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Welcome to the Making Sense podcast, this is Sam Harris. OK. The siege of the capital. I can't say I was expecting that exactly, but I can't say I was surprised either. And nothing will surprise you about my view of Trump's responsibility here. I think I need hardly express it. But like so much that has happened under Trump, what occurred at the Capitol was in every way unsurprising, but it was also in every way astonishing. Trump has managed to invent a new state of the human brain.

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Trump has turned our democracy and this period in American history into pizza gate. That was a pizza gate insurrection. We had people visibly and audibly deranged by misinformation, I mean, just listen to what they say when you stick a microphone in front of their faces. These are people who have been unhinged by the lies that have spilled ceaselessly from the mouth of this president for years. In a way, it was absolutely perfect. It had none of the gravitas of a real coup, but it fully degraded our country.

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I mean, in some ways it was more debasing than a real coup attempt. What we saw in D.C. was like a YouTube comment thread come to life. Now we may find out much more about what happened here and it may even be more sinister than it appeared. I don't know. But at the time I'm recording this, I'm seeing two truly terrible unforced errors being made at the moment on social media and in the media generally. And they're causing a lot of further harm.

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Ones occurring on the right and the other on the left politically. Once again, those two poles are a little hard to map, but they'll have to do for the moment. And we have a problem on both sides of our politics where people have become single issue thinkers, even people who are very smart on other topics, it just seems that now most people can't manage to think about two problems at the same time. You know, it's possible to have cancer and heart disease at the same time, right?

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That's a possible state of the human body and they're both problems and they have to be thought about differently. They've got different causes, different remedies. It is possible to acknowledge that Donald Trump is the most dangerously unfit person who has ever occupied the office of the presidency, while also acknowledging that leftist social justice hysteria is terrible and needs to be opposed. You don't have to be a genius to keep both of these grotesque objects in view. And then it appears that only a handful of people really can manage it.

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I just cannot believe what I'm seeing on social media now. Here are the two reactions that I find most troubling. On the right or right of center, many people are minimizing the gravity of what happened at the Capitol by comparing it to the violence that attended the BLM protests last summer and the insane events in Seattle and Portland. And these people are now focused on the hypocrisy of those in the media and in the Democratic Party who overlooked the violence last summer and who are now calling for law and order.

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The real problem is almost certainly worse than this. The real problem is that nearly 50 percent of Republicans support the attack on the Capitol. That is a horrific polling number. That is the abyss politically, but that aside, virtually every one right of center is focused on the hypocrisy of the left, both real and imagined. This is a dangerous delusion on many levels. First, in many cases, it's not true, you know, it's not true to say that Biden and Kamala Harris didn't condemn the looting and violence last summer.

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They did. They just didn't do it enough, not nearly enough. And I criticized them at the time. But there's a much deeper dis analogy here of what happened in D.C. this week was not a protest that got out of hand. This was an insurrection incited by the sitting president of the United States, regretted terms

like insurrection and coup seem grandiose, given Trump's total ineptitude. He can't actually accomplish his aims. But consider the people who attacked the Capitol, fought with cops, right?

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They really fought with cops. They weren't all just let in and risk their lives to get into that building. OK, one cop is dead from having been beaten over the head with a fire extinguisher and one insurrectionist is dead, having been shot in the neck by a police. And there was no telling what that mob would do once it got inside those buildings. They were not looting a shopping mall. They were storming the halls of Congress at the direct encouragement of the president of the United States who had convinced them over the course of months that their democracy had literally been stolen from them, that they don't have a democracy anymore, that they don't have a country anymore, and that they must fight to get it back.

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He set them loose on the Capitol that very morning, saying that he would be with them, if you don't see a difference between that and a BLM protest that devolves into looting and arson. Take a moment and try. There is no analogy to be drawn here. Now, it is a miracle that more people weren't killed at the Capitol. In fact, many more should have been killed. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying I wish that many more people had died.

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I'm very thankful that so few did. But if you run that experiment again right there, let's storm the halls of Congress experiment. You run it 100 times. I am certain that many more people die in most of those scenarios. And it was only due to a total failure of security that more people didn't die. The people crashing through those doors who had already overwhelmed cops, the people who were staring down the upraised guns of the cops who were inside smashing through the glass, those people should have been shot.

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Because what is the alternative to just let the lives of our elected officials depend upon the restraint of a mob? Some of the people were armed. One guy was carrying zip ties of a sort that cops use for handcuffs. What was he planning to do with those take hostages? There's actually no way of knowing what would have happened had those people gotten their hands on Nancy Pelosi or Mike Pence. There were people calling for the hanging of Mike Pence. So you're going to rely on the restraint of people who have just risked their lives to break into the Capitol, who believe that there's a global conspiracy of child raping cannibals, running the world, people who have never received anything other than a wink and a nod from the president of the United States on those very points.

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Granted, much of the footage of this attack on the Capitol is perplexing. You've got a cop taking selfies with some of the crowd. You've got cops seeming to let people in after others had broken through their ranks. And then you've got everyone just wandering around taking selfies and vandalizing the place. Some of the footage that makes it look like a busload of people headed to Burning Man just decided to use the restrooms at the Capitol. Some of the people are surprisingly old, right, but other footage reveals that this was an absolute emergency, to not acknowledge the gravity of what happened here, to not acknowledge the degree to which it disgraced our country and weakened it in the eyes of the world.

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Yes, the BLM riots were also a disgrace and yes, the press contortions around them were also a disgrace to have CNN anchors say, as a dozen cities were being set on fire. Well, whoever said protests need to be peaceful, that was a disgrace to have a journalist on camera trumpeting the mostly peaceful protests even while cars and buildings burned in the background. That was all a disgrace and just amazing dark comedy. And yes, it was insane, patently insane, to see calls to defund the police as social order was unraveling across our country.

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But what happened this week was altogether different. Nothing like this has ever happened in our country before. I mean, this was a desecration of our government, of our whole system of government engineered by the president himself. A mob was set upon the Capitol by the president himself for the purpose of disrupting the certification of an election that he lost, absolutely lost, but claims to have won. Just take a moment to view this travesty through the eyes of Xi Jinping or Vladimir Putin or any other dictator on Earth who has a real interest in proving that democracy just doesn't work right, that there's nothing to aspire to.

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They have captive populations who they are messaging to now. They get to tell them that democracy is bullshit, right. That having a free press is just dangerous bullshit. Right. Because it drives people insane. What does the United States stand for in the world today? If you don't think it matters for our country to become the laughing stock of the world, to fail and fail and fail again, right, to fail to deal with covid and to fail in a way that still seems impossible to understand, to fail to distribute vaccines we already have in hand when there are more deaths from covid than at any point during the pandemic.

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Right. We're at the absolute peak and this desecration of the very seat of our democracy is happening before the eyes of the world to fail to prevent the Russians from accomplishing the greatest hack in the history of cyber war and to fail so hard at containing the absolute madness of our president that we can't even talk about these other failures. We can't even talk about covid or the Pearl Harbor level hack of our government because we have a shirtless fucking Viking stalking the halls of Congress.

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We've got people in Camp Auschwitz T-shirts hunting down Nancy Pelosi at the behest of the fucking president of the United States. Trump has been assaulting the foundations of our democracy since before he took office, and if you couldn't see it earlier, as many of us did, it should have been absolutely clear to you the moment he refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power during the 2012 campaign. He actually did that during the 2016 campaign. That should have been disqualified.

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But throughout 2020, he repeatedly refused to offer an assurance that he would cooperate with a peaceful transfer of power. Half a dozen times at least, he shattered the most important democratic norm we have right before our eyes. He should have been impeached for that. I think that moment was the most shocking development in our politics in 100 years. The real Trump derangement syndrome is not to have seen every day of this obscene presidency. What a terrifying risk Trump has posed to the safety and integrity of our country.

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And, of course, the ultimate Trump derangement syndrome sent a delusional mob attacking the Capitol, imagining that this was a path to securing Trump another four years as president. So I hear myself getting tuned up here, I want to respond to one species of criticism I keep getting on social media. I think I should have cleared this up a long time ago because there is some conceptual confusion here. I keep hearing from people who are apparently contented users of the waking up app.

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Who say things like, your app has changed my life, I'm getting incredible value from it, but I find your comments on politics really off-putting. These are not the sort of things that a teacher of mindfulness should be saying. You know, there are many versions of this. People tweet me and they say you should use your own app. You know, you sound like you need some mindfulness. Let me clear this up, if you think there is something about meditation, successful meditation, right, if you think there's something about cutting through the illusion of the self or recognizing the nature of mind prior to concepts, if you think there's some necessary contradiction between that project.

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And caring about the kinds of problems I'm talking about now. You're confused, there is nothing

incompatible between mindfulness and not wanting to lose a cyberwar, say. There is no contradiction between what I'm saying now and how I'm saying it and the practices or worldview I present in waking up, you may disagree with some points I'm making here. There are probably several things worth debating. But if you think that meditative insight should cause one not to care about the implosion of our democracy or about our ongoing failure to deal with civilizational challenges, if you think we get to not care about the world we're building or wrecking the world that our children will be condemned to live in, it's time to take your head out of your ass.

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And if you think I can't say that mindfully or mean that mindfully in this very tone of voice, if you think it's impossible for me to be mindful right now, nationalistically mindful, free of self mindful, even as I tell you to take your head out of your ass, then you are confused about what mindfulness is and about what meditation is and about what the whole project of living an examined life is. You have mistaken a style of communication and anodyne religious or new agey communication and a pseudo ethic around being as inoffensive as possible for the goal of spiritual life.

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Yes, there are some apparent paradoxes here, but there should be no confusion. Yes, it is possible to be free and happy in almost any circumstance. I believe that is true. If you put me in solitary confinement, I know that I could be happy given what I know about my own mind. That is true. And that is an immense strength borne entirely of meditation and it's available to everyone. But that doesn't mean that we should acquiesce to the ruination of everything, to the breakdown of society.

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If we find ourselves living in some hell scape out of the Road Warrior movies, yes, it will still be possible to meditate and to feel compassion for oneself and others and to find equanimity. That is the capacity of the human mind that will not go away. But we are right not to want to see things totally fall apart in our society, and if your practice of meditation is making you unable to take problems of civilizational importance seriously, well, then you may be managing your own stress well, but you're no good to us.

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What we need now are people who understand their own minds and who also understand the world. I mean, I studied with some of the greatest meditation masters who were alive at the end of the 20th century. These were extraordinary teachers, but they didn't know a damn thing about most of what I talk about on this podcast. And if they were alive today, they still wouldn't. And it is a very good thing that people like that aren't in charge of our cyber war capabilities because then we wouldn't have any.

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We have to play this game on multiple levels. So it's great that many of you are getting value out of waking up, but if you don't like me in this mode when I'm actually doing my best to respond to a real emergency in our culture, if you don't understand that, we need to mount a competent response to the challenges we face on a hundred fronts. You're not really getting what I'm teaching over there at waking up. You can't let meditation turn you into a new age goofball who just burns incense and thinks that the universe is one big mystery and that everything happens for a reason.

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Sometimes things happen for bad fucking reasons. And a whole generation or generations lose the most basic capacity for order and for getting what they want in life and lose good things they didn't need to lose. You know, sometimes the barbarians really do come through the gates. Yes, we can always have conversations about the fundamental nature of reality, we can have them here in this circumstance of relative order and prosperity, where we can take important things for granted, where I can have a podcast and you can have a smartphone on which to hear it, or we can contemplate reality after we've bombed and hacked and surveilled and abused ourselves back into the Dark Ages.

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The nature of consciousness is available everywhere, even in a cave, and many great contemplatives

have found it in a cave. I've met great Tibetan yogis who have spent years in caves, but I would prefer not to have to live in one because the world has become a Cormac McCarthy novel and you would prefer it to, no matter how much you meditate. There is simply no contradiction between deep insight into the nature of mind and getting our shit together out in the world.

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That tirade was brought to you by waking up a meditation app. All right, this brings me to the second bad take I've been seeing on social media and everywhere else. Many people on the left are interpreting the utter failure of law enforcement to protect the Capitol this week. As a symptom of white supremacy, they're racialized in this travesty. And everyone is doing this, here's what Joe Biden tweeted. No one can tell me that if it had been a group of Black Lives Matter protesters yesterday, that they wouldn't have been treated very differently than the mob that stormed the Capitol.

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We all know that's true and it's unacceptable. And every anchor on the news has made this point, and Kamala Harris has made it, Michelle Obama, Barack Obama, everyone has tried to stick this WOAK landing. And in some cases, it was the only point they made in response to this desecration of American democracy. And it's the wrong point to make, and it's wrong in almost every way, it would be wrong even if it were right, even if it were obviously true.

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It's not the point to make now, but there are so many ways to see that it is probably not true. At best, it's a half truth and a slightly paradoxical one when you look at the details. When something is this easy to see and it isn't being seen, you really have to worry about what's happening in our culture. First, consider the events of January 6th at the Capitol through the eyes of all the black cops who were struggling to defend that building and the people in it.

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Some of the most shocking footage of how unprepared and unequipped the cops were was of this lone black officer being forced up the stairs by the mob, endlessly retreating. Perhaps you've seen this, right? It's crazy footage. At one point he picks up a baton and then thinks better of it. Right, his gun is apparently meaningless to the horde of zombies who are pursuing him, and there's one especially aggressive white guy who keeps chasing him up the stairs.

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Right. And the cop keeps backing up and backing up. What is being claimed here? Are you telling me that this black cop didn't shoot white boy in the face because of his own internalized white supremacy? You know, this double standard was operative there. He would have shot a black writer and not a white one. Is that really the claim you want to make? And the truth is obvious, this black cop was undoubtedly in fear for his life and he recognized he was in a totally untenable situation.

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He was struggling to do his job and keep a mob back that wasn't going to be kept back unless he started killing people. But if he went down that path, he didn't have enough ammunition to kill all the people he would have to kill to have saved himself. One cop with a handgun can't hold back a hundred people who aren't afraid to die. Had there been an appropriate police presence, had that cop been joined by 50 others at that point, there would have been a fight on those stairs and there would have been people in that mob bloodied and beaten by cops, as there should have been.

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It was an insane situation. And in other places in the capital, that's what was happening. There were cops fighting what had become an insurgent mob and one died. And yes, one Trump supporter was shot in the neck and killed as she tried to breach a door. There's another place to put the lie to this racialized framing. A white woman was shot and killed. How many BLM protesters were shot and killed by cops over months of rioting in dozens of cities?

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To my knowledge, none. Imagine if one were imagine if a black woman were executed at point blank range. Surely that's the way it would have been described had it happen. A black woman executed at point blank range for merely trying to breach a door at an otherwise peaceful BLM protest. What would have been said had that happened? That's all we'd be talking about now. But here, a white woman was shot in the neck and killed. It's completely understandable.

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She was shot, what's not understandable is that more weren't shot. But to interpret this as yet another symptom of white privilege is, frankly, crazy. And there is endless footage of BLM protests gone wrong, where the cops are just standing and watching and doing nothing right. They are not using extreme force on crowds of looters who are disproportionately black. We all saw that footage and asked ourselves, what the hell are the cops there for if they're not going to stop people from burning down buildings?

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Yes, absurd force was directed at peaceful protesters in many places rather than looters and arsonists. And many of those peaceful protesters were white. Using this abomination that occurred at the Capitol as yet another opportunity to score a social justice point is frankly idiotic and it's incredibly divisive. It convinces everyone right of center that there's cynicism and blind partisanship is totally justified. What we're witnessing now is just how high a price we are paying for the hypocrisy and moral blindness of the media during the BLM riots, we would be in a much better place had they not bent over backwards to obfuscate what a sickening eruption of criminality we were witnessing, how destabilizing it was, how dysfunctional it was, how appropriate the anger was of business owners who were left to their own devices to defend their businesses.

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And many lost them and their whole neighborhoods. That will take a generation to recover because they were burned out by mobs of Coltec lunatics. Here's another dis analogy. We're being told that the Capitol Police would have behaved like jackbooted thugs had the capital been attacked by a BLM protest. Anyone remember the endless imagery of cops bending the knee at those BLM protests, literally getting down on their knees in solidarity as something approaching a Maoist struggle session surrounded them? Yes, there was some peculiar behavior of cops on the Capitol, but I didn't see any bending the knee in solidarity.

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Honestly, at the time I'm recording this, it is still a mystery why the Capitol was so unprotected and there might be some real conspiracy behind that.

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It could be something that reaches all the way to Trump, or it could be due to the fact that the mayor of D.C. didn't like the heavy handed federal response to the BLM demonstrations that happened in D.C., in particular when Trump orchestrated his photo op in front of the church. So ironically, it could be a fairly weak mayor is resistance to heavy handed policing that left the capital undefended. That would be amazing to have that be the underlying cause of what is now being alleged to be proof positive of the truth of white supremacy and white privilege governing law enforcement in this country.

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Anyway, I don't know what happened there, I'm sure we will learn a lot and it could point in both directions, right? It could be overdetermined. You know, we could find out that some of the cops are diehard Trump supporters who totally sympathized with the attack on the Capitol. And some obviously did their best to resist it. From the footage I've seen, it's easy to see how in certain places, at least, the cops could have been somewhat mystified by what they were up against.

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I mean, it was kind of mystifying. You had people who looked the part who looked like straight up insurrectionists, which is what they were.

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And then you had old ladies and old men who were kind of shuffling in there and then all the cosplay and costumed weirdness. I don't put a lot of onus on a cop in that circumstance who's trying to humor a bunch of people by taking a selfie. I don't know what the mood in that particular room was like at that moment, but there are many social cues that are hard to interpret. But the general picture we should draw from what we know at this point is of a police force that was totally under-resourced.

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The cops were put in a totally untenable position for reasons we should understand, and something like this can never happen again. Those cops got completely screwed. And to summarize their failure as a symptom of racism, again, even as you see black cops among them struggling to protect the place, it's so sloppy and disingenuous. And this pseudo insight is now raining down from on high from every liberal voice in the media. I am genuinely concerned that we have tens of millions of people in Trumpistan now who are, for all intents and purposes, totally unreachable, but between them and the rest of us, we have millions of conservatives who are not QAnon lunatics, but they are absolutely outraged over the selective application of outrage.

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And as I said at the beginning here, they are not following the plot. Right. They are missing something crucial. The analogy between what happened last week and the BLM riots is idiotic. But it is easy to see how the media and Democratic politicians have totally discredited themselves in their eyes. That has to be corrected. There's so many things here that have to be corrected and to just don't go on the right now, as the Orange Compline is driven out of office is a colossal mistake.

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Politically, pragmatically, we have to figure out how to heal the divide in our country. Our country is shattered. And Trump is largely responsible, but not entirely responsible. Finally, I just want to touch upon the fact that Trump was finally banned from Twitter. And while I admitted that there was a lot to debate here of interest, I signalled my approval of this in very clear terms on Twitter, for which I got fairly furious pushback. There are people who seem way more agitated over the fact that Trump was kicked off Twitter than they were over the attack on the Capitol.

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This is a very interesting topic and I think there are many issues to debate. But it seems to me that in the case of Trump, it's not even a close call. Trump has been violating any sane terms of service policy on Twitter for years. He's threatened nuclear war on Twitter. More importantly, he has ruined people's lives intentionally on Twitter as President of the United States with tens of millions of rabid followers, many of whom he knows to be quite deranged, that he's attacked private citizens repeatedly, knowing that they would be doxxed and inundated with death threats.

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That should get you kicked off Twitter. He should have been kicked off years ago. In recent months, he's relentlessly spread misinformation about the election and he has destabilized our society in the process. And then he incited an attack on the Capitol. Twitter isn't obligated to give him a platform to do those things. This is not a free speech issue. This isn't a why can't we just debate all ideas issue? This is why should we let the most dangerous cult leader on earth use our platform to sow division in society issue?

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Why should we give him the tools to produce mob violence? Honestly, I would expect to get kicked off Twitter for causing one one millionth the harm Trump has caused on the platform. Many people have pointed out an apparent irony here that the president of the United States has been kicked off Twitter, but, you know, Ayatollah Khamenei or the Chinese Communist Party still have their profiles up and they're spreading odious misinformation. Well, they should be kicked off too. It's not an argument for not kicking Trump off.

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It's an argument for being consistent. Yes, the Chinese Communist Party doesn't need Twitter as a platform to spread its propaganda. That seems like a pretty easy call, but there are many other things to say here. And I share people's concern about the power of big tech and especially the the harm that these social media platforms have done to our society. This needs to be the focus of government regulation. Right. I think Facebook should probably be broken up as a monopoly.

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I think there's a lot that has to be done here. But people have been getting kicked off Twitter for far less every single day you've been on Twitter, and it is somewhat ironic to see all of these erstwhile libertarians not be able to find their libertarian principles and recognize that private companies should be able to do whatever the hell they want to do. Twitter can kick anyone off its platform it wants to it can kick all the men off tomorrow and all the women off.

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It can have only trans people on the platform if it wants to tomorrow. Granted, there is an interesting discussion to have about the power of these platforms, maybe social media needs to be looked at more like telecom. Should the phone company be able to kick all the Nazis off its platform because it doesn't like what they talk about? These are interesting questions. But we have much bigger problems that in large part have been caused by social media and the malicious spread of misinformation by some of the most powerful figures in our society on these platforms is one of the biggest problems we have.

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And with less than two weeks left in his doomed presidency, letting an increasingly destabilized Trump just tweet whatever the hell he wants to millions of proper lunatics, which is what everyone who believes his lies has become. That was an untenable situation. So it might have been a hard call for Jack and the other people at Twitter, but as far as I can tell, it was the right one. Needless to say, there's a lot we need to figure out going forward.

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I do not have a crystal ball here, but I can tell you what I'm concerned about. I am certainly worried that we will see some Timothy McVeigh style terrorism coming from the right at some point. And, of course, part of the responsibility for this will fall on Trump and his enablers. Even if it happens months from now, I mean, honestly, the lies that he has told will long outlive him. Our society has been poisoned, verifiably poisoned by lies.

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And Trump harbors an enormous responsibility for this. But the antidote to the lies of Trump and his enablers can't be the lies of the left. We need an intellectually honest discussion about what's going on in the world. So I am certainly worried about what the far right and the Trump cult is capable of and to just for 10 seconds revisit a position I took long ago, which has now changed in light of recent events. Whenever the topic of white supremacy and Christian militia risk has come up, I have claimed to be agnostic about how big a problem these things are in our society.

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Whether they were diminishing, whether they were being exaggerated by the people who focus on those issues, I now think that everything in that cesspool, whatever you want to call it, is suddenly of much greater concern and growing concern. Now, again, given how Trump has behaved in recent months to have nearly half our society believe, I think the last poll showed that 90 percent of Republicans believe that the election of Joe Biden was fraudulent. I hope that number is wrong, maybe 70 percent.

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I don't honestly know, I can't believe these numbers, but to have anything like half our society. Believe that the government has been stolen, that is a shattering of society. We have to figure out how to remedy that. So Biden's presidency, with all the challenges he's going to face, COVID and its



economic consequences, the bellicosity of China, the major challenges that Biden should focus on. But honestly, one of the most important things we can do and begin doing immediately is figure out how to hold elections in this country that are secure in a way that everyone can recognize; transparent, unhackable where the right people get to vote and they know their vote has counted so that when you lose, you can admit you've lost.

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We simply have to figure out how to put such a system in place. And I also think Biden should work very hard to diminish the power of the presidency and I think the Oval Office has to be made psychopath proof. Of course, it would be great if we could figure out how not to elect a psychopath to the presidency. But once having done that, we need a system that will check the misuse of that office. Right. We need laws where we only had norms that Trump was more than happy to violate.

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I don't know how that can be done. And I look to have people on the podcast who know much more about that. But Trump has been a stress test of our democracy that we nearly failed and we should do our best to learn from it. I've just been a barrel of laughs, these last two podcasts. Can we start 2021 again, is that OK? It's January 9th, I'm starting the New Year all over again. Happy New Year, everybody.