your online presence, then Q Anon is kind of like an online cheat code. Because the QAnon community, they will flock to any online influencers that repeat their narratives. So, if you want to build up your following, then it might be a good idea to promote QAnon because it does that for you.

Now, of course, the danger is that it promotes extremism and this can lead to dangerous situations and violence. But if you're just interested in pure page views, then it could be quite effective.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: To understand that effectiveness it helps to understand the shape shifting nature of QAnon conspiracism.

SEANE CORN: The periphery of that core are all these other beliefs.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: Corn explains.

SEANE CORN: Especially beliefs that are related to concerns in the wellness community. They really appeal to the anti-vaxxers within my community and this paranoia that we're going to be forced into vaccinations.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: This particular kind of paranoia and the QAnon rabbit hole, down which is leading so many in Corn's community has been dubbed Conspiracism. A term popularized by the podcast of the same name now tracking this phenomenon. The trip down the rabbit hole is greased by the language of QAnon. The phrase "great awakening" suggests an experience you might have after enough meditation retreats. And then there's the main tagline for the conspiracy movement.

SEANE CORN: "Where we go one, we go all," which is very much in alignment with a belief system within yoga. I mean, we believe we are all one.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: And as the conspiracy theory, spreads outward, it's adapting. QAnon converts use the language that they're steeped in, that works in their communities, to spread the message. I hear you, I'm listening.

SEANE CORN: Very specific languaging that you would use when you're in conflict as a way to develop relationship and create a sense of just harmony and good will.

If I was part of a cult, that's what I would do. That's how you bring people in, in my community, not through divisiveness and harsh rhetoric, but through communication and openness.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: That's especially true in a moment of extreme vulnerability. A global pandemic, a lockdown, an unpredictable election.

SEANE CORN: There's a sense of helplessness, a feeling of being out of control. People, because of that fear, their nervous systems are deregulated and they're looking for something to bring them back into homeostasis, into a sense of calm.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: Into that vulnerability has stepped a conspiracy theory that gives the illusion of empowering people, often while urging them to throw what power they do have away.

SEANE CORN: They're being oriented towards what's called #walkaway. Inviting people, basically just to abandon the system altogether and not vote— at all.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: It may be hard to understand why members of a supposedly "progressive" community would fall prey to a worldview that's going all in for the political right. But Corn says that confusion might be based on a false premise.

SEANE CORN: It should never be assumed that just because you practice yoga or eat organic food that somehow you're democratic or left-leaning in any capacity.

When I go to their profiles to see who are these people, what are their lives like, what do they believe? And I'm seeing a lot of White folks and a lot of White women with privilege. They actually benefit from their policies.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: It's clear the Republicans have more successfully capitalized on the QAnon conspiracy, but political scientists Joseph Uscinski says there's nothing in the QAnon ethos that's fundamentally about conservatism or the Republican party.

JOSEPH USCINSKI: They're not talking tax policy or anything like that. So the doctrine itself isn't really about left-right politics. There are a lot of people in the Republican Party that QAnon wants hung for their crimes too.

I mean, they have misgivings about the entire establishment and that's sort of why they're gravitating towards Trump because Trump was an outsider. In many of the polls show equal numbers of Republicans, Democrats believe QAnon.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: And you say that that is people with a propensity toward conspiratorial thinking. What are the signs of that propensity?

JOSEPH USCINSKI: Conspiracy thinking is a worldview, which we all have to one degree or another, in which conspiracies dictate events and circumstances. So you can imagine someone who has that worldview very strongly, any event they witness or any circumstance they want to explain, it's going to be very easy for them to jump to a conspiratorial explanation because it matches what they already believe about how the world works.

TRAVIS VIEW: I think it's really more magical thinking. And I think that you can find plenty of magical thinking in these wellness communities.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: Travis view.

TRAVIS VIEW: People might buy into the idea that crystals have healing properties, for example. When you believe something like that then it's not that great of a leap to believe that we're entering into a new, great, more enlightened age and you get to be a part of it simply by posting these hashtags on Instagram.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: In response to the upswell and QAnon content in the wellness and spirituality world, members of Corn's community drafted a statement that she and others with large followings posted to their Instagram pages. With white capital letters set against a black square background—"We care and we stand against Q Anon."

SEANE CORN: So I felt it was my responsibility as a leader in the community, as someone that I know people trust, not to be neutral about it because QAnon has its roots in White supremacy culture. They support racial terrorism. They are an anti-science organization. They're fraught with lies. And if we believe that we're all one, and that's how we talk about that in the wellness world, that we're all one and that I can't be free unless we're all free, then not to address this makes me complicit.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: In response, she's gotten some predictable backlash in her comments and her DMs.

SEANE CORN: What I did was polarizing and created division, which makes me sad, but it was necessary just to kind of name it for what it is. They are as concerned about the wellbeing of this community as I am. I just think that they're misinformed and have been manipulated, but they think the same thing about me.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: Within the wellness community, it's a battle of influencers versus influencers. But alongside the hate, Corn also gets another kind of response.

SEANE CORN: She says, "I am the girl you were talking about. The newer yoga instructor without a community, vulnerable to those messages, and was really confused by everything already. Then this all came out and I really needed the support. Thank you very much for speaking about this." I have received countless messages like that by people saying that they were slipping or messages saying that their beloved teachers were saying things that really confused them.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: Corn emphasizes that she's only one of the many people working to combat the disinformation sweeping her community. Working separately and together to create resources, to bring clarity to the informational chaos. But in this moment of global uncertainty and fear, the wellness world is far from the only one facing the threat of encroaching conspiracism courtesy of QAnon.

Travis View.

TRAVIS VIEW: Kind of like a cafeteria conspiracy theory in the sense that you can sort of go out into the broad, complex narrative that is QAnon and sort of focus on the parts that appeal best to you. And I think that's what a lot of people are doing on either side of the political spectrum.

LEAH FEDER - PRODUCER, ON THE MEDIA: Last week, Lily Loofbourow wrote in slate about an influx of women joining the queue and unfold this summer. Back in July, the Guardian

reported on QAnon's perch in the world of mixed martial arts. Seekers flow in through an ever expanding array of entry points. Maybe new age awakenings aren't for you. Maybe you're not enticed by the possible arrest of Hillary Clinton. But how about curing disease or saving children? Once you're in, often you stay in.

Syracuse university, professor Whitney Phillips wrote and Wired this week about the network effects that make debunking a conspiracy like QAnon so challenging. Once a person is tuned into the conspiracy, they surf more sites to confirm it, subjecting them to media wraparound effect. Everything lines up. Efforts like Corn's to fight bad information with good are laudable, essential even, but until these powerful social media platforms take action to combat the disinformation ecosystem that they've created, Corn and her allies will be left bringing sage bundles to a gun fight.

Summary

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: We've just heard clips today starting with Tom Hartman laying out the fact that QAnon's most central theories are mostly rehashed, anti-semitic propaganda, dating back to the Nazis and beyond; You Are Not So Smart discussed the emotional and psychological elements of conspiratorial thinking that are exacerbated by the nature of the internet; The Topical from The Onion satirically explained that everything about QAnon is actually true and supported by facts if you just read between the lines; QAnon Anonymous first spoke with Michael Hobbes about the nature of human trafficking and how it is almost nothing like the pop culture definition; QAnon Anonymous also spoke with Annie Kelly about how women are being drawn into QAnon; The Last Post, more satire, spoke with comedian Will Anderson about the new line of QAnon children's toys. And, by the way, if you need a daily satirical news podcast set in another dimension, I definitely recommend that you make it The Last Post. It's become my new favorite this year. Ali Velshi on MSNBC spoke with a reformed neo-nazi about how people fall prey to cult conspiracy echo chambers. We heard a portion of a video from Folding Ideas on YouTube explaining the search for simplicity that is the through-line between flat earthers and QAnon followers.

All of that was available to everyone, but members also heard some bonus content that everyone else missed out on. There was a clip from Deconstructed giving some historical context with American conspiracy theories through time; Power Corrupts spoke with a thoughtful, nuanced, lucid-sounding QAnon follower because yes, they do exist; and On The Media dove into the world of conspirituality. For non-members, those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and they are part of the transcript for today's show. So, you can still find it if you make the effort, but to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or request a financial hardship membership. Every request is granted, no questions asked because I don't want money to be a barrier to information. And now we'll hear from you. This first voicemail is from Scott, and his comment was posted under the episode all about the post office and the census. I think he wanted you to hear what he thought about that episode.

Re: Episode on Post Office and Census - Scott

Scott: Jay! This episode was SO GOOD. I put off listening to it for a long time because I thought it would be, 1), boring and 2), depressing, but it was neither of those things. Bravo! Hey everyone! Listen to this episode! The Planet Money Section is superb.

Biden vs Howie Hawkins - Lars from Brooklyn

Voicemail: Lars from Brooklyn: Hi Jay, this is Lars from Brooklyn.

I wanted to comment on an issue mentioned in voice response in a recent show and your reaction about why someone would not vote for Biden.

The conversation with the guy who said he was thinking of voting Green Party due to his positions informed by his faith actually had me leaning to changing my mind from Joe Biden back to Howie Hawkins, and the reasoning goes like this:

I live in New York City, so my vote for president in the general election is, in all practical consideration, not going to make any difference in the electoral college. If it was a direct popular vote, there would not be any question and I would vote for Biden. So, by voting for Hawkins, it would build credibility for the Green Party, which I generally support, and help them maintain their ballot line inclusion, etc. The additional, probably wishful, thinking is that it would also indicate to Biden, if he does win, that there is support for a progressive agenda to the left of his platform.

With everything that has gone on more recently with the Supreme Court and Trump's proclamations about not ensuring a peaceful transfer of power, I am now leaning back to Biden as we need to send as loud a message to 45 as possible, but I'm surprised this isn't talked about more unless the fear is that people in states where it may not be an absolute Democratic lock might do this and inadvertently contribute to a Democratic Party loss.

Listening to the responses in episode 1369, I feel that in order to contribute to the conversation I need to provide a bit more of my perspective.

I would contend that, in the aggregate, underprivileged Americans have suffered more by Democrats who have compromised and supported Democratic neoliberal politicians than by those who have supported progressive third-party candidates. The result has been a slide to the right by the Democratic Party far past most western European countries whom we would like to compare ourselves to. What most liberal elites won't own up to is that they have largely benefited from these pro-business, pro-market ideologies -- especially within the tech industry and urban professional class.

So what privilege, exactly, are these people, who tend to mostly benefit from these policies, really exercising by voting for the center? I would argue they are exercising the privilege to enrich themselves, even though they would never see it that way, to the detriment of the working class.

What was a win-win situation for these elites -- personally beneficial policies regardless of which major party won -- has now turned into a horror show with Trump and forced those in even mildly contested district to vote him out no matter what.

I realize that if everyone voted with their conscience in solidly blue states, there is a slight chance those states could end up contested. I don't feel that's even a remote possibility in New York where I live, so where to cast my vote seems at least worth discussing and not dismissing out-of-hand. Having said all that, given the gravity of current events, I currently do plan on voting for Biden. Although it does feel a bit like I'm doing it mostly to run up the score in the popular election -- arguably an emotional decision.

Final comments on why Democracy is built on a foundation of human perception rather than laws. Also, resources to keep you away from conspiratorial and magical thinking

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: Thanks for listening everyone. Thanks to Deon Clark and Aaron Clayton for their research work on the show. Thanks to the monosyllabic transcriptionists trio: Ben, Dan and Ken for their volunteer work helping to put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets and activism segments.

And thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote their messages to be played as 'voicedmails.' If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can send us a voice memo by email. Record a message at (202) 999-3991 or write me a message directly to jay@bestoftheleft.com.

Now, in response first to Lars from Brooklyn about voting Green in a solidly blue state. Sounds like Lars sort of worked out his thoughts as he went and came to the same conclusion that I've come to. And I would just say that I have also had those same thoughts. And if you go back to 2016, you can probably dig up somewhere where I said this exact thing, and said that when I talk about theories of change and voting strategically and all of that I really do mean only in swing states, and that if you're in a solidly blue or solidly red state, then your theory of change has the freedom to change based on that information. And if you want to send legitimacy to a third party, and you understand that because you don't live in a swing state, you can do that without really risking affecting the election in any way, then that's a perfectly reasonable thing to do. Now, whether that theory of change has legs, whether it's likely to work or go anywhere, that's a whole separate discussion. But in terms of your theory of change being at odds with the immediate dangers to vulnerable populations in this moment if the election goes the wrong way, that discussion gets to be completely separated, based on that.

So, Lars, I completely agree if you live in a solid blue state and you want to vote Green, I generally don't have a problem with that and have said as much in the past. However, just as Lars concluded, I think this year is different, and it is probably best to vote for Biden for the sake of running up the popular vote.

And now, I'll just respond to Lars' final question: is that an emotional decision? Is it an emotional decision to think there's nothing politically or legally advantageous about running up the popular vote; it would just feel good. And I would argue that no, it is not just an

emotional decision because democracy as a concept -- or if you want to get finicky about it -- a democratic republic in which we vote to elect representatives is not just about what's written in the laws. Democracy is about the perception of legitimacy. Democracy is nothing if the laws that are written are not perceived by the population to be legitimate. The winners of the election mean nothing if they are perceived by the population as not having legitimately won. And so, the rules that we have in place for how we run our elections and the laws that we have in place to maintain the structure of democracy are in place to maintain the perception of legitimacy because that is at the very end of the day the only thing we really have to hang on to. It goes all the way back to the government deriving its power from the consent of the governed. That consent is contingent on perception because if Trump has proven anything in his tenure, it is that laws don't mean anything if humans don't step up and enforce those laws or rules or norms. Life is what we make it. Our government is what we make it. And perception is at the core of the human experience. You've heard the term, my perception is my reality. That is why it is so important for us to maintain the structures of democracy and maintain the legitimacy in the perception of the minds of the governed. And so, I think that it is not an emotional decision to run up the popular vote. I think that if Joe Biden wins the election, it is equally important that he be perceived as legitimately winning the election, and running up the popular vote is part of that perception.

And then secondly, today, I just have some recommendations for anyone who wants more information on QAnon or needs some resources to share with someone you may come across who you think may be going down that path. There are a couple of very different ones. And then a third, on a separate track, so I'm going to share all three of these.

The first is the QAnon Anonymous podcast. We heard from them today. They do deep dives to understand the mechanics of QAnon, and I think that one of the best inoculations against conspiratorial thinking is understanding really well how it works so that you can then see those mechanics at play or in play in the real world and be inoculated against that. So, the QAnon Anonymous podcast is a good resource for people.

And then there's the one that members will have heard referenced in their bonus clip from On The Media. So, if you're not a member, but you want to check that out, it's the On The Media clip in the bonus section about 'conspirativity' -- and this is the one that, maybe my audience or friends of my audience may be more attuned to or susceptible to -- and it's all about the world of the school-to-prison pipeline. Then there's now the yoga-to anti-vax-to-QAnon pipeline and conspirativity is when you're in the world of . . . if you are into yoga and spiritual thinking, well then maybe you would be interested in this other far-out idea about vaccinations being bad. And then once you're on that road, it's a short jump to child abuse rings and that sort of thing. And then you're getting sucked all the way down the rabbit hole. So, the conspirativity podcast focuses on that aspect of it, and I think could be a good resource for people. It was discussed in the On The Media clip as being something that genuinely helped people who recognize themselves, at least in retrospect, as maybe being in the danger zone heading down the wrong path or seeing that they very well could have and came across this podcast and were pulled in a better, healthier, more fact-based direction

And then, as I said, the third, is on a very different track, but I think you'll see how they're related. I highly recommend a limited series podcast called The Dream. It's all about

multilevel marketing and if you or anyone you know is considering, especially in desperate financial times which we are definitely experiencing right now, that is when people start getting the idea maybe I should buy into one of these multilevel marketing companies and become a 'sell something from home through social media on the internet.' And it's really important to understand the logistics and the mechanics, the marketing, all of the techniques being used by these companies to convince people that you can make lots of money with them and then see the hard, fast realities that make it literally impossible -- not because you didn't work hard enough impossible -- literally impossible to make money for the vast majority of people who join into those companies. So, The Dream: I highly recommend it. It does a fantastic job I would think inoculating people against this. And anyone in financial hard times needs this information so that they can make an informed decision about joining a multilevel marketing company, because when you're in hard financial times and you're desperate, you're not thinking straight, and you will do whatever it takes. You think, well, if I just work hard enough, I can make this work. But if that's literally impossible for the vast majority of people, the most likely outcome for joining one of those companies is to be horribly, horribly in debt. So, to go from hard financial times to even worse financial times is the most likely outcome for joining one of those.

So, the QAnon Anonymous podcast, the conspirituality podcast and The Dream podcast: all recommendations that you should check out or share with anyone who you think could benefit from them.

As always, keep comments coming in at (202) 999-3991 or emailing me at jay@bestoftheleft.com. That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support. That is absolutely how the program survives.

Of course, everyone can support the show just by telling everyone you know, about it and leaving those glowing reviews on Apple podcasts and Facebook to help others find the show. For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all that information can always be found in the show notes on the blog and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So, coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to you twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com.