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And Sam Harris dug to request a free account. And we grant 100 percent of those requests. No questions asked. I am here with Graham Wood, Graham, thanks for joining me. My pleasure, Sam. So where am I reaching you? I get the sense you're not at home. I'm usually not at home, and right now I'm in Oslo, Norway, home for me is the United States and usually I'm traveling around. It's harder than it usually is, but I have family over here.

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I got jailbreaking from the U.S. and made it out.

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Have you been traveling throughout covid or have you been locked down for a period?

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This has been the most sedentary period of six months or so in my life. So I've been locked down with the exception of one reporting trip to Florida.

[00:01:24.850]

And you've been on the podcast before. You wrote a great book on the Islamic State, which we discussed the way of the strangers. So people are encouraged to listen to that if they want to get your expertise on all things related to jihad. But generally. Can you summarize your focus as a writer? I mean, you write mainly for the Atlantic and cover really interesting stuff. What sort of things are you focused on these days? These days, I've been not traveling around so much, so I've been writing a lot of opinion columns, I've been writing a fair bit on covid, usually with an international focus.

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But my bread and butter is traveling around finding things that are interesting, wherever they might be, and as you mentioned for a few years, the main thing that I've been writing about has been the Islamic State and the development of jihadism. So domestically, I think I want to focus on all the ways in which the United States has begun to resemble a failing state. You obviously know what it's like to be in a failed state or to focus on it.

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But it seems to me we're dealing with trends in public opinion and disinformation and failures of sensemaking, a breakdown of trust in institutions, political polarization, failures of leadership at a level that I haven't even contemplated in my lifetime. I don't think I mean, perhaps I was just too young to understand how bad it was at various points earlier in my life. But this just seems like an unraveling that is fairly disconcerting. You know, I'm happy to go wherever you want to go, but I thought we could talk through what's been going on with social protests and police violence and the political ramifications of what happened in Kenosha and Portland.

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And actually, I know I recall that the first time we met was around this topic of violence. I actually I got into Brazilian jujitsu and you wrote a piece in the Atlantic on that. And that's how you came out. And I sort of introduced you to my midlife crisis around all things jujitsu and self defensive. So it's kind of full circle for our conversation. But give me your general sense of what we're living through at the moment in the U.S..

[00:03:56.070]

Yeah, so like I mentioned, a lot of my reporting has been going overseas to places that have had some level of social breakdown, some level of political breakdown. And so, yeah, there are some aspects of that that you definitely see in the United States. When I think of societies that have really broken down, though, I think of places like Somalia, like Iraq, places where the government just has ceased to exist. And we don't have that.

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We have touches of that. And we have. A kind of relative breakdown that I think is we experience both as an absolute loss of standards and performance of government, but also a relative loss when we look at other countries that seem to be doing much better than we are and that, you know, we thought we thought we were in their league or we were they were not quite in our league, but but below us and somewhere like, say, Vietnam or Thailand.

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It has just been cleaning our clock when it comes to dealing with with covid, so what is breakdown look like in another place, the kind of places where I would have been sent a couple of years ago, 10 years ago, to report, I think of places like like Zimbabwe, where the government has no longer any control over its currency. It can't be trusted to maintain law and order because it insists on destroying any any kind of any kind of law and order that might exist.

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So we see bits of that right now. I mean, there are cities that are pretty much acknowledged to be no longer under control of the forces, law enforcement or any other kind of discernible powers that we would want to have a monopoly on the use of legitimate force. So there's this touches of that. Now, what I've found in looking at other countries is that the really dangerous combination is a place like Iraq where at one point you have total control by the government, way too much control, control over the life and death of its citizens, say, during the Saddam Hussein regime.

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That's replaced by total anarchy. So in the United States, you see touches of that, too. You see the government arrogating to itself all sorts of kinds of of power that you we shouldn't really be comfortable with. And then at the same time, you see the total breakdown of law and order in certain pockets of of urban America. So. I am, yeah, I'm terrified to see that combination of both consolidation of power and then total chaos.

[00:06:44.420]

It's it's a really ugly combination to see. Yeah, I remember I did a podcast in the beginning of April with Stanley McChrystal and Chris Fussell, his partner, forgive me, Chris, I can't recall whether you pronounce your last name, futsal or Fusel or some other variant there. But anyway, I remember having this conversation with them and talking about the prospect of a breakdown in social cohesion under covid. And I remember I think I actually telegraphed this in the conversation, but if I didn't, I was certainly thinking it that I was worried that I was being a scaremonger for even just hypothesizing that this was possibly on the menu or worth thinking through.

[00:07:31.850]

Right. Just that things could fray enough so that there would be violence in the streets, that our political partisanship could turn violent. It really did seem, you know, as recently as the beginning of April, far fetched to me. And I just felt like it was worth talking about because it was possible. But, you know, if you'd asked me then, I certainly didn't feel it was likely. And and so now I'm interested to consider how many of us have now kind of reset our expectations.

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And this seems like the new normal and we're not actually entertaining how much worse things could get. And it would seem like scaremongering to sincerely entertain that. But there is a kind of slide towards something unrecognizable, at least in our lifetimes here. Obviously, there are comparisons with the 60s and there was a, you know, a fair amount of social unrest then. I don't know if you know, I'm sure there are many decent analogies there as well.

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But, you know, with Trump in the White House and the prospect of either him being re-elected or there being, you know, real, a real unwillingness to accept the results of an election that goes against him, it seems like a very risky time we're in. And the thing that is so disconcerting for me just on an hourly basis, is to see how things are distorted in what used to be the most reliable sources of news for us right now.

[00:09:08.140]

I feel like now I can count on The New York Times to get crucial things wrong with respect to what's happening with protests and police violence and wrong in a way that just amplifies political partisanship and hysteria on the part of people who actually decide to go in the streets, you know, and certainly hysteria on social media. And so I feel like there's a kind of a moral panic component to a lot of what's going on. And there are very few levelheaded people in the media whose inclination is to turn down the temperature on things.

[00:09:47.360]

The business model of media is to be as shrill and sensational as possible so that the partisans amplify your message. So, yeah, I just there's a way in which this is a runaway train, or at least feels like one that worries me and for which I really don't have any. It just seems deeply unfamiliar to be living through.

[00:10:07.400]

Yeah, I think there's a definite recalibration that's taking place within media and a recalibration that as citizens we've got to kind of work through in our own minds. You know, we notice things that we didn't notice before about stories getting covered or not getting covered. That should be. And, you know, I would still take The New York Times over my Facebook feed, say, as a way to understand what's happening in the United States. That said, you know.

[00:10:38.570]

It's it's been tough at the Atlantic, which is where I wrote most of the time, the magazine has endorsed a candidate in the last election, it endorsed Hillary Clinton. Very odd thing for the Atlantic to do just because we we don't endorse candidates most of the time, but to have announced ourselves as as having been on one side, now readers have to have to take that into account. And it's just our being honest. I mean, there were basically nobody at the magazine who was in favor of Donald Trump.

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And so it was important that that that we come right out and say that. And so when readers read us, they they know that that's where our our origin point is going to be in our opinions. That said, we still and I've been told by more than one editor that if Donald Trump does something right, then it's our duty to say so. So there is still a standard of truth that we're working toward. It's just that we're in a different media environment.

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I would also hasten to add that it's not just media. I mean, there are so many other sources of of truth that we would have taken for granted in the past that we no longer can. You may have seen Harold Varmus co-wrote an op ed in The New York Times know just in the last couple of days this the former head of the NIH, when the most Nobel Prize winner basically said don't trust the CDC. CDC has been politicized. So if you've got Harold Varmus telling you not trust the CDC, then you really have a breakdown in the sources of medical information.

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You're when you need to have that information coming through loud and clear with the consensus of the best medical minds. Yeah.

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Don't trust the CDC in the middle of a pandemic when you have to decide whether to send your kids

back to school. It really is unbelievable we're in this situation. Well, let's talk a little bit about the violence we've seen, because this is a place where I see everyone left of center seeming to get virtually every specific claim wrong. And, you know, I'm someone who, as I think you know, is more concerned that we not reelect Donald Trump than most people.

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I mean, certainly I would put my anti Trump bona fides up against anybody on the left or the center or among the never Trump Republicans. But it is crazy making and deeply concerning that the left seems to the bar is nowhere near what where you put it at the Atlantic. Not only would they not acknowledge that he gets anything right, but just everything is upside down in how they describe what's happening with police violence and social protest. Many NPR just published a wonderful interview, which I think you noticed, informing all of humanity that looting was essentially a moral imperative and a great form of social protest because small business owners are really no better than big business owners and they all deserve to have their stuff stolen.

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And this was presented on the NPR website without any there wasn't a single critical question, if I recall correctly. It was just like this is practically NPR's position on looting. Yeah, it was.

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That was shocking to read. I've actually subjected myself to the book. I've read it cover to cover it by now and have reviewed it for the Atlantic. How nice it is. If anything, it's more radical than the NPR interview would have you believe. The NPR interview really took the title of the book as the jumping off point in Defense of Looting by Vicki Oster. While the book is actually mostly about in defense of violence, so looting is an afterthought.

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I think there are whole chapters where looting isn't mentioned explicitly. What it's really trying to argue is that America is conceived in sin, racial sin, capitalists and you name it, that the system that we've inherited in the present is bad, screwed up and that it must be destroyed. So, you know, if it sounds like the kind of thing that would destroy our society, to just have people smash open shops, take everything in them and burn them down, then that is very much the point.

[00:15:07.370]

There's a desire on the part of the author to recreate society in what I can only assume is some kind of she doesn't say explicitly, but a Marxist anarchist revolution that is born out of violence, wiping away the old order. And yes, the NPR interview that introduced this book to I think most of the people who have heard about it was totally uncritical. And I will say this for it. I think that NPR did the right thing by interviewing this writer, because there are a lot of people who have, if not explicitly positive things to say about looting, think that looting is a reasonable response to the injustices of of American history or the present in the American system.

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And I think that those people need to articulate what they really think. They they can't just get away with saying, I don't want to criticize the looters. No, I want them to to say I'm on the side of the Costabile or say that they have a different view of of of looting. But being able to be kind of mealy mouthed about these things has not worked out very well. And it's allowed, for example, Donald Trump to to conflate the position of, say, Joe Biden with the position of, say, someone who throws a brick through a window and steals an iPad, which is completely unfair.

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Making sure that these differences are as sharp as possible, I think is one of the things that journalists should do. So inspired they started to do that. Unfortunately, they weren't as critical of as they could have been of the author when when they had her in their clutches.

[00:16:49.160]

Yes. Joe Biden as of yesterday, I think will release this a few days hence. But we're recording the day

after he gave his speech in Pittsburgh and the purpose of which was to put some daylight between him and. The caricature of him that Donald Trump tried to paint, aligning him with the left and the pro chaos, pro looting, anti capitalist, you know, far left, which exists and is, you know, clearly worth disavowing. I assume you saw that speech.

[00:17:22.190]

I was pleasantly surprised that he took the line that he did. And I thought it was pretty effective. But he does still get enough wrong as part of his talking points that given enough time, he doesn't do himself too many favors here. So like when he talks about police violence, virtually everything he says seems to me to be pandering to Black Lives Matter in a way that's just inaccurate. I should, you know, explain why I think that.

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But, you know, I think he also said that Kyle Rittenhouse was a white supremacist at one point, not in his speech, but I think on Twitter, I think, you know, his campaign released something about white supremacists in a way that was clearly referencing the Rittenhouse shooting. I don't think there's any evidence that Rittenhouse is a white supremacist, is there? I mean, obviously, things can change by the day. But the time we're having this conversation, do you know of any evidence that suggests that?

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No, unless you think that a white supremacist is someone who believes that there is such a thing as private property that should be defended by the state. And, you know, there are such people who are so radical that they would say that that alone will make you a white supremacist. But as far as I know. All the reporting about Kyle Rittenhouse is social media suggests that he was a big cop enthusiast, a big gun enthusiast, and if that makes you a white supremacist, then I guess he's a white supremacist.

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But I tend to be more restrictive in my definition.

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Yeah, well, I think our sanity depends on our being that way. So let's just win this all the way back to the Jacob Blake shooting, which was the proximate cause of all of this chaos. What happened there to my eye, again, you were talking at one point in time and you know, who knows what facts will come out in subsequent days or weeks? We might learn a lot about the cops there. We might learn that they're all members of the local chapter of the KKK.

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And therefore, racism could have been a conscious motive on their part. But when I see a shooting like that within the frame of that video, the color of everyone's skin is totally irrelevant. I've seen videos like that where white people are getting shot. I've seen videos like that where black people are getting shot by black cops. And, you know, I've talked at sufficient length about the statistics of all of these encounters with cops and applications of violence, lethal and not and justified.

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And not to say that the story is not is certainly not a clean Black Lives Matter story of us having an epidemic of racist police violence against young black men. That is just the statistics don't bear that out. You know, I would just say to our listeners, you have to listen to my two hour walk through this morass titled Can We Step Back from the Brink or Can We Pull Back from the Brink? One of those, but was when I look at a video like this and I'd be interested to know if you see this differently.

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We clearly see a person who has been resisting arrest. I don't know to what degree he fought with the cops before the video starts and we see him just essentially moving away from the cops, you know, and their guns are already drawn at this point. But I think it's from other video. I think it's pretty clear that there was a kind of a wrestling match happening and then he broke away. And then you have fully three cops, if memory serves pursuing him around his car and he's, you know, now opening his door to either get into his car to drive away or reaching into the driver's side of the car for something it's

not clear from the video.

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And then he gets shot seven times in the back. And now he is, I believe, still in some terrible state and very likely paralyzed. So I think it seems likely he'll survive at this point. And this encounter gets summarized virtually everywhere in mainstream media as this is not a verbatim quote, but this is a paraphrase of virtually every summary I've seen. You know, yet another black man shot by white cops or a black man shot in the back seven times in front of his kids by white cops.

[00:21:39.290]

Right. You know, and it is just it's an article of faith that the skin color of all involved is absolutely relevant here and worth emphasizing. And it's also an article of faith that all of these details have some moral opprobrium attached to them, like it is assumed the cop could never be justified in shooting someone in the back in an encounter like this. Whereas if you understand how violence evolves and you understand that we're living in a society in the U.S. where every police officer has to assume that everyone they are dealing with is either potentially armed and if they're reaching for something in their car, they are very likely reaching for a gun.

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I mean, this is not the default assumption perhaps in Western Europe, but in the U.S. it absolutely has to be. Our failures of, you know, gun control are relevant here. But the idea that cops are performing some kind of a lynching by shooting someone in the back because he has fought them off or ran around his car and opened the door and reached in, that's just it's just completely untrue, given a cop's eye view of the world.

[00:22:56.930]

I think that the only thing I want to say here, and I'll turn it over to you, that really does put the onus on the cops is clearly they lacked the training or capacity to control him physically and take him down so that they wouldn't have to use lethal force. Right. I mean, like cops who actually could restrain somebody could have easily restrained him. And he was outnumbered. He was walking away from them in a way that allowed for any cop with a modicum of training to take him down and hold him down.

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And the fact that they couldn't do that suggests that there's a serious or. And problem and training problem, you know, and we know this is true, you know, nationwide, and so that's something to be worried about and and rectified. But I mean, even their people's intuitions about what cops should be doing should be allowed to do. All of this is run off the rails in mainstream media. Maybe it's a point of seemingly absolute consensus that cops should never use, you know, a rear neck restraint, otherwise known as a rear naked choke, because some number of people have died under those conditions or seem to have died under those conditions.

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I think in many cases that that was not, in fact, their cause of death, whereas a rear naked choke is in fact, if done appropriately, a remarkably safe procedure is done in every jujitsu school in the country every day of the year. And if it had any high rate of lethality, you would just be seeing people die all over the country all the time. And jujitsu training. And this is now I think it's illegal in New York now and maybe illegal in other states for cops to even attempt this.

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What you have done when you remove that tool, you have made it far more likely that cops are going to have to resort to lethal force because they can't is really one of the only ways to incapacitate someone so that you can cuff them if you're going to rely on your grappling skills. And so it's just everything is upside down here. But again, I would love to know if you disagree with anything I said about what we can glean from that video.

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There's a few things that I see when I watch that video, in addition to just being horrified at seeing it, seeing violence of any type that first of all. So I think you're kind of like me in that you've probably spent a fair bit of time watching encounters like this on YouTube or wherever videos of of police subduing, failing to subdue someone, police doling out violence and being the victims of it. And I think many people who see that scene, they start off being rightfully horrified at having witnessed an act of violence.

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And then they don't have some of the context that you might have if you've gone down some of those YouTube rabbit holes and watched lots of violence like this and seen how this kind of thing could turn out in other scenarios, how that does turn out in other scenarios, like, you know, the fact that he's lunging into his car, who knows what he's lunging for. Apparently, there's a knife there. It's not it's not it's not a crime to have a knife in your car, as far as I know.

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However, if you're a cop and someone grabs a knife and you're right behind him and that person wants to stab you, you could have a gun. But I don't think the average person knows whether you should expect to get stabbed. If someone is four feet away from you, you have a gun and they have a knife. And the answer is almost certainly you're going to get stabbed. That's what you are are are dealing with. If you have someone who wants to stab you and you're that close, it's not unless you get one really good shot right in the head, it's very likely that the person is going to get to you and be on top of you with a knife, even if you've even if you've put around in him already.

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So, yeah, I think there's there's not a great intuition on the part of the general public about the kind of threat that's being faced, about the type of mindset that you might be in if you're aware of those threats to. And I think to that that's that's a problem that not just with with police training, not just with the poor intuitions of the general public, but also with Kyle Rittenhouse. You know, if you are spending a lot of time thinking about guns, thinking about law enforcement, you were going to be aware of these things and maybe primed to overreact a bit, too, if if you're your politics suggested.

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The other thing in that in that video and what you're describing is the the failure to describe it properly, properly. You know, as a journalist, what I tend to do is I look for incidents that turn out to be more complicated than they originally appear. And what you're describing is the exact opposite of this. And people seem to like doing that. Both sides, liberals, conservatives, left, far right. You find a situation of of moral complexity, of deep ambiguity like this.

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And people are not as interested in what I do is as in turning it into a black and white morality play. It takes takes a lot of investigation to find out what's actually happening. Just watching a few seconds of video is not going to tell you why the cops are there in the first place, what the interaction has been like up until the point where we see them shoot a guy seven times in the back. And I'm not sure we'll ever know that.

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I mean, half the people I talked to about that shooting think that the guy. Right on the scene, they're not aware that he's still alive right now, so if they're not aware of that detail and they're unaware pretty much every aspect of the context of of that shooting and it can be used for one of these binary political purposes, either to suggest that he's a demon or to suggest that the people who shot them are.

[00:28:55.370]

Yeah, well, I want to talk about the Kyle Rittenhouse episode, because that does strike me as more complex and interesting in the end and has pretty wide implications. But, yeah, just to reiterate something you said there about the Jacob Blake shooting and what it's like to have seen a lot of these videos, I mean, what you have to know is that every permutation of this kind of encounter has

happened. So you can find video again with the race of everyone swapped in and out.

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Right. You can find video where the guy reaches into his car, pulls out a gun and shoots the cop in the face and kills him. Right. And every cop knows about those kinds of encounters. Right. So it's just you have to game this out more fully than your knee jerk reaction may admit, of which it is just awful that we're living in a society where cops shoot a guy in the back in front of his kids with an apparent intent of killing him.

[00:30:00.020]

Right. As a way to pacify him. I mean, how did we get here? This is completely insane and unacceptable. But once the wheels begin to come off in an encounter like this, there are very few options open to people who don't have, you know, all the tools that might be possible there. I mean, again, cops of sufficient strength and training could have easily taken this guy down and held him down. He wouldn't have been injured in the end.

[00:30:28.070]

Right. So there's an absolute deficit of training and recruitment there that is visible to the eye of anyone who knows what is going on. And then there's the fact that I think a taser was used before the video picks up and failed. But, you know, people think that tasers are magic. You know, why not always use them? Well, they're not magic. And they often fail and they're more dangerous than a neck restraint, which has now been ruled illegal.

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Right. Because it's if you take someone and it works and they fall to the concrete and hit their head, you know, that is virtually always worse than actually being choked out, you know, in a jujitsu class. So people have to become better students of this kind of violence before they have these reactions that seem to justify burning down half a city or writing headlines which attest yet again in the loudest possible way that we have a real problem of lethal racist violence perpetuated by cops.

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Because, again, you know, unless we find out more about the precursors to that event, there's no reason to even talk about race at this point. That's what's so sickening. My hypothesis is that virtually every mention of race is counterproductive. Now in our society. It's virtually only going to push society in one direction, which is greater polarization, greater derangement, greater hysteria, less contact with actual facts. And it's also going to increase the likelihood that we're going to get four more years of Donald Trump.

[00:32:04.820]

There's one aspect of what you say that I am not so sure about, and we should come back to race in a second. But the idea that we should familiarize ourselves with this kind of interaction used to be very appealing to me. You know, I started watching these videos and I actually wrote a profile a couple of years ago of a guy named John Carea, very nice guy who does kind of color commentary and videos exactly like this. So it will be badge cam, it'll be CCTV, but it's always violence that either happens or is averted.

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And then he will minutely dissect what happened.

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Then he's a former preacher, right? He went from minister to full time here to claim self-defense video and analysis. Yeah.

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And he's still a man of God in the sense that he will remind you of the importance of having a good relationship with Jesus and remind you why, you know, Jesus would want you to put in the right amount of time at the range and so forth. So he's a great guy and he's extremely responsible. You



know, he's very I think evidenced based when he's he's doing these analyses. And I've learned a great deal. I think that people should watch him and heed his his is his words of caution as well.

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I'm also, though not really certain whether I want people to be thinking about this all the time. For one thing, rarely do you see people you know. A student studying encounters that go well, you know, they end up seeing huge numbers of accounts, of encounters that that go very badly, even if these are extremely rare and in the life of a cop or a citizen.

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And I found it by watching them, that you have to be extremely scrupulous in making sure that you have kind of kept your head on your shoulders when it comes to understanding. What the actual likelihood that this is going to happen to you is and if you if you don't do that, your mind will be even more warped than when you when you went in, you might have a better sense of, yes, this person with this weapon is a danger at this distance when I'm carrying this weapon, when I'm ready for him, when I'm not.

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But the fact of the matter is, most of us don't get attacked. Very, very few of us are law enforcement. So many of these things are just not relevant to our lives. And when we get too used to them, then I think it can have a really warping effect in our psychology. I know you, Sam, spent a long time thinking about self-defense, personal security and so forth, as if I and I'm not sure I would take back any of that time in my case.

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But I do worry that people are becoming over familiar with these types of of interactions. And what they get out of it is not necessarily healthy for us collectively as a society.

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Yeah, no, I would totally agree with that. And this is a nice Segway into the Kyle Rittenhouse phenomenon, because if you become a student of this kind of violence, yes, you can get an outsized sense of how common it is. I mean, so really, what I just to make clear what I was recommending is like, if you're not someone who really knows a lot about violence and if you haven't studied it, if you haven't trained in anything.

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Right, if you just don't know how hard it is to to shoot what you're aiming at, you know, especially when that thing is moving, if you're just not informed, don't have a strong opinion about these things. Right. Don't go in like that. Now is a good time to burn down the local sporting goods store over this or support others doing likewise when you just don't know what's going on. Certainly, it also attracts is a kind of bug light.

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It attracts a certain kind of mind and a certain kind of person to spend a lot of time doing this. And it's going to select for people who have that, you know, fondness for firearms and self-defense training and, you know, joining militias and sort of the Kyle Rittenhouse kind of person. And then we wind up in this other terrible place on the landscape, which is once you get any kind of breakdown in social order, once cops get pushed far enough on their on the back foot such that they're not doing the kind of policing we would expect them to do.

[00:36:33.170]

Right. Once they have essentially announced nationwide that they won't protect property, which they de facto have. Just by example, we saw this in the first wave of protests and riots that even in the most affluent parts of the most affluent cities, cops would not protect property. I mean, you know, potentially there's an argument for that, but it's probably not a great one. And in response to the protests, we had the worst of all possibilities.

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We had cops essentially saying they would not protect property and they wouldn't even be diligent in protecting the people who tried to protect their own property from being, you know, violently attacked by mobs. We all saw footage of store owners being beaten by mobs, but what they would do is they would kick the shit out of peaceful protesters. Right. That's what the cops were up for. So it was like if you wanted to create a machine to amplify cynicism and a commitment to a kind of vigilante, you know, take matters into your own hands ethic, you could not have done better than these last few months with the spectacle of American policing.

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And, you know, what you have there, too, is exactly that, that kind of twin evil force going on where it's the forces of total chaos. That is the cops saying we are not going to enforce laws concerning property, go out, light fires, whatever, but at the same time claiming for themselves immense power. So chaos and order both being weaponized to just make life hell. If you combine those two, you get what what I was describing earlier is as these characteristics of hellish failed states that I've reported on overseas, you know, it's in micro, it's not beyond recovery, but it's a taste of what life is like in places where where everything falls apart.

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And, you know, what I worry about most, too, is that these effects are not exactly accidental.

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You know, the police, they step back from from enforcement of of property crimes and sometimes in in other places where I've reported, it's been pretty clear that they'll say, yes, we stand. Between you and violence and chaos, if we're not here, then that's what's going to happen, but kind of silently uttered after that, after that promise, that threat is we're going to make sure that that's what's happening. What happens if we're not there? That is, if if we're not there to protect you, then things will go badly because we insist that they'll go badly so that you, you know, give us the proper respect and, you know, sign over your security to us along with everything else.

[00:39:32.520]

So what is your actual allegation or concern there that the cops have put the rioters on a sufficiently long leash for reasons of sort of justifying their own office? Like what? You sure you want to defend us? We'll take a look at what's going to happen tonight when we just, you know, sit on our hands.

[00:39:54.450]

What I make happen. Yeah, well, what I think is happening is that incentives exist. So the incentive is to say, first of all, there are some perfectly reasonable incentives. You don't enforce laws concerning property because you're spending your resources, making sure that people don't get killed and you try to make sure that violence isn't happening. So that's a good reason to do this. But there is an incentive to to say, look, we're not going to enforce this because we want to show you what happens when you don't have us.

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And the incentive is for what happens when you don't have us to be very, very bad, to be as bad as possible so that your appreciation for us, the police is is is sufficient. So I'm not alleging that there's some conspiracy where the cops are handing people guns or Molotov cocktails. What I'm saying is that at all levels, there are some really, really negative, vicious incentives that are at work. And it wouldn't be shocking if there was a downward spiral that that's driven by.

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Yeah, and all of this is coupled to what is now known as the Ferguson effect, where cops, because they don't want to wind up on YouTube on what seems to be the wrong end of yet another lethal encounter, which in their world may, in fact, have been a justified shooting. They're just going to stop policing proactively and crime rates are probably soaring as a result of that. So the Rittenhouse thing is interesting because you have someone who draws the the obvious lesson, especially right of center here politically, that, you know, we have the Second Amendment for a reason.

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It only makes sense to get really into guns and personal protection because you really can't delegate the protection of yourself and your family to the cops. At a minimum. They're just usually not there when you need them and they're going to show up too late to do anything other than hopefully solve the crime that you were the victim of. So if you if you care about self-defense, well, then it really has to you have to put the self back in self-defense and therefore you need guns and you need to train with them and you need to take selfies of yourself walking around in the woods with your AR 15 and become one of those guys.

[00:42:07.750]

And then you hear about this breakdown in social order a few miles away from where you live and you decide you are going to be this, you know, high testosterone, good Samaritan and get out there and put yourself between the forces of chaos and the social order that still needs to be maintained. And you're going to protect people's businesses, as I think Carl Rittenhouse was intending to do. At least that's been reported. And there's you know, there's footage of him cleaning up graffiti earlier in the day, I think.

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And then he's he's interviewed by somebody. And in the various points in those interviews, he seems like a perfectly nice kid.

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And there's no indication that he's intending to shoot somebody. There's every indication that during some portions of it, I think he's offering medical assistance, maybe medical assistance, that he has no business offering. And I don't think many people take him up on it. But there's no, as far as I can tell, no recorded evidence in the videos or interviews with him that he's there looking for a fight that said, you know, he went from Illinois to Wisconsin and picked up an AR 15 and went into a really, really, really dangerous place where anything could have happened.

[00:43:27.310]

So maybe that is, you know, all by itself looking for a fight. Yeah. I wonder whether he had the right level of I mean, obviously did not have the right level of situational awareness, awareness of what he was getting into. I mean, if you're walking around open carrying. With any weapon, even if it's a tiny pistol, someone taps you on the shoulder in that scenario in Kenosha, when buildings are burning around you and people are screaming in crowds around you, you have to consider that within the next few seconds someone is going to try to kill you with the weapon that you have brought.

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That could be the weapon that puts a bullet in your brain. So I didn't see any awareness in his face. I don't imagine that that any awareness could possibly be had. If you're, say, a recent high school graduate who shows up with your AR 15 in the middle of a riot in a previously unexampled, horrible situation in this country. This is this is a situation that he clearly had never been in, that he would be terrible at assessing the danger to him.

[00:44:40.370]

You know, when when younger reporters go into war zones and I talk to them, sometimes they'll ask, what do you suggest? What should I know? And the first thing that I say is, is that danger just doesn't always feel like danger. You're going into a situation that is unlike anything you've experienced before. If you've seen movies, then you edit out all the boring parts that happened in the movies. Right. So you're going to have a very poor sense of what the actual rhythms of a day in Baghdad will be.

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And you'll be surprised at how quickly things go bad, how quickly the danger arrives, how quickly it passes. And these things are extremely difficult to train. They're the kind of thing that you learn by accidentally surviving long enough. And, you know, he had one day, one day in Kenosha and they

turned bad really, really fast. I'm still very curious about what happened in the actual run up to the first shooting, because, you know, the guy who he shot, Joseph Rosenbaum, doesn't seem to have been the most stable individual.

[00:45:53.390]

And you know that there's suggestions that he was furious that he may have attacked Rittenhouse. And then there's all these moral questions and legal questions that I don't think either of us is really competent to to to adjudicate about whether Rittenhouse, under the laws of the state of Wisconsin, would have been justified in shooting him. If Rosenbaum say, grabbed for his gun, as is, I think, alleged in the criminal complaint against Rittenhouse, that he shot Rosenbaum after after that happened, that is after Rosenbaum went for his gun.

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But, you know. It just has to be said again and again that if you open carry in a situation like that, where there is mayhem all around you and crazy people who have literally flocked there from from other states because they're looking for craziness, then you've committed a an error that is really sealing your fate. I can't see how how to how to see it any other way. If Rittenhouse had been from Kenosha and had just woken up and rolled out of bed and seen mayhem in his front yard and thought he had to defend himself, that would be one thing.

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But he made such a terrible decision that almost everything that happened that flowed from that is going to have to be seen in that light.

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Well, it's a decision that so many people are making. Everyone who shows up to one of these protests or shows up anywhere, you know, whether it's in counterprotest to the protests they don't like or it's their own protest. You know, as we saw against lockdown earlier in the pandemic, anyone who shows up armed, you know, carrying an AR 15 or, you know, any firearm, some of these people have thought it through and they're just happy to run the risk.

[00:47:45.580]

But the reality is, is that the presence of a gun completely changes the dynamic of any interpersonal violence. When you know you have a gun with concealed carry, that's its own burden ethically and tactically, right? I mean, just you can have a gun on you and no one can see it. And still, there are many doors close to you. You cannot afford to get into a wrestling match with someone or a shoving match or a boxing match.

[00:48:14.930]

You know, in that kind of ordinary range of interpersonal violence, when you have a gun on your belt, which at any moment, you know, you might decide to draw or you might fall out, you know, in a scuffle or it might be seen by the other person. I mean, just everything is potentially lethal. And, you know, you have to think through what you're going to do if you start losing a fight and you are armed is a different situation.

[00:48:43.610]

Now, obviously, anyone who's a true firearms person will, you know, have recourse to, you know, several aphorisms at this point. You know, better to be judged by 12 than carried by six or, you know, in certain cases, obviously, I would agree with that. But the real heuristic here is if you are going to be someone who who assumes the responsibility, you know, the real responsibility of real self-defense. Right. If you're going to have firearms trained with firearms, think of the scenarios under which you would use firearms.

[00:49:16.370]

Right. You are going to be the sheriff of your own life in the end. And you understand that calling 911 one is not actually a self-defense plan.

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You have to avoid violence at virtually every cost. Avoidance has to be your master strategy because it's only if you've practiced that impeccably. Do you know that you will be justified if you find yourself having to resort to lethal force and if you've decided to just go out to a random car dealership with your AR 15 because you don't think the cops are going to defend those precious cars, you're someone who's not avoiding violence at all, right? You're putting yourself in a very tenuous circumstance, you know, in front of a mob.

[00:50:05.870]

And it's totally irresponsible in the end. So that that part can't be defended and yet everything's going to be. If you'd like to continue listening to this podcast, you'll need to subscribe at Sam Harris. Doug, you'll get access to all full length episodes of the Making Sense podcast and to other subscriber only content, including bonus episodes and Amma's and the conversations I've been having on the Waking Up app. The Making Sense podcast is ad free and relies entirely on listener support.

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