

**Lex Fridman Podcast #451 - Rick Spence: CIA, KGB, Illuminati, Secret Societies, Cults &
Conspiracies**

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Lex Fridman

The following is a conversation with Rick Spence, a historian specializing in the history of intelligence agencies, espionage, secret societies, conspiracies, the occult and military history. This is the Lex Fridman Podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now dear friends, here's Rick Spence. You have written and lectured about serial killers, secret societies, cults and intelligence agencies. So we can basically begin at any of these fascinating topics, but let's begin with intelligence agencies. Which has been the most powerful intelligence agency in history?

Rick Spence

The most powerful intelligence agency in history. It's an interesting question. I'd say probably in terms of historical longevity and consistency of performance that the Russian Intelligence Services. Notice I didn't say the KGB specifically, but the Russian Intelligence Services, going back to the Czarist period are consistently pretty good. Not infallible, none of them are. Of course, there's a common Western way of looking at anything Russian. Very often, I think it's still the case Russians are viewed in one or two ways. Either they are Bumbling idiots or they're diabolically clever, no sort of middle ground. You can find both of those examples in this. So what I mean by that is that if you're looking at the modern SVR or FSB, which are just two different organizations that used to be part of the one big KGB or the KGB or its predecessors, the Checka, you're really going back to the late 19th century and the Imperial Russian Intelligence Security Service, generally known as the Okhrana or Okhrana. It's really the Department of Police, the special Corps of Gendarmes. Their primary job was protecting the imperial regime and protecting it against imperial or other interior enemies, Revolutionaries for the most part. They got very, very good at that by co-opting people within those movements, infiltrating and recruiting informers, [inaudible 00:02:41] provocateurs. In fact, they excelled at the [inaudible 00:02:45] provocateur. Person who placed aside an organization to cause trouble, usually maneuver them into a position of leadership, and they provoke actions that can then allow you to crack down on that is many sort of lure or bring the target organization into any legal or open status that it can be more effectively suppressed. They were very good at that. So good that by the early 20th century in the years preceding the Russian Revolution in 1917, they had effectively infiltrated every radical party, Bolsheviks, Menchaviks, SRs, great and small, and placed people in positions of influence and leadership to the point that arguably that is, you can debate this, that I think in the whole, they could largely dictate what those parties did. Nothing was discussed at any central committee meeting of any revolutionary group that the Okhrana wasn't immediately aware of, and they often had people in positions to influence what those decisions were. Of course, that raises an interesting question, is that if they were that good and they had infiltrated and effectively controlled most of the opposition, then how did the regime get overthrown by revolutionaries? The answer to that is that it wasn't overthrown by revolutionaries, it was overthrown by politicians. That would then take us into a detour into Russian history. But I'll just leave it with this. If you look at 1917 and you look closely, this is one of the things I'd always tell my students is that there are two Russian revolutions in

1917. There's the first one in March or February, depending on your calendar, that overthrows Nicholas II. Revolutionaries are really not involved with that. Bolsheviks are nowhere to be seen. Trotsky and Lenin are nowhere to be seen. They have nothing to do with that. That has to do effectively with a political conspiracy within the Russian parliament, the Duma. To unseat and emperor, they thought was bungling the war and was essentially a loser to begin with. It was a coup d'état, a parliamentary coup d'état. The temporary or provisional government that that revolution put in power was the one overthrown by Lenin eight months later. That government was essentially one dominated by moderate socialists. It was a government that very quickly sort of turned to the left. The guy we associate with that is Alexander Kerensky. Alexander Kerensky was a Russian socialist, a politician. He was the quasi-dictator of that regime. He's the person, not the Tsar, who's overthrown by Lenin. So the revolutionaries then did not prove to be the fatal threat to the Tsarist regime. It was the Tsarist political system itself that did that. What then transpired was that the Okhrana and its method, and many of its agents then immediately segued over into the new Soviet Security Service. So one of the first things that Lenin did in December of 1917, within a month of seizing power since the hold on power was tenuous at best, was that while you were going to need some kind of organization to infiltrate and suppress those pesky counter-revolutionaries and foreign imperialists and all of the other enemies that we have. So the extraordinary Commission to Combat Counter-revolution and sabotage the Cheka was formed. You put a veteran Bolshevik, Felix Dzerzhinsky at the head of that someone you could politically rely upon, but Dzerzhinsky built his organization essentially out of the Okhrana. There were all of these informers sitting around with nothing to do, and they were employed in the early twenties. The kind of rank-and-file of the Cheka might've been 80 to 90% former Imperial officials. Those were gradually decreased over time. So why would they do that? Well, they were professionals. They also needed to eat and things were somewhat precarious. So if your job is to be an agent provocateur, if your job is to infiltrate targeted organizations and lead them astray, you do that for whoever pays you. That's part of the professionalism, which goes in. Under the Soviets, the Soviet Intelligence Services are also very good at that. They're very good at infiltrating people into opposing organizations. I guess the one example I would give to demonstrate that at the Cambridge five, the British traders from the Soviet standpoint, heroes who were recruited, most notably Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, Donald McClain, Anthony Blunt, and there may have been, well more than five, but that wasn't bad out of just Cambridge. Then placing those people in high positions, the ultimate goal, of course, is to get your people into positions of leadership and influence in the opposing intelligence service. So they did. Of course, it all fell apart and they ended up in ...Philby ended up living the last part of his life in exile in Moscow, but they got their money's worth out of him. You can also find this in KGB infiltration, the CIA, the FBI, the Aldrich Ames, Robert Hanson cases. Of course, we were infiltrating. By we, I mean the Americans in the West managed to infiltrate our moles as well. But if it came down, someone could dispute this. But I would think if you were going to come down to kind of like who had the most moles Super Bowl, probably the Soviets would come somewhat ahead of that.

Lex Fridman

So the scale of the infiltration, the number of people and the skill of it, is there a case to be made that the Okhrana and the Chaka orchestrated both the components of the Russian Revolution as you described them?

Rick Spence

Well, there's an interesting question for me. There are all kinds of questions about this. One of the questions is whether or not Lenin was an Okhrana agent. Okay, I've just said heresy. I'll do that quite often. I am a heretic and proud of it.

Lex Fridman

Great.

Rick Spence

Why would you possibly say that Lenin could have been an Okhrana agent? Well, let's look what he managed to do. So you had, coming into the 20th century, nominally, a single Marxist movement, the Russian social Democratic Labor Party, and Bolsheviks and Mensheviks majority-ites and minority-ites are merely factions of that party. They always agreed that they were all Marxists. We all believe in dialectical materialism and the rise of were all socialists comrade. The difference was the tactical means by which one would attain this. What Lenin wanted was a militant small-scale Vanguard party. Wanted a revolution, wanted to seize power, seize control of the state. Once you have the state, then you induce socialism from above. Whereas the majority of the people, the so-called Mensheviks, the minority-ites who are oddly-enough, the vast majority of the party, that's one of the first things. How do you lose that argument? How does the minority get to grab the name? But Lenin did that. So what Lenin wanted was a conspiratorial party of committed revolutionaries that would plot and scheme and undermine and eventually seize control of the state and induce socialism from above. There were other Russian Marxists who thought that that sounded vaguely totalitarian and not really democratic and not even terribly socialist. They opposed that ineffectively from the beginning, outmaneuvered every step of the way. The Mensheviks are a case study in failure of a political organization. That too will be heresy to some people. But look, they lost. So what Lenin managed to do starting around 1903, continuing under this, is he managed to divide, to take what had been a single Marxist party and split it into angry contending factions because he and his Bolsheviks run one side advocating a much more militant conspiratorial policy. The discombobulated Mensheviks were over on the other. And in between were a lot of people who really didn't know where they stood on this. Sometimes they kind of agreed he seems to be making sense today. No, no, I don't think he's making sense in that day. But he managed to completely disunify this organization. Now, who could possibly have seen benefit in that the Okhrana. Now, whether or not they put him up to it, whether or not in some way they helped move him into a position of leadership or encouraged it or encouraged it through people around him, whether he was a witting or unwitting agent of the Tsar's Secret Police, he

certainly accomplished exactly what it was that they had wanted. I find that suspicious. It's one of those things that it's so convenient in a way, is that I'm not necessarily sure that was an accident. There's also this whole question to me as to what was going on within the Okhrana itself. Now, this is one of these questions we may come to later about how intelligence agencies interact or serve the governments to which they are theoretically subordinate. They do tend to acquire a great deal of influence and power. After all, their main job is to collect information. That information could be about all kinds of things, including people within the government structure itself. They also know how to leverage that information in a way to get people to do what you want them to do. So an argument can be made, again, an argument, not a fact, merely an opinion, which is mostly what history is made out of opinions is that at some point between about 1900 and 1917, people within the Okhrana were playing their own game. That game took them in a direction, which meant that continued loyalty to the emperor, specifically to Nicholas II, was no longer part of that. To me, in a way, it seems almost during the events of 1917, that one, you had an organization that was very effective that suddenly just becomes ineffective. It doesn't really disappear. These things don't go away because it will reappear as the O'Chacka basically fairly quickly. But it raises the question to me as to what degree there were people within the organization who allowed events to take the course they wished.

Lex Fridman

I always wonder how much deliberate planning there is within an organization like Okhrana or if there's kind of a distributed intelligence that happens.

Rick Spence

Well, one of the key elements that any kind of intelligence organization or operation is compartmentalization need to know. So rarely do you have an occasion where everybody in an executive position are all brought into a big corporate meeting and we discuss all of the secret operations that are going on. No, no, you never do that. Only a very limited number of people should know about that. If you have a person who is a case officer, is controlling agency, he's the only one that should know who those people are, possibly his immediate superiors. But no way do you want that to be common knowledge. So information within the organization itself is compartmentalized. So you don't need everybody to be in on it. You don't even need necessarily the people who are nominally at the top. Versus the Okhrana, the real boss of the Okhrana was the Imperial ministry of the Interior, the Minister of the Interior, in fact. But the Minister of the Interior had no real effective control over this at all. To the point was that at one point early on, they actually organized the assassination of their own boss. They have their agents among the revolutionaries kill the Minister of the Interior. He'll just replaced by another one. He's an Imperial bureaucrat. He's not really part of their organization. It's like a director of an intelligence agency appointed by the president. Maybe he's part of the organization, maybe he isn't. Maybe he is not one of us. So you've got different levels, different compartments within it. Who's actually running the show, if anyone is, I don't know. That's never supposed to be apparent.

Lex Fridman

Well, that's a fascinating question. You could see this with NKVD. It's obviously an extremely powerful organization that starts to eat itself, where everybody's pointing fingers internally also as a way to gain more power. So the question is in organizations like that that are so-called compartmentalized, where's the power? Where's the center of power? Because you would think given that much power, some individual or a group of individuals will start accumulating that power. But it seems like that's not always a trivial thing because if you get too powerful, the snake eats that person.

Rick Spence

Well, if we go back again to the founder of Soviet Secret Police, Felix Dzerzhinsky dies in 1926, keels over after giving a heated speech to a party meeting. Now, the common view, what you usually read, which was key for the time, is that clearly Stalin had him whacked because anytime someone died, it was almost always that. I think a lot of times he did. But in some cases, Stalin's probably getting blamed for things that he didn't actually do. Dzerzhinsky wasn't even opposed to Stalin. So it's not clear why he ... but Stalin died. Obviously, he was poisoned. Something happened. It was an unnatural death. Somebody goes in for an operation, it gets a little too much anesthesia. Stalin killed them. Somebody tips over in a canoe in upstate New York, Stalin killed them. There's actually a case about that. So that itself can be kind of useful, where every time someone dies, they think you killed them. That's kind of an interesting method of intimidation in that regard. But the suspicion is nonetheless there, Dzerzhinsk was the grand inquisitor. He was seemingly firmly in control of the organization. Of course, maybe he wasn't. My guess would be is that if Dzerzhinsky's death was not natural causes, that he was probably eliminated by someone within his own organization. Then you look at the people who take over his immediate successor is Vyacheslav Menzhinsky who's really not really a secret policeman, more a kind of intellectual dilettante. But if you look behind him, is the fellow Genrikh Yagoda, and Yagoda will really manage things from behind the scenes until Menzhinsky dies in 1930. Then Yagoda will hold on until he's the victim of the purges, I think in 37 or 38. Yagoda is ambitious, murderous, and if I was going to point the finger to anybody who possibly had Dzerzhinsky whacked, it would be him. For the purposes simply of advancement. The person to look out at any kind of corporate organization is your immediate subordinate, the person who could move into your job, because more than likely, that's exactly what they're planning to do.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, just one step away from the very top, somebody there will probably accumulate the most power. You mentioned that the various Russian intelligence agencies were good at creating agent provocateurs infiltrating the halls of power. What does it take to do that?

Rick Spence

Well, there's an interesting little acronym called MICE, M-I-C-E. It's generally used, and it's just the way in which you would acquire. How do you get people to work for you? Well, M stands for money. You pay them. People are greedy. They want money. If you look at Aldrich Ames, he had a very, very expensive wife with expensive tastes. So he wanted money. I is for ideology. So during, particularly in the 1920s and the 1930s, the Soviets were very effective in exploiting communists, people who wanted to serve the great cause, even though that's initially not really what they wanted to do. Because the idea was that if you recruit agents from among, let's say, American communists, you compromise the party because exactly what your enemies are going to say is that all communists are Soviet spies. They're all traitors in some way. So you would really want to keep those two things separate. But ideology was just so convenient, and those people would just work for you so well. You could get them to do anything, betray their grandmother. They would go ahead and do that for the greater good. So ideology can be a motivation, and that can be someone who is a devoted Marxist-Leninist. It can also be someone who's a disgruntled communist because there's no anti-communist like an ex-communist. Those who lose the faith can become very, very useful. For instance, if you look in the case of American intelligence, the people who essentially temporarily destroyed much of the KGB organization in the US post-World War II, where people like Whitaker Chambers, Louis Budenz, Elizabeth Bentley, all of those people had been Communist party members. They had all been part of the Red Faithful. They all, for one reason or another, became disillusioned and turned rat or patriot, whichever case you may want to put in that regard.

Lex Fridman

What does the C in the E stand for?

Rick Spence

The C is for coercion. That's where you have to persuade someone to work for you. You have to pressure them. So usually you blackmail them. That could be they have a gambling habit. In the old days, it's very often they were gay. Get them in a decision where they can be compromised and you can get them to do your bidding. Those people usually have a certain amount of control. Here's an interesting example of how the Okhrana tended to handle this, and I think it's still largely used. You'd round up a bunch of revolutionaries on some charge or another distributing revolutionary literature, running any illegal printing press. You bring a guy into the room and you say, okay, you're going to work for us. Of course, we refuse to do so. They go, well, if you refuse, we'll keep the rest of your comrades in jail for a while, maybe beat them with a rubber truncheon or so, and then we're just going to let you go. We're just going to put you back out on the street. If you don't work for us, we will spread the rumor through our agents already in your organization that you are. Then what will your comrades do? How long are you going to live? So you see, you have no choice. You're ours, and you're going to cooperate with us. The way that that effectiveness will be ensured is that you have multiple agents within the same organization who don't know who each other are. That's

very important. They'll all be filing reports. So let's say you have three agents inside the central committee of the SR party, and there's a committee meeting, and you're going to look at the reports they file. They all better agree with each other. If one person doesn't report what the other two do, then perhaps they're not entirely doing their job and they can be liquidated at any time. All you do is drop the dime on them. This was done periodically. In fact, in some cases, you would betray your own agents just to completely discombobulate to the organization. This happened in one particular case around 1908, the fellow who was the head of the chief revolutionary terrorist organization, which wasn't Bolshevik, but the so-called socialist revolutionaries. Actually the biggest revolutionary party, the SRs, who aren't even actually Marxists more anarchists, but they went all in for the propaganda, the deed. They really like blowing people up and carried out quite a campaign of terrorism. The fellow who was the head of that terrorist organization was a fellow by name of Yevno Azef. Yevno Azef was, guess what? An Okhrana agent. Everything he did, every assassination that he planned, he did in consultation with his control. So he'd kind of run out his string. There was increasing suspicion of him. He was also asking for a lot more money. So the Okhrana itself arranged to have him ride it out. What did that do? Well, what do you do in your party when you find out the chief of your terrorist brigade was a secret police agent. It's consternation and mistrust. Nobody in the party would ever trust, and you couldn't tell who you were sitting around. I know that a fellow I wrote a biography on Boris Sevenkov who was a Russian revolutionary and the second in command within the terrorist organization. By the way, the guy that wanted Azef's job so bad he could taste it, well, on the one level, he expressed absolute horror that his boss was a police agent, and well, he should, because Sevenkov was a police agent too. See, they already had the number two waiting in the wings to take over, but he was legitimately shocked. He didn't really suspect that. So it's a way of manipulating this. Then finally, we come to the E. That I think is the most important, ego. Sometimes people spy or betray because of the egotistical satisfaction that they receive, the sheer kind of Machiavellian joy in deceit. An example of that would be Kim Philby, one of the Cambridge five. Now, Philby was a communist, and he would argue that he always saw himself as serving the communist cause. But he also made this statement, I think it's in the preface to his autobiography, and he says, one never looks twice at the offer of service in elite force. He's talking about his recruitment by the NKVD in the 1930s, and he was absolutely chuffed by that. The mere fact that they would want him, what he considered to be a first-rate organization would want him, satisfied his ego. If I was to take a guess as to whether it was ideological motivation, whether it was the romance of communism or whether it was the appeal of ego that was the most important in his career of treason, I'd go with ego. I think that figures into a lot. Someone doesn't get the promotions that they wanted. Again, if you look at something like Aldrich Ames career in particular, you've got these ... his career in the CIA was hit or miss. He didn't get the postings or promotions that he wanted his evaluation. He never felt that he got credit for doing that. That's the type of thing that tends to stick in someone's craw and can lead for egotistical reasons an added incentive to betray.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that there's a boost to the ego when you can deceive, sort of not play by the rules of the world and just play with powerful people like they're your pawns.

Rick Spence

You're the only one that knows this. You're only the only one that knows that the person who is sitting across from you to which you have sworn your loyalty, you're simultaneously betraying. What a rush that must be for some people.

Lex Fridman

I wonder how many people are susceptible to this. I would like to believe that the people, a lot of people have the integrity to at least withstand the money and the ideology, the pull of that and the ego.

Rick Spence

It can also be a combination of the two. You can create a recipe of these things, certain amount of money, ego and a little push of coercion that if you don't, we'll rat you out. You'll be exposed.

Lex Fridman

What are some differences to you as we look at the history of the 20th century between the Russian intelligence and the American intelligence in the CIA?

Rick Spence

If you look at both the Okhrana and the KGB, one of the things that you find consistent is that a single organization handled foreign intelligence that is spying upon enemy or hostile governments and also internal security. So that's all part of it. Whereas if you look at the US models that evolved, you eventually have the FBI under Hoover, who insists that he's going to be the counterintelligence force. If there are commie spies running around America, it's the FBI who's supposed to ferret them out. The CIA is not supposed to be involved in that. The Charter, the basic agreement in 1947, did not give the CIA any ... It's often said they were barred from spying on Americans, which isn't quite true. You can always find a way to do that. What they don't have is they don't have any police or judicial powers. They can't run around in the country carrying guns to use on people. They can't arrest you. They can't interrogate you, they can't jail you. They have no police or judicial powers. Now, that means they have to get that from someone else. That doesn't mean that other agencies can't be brought in or local police officials, corn or whatever you need you can eventually acquire. But they can't do that directly. So you've got this division between foreign intelligence and domestic counterintelligence often split between hostile organizations. The relationship between the FBI and the CIA, I think it's fair to say, is not chummy, never has been. There's always been a certain amount of rivalry and contention between the two. It's not to say that something like that didn't exist between the domestic counterintelligence and foreign

intelligence components of the KGB, but there would be less of that to a degree, because there was a single organization. They're all answerable to the same people. So that gives you a certain greater amount, I think, of leeway and power because you're controlling both of those ends. I remember somebody telling me once that, and he was a retired KGB officer. There you go, retired. One of the things that he found amusing was that in his role, one of the things that he could be is that he could be anywhere at any time in any dress, which meant that he could be in or out of uniform and any place at any time. He was authorized to do that.

Lex Fridman

So more freedom, more power.

Rick Spence

I think one of the things that you would often view is that, well, the Russians are simply naturally meaner. There's less respect for human rights. There's a greater tendency to abuse power that one might have. Frankly, they're all pretty good at that. It is fair to say that there's probably some degree of cultural differences that are not necessarily for institutional reasons, but cultural reasons. There could well be things that Americans might balk at doing more than you would find on the Russian or Soviet side of the equations. The other aspect of that is that Russian history is long and contentious and bloody. One of the things it certainly teaches you never trust foreigners. Every foreign government anywhere, any country on your border is a real or potential enemy. They will all, at some point, if given the chance, invade you. Therefore, they must always be treated with great suspicion. It goes back to something that I think the British observed was that countries don't have friends, they have interests, and those interests can change over time.

Lex Fridman

Well, the CIA is probably equally suspicious of all other nations.

Rick Spence

That's your job. You're supposed to be suspicious. Your job is not to be trusting. Yeah, the basic job of an intelligence- ... your job is not to be trusting. Yeah. The basic job of an intelligence agency is to safeguard your secrets and steal the other guys' and then hide those away.

Lex Fridman

Are there laws, either intelligence agencies that they're not willing to break? Is it basically lawless operation to where you can break any law as long as it accomplishes the task?

Rick Spence

Well, I think John le Carre, give his pen name, was talking about his early recruitment into British intelligence. And one of the things he remembered being told up front was, "If you do

this, you have to be willing to lie and you have to be willing to kill." Now, those are things that in ordinary human interactions are bad things. Generally, we don't like it when people lie to us. We expect that people will act honestly towards us, whether that's being a businessman you're involved with, your employers. We're often disappointed in that because people do lie all the time for a variety of reasons, but honesty is generally considered to be. But in a realm where deception is a rule, dishonesty is a virtue. To be good at that, to be able to lie convincingly is good. It's one of the things you need to do. And killing also is generally frowned upon. Put people in prison for that, they're otherwise executed. But in certain circumstances, killing is one of those things that you need to be able to do. So what he felt he was being told in that case is that once you enter this realm, the same sort of moral rules that apply in general British society do not apply. And if you're squeamish about it, you won't fit in. You have to be able to do those things.

Lex Fridman

I wonder how often those intelligence agencies in the 20th century, and of course the natural question extending it to the 21st century, how often they go to the assassination, how often they go to the kill part of that versus just the espionage.

Rick Spence

Let's take an example from American intelligence, from the CIA 1950s, 1960s into the 1970s, MKUltra. That is a secret program which was involved with what is generally categorized as mind control, which really means messing with people's heads. And what was the goal of that? Well, there seemed to have been lots of goals. But there was an FBI memo that I recently acquired quite legally, by the way, it's declassified, but it's from 1949. So this is only two years after the CIA came into existence. And it's an FBI memo because the FBI, of course, very curious what the CIA is up to and the FBI are not part of this meeting, but they have someone, they're sort of spying on what's going on. So there was a meeting which was held in a private apartment in New York. So it's not held in any kind of, it's essentially never really happened because it's in somebody's house. And there are a couple of guys there from the CIA. One of them is Cleve Backster. Cleve Backster is the great godfather of the lie detector. Pretty much everything that we know or think we know about lie detectors today, you owe to Cleve Backster. He's also the same guy that thought that plants could feel, which somehow was a derivative of his work on lie detectors. So these guys are there and they're giving a talk to some military and other personnel. And there's certain parts of the document which are of course redacted, but you could figure out what it is that they're talking about. And they're talking about hypnotic suggestion and all the wonderful things that you can potentially do with hypnotic suggestion. And two of the things they note is that one of the things we could potentially do is erase memories from people's minds and implant false memories. That would be really keen to do that, just imagine how that would be done. So here to me is the interesting point. They're talking about this in 1949. MKUltra does not come along until really 1953. Although there are all sorts of Artichoke and others, everything is sort of leading up to that. It's simply an elaboration of programs that were

already there. I don't think that it ultimately matters whether you can implant memories or erase memories. To me, the important part is they thought they could and they were going to try to do it. And that eventually is what you find out in the efforts made during the 1950s and '60s through MKUltra, MKSearch, MKNaoimi and all the others that came out. That's one of the things they're working for. And among the few MKUltra era documents that survived, there's that whole question is that could you get someone to put a gun to someone's head and pull the trigger and then not remember it later. Yeah, you could, interestingly enough.

Lex Fridman

So non-direct violence, controlling people's minds, controlling people's minds at scale and experimenting with different kinds of ways of doing that.

Rick Spence

One person put it that the basic argument there or the basic thing you're after was to understand the architecture of the human mind, how it worked, how it put together, and then how you could take those pieces apart and assemble them in different ways. So this is where hypnosis comes in, which was then, still is, fairly spooky thing. Nobody's ever explained to me exactly what it is. The idea was that could, you think the whole possibilities in this case, could you create an alternate personality and use that alternate personality in an agent role, but then be able to turn it on and off. So subsequently, the person which that personality inhabited was captured and interrogated, tortured, had their fingernails torn out, they would have no memory of it. They couldn't give any kind of secret away because it was embedded in some part of their brain where there was a completely different person. You can just imagine the possibilities that you can dream up. And again, it's not, I think, the question is to whether that is possible or whether it was done, although I suspect that both of those are true, but that you would try to do it. Then imagine the mischief that comes out of that. And one of the big complaints from a legal standpoint about MKUltra and the rest is that you were having medical experiments essentially being carried out on people without their knowledge and against their will, which is a no-no.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. The fact that you're willing to do medical experiments says something about what you're willing to do. And I'm sure that same spirit, innovative spirit, persists to this day. And maybe less so, I hope less so, in the United States, but probably in other intelligence agencies in the world.

Rick Spence

Well, one thing that was learned, and the reason why most MKUltra and similar records were destroyed on order in the early '70s, around the time the CIA became under a certain amount of scrutiny. The mid '70s were not a good time for the agency because you had the church committee breathing down their neck, you had all of these... People were asking lots of questions. So you need to dump this stuff because there's all kinds of, because you are

committing crimes against American citizens, so let's eradicate it. And the important lesson to be learned is that never do these type of thing again where at least in any way in which the agency's direct fingerprints are placed on it. You can pay people. You can subsidize research. You can set up venture capital firms. You got plenty of money and you can funnel that money into the hands of people who will carry out this research privately. So if something goes wrong, you have perfect deniability.

Lex Fridman

On the topic of MICE, on the topic of money, ideology, coercion and ego, let me ask you about a conspiracy theory. So there is a conspiracy theory that the CIA is behind Jeffrey Epstein. At a high level, if you can just talk about that, is that something that's at all even possible? That you have, basically this will be for coercion, you get a bunch of powerful people to be sexually mischievous and then you collect evidence on them so that you can then have leverage on them.

Rick Spence

Well, let's look at what Epstein was doing. He was a businessman who then also developed a very lucrative sideline in being a high-level procurer basically in supplying young girls. And he also filmed much of that activity. I think his partner in this, Ghislaine, and I'm hope I'm pronouncing her name correctly.

Lex Fridman

I think it's Ghislaine.

Rick Spence

Ghislaine?

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Rick Spence

Well, I've heard it both ways Ghislaine or Ghislaine, whichever it may be, I think her argument at one point was that, "Well, we did this to protect ourselves." But this type of thing has been done before, there's nothing new about this. Getting influential people in compromising situations and filming them. I could give you another historical example of that. In late 1920, actually early-1930s, just pre-Nazi Berlin, there was a very prominent sort of would-be psychic and occultist by the name of Erik Jan Hanussen. He had a private yacht, I think it was called the Seven Sins. And he hosted parties. He also had a whole club called the Palace of the Occult, which hosted parties where things went on. And there were cameras everywhere. He filmed important people, guys like the brownshirt chief of Berlin in various states of undress and sexual congress. And he did that for the purposes of blackmail. So in Epstein's case, he is a procurer of young girls to wealthy men largely. And

many of those events were recorded. Now, even if it wasn't his intention to use them for blackmail, think of what someone else could do it because people know about this. So you could raise a question Epstein is just kind of a greedy pervert, but through his greedy perversion, he's now collecting information that could be useful. Who could that be useful to? Who would like dirt on Prince Andrew? Think of all the people who were there and there were important people who went to Lolita Island. So if it isn't Epstein directly, he might have been being, I'm not trying to let him off the hook because they have anything for him, he was either running his own blackmail business or someone was using him as a front for that. I think we're kidding ourselves if we're trying to pretend that's not what was going on.

Lex Fridman

So you think, EU and American intelligence agencies would be willing to swoop in and take advantage of a situation like that?

Rick Spence

Well, you know-

Lex Fridman

Just in the case.

Rick Spence

American politicians could ultimately end up in a position to oversee things like intelligence budgets. One of them might even become director. You're never know. He can never tell what some crazy president might do. It could be very, one of the guys who understood was J. Edgar Hoover, J. Edgar Hoover spent a long time collecting dossiers on politicians. How do you think he'd remain director of the FBI as long as he did? Because he systematically collected dirt on people. So there is a history of this type of thing. And again, you could argue that's partly for his protection, to keep his job, to protect the sanctity and security of the Bureau. You can find a million different ways to justify that.

Lex Fridman

That's really dark.

Rick Spence

Well, there is that side to human nature, let's put it that way.

Lex Fridman

Whether it's the CIA or the Okhrana, maybe that's what the President of the United States sees when they show up to office is all this stuff they have on him or her and say that there's a internal mechanism of power that you don't want to mess with and so you will listen, whether that internal mechanism of power is the military industrial complex or whatever, the bureaucracy of government.

Rick Spence

Contacts with the deep state.

Lex Fridman

The deep state.

Rick Spence

Entrenched, bureaucratic. Well, it's been said and I think it's generally true, that bureaucratic creatures are like any other creatures. It basically exists to perpetuate itself and to grow.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Rick Spence

Nobody wants to go out of business. And of course, you get all of these things like Pizzagate and accusations of one form or another. But here's an interesting thing to consider. Okay. And I want to argue that I'm not saying that Pizzagate in any way was real or QAnon, anything, but where do they get these ideas from? So let's ask ourselves, do pedophiles exist? Yeah. Do organized pedophile organizations exist? Yeah, they share information, pictures, they're out there on the dark web, they cooperate. So does child trafficking exist? Yeah, it does. So in other words, whether or not specific conspiracy theories about this or that group of organized pedophile cultists is real, all the ingredients for that to be real are there. Pedophiles exist, organized pedophilia exists, child and human trafficking exists. At some point, at some time, someone will put all of those together. In fact, certainly, they already have.

Lex Fridman

We'll jump around a little bit.

Rick Spence

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

But your work is so fascinating and it covers so many topics. So if we jump into the present with the Bohemian Grove and the Bilderberg group.

Rick Spence

Bilderbergers.

Lex Fridman

So the elites, as I think you've referred to them. So these gathering of the elites, can you just talk about them? What is this?

Rick Spence

Well, first thing I have to point out is that Bohemian Grove is a place, not an organization, it's where the Bohemian Club meets. It's that 2,700 acre, old-growth redwoods near north of San Francisco. The Bohemian Club began, I think it went back in the 1870s. Its initial members were mostly journalists. In fact, supposedly the name itself comes from, it was a term for an itinerant journalist who moved from paper to paper was called a bohemian. And although I think there may be other reasons why that particular term was chosen as well. But I think the original five members, there were three journalists, there was a merchant and there was a vintner, guy owned a vineyards, California. How surprising? None of them terribly wealthy, but they formed an exclusive men's club, was and still is. And nothing terribly unusual about that at the time. But it became fashionable. And as it became fashionable, more wealthy people wanted to become part of it. And the thing about getting rich guys to join your club is what do rich guys have? Money. And of course, it's one of those rich guys that bought Bohemian Grove where now you build your old boys summer camp, which is what it is. They got cabins with goofy names. They go there, they perform skits, they dress up in costumes.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Rick Spence

True. Some of those skits look like pagan human sacrifices, but it's just a skit. What's really going on there? So on the one hand you can argue, look, it's a rich guy's club. They like to get out there. The whole motto of the place is weaving spiders come not here. So we're going to talk about in business. We just want to get out into the woods, put on some robes, burn a couple of effigies in front of the owl, have a good time, probably get drunk a lot.

Lex Fridman

What's with the robes? Why do they do weird creepy shit? Why do they put on a mask and the robe and do the plays and the owl and then sacrificing, I don't know, whatever?

Rick Spence

Why do you have a giant owl?

Lex Fridman

Exactly.

Rick Spence

Why do you do that?

Lex Fridman

What is that in human nature because I don't think rich people are different than not rich people, what is it about wealth and power that brings that out of people?

Rick Spence

Well, part of it is the ritual aspect of it. And yeah, that clearly is a ritual. Rituals are pretty simple. Rituals are just a series of actions performed in a precise sequence to produce an effect. That describes a lot of things. It describes plays, symphonies, every movie you've ever seen. A movie is a ritual. It is a series of actions carried out in a precise sequence to produce an effect with an added soundtrack to cue you to what emotions you're supposed to be feeling.

Lex Fridman

It's a great idea. So the rich people should just go to a movie or maybe just go to a Taylor Swift concert. Why do you have to, why the owl thing?

Rick Spence

Part of it is to create this kind of sense, I suppose, of group solidarity. You're all going to appear and also a way of transcending yourself in a way. When you put on the robe, it's like putting on a uniform. You are in some way a different or more important person. It's a ritual. Okay. The key ritual at Bohemian Grove is a thing called the cremation of care. And that's what it's supposed to be. "We're going to put all of our, we're rich, important people. We have to make all of these critical decisions. Life is so hard. So we're going to go out here in the woods and we're going to kick back and we're all going to gather around the lake and then we're going to carry," it's wicker, it's not a real person. And how would you know? "And this is the cremation of our care," but it's a ritual which is meant to produce a sense of solidarity and relief among those people who are there. The question comes down with the rituals as how seriously do you take them? How important is this to the people who carry them out? And the interesting answer to that is that for some people it's just boring. There are probably people standing around the owl who think this is ridiculous and can't wait for it to get over with. There are the people that are kind of excited about it, get caught up into it, but other people can take it very seriously. It's all the matter of the intention that you have about what the ritual means. And I don't mean to suggest by that that there's anything necessarily sinister about what's going on, but it is clearly a ritual carried out for some kind of group reinforcing purpose. And you're absolutely right. You don't have to do it that way. I've gone to summer camps and we never carried out mock sacrifices in front of an owl. We did all those other things. We didn't even have any robes either. So it goes beyond merely a rich guy summer camp, although that's an aspect of it. But it also I think often obscures, focusing on Bohemian Grove at the getaway of the club, ignores that the club is around all

the time. That's what's at the center of this, it is the club and its members. So despite all the talk about no weaving spiders coming around here, one of the other features of the summer meeting are things called lakeside talks. And this, often people are invited to go there. And one of the people who was invited, I think around 1968, was Richard Nixon who was making his political comeback. And he was invited to give a talk where very important people are listening. And Nixon in his memoirs, realized what was going on. He was being auditioned as to whether or not he was going to be [inaudible 00:57:19], he recognized that that was really the beginning of his second presidential campaign. He was being vetted. So one of the main theories, call it a conspiracy theory or not, about the Bohemian Club and the gatherings, is that people of wealth and influence gather together and whether or not it's part of the agenda or not, inevitably you're going to talk about things of interest. But to me, the mere fact that you invite people in, political leaders, to give lakeside talks means that there are weaving spiders which are going on and it is a perfect private venue to vet people for political office.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, where else are you going to do it, if you are interested in vetting, if you are interesting and powerful people selecting?

Rick Spence

Well see, here's the question. Are these guys actually picking who's going to be president? Is that the decision which is being made or are they just deciding what horses they're going to back?

Lex Fridman

Right.

Rick Spence

I think the latter is the simpler version of it, but it doesn't mean it's the other way around. But these are the kinds of, Nixon was, there was the whole 1960 thing. So he's the new Nixon, remember, and this is where the new Nixon apparently made a good impression on the right people because he did indeed get the Republican nomination and he did indeed become president.

Lex Fridman

Well, there could also be a much more innocent explanation of really it's powerful people getting together and having conversations and through that conversation, influencing each other's view of the world and just having a legitimate discussion of policies, foreign policy.

Rick Spence

Why wouldn't they? Why would you assume that people are not going to do that?

Lex Fridman

It's the owl thing with the robes.

Rick Spence

Why the owl and why the robes?

Lex Fridman

Which is why it becomes really compelling when guys like Alex Jones, forgive me, but I have not watched his documentary, I probably should at some point, about the Bohemian Grove where he claims that there is a Satanist human sacrifice of, I think, children. And I think that's quite a popular conspiracy theory. Or has lost popularity, it kind of transformed itself into the QAnon set of conspiracy theories. But can you speak to that conspiracy?

Rick Spence

Let's put it this way, the general public rich people are inherently suspicious.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Great.

Rick Spence

Let's put it that way. First of all, they've got all that money. And exactly how did one obtain it? And I do not of necessity adhere to the view that behind every great fortune there is a great crime, but there often are. There are ways in which it's acquired. But I think it's one of the things I think that can happen is particularly when people acquire a huge amount of money, and I won't name any names, but let's say there are people who perhaps in the tech sphere who coming from no particular background of wealth, suddenly find themselves with \$600 billion. Whoa. This is the question you would have to ask yourself. Why me? Because you're one of the rare, tiny group of human beings who will ever have that kind of wealth in your hands. Even if you are a convinced atheist, I think at some point, you have to begin to suspect that the cosmic muffin, providence, whatever it is, put this money in your hands to do what? Achieve great things. Just think of all the stuff. So you're going to start a foundation and you're going to start backing all the things that you like. I think there's an element of ego that comes in with it as well. And again, it may not be so much what the rich person with a huge amount of money at their disposal and a lot of fuzzy ideas about what to do with it can be influenced by others. It's always that question as to who is actually manipulating these events? What's going on in that regard? In some way, they can be a very useful sucker. Find somebody with a lot of money and get them to finance the things that you want them to do. The Bohemian Club is I don't think in and of itself inherently evil or sinister, but it means that there are lots of different people in it who have different agendas. It goes back to what I said about how somebody feels about the cremation of care ritual. This is either just a waste of time, it's just some sort of silly thing that we're doing or it's something of great importance. Perhaps even mystical or religious importance. Because

that's ostensibly what it's pretending to be. There's always this question as to what degree you begin to play and the play becomes serious. That tends to happen a lot.

Lex Fridman

You've studied a lot of cults and occultism, what do you think is the power of that mystical experience?

Rick Spence

Well, what is broadly referred to... Well, we get into what's occultism, what's the occult? The occult is the hidden, that's all it really means. Specifically, hidden from sight. And the basis of it is the idea that what is hidden, well, what is hidden from us is most of the world, most of reality. So the basic concept within occultism, the basic concept within most religions, which are approved forms of occultism, is that the world, the physical world that we are aware of is only a very small part of a much larger reality. And that what the methods and practices of occultism arguably do is to allow someone to either enter into this larger reality or to access that larger reality for purposes to be exploited here. The most interesting statement about and a key element of this becomes the thing called magic. Now, we all know magic, it's a guy standing on stage performing a trick. But the interesting thing about a stage magician is that a stage magician is we know when we're watching it that it's a trick, yet we can't really figure out, if he does it well, how that trick is being accomplished because it seems to defy physical laws. And that's fascinating about it. So even though it's a trick, if you can't figure it out, it has this kind of power of fascination. But it's mimicking something. Stage magic is mimicking real magic. So what's real magic. Well, let's go back to Aleister Crowley because he always has to come. I knew he was going to come up at some point in this, earlier than not, because he always does.

Lex Fridman

All roads lead to Aleister.

Rick Spence

All roads lead to Aleister Crowley. Aleister Crowley and I've said this enough that I should be able to get it right, but I'm paraphrasing here, he goes, "Magick," which of course he spelled with a K or CK, "is the art and science of causing change to occur in conformity with will?" So in a way, that's sort of mind over matter. But it's the idea that one can through will, through intention bend reality to make something happen. Somebody once put it this way, it's tipping the luck plane. So you got some kind of a level plane. What we're just trying to do is just tip it just a little bit so the marble rolls over one side or to another. Now that presupposes a lot of things, that is there a luck plane? I don't know. But it's a good sort of idea to have. And here again, don't become overly bothered trying to figure out whether you actually can bend reality, become bothered by the fact that there are people who believe that they can and will go to great efforts to do so and will often believe they have succeeded. So it's this effort to make things occur in a particular way, maybe just to sort of

nudge reality in one little way or another. And that's where things like rituals come in. Rituals are a way of focusing will and intention. We're all there. We're all thinking about the same thing. And you have to imagine just how the pervasiveness of what could be called that kind of magical thinking every day is everywhere. So let me give you an example. You ever attended a high school football pep rally? Think of what's going on there. Okay, your team is going to battle the other team. You've now assembled everyone in the gymnasium. You've got people who are dancing around in animal totem costumes. And what are you chanting? Everyone is supposed to chant that the other team dies, that you'll be horribly defeated and that our team will be victorious. That is a magic ritual. The idea is it becomes into this idea that's very popular today about visualizing things, visualizing, manifesting. I love this term. You need to manifest your success. Well, that's just magic. That is trying to cause change in conformity with will. So these things can happen without you being even consciously aware of what's going on. And you don't need to be because if you're all a part of a mob, which is there in the gymnasium and you get into this and you get worked up and a cultist would argue what you're doing is you're creating a huge amount of energy. All of these people are putting energy into something and that energy goes somewhere. And maybe you can. Maybe, just maybe, you actually can slightly increase the chances of your team's victory. Of course, your opponents are having their own ritual at the same time. So whoever has the bigger mojo will apparently win on the team.

Lex Fridman

So I would say trivial example of that, but a clear one. I do believe that there's incredible power in groups of humans getting together and morphing reality. I think that's probably one of the things that made human civilization what it is. Groups of people being able to believe a thing and bring that belief into reality.

Rick Spence

Yes, you're exactly right. Bring to conceive of something and then through intention, will, to manifest that into this realm.

Lex Fridman

And of course, that power of the collective mind can be leveraged by charismatic leaders to do all kinds of stuff, where you get cults that do horrible things or anything.

Rick Spence

There might be a cult that does good things. I don't know. It depends.

Lex Fridman

We usually don't call those cults.

Rick Spence

We don't call those cults.

Lex Fridman

Exactly. A hundred percent.

Rick Spence

Without endorsing this entirely and interesting, one of the questions, what's the difference between a cult and a religion? And it has been said that in the case of a cult, there's always someone at the top who knows what's going on, generally, who knows it's a scam. In a religion, that person is dead. So see, I've just managed to insult every single religion. But it's an... ... Insult every single... But, it's an interesting way of thinking about it, because I think there is some degree of accuracy in that statement.

Lex Fridman

Actually, the interesting psychological question is, in cults, do you think the person at the top always knows that it's a scam? Do you think there's something about the human mind where you gradually begin to believe it?

Rick Spence

Begin to believe your own bullshit?

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Rick Spence

Yes.

Lex Fridman

That seems to be—

Rick Spence

That, again, is part of magic, I think, is believing your own bullshit. It doesn't necessarily mean that the head of the cult realized, but there's someone, maybe the second... I always look in the lieutenant, someone probably has an idea about what's going on. The other thing that seems to be a dead giveaway for what we would call a cult is what's called excessive reverence for the leader. People just believe everything these people say. To give you an example, the first time I ever encountered anything like that was in Santa Barbara, California in the 1970s. I was going to grad school. And there was a particular cult locally, I think it was Brotherhood of the Son. And, it was the same. So there was some guy who... Among the other things, followers were convinced to hand over all their money and personal belongings to him. I believe he used part of that money to buy a yacht with. Anyway. A lot of it went to him. And then, of course, working for free upon different cult-owned business enterprises, of which there were several. And there was a person I knew who became a devoted follower of this, and all I could think of at one point was ask them, "What the hell is

the matter with you? I mean, have you lost your mind? What is it that this person can possibly be providing that you essentially are going to become a slave to them?" Which is what they were doing. And I actually give that credit in a way of sparking my whole interest in things like secret societies. And here, again, as a disclaimer, I am not now, nor have I ever been the member of any fraternal organization, secret society, or cult that I know of. And that's what interests me about them, because I'm just always trying to figure out why people do these things. Like I said, why the robes and the owl? Why?

Lex Fridman

... Yeah.

Rick Spence

Why do you do that? And, it's trying to figure it out. I mean, I couldn't even hack the boy scouts. Okay? That was too much. Because to me, you join an organization and the first thing that comes along is there are rules and someone is telling you what to do. Okay? I don't like people telling me what to do. Spent much of my life trying to avoid that as much as possible. And, join a cult, there's going to be someone telling you what to do. Join the Bohemian Club, and there's going to be someone telling you what to do. Obviously, a lot of people really get something out of that. In some ways, it's necessary for them to function. But I do not understand it and my study of it is a personal error to try to understand why people do that.

Lex Fridman

And there are so many reasons, primary of which I would say is the desire in the human heart to belong. And, the dark forms that takes throughout human history. Recent history is something I'd love to talk to you a bit about. If we can go back to the beginning of the 20th century on the German side, you've described how secret societies like The Thule Society lay the foundation for Nazi ideology. Can you, through that lens, from that perspective, describe the rise of the Nazi party?

Rick Spence

Well, I guess we could start with what on earth is The Thule Society? So The Thule Society was a small German occult society. That is, they studied metaphysics, another fancy word for occultism, that appeared in Munich around 1917, 1918. The key figure behind it was a German esotericist by the name of Rudolf von Sebottendorff. Okay, not his real name. His real name was Adam Rudolf Glauer. He was adopted by a German nobleman and got the name von Sebottendorff, and I like to say that name. So, I have this real thing about vague, mysterious characters who show up and do things, and trying to figure out who these people are. So we're working up the years prior to the first World War. So, the decade or so prior to World War I, he spends a lot of time in the Ottoman Empire, Turkey. There was none in the Ottoman Empire, which was a fairly tumultuous place, because in 1908 and 1909, there was the Young Turk Revolution. And, you had a military coup, which effectively

overthrew the Ottoman Sultan and installed a military junta, which would go on during the first World War to make its greatest achievement in the Armenian Genocide. Eventually, it created a genocidal military regime which would lead the country into a disastrous first world war, which would destroy the Ottoman Empire, out of which modern Turkey emerges. Yada, yada, yada.

Lex Fridman

And by the way, we should take a tiny tangent here, which is, that you refer to the intelligence agencies as being exceptionally successful. And, here in the case of the Young Turks being also very successful in doing the genocide, meaning they've achieved the greatest impact, even though the impact on the scale of good to evil tends towards evil.

Rick Spence

It's one of those things that often comes out of revolutionary situations. Revolutions always seek to make things better. Don't they? "We're going to take a bad old regime. The Sultan is..." And the Sultan was bad, I think it's fair to say. Abdul Hamid II wasn't called a red sultan because of his favorite color type of thing. And, the idea is that they were going to improve. The Ottoman Empire was a multinational empire. They were going to try to equalize and bring in the different groups. And, none of that happened. It became worse, in the same way that you could argue that the goal of Russian revolutionaries was to get rid of the bad old, incompetent, medieval Tsarist regime and to bring in a new great shining future. And it became even more authoritarian. And, the crimes of the Imperial Russian regime pale in significance of what would follow, in the same way that the crimes of Abdul Hamid pale when you get to the Young Turks. But, that wasn't necessarily the intention. But, von Sebottendorff is a German businessman who's working in this period. And the whole point here is that the Ottoman Empire in this period is a hotbed of political intrigue and all kinds of interesting things about it. The Young Turk Revolution is essentially a military coup, but it is plotted in Masonic lodges. Okay? I know, technically Masonic lodges are never supposed to be involved in politics, but they are. Or, the lodge meeting breaks up, and then you plot the revolution. So, same group of people, but it's not technically. But yes. And there's the Macedonia Resorcia Lodge in Thessaloniki was ground zero for plotting this military coup that was supposed to improve the Empire. Sebottendorff is, in one way or another, mixed up in all of this, or at least he's an observer. Plus, he's initiated into the Masonic lodges. And interestingly enough, the fellow initiates him into one of these eastern lodges is a Jewish merchant by the name of Termoodi, and who's also a Kabbalist. And, Sebottendorff is very, very interested in the occult. He's initiated into eastern Masonic lodges and a period when those same lodges are being used as a center for political intrigue. He also apparently is involved in gunrunning, which in revolutionary periods is there's a lot of money to be made off of that. So he's connected to various dark businesses in a tumultuous time with connections to politicized freemasonry and the occult. Now, in the course of the first World War, he returns to Germany. He just shows up. And, it would be my operative suspicion or theory that Sebottendorff was working for someone. I don't think he just pops up in Munich

on his own accord. Why does he leave the Ottoman Empire and return to that place? Who's behind him? Now, maybe no one, but maybe someone, because he does seem to have money at his disposal. And he comes into Munich and he basically takes over this small occult study group. Now, the interesting thing is that The Thule Society is really just a branch of another existing, what's called, an Areosophist order, a thing called the German order, or the Germanic order, which is centered in Berlin. But for some reason, he doesn't want his group to be connected by name with the Germanic order. So, Thule Society, Thule in this case, is a reference to supposedly a mythical Arctic homeland of the Aryan race. Apparently, they were all snow people who wander out of the snow at some point. It's a frozen Atlantis. So I mentioned these people, the Areosophists, which, you have to practice saying that. So, what are they? Well, they're a racist Germanic offshoot of Theosophy. And, I know I'm explaining one thing to explain something, but there's no other way to do this. So, Theosophy was 19th century very popular and widely modeled occult belief that was founded by a Russian woman by the name of Helena Blavatsky. She was a medium psychic, supposedly got channelings from the ascended masters. The basic story there, they're all of the ascended masters, which are mystical beings that may or may not have once been human. They live inside the Himalayas or they float among them on a cloud, and they guide the spiritual evolution of humanity. What Blavatsky did was to take Western esotericism and blend it with Hindu and Buddhist esotericism, which became very, very sexy in the West, still is. Buddhism attracts a lot of people, because, well, it's Buddhism, it's different, see? So, the Mahatmas, the ascended masters were sending her messages, despite the fact that she was later proven pretty much to be a fraud and writing the letters herself. Nevertheless, people still went along with this doctrine, and it's been widely modified and copied since then. So, an idea in Theosophy was that human spiritual evolution was tied to physical evolution. In the case of Blavatsky, Blavatsky never said that Aryans, white people, anything out this superior. She talked about the different root races, but their version of it's just gobbledygook that seems to include everyone in. I'd defy you to make much sense out of it. But, in the early 20th century, there were different... One of the things that became fashionable, not terribly popular, these are small movements, was the idea that, well, Germany is a new upcoming country, and part of this I think was really trying to define who the Germans were, because remember, the German Empire, Germany as a political state, doesn't come until existence until 1871. Prior to that, Germany was a geographic expression, a vaguen, which described a large area in Central Europe where a lot of people who wore leather shorts or something like that and spoke similar German dialects were nominally Germans, but they might be Prussians or Bavarians. They came in all sorts of varieties in religion. There was no German identity. Something very similar happened in Italy in this same period. I mean, there weren't Italians, there were Sardinians, and there were Romans, and there were Sicilians. Umbrians spoke, again, dialects of a similar language, but had never lived, not since the Roman Empire under a single state and really didn't think of themselves as the same. So you have to create this artificial thing. You have to create Germans. "There is now a Germany with an emperor. And so, we're all going to be Germans." Well, exactly what is that? Much of it is an artificial creation. You have to decide upon some

standard dialect. Okay, we'll decide what that is. Often dialect that only a few people actually speak, and then they will be drilled into children's heads through state schooling programs. So I think this is the milieu that it comes out of. People were trying to figure out what on earth Germans actually were. And, the need for some common identity. And, that leads to everything like Wagnerian Opera. Richard Wagner wanted to create a German mythical music. So he went back and strip mined old German myths and cobbled them together into a lot of people standing on stage singing. And, that was his purpose. He was a nationalist. He was in many ways a racialist nationalist. And this was his idea of trying to create out of bits and pieces of the past, a newfangled form of German identity. So, on the more mystical end of this, you had the ideas that, well, Germany must have been created for some special purpose, because the Germans must be very special people and we must have some particular destiny. And then, out of this, the direction this is heading, well, we're all part of some master race with some ties to some great civilization in the past, call it Thule, call it whatever you want to be. They basically just invent things and try to attach those to the past. And so, Areosophy was the Areonized version of Theosophy. And what this did was to take the idea that spiritual and physical evolution had led to the most advanced form of human beings, which were the Aryans, and the most advanced group of them were, of course, the Germans. And, this attracted appeal. Keep in mind, again, this was not a mass movement. This was very much a fringe movement. Most people weren't aware of it and weren't particularly interested in it, but it had an appeal for those who already had a esoteric bent in some form or another. And, this is where things like the Germanin order or the German order and their other groups, it was only one of many, grew out of. And, what it was that the Thule Society as a branch, The Thule Gesellschaft was supposed to do, was to study this. It was an esoteric study group. And so, people would get together and they'd talk about things, probably make more stuff up and all work around this idea of German Aryans as the most advanced human beings, and all the wonderful things that the future would hold. And the fact that this was in the midst of a war in which Germany was, again, fighting, as they saw it, for its existence, heightened those tensions as well. So, my suspicion, again, is that Sebottendorff, in terms of who was behind him, that he was essentially called back to Germany to work either for the Prussian political police or for some aspect of German intelligence or security to try to mobilize occultism or esotericism for the war effort, because again, this is 1918, the war, it's gone on way too long. Within a few months, Germany will collapse, and it will collapse simply from the psychological exhaustion of the population.

Lex Fridman

So this is almost to help the war effort with a propaganda, a narrative that can strengthen the will of the German people.

Rick Spence

Well, strengthen the will of some people.

Lex Fridman

Some people.

Rick Spence

You have to try to appeal to different aspects of this. But the mystical aspect is one of those things, it can have a very powerful influence. And the idea is that if we can come up with some mystical nationalism, maybe that's one way to put it, a mystical nationalism that can be exploited for the... Because at this point you, you're grasping at straws, and this is a whole period when the Germans are marshalling the last of their forces to launch a series of offensives on the Western front, the Peace Offensive, which will initially be successful, but will ultimately fail, and lead to a collapse in morale. But among the leadership of Germany, it was a recognition. It was that national morale was flagging. And, one of the other things that was raising its head was what had happened nearby a year... Well, the Russian Revolution, which had now brought the idea, which brought another solution to all of this, the idea of revolutionary Marxism. Here, we need to remind ourselves as to where Marxism comes from, not Russia, Germany. Where was the largest Marxist party? In Germany.

Lex Fridman

And Marx probably expected the revolution to begin in Germany.

Rick Spence

Where else?

Lex Fridman

I mean, the Soviet Union is not very industrialized. Germany is. And so, that's where it would probably be.

Rick Spence

Russia, 5% of the population is industrial workers. In Germany, 40% of the population is industrial. So, if any place was made for Marxism, it was Germany. I think that's why it caught on in East Germany so well, because it had come home. And, it was a local belief. It wasn't something imported by the Russians. It was a German invention. One of the things you can see in this is The Thule Society was particularly involved in a anti-Marxist or anti-Bolshevik agitation. Sebottendorff saw them as this whole movement. It was a counter to this. It was a counter-Marxist movement.

Lex Fridman

Can we try to break that apart in a nuanced way? So, it was a nationalist movement. The occult was part of the picture, occult racial theories. So, there's a racial component, like the Aryan race, so it's not just the nation of Germany. And you take that and contrast it with Marxism. Did they also formulate that in racial terms? Do they formulate that in national versus global terms? How do they see this?

Rick Spence

Marxism formulates everything by class. Okay? People are categorized by class. You're either part of the proletariat or you're part of the bourgeoisie, or you're either part of the proletariat or just some scum. Really, it needs to be swept into the dustbin of history. Only workers count. And, that was what would take someone who was a nationalist would drive them crazy, because their idea is, "We're trying to create a German. People. We're trying to create a common German identity." But what the Marxists are doing is they're dividing Germans against each other by class. German workers hate the German bourgeoisie. German proletariat as opposed to German capitalists. We're all trying to fight this war together. So, that was why Marxism, particularly in the form of Bolshevism, was seen as unpatriotic. And of course, was opposed to the war as a whole, the idea that parroting Lenin was that the war was an imperialist war. And the only thing that was good that was going to come out of it is that the imperialist war, through all of the crises it was creating, would eventually lead to a class war. And that would be good, because that would reconcile all of these things. But, think of the two very different versions of this, the Bolshevik version, or let's just call it, the Marxist version of Germany, was going to be a class society in which we're going to have to have some civil upheaval, which will have Germans fighting Germans. Whereas, the mystical nationalism, the almost religious nationalism that Sebottendorff from The Thule Society had hitched its wagon to held that Germans are all part of a single racial family, and that's what must be the most important thing. And that these can be different ways of trying to influence people. It comes down to a matter of political influence. So in a sense, I think that what Sebottendorff and The Thule Society was trying to do, at least within Munich, was to use this idea of mystical nationalism as a potential rallying point for some part of the population to oppose these other forces to keep people fighting. The war is lost though in November, the Kaiser abdicates, and essentially, the socialists do take over Germany. Things come very, very close to following the Russian model. And, you even get the Russian version or take on the Bolsheviks, which are the Spartacists who try and fail to seize power early on. But you do essentially end up with a socialist Germany. And, that then leaves in the aftermath of the war. The Thule Society is sort of the odd man out, although they're still very closely connected to the army. And here's one of the things that I find interesting. When you get into 1919, who is it that's paying Sebottendorff's bills? It's the army. The one thing the German army is absolutely determined to do is to preserve its social position and power. And they're perfectly willing to dump the Kaiser to do that. This deal, which is made in November of 1918, Kaiser's abdication, the proclamation of a German Republic, which, you just had this guy declare it. It wasn't really planned. There's the Ebert-Groner Pact. Groner is the chief of general staff at this point. Ebert is the chief socialist politician basically, and they make an agreement. And the agreement basically is that the Army will support Ebert's government if Ebert supports the Army. And particularly that means the continuation of the Officer Corps and the general staff in one form or another. So a deal is made. And that of course, is what will eventually help defeat the Spartacist uprising.

Lex Fridman

Now, was the Army doing the similar things that we've talked about with the intelligence agencies, this same trying to control the direction of public power?

Rick Spence

The German intelligence landscape in the first World War is obscure in many ways. There are lots of things that are going on. Germany has a military intelligence service called Abteilung or Section IIIB. That's just plain military intelligence. They're constantly trying to collect military information before the war about the weaponry and plans of the enemies. And then, about what the operational plans were during the war. It doesn't really go much beyond that though. The German foreign office runs a political intelligence service, and that's the one which is much more involved in things like subsidizing subversion in Russia, which is one of the things that the Germans sign on to fairly early. Little diversion here in 1915, there is a Russian revolutionary who's lived much of his life in Germany, who goes by the code name of Parvis. And, he essentially comes to the Germans in Constantinople, interestingly enough, in Turkey, he's hanging around there at the same time as Sebottendorff is there, which I find curious. So, Parvis or Alexander Helpant to give his actual name, comes to them and he goes, "Look, there's a lot of revolutionaries in Russia and there's a lot of mistrust with the regime. We think that the war will increase the contradictions in Russian society. And, if you give me a lot of marks, I can finance this revolutionary activity. And through subversion, I can take Russia out of the war." Well, the Germans are facing a two-front war. That sounds great. "We'll use money in order to..." But notice what they're doing. The German general staff, a very conservative organization, not a bunch of revolutionaries, are going to finance revolution in an opposing country. They're going to finance revolutionary subversion to take Russia out of the war, which basically works. So that gives you another idea as to what the German military is willing to do. They're not revolutionaries, but they'll pay revolutionaries to subvert another regime. Now, you've got the problem, is that, the revolutionary regime that your money helped bring to power is now threatening to extend into your country. So, the whole question for the Army and for others in Germany in 1919 is how to keep Germany from going Bolshevik from, in a sense, being hoist by your own petard. So The Thule Society, I don't think is a huge part of this program, but it is a part of it, and it's all an effort to try to keep control. And that's why the army is financing them. That's even why the Army at some point then supplies them with its own propagandists. So, The Thule Society begins to create under Sebottendorff leadership, what he called, the Rings of Thule. And these are satellite organizations that aren't the society as though, but they're controlled and inspired by it. And one of those is a thing called the German Workers Party. And the German Workers Party, again, is local. It's not large, it's not terribly influential, but what does it aspire to be? It aspires to be a party that will bring German workers away from the seductive influence of the Bolsheviks and into a more patriotic position. And, the way that I describe this is that it's not an anti-communist organization, it's a counter-communist organization. So you don't create something which completely opposes it, you create something which mimics it, which is ultimately what the

German Workers Party will become, is the National Socialist German Workers Party, known as that term, socialist. And that is, in my view, what Nazism is from the beginning. It is a counter-communist movement.

Lex Fridman

And by the way, for people who don't know, the National Socialist German Workers Party is also known as the Nazi Party. So how did this evolution happen from that complicated little interplay? We should also say that a guy named Adolf Hitler is in the army at this time.

Rick Spence

Yes.

Lex Fridman

Man.

Rick Spence

Well, he's going to come into this, because remember, I said the Army was going to supply its own propagandists to help the German Workers Party and The Thule Society do their work. And the propagandists they supply them with is a man who the Army trains, sends to classes to learn the art of public speaking and propaganda. And that fellow is Corporal Adolf Hitler.

Lex Fridman

So how does Adolf Hitler connect with the German Workers Party?

Rick Spence

Well, he'd been in the Army during the war. The only regular job that he'd ever had, liked it. So you often get the view is that, well, at the end of the war, he joined millions of other German soldiers who didn't have... No, no, he stays in the army. He stays in the Army until 1921. He's on the Army payroll at the very time in which he has helped them to set this up. What appears to have happened is this, Sebottendorff had organized The Thule Society, they had tried to oppose. There's actually a brief period of time in which the communists actually take over Munich, the Bavarian Soviet Republic, which doesn't last very long. And eventually, the Army volunteers to put this down. While that's going on by the way, Hitler is actually sitting in the barracks in Munich wearing a red armband, because he is technically part of the soldiers who have got over to the Bavarian Soviet Republic. He seems to have had flexible interests in this case. So, once order is restored, so to speak, the army comes in and decide that, "Well, one of the things we need? We need to have people who can lecture soldiers on patriotic topics." And so, there is a particular captain by the name of Karl Mayer who spots Hitler. He later describes him as a stray dog looking for a master. Hitler has a knack for public speaking. Other soldiers will listen to him. Some people can do that, some people can't. Mayer decides that he's a good candidate for further training. And so, yes, they

bring him in. They turn him into a, what's called, a [foreign language 01:43:56], a liaison man. He's an army propagandist. And then, you've got this little outfit called the German Workers Party. And essentially what happens is that Hitler is sent in to take over leadership of that, which is what happens. He shows up, he attends a meeting, there are 50 people there. By the way, the topic of the first meeting he's at, is how and why capitalism should be abolished, which is not what you might, well, expect. Because remember, the German Workers Party is trying to cast itself as a counter Bolshevism. So it's not saying that capitalism is great, which is important. No, capitalism is evil. We agree upon that. We just agree it has to be destroyed from a nationalist point of view, as opposed from some strange internationalist point of view. So Hitler is essentially, as I see it, sent in by the Army as their trained man to assume leadership within this small party and to use it- To assume leadership within this small party and to use it for the army's patriotic propaganda campaign. And is a season doing so even to the name change, to the National Socialist or German Workers Party. I mean, really what sounds more red than that?

Lex Fridman

So the interesting thing here is from where did anti-Semitism seep into this whole thing? It seems like the way they try to formulate counter-Marxism is by saying the problem with capitalism and the problem with Marxism is that it's really Judeo-capitalism and, "Judeo-Bolshevism". From where did that ideology seep in?

Rick Spence

Well, that's a huge topic. Where does anti-Semitism come from? Let's start with that term itself. A term which I have really grown increasingly to dislike because it doesn't actually say what it means. Anti-Semitism is anti-Jewism. That's all it is. I'm not sure whether there has ever existed a person who hated Jews, Arabs, and Maltese equally. Okay. That's kind of hard to imagine. I don't know. But that's technically what that would mean because let's face it, most Semites are Arabs. So if you're an anti-Semite, then you don't seem to distinguish Jews from Arabs. It makes no sense. The origin of the term is invented by, guess what? An anti-Semite. Okay. A guy in the 1870s, a German journalist by the name of Wilhelm Marr, who is, wouldn't you know it part Jewish himself. And who decides that you really needed a better term than Judenhass, Jew hate, which was the term that, because that just sounds so inelegant, doesn't it? Okay. What do you want to call yourself a Jew-hater or an anti-Semite? See, anti-Semitism, it's got that ism part of the end of it, which means it's a system of belief. Anything that has an ism must somehow be scientific and important. It's all part of the 19th century obsession with trying to bring science into something, one or the other. So we're going to get rid of Jew-hate, and we're going to turn it into anti-Semitism. And we're only going to be talking about Jews, but we'll never actually say that. And somehow the invention of a Jew-hater to disguise the fact that he's a Jew-hater, even though he's partly Jewish by inventing the term anti-Semitism worked because everybody has bought it and repeated it ever since. So I don't know, maybe just because anti-Jewism

would just be, is it too direct in some way? Do we have difficulty confronting actually what it is that we're talking about?

Lex Fridman

I do wish terms were a little bit more direct and self-explanatory. Yeah, Jew-hate is a better term.

Rick Spence

Well, the question then comes, what exactly do you hate about Jews? And a lot of this has to do with, if you go back prior to the 19th century, if Jews were hated, they were hated for religious reasons. In Christian Europe, they were hated because they weren't Christians and they existed as the only kind of significant religious minority. But other than that, they tended to live separately. They had little economic influence. Jews tended to live in shtetls in the East, ghettos elsewhere. They were, some were involved in banking and business, but they sort of remained segregated from much of society. That changes when you get to the 19th century and with what's called Jewish emancipation. And that means that between about 1800 and 1850, most European countries drop the various legal or social restrictions against Jews. They are assimilated into the general society. So ideally, you stop being a German Jew and you become a Jewish German. Those are two very different important concepts. And what that does, of course, is that it opens up the professions, business world, elsewhere. So Jews move who had been largely within those realms to begin with, they already had a good deal of experience in banking business, and they move into those areas and professions and become quite visible. And that's what then creates anti-Semitism because in some way that is seen as part of the changes that have taken place. And there are a lot of things going on here. Part of it has to do with the kind of wrenching social and economic changes that took place with industrialization. So one of the things to keep in mind is that in the process of industrialization, just like today, whole classes of people were made extinct economically, craftsmen, for instance. So when factories came along and began to produce things with machines, all the craftspeople who had made those things previously are now unemployed or go to work as wage labor in factories. So there are winners and losers in industrialization. And what people saw in Germany and elsewhere is that among this new sort of rising capitalist elite among these new professions, among the bureaucrats that are coming out of these burgeoning states, they were visibly a fair number of Jews. So in some way, the rise of Jews in the minds of many people were connected to all of the other bad things that were going on. The world was changing in a way we don't like. And seemingly the Jews are prospering while I am not, and that was true in Germany and elsewhere, Jews because highly visible in the professions, they became very visible in banking. They became visible in legal profession. They became visible in the medical profession. And those are people that a lot of people would come in contact with, bankers, lawyers, and doctors. They were not the majority there, but vastly overrepresented in terms of the general population and especially within the cities. So in that sense, the roots of anti-Semitism to me is that Jews in Germany and

Elsewhere and not just in Germany by any means, France, Britain, everywhere else became identified with the bad changes that were taking place. But you also found that Jews were not only prominent among capitalists, they were also prominent in the socialist movement as well. So one of the things you could look around if we returned to Germany in 1919 in the aftermath of World War I, and you look around in Bavaria or elsewhere, you tend to find that there are a lot of Jews in visible positions on the German left. Rosa Luxemburg is but one example of that, Eugen Levine, some of them came in from Russia. When the Soviets send a representative to Germany in this period, it's Karl Radek, a Jew. So it wasn't difficult to exploit that, to argue that just as the ranks of capitalism was full of Jews, the ranks of Bolshevism or of the revolutionary left, were full of Jews. Because you could easily go around and distinguish a great many of them. Again, they don't have to be the majority, they just have to be numerous, prominent, and visible, which they were. So this provided you a, in the case of the propaganda of the German army, the type of stuff that Hitler was spewed out. They could put all the anti-capitalist rhetoric in there, wanted to. The army was never going to overthrow capitalism, and the capitalists knew they weren't going to do it. So go ahead, talk shit about us. We don't really care. That's not going to, because we know that the army would prevent that from happening. The way to then undermine the real enemy, it was a scene. The revolutionary left was to point out the Jewish influence there. I mean, look at Russia. Well, Lenin is up, Trotsky, there he is. Look, there's a Jew. There's one. Radek is a Jew. It wasn't hard to find them in that regard.

Lex Fridman

You gave a lecture on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It's widely considered to be the most influential work of anti-Semitism ever perhaps. Can you describe this text?

Rick Spence

Well, the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion is probably one of the most troublesome and destructive works of literature that has ever emerged. And yet its origins remain obscure. So you get a whole variety of stories about where it came from. So the one story that is often is that it was the work of the Okhrana, the Russian Secret police. And in particular, it was all crafted in 1904 and 1905 in Paris. There's a whole description of Pyotr Rachkovsky who was the, supposedly the chief of the Okhrana at the time, was the man behind it, another fellow by the name of Matvei Golovinski was the drafter of it. And that they had this document written by a French political writer from some decades back called Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu, which they were then adapting. Usually it's argued that they plagiarized it into the protocols. And none of that is really true. I mean, the first part about it is that at the time this supposedly took place, Rachkovsky wasn't working for the Okhrana, he had been fired and he wasn't in Paris. And the whole situation, which is described couldn't have taken place because the people who did it weren't there. It's a story, but it provides a kind of explanation for it. So the protocols emerge, so you always have to go back. This is one of the things that I have found always useful in research, is go back to the beginning, find the first place this is mentioned, or the

first version, or the first iteration. Where does it start? So you go back to Saint Petersburg, Russia around 1903. There is a small right wing anti-Semitic newspaper published there called Znamya, banner. And it publishes in a kind of serial form a work doesn't credit with any original author. And this is the first version of the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion. But what it's actually describing is a Judeo-Masonic plot to rule the world. Those two terms are always combined together. And I think in the earlier version, there's far more mentions of Freemasons than there are Jews. And the publisher of Znamya is closely connected to a thing called the Union of Russian People. The Union Russian Men, which was ostensibly existed to defend the empire against subversion and particularly against what it thought was Jewish subversion when they also argued that the prominence of Jews in revolutionary movements somehow proved that this was in some way a Jewish revolution. But again, this is not a mainstream newspaper. It's not appealing to a mainstream population. Very few people saw it, but this is where it appears. Now keep in mind that's two or three years before it's usually said to have been written, or the other version is that there's this crazy priest by the name of Sergei Nilus, and he wrote it or actually appended it as an appendix to his work in 1905. Now it was around before that. So Nilus didn't create it. It wasn't drafted in Paris in 1904 and 1905. It was serialized in an obscure right wing Russian newspaper, 1903.

Lex Fridman

And by the way, we should say that these are 24 protocols.

Rick Spence

Well, it varies.

Lex Fridman

It varies.

Rick Spence

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

That are, I guess supposed to be meeting notes about the supposed cabal where the Jews and Freemasons are planning together a world domination. But it's like meeting notes, right?

Rick Spence

Protocol, which are Russian term basically for notes of a meeting.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Rick Spence

Well, it's notes of a meeting. These are the goofiest things I've ever seen because what you've got here, it's not notes. No one takes notes from a meeting that way. What you've got is the exposition of a Bond villain. All right. It's all of this, boy, all them, we're going to do this. And then the last thing you want to do is lay out, if you've got a plan for world domination, my suggestion would be don't write it down. So it's not notes of a meeting. It's again, it's another sort of narrative or story that's being told. It bears no resemblance to the Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu. But what it is, the best thing, it's not particularly readable in some ways. There was an Italian writer by the name of Cesare Michelis, who wrote a book translated in English called The Non-Existent Manuscript. And what it is, is that he takes the different versions starting with the 1902, 1903 versions and looks through the other ones, and he tries to, in the process, to reconstruct what he thinks the original might have been. But the other thing he does, which was fascinating to me, is that he takes this whole sort of initial text and in bold type he indicates the paragraphs, but more often sentences or phrases that appear to be identical from the Joly work and they're just scattered throughout it. There's no particular rhyme or reason to it. You don't plagiarize that way. I mean, who does that? It's sentence here, sentence there, which has led to a peculiar theory of mine, which of course I will have to expound upon, which is that I think that the original author of the protocols was the same Maurice Joly. I think what someone stumbled across was a work which he wrote and never published, and which he just drew. It's exactly what someone would do working from your own kind of material, because I've written things and then taken what I've written and then sort of repackaged that into something else.

Lex Fridman

Sentence here, sentence there.

Rick Spence

Yeah. And the same sort of thing comes out, only sort of bits and pieces of it remain. So why would Joly have done that? Joly was, we're talking about a man whose career basically spanned the 1850s to 1870s. He's an obscure figure. I'm not even totally sure he existed, I mean, but it's one of those things you go looking for him.

Lex Fridman

I love that you're a scholar of people that just kind of emerge out of the darkness.

Rick Spence

They just come from nowhere.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. And there's the Okhrana there also. And we should also say this was, I guess the original would be written. I mean, what's the language of the original? Russian?

Rick Spence

Russian. But my hunch is that that's adopted from a French version. First of all, they're constantly harping on Freemasons, which wasn't nearly as a big idea as there. If you go back to France in the 1890s, there's some big scandals. Well, there's the Dreyfus scandal. We got that. All right. Where you've got a Jewish officer on trial for being a traitor. All right. So that was [inaudible 02:02:34]. So you bring in the whole Jewish element. Jews is disloyal Dreyfus case 1894. Earlier you had the Panama scandal, which was this huge investment scandal when the Panama Canal company in Paris collapsed. And again many of the major players in that were Jewish financiers. And then you've got the Taxil hoax. So the Taxil hoax was the work of this guy. His real name was I think Jogand-Pages. He was kind of a French journalist. I don't know. He started out writing porn. So I mean, he wrote things like Sex Lives of the Popes and the Erotic Bible and various things of that kind. He was a Catholic, broke with the Catholic Church, wrote bad stuff about the Popes, and apparently became a Freemason for a while, and then supposedly recanted his evil ways, went back to the church. And then under the name Leo Taxil began writing these whole series of articles, basically arguing that there was a Masonic-Satanic conspiracy run, by the way, by an American, Albert Pike. And this also included child sacrifice. It's got Pizzagate and it is as well by a high priestess Diana Vaughan. And so there's like child sacrifice, weird Robie, Bohemian Grove stuff, and the Freemasons or devil worshipers going back to the Knights Templars. And so there's a thing called the Devil in the 19th Century and the Secrets of Freemasonry, and this became a bestseller in France. So France is just obsessed with all these kinds of conspiracies. So evil, Satanic, Freemasons, evil, Jewish financiers, Dreyfus. This, this is the brew where all of this come. So want to figure out how Freemasons and Jews get connected together? France is the place where this happens. Now, Taxil or Jogand-Pages eventually pulls another interesting thing in this around 1897, critics argue that he's making this stuff up and demand that he present Diana Vaughan, suppose Satanic, high priestess toddler killer. And he says, oh, we're going to have a press conference. She'll appear and say all of this stuff as she returns to the church and possibly becomes a nun. And so people show up, high figures in the Catholic Church shows up, and he does. No Diana Vaughan and Jogand-Pages goes, it's all a hoax. I made it up. You're all a bunch of idiots for believing it. Okay. You, you members of the church, especially just what gullible morons you are, and that's it. He confesses. To this day however, you will find people who will insist that it's actually true because they desperately want it to be true. But this is, I think the milieu that, I like that word apparently that this comes out of, and this is this whole kind of unhealthy mix. So France to me is the only place that in the decade preceding it, that something like this would be concocted. So it was either created by some sort of unknown person there. But I still think that even though he dies in like 1879, that in Maurice Joly's troubled career, he went from being an opponent of French Emperor, Napoleon III, which is what the whole dialogues was written against. And then he was for a time, a close political ally of a French politician by the name of Adolphe Cremieux. So Adolphe Cremieux, well, what's he got going for him? Well, he was kind of a radical politician. He was an opponent of Napoleon III. He was a Freemason. Oh, and he was Jewish. In fact, at one point, I think he

was actually the head, both of the Scottish right in France, and an important figure in the Alliance Israélite, the Jewish organization in France. So he was publicly very prominently Jewish and Masonic. So someone else who would've linked them together. Joly, as he did with virtually everyone, this was a guy whose life largely consisted of dual threats and fistfights. So he gets angry at Cremieux, and it's exactly the type of thing that he might write to vent his spleen about it. But he died, probably a suicide, that's kind of difficult to tell in obscurity. His son seems to have inherited most of his literary works, and his son became a journalist, worked for newspapers in France in the 1890s, but was also associated with some people on the fringes of the Okhrana or the Russian press in France. So one of the little things that had happened by this time is that France and Russia had become allies, even though their political systems were completely incompatible. And so the Russians were using money to subsidize French newspapers that were championing the alliance between the two. Russian meddling. Okay. Now they're just paying to have the right kind of newspapers come out. So there's this whole connection between the kind of Russian journalistic world and the French journalistic world and all of these scandals which are going on, and Joly's son and then 10 years down the road, this thing pops up in a newspaper in Saint Petersburg. That's where I think the origins lay.

Lex Fridman

Why do you think it took off? Why do you think it grabbed a large number of people's imaginations and even after it was shown to be not actually what it's supposed to be, people still believe it's real?

Rick Spence

Well, it doesn't take off immediately. Okay. Never receives any kind of wide, I mean, nobody much reads the first edition of it. It keeps getting, there is something like 18 or 19 different versions as it goes through. I mean, people leave this protocol out or leave another one. As time goes on, there's more and more emphasis on Jews and less and less on Freemasons. So it's sort of, and the whole thing could have begun as an anti-Masonic tract. I mean, you could leave Jews out of it entirely and just turn it into a Masonic plot to rule the world, but let's just throw them in as well since the two things are already being combined elsewhere. It doesn't become a big deal until really after the first World War because the initial versions of it are all in Russian. And let's face it, well, that's widely read in Russia. It's not much read anywhere else. It's a different alphabet. Nobody can even see what it means. So it has no particular influence outside of Russia. But then you get to 1919 and you get all these different versions of it. So suddenly you get two English versions in the US, another English version in Britain, a German edition, a French edition, a Dutch edition. Everybody is coming up with these things. So it's not until in the immediate aftermath of the first World War that this metastasizes and it begins to show up in all of these different foreign editions. And I think that it just has to do with the changes that have taken place during the war. One of the things that people began looking for was that why was there a war? And we've just had this whole disastrous war and the world has been turned upside down. So there has to be some

kind of explanation for that. I don't know. And one of the things this offered to, see there's this evil plan, there's this evil plan that has been put into motion, and this could possibly explain what's taking place. The reason with the protocols were, I think widely bought then and why they still are in many ways is the same reason that the Taxil hoax I was talking about was. Because it told a story that people wanted to believe. So in France in the 1890s, there was widespread suspicion of Freemasons. It was seen as a somewhat sinister, secretive organization, certainly secretive. And there was also the same sort of generalized prejudices about Jews, clannish distinct, too much influence, all of the things that went on. So it was sort of easy to combined those two things together. And even though Taxil admits it was a hoax, there were those who argued that this is just too, it's too accurate. It describes things to completely to be a hoax. And that you get the same arguments, in fact, I've heard the same arguments with the protocol. I don't even buy this as an example of plagiarism, because you can't actually prove what's being plagiarized in any sense. To me, the protocols are a prime example of what I call a turd on a plate. These things crop up. I have to explain that now.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, please.

Rick Spence

But afterward. What is a turd on a plate? Well, a turd on a plate is a turd on a plate. Suppose you come in and there's a plate sitting on the table and there's a turd on it. Now the first thing you're going to wonder, is that a turd? Is it a human turd? Where did it come from? Why would someone poop on a plate? There are all these questions that come to mind. It makes no sense, but that's what you come, it's just there. Right. I don't know where it came from. I don't know why. But there's a turd on a plate, and that's what the protocols, that they're just there.

Lex Fridman

But the reality is just like with a turd on a plate, you take a picture of that in modern day and it becomes a meme, becomes viral and becomes a joke on all social media, and now it's viewed by tens of millions of people or whatever. It becomes popular. So wherever the turd came from, it did captivate the imagination.

Rick Spence

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

It did speak to something,

Rick Spence

But does it seemed to provide an explanation?

Lex Fridman

Can you just speak to Jew hatred? Is it just an accident of history? Why was it the Jews versus the Freemasons? Is it the collective mind searching for small group to blame for the pains of civilization and then Jews just happened to be the thing that was selected at that moment in history?

Rick Spence

It goes all the way back to the Greeks. Let's blame them. So one of the first occasions you find the idea that Jews are a distinct, mean-spirited, nasty people goes back to, and a Greco-historian named Manetho. This is around, I think 300 B.C. early, can't even rope the Romans into this one. So Manetho is trying to write a history of the dynasties of Egypt. I think his history of dynasties of Egypt still is one of the basic works in this. But he tells this whole story, which essentially describes the kind of first blood libels, that the Jews to celebrate their various religious holidays would capture Greeks and fatten them up in the basement and then slaughter them and eat them or drain their blood or do something. Yeah. It's just the sort of earlier version of that kind. Also, I think it repeats the sort of Egyptian version of the Exodus out of Egypt, which is quite different than the biblical version. In this case, the Egyptian, they stole all the stuff out of the Egyptian's houses and ran off into the desert.

Lex Fridman

The Jews stole all the stuff and ran off?

Rick Spence

Yeah, Hebrews. Hebrews robbed the Egyptians. They were taken in. We took them in and sheltered them, gave them jobs, and then they stole all the jewelry and ran away. We didn't even chase them. We were glad to see them gone. So it's a different narrative on that story, but it essentially portrays the Jews as being hostile, that they don't like other people, they're contemptuous of other people's religions, the rest of it. And see, the Greeks tended to think of themselves as being extremely cosmopolitan. Now, the Greeks run across people worshipping other gods. They go, oh, well those are just our gods under different names. Okay. Everything was sort of adjusted into their landscape. So you end up with that kind of hostility, which was there at the time. And that was probably influenced also by some of these earlier rebellions that had taken place in Egypt. During the Roman period, you not only have the Judean Rebellion in 70 A.D., but you have a couple of other uprisings in North Africa, and they were very bloody affairs. And in some cases, Jews began massacring other people around them. They start killing the Greeks and the Greeks start killing them. So there was a fair amount of, from that period on, a certain amount of bad blood of mutual contempt between Greeks or between Hellenes, between the people who became Hellenized as the Romans would be and the Jews. And the Romans also seems to have developed much of that idea. They considered Judea as being a horrible place to have to govern, inhabited by a stubborn, obnoxious people, not well-liked. So that's really where you

see the earliest version of that. And the reasons for it would be complicated, but you could say is that going back to Manetho and to the Roman period, Jews, Judeans frequently experienced difficulties, conflicts with other people living around them. And part of that probably had to do with the diaspora, which was the movement. Well, you get the idea. The Romans came in and kicked everybody out, which they didn't. Jews had been leaving Judea since it was a poor limited area. And moving into areas like North Africa, Egypt, Cyrenaica, all the way into Southern France. They moved widely around the Roman Empire. So that sense of both distinctness and hostility existed since ancient times. So it wasn't just, the attitude of the church towards Jews was mixed by... Well, one of the ideas, of course, is that at the end of time, just before the second coming, one of the signs, how are we going to know that Jesus is going to return and the world is going to end? Well, the Jews will all convert. There will be a mass conversion. They'll sort of see the light. Now, so there have to be Jews around to do that, or we won't. It's like a canary in a coal mine. You have to have them there to tip it off. So that was one of the arguments as to why, within the church as to why Jews would not be forcibly converted beyond the fact that it's just kind of bad policy to forcibly convert people because you don't know whether it's sincere, but they need to be preserved as a kind of artifact, which will then redeem itself at the end of time. It's not something which is encouraged. It predates Christianity, and then Christianity, of course, in its own way, just sort of... ... of course, in its own way, just plagiarizes the whole Jewish thing, doesn't it? I mean, I hesitate to use that term, but that's what you do. It's just like, "Well, we're the Jews now. You used to have a unique relationship with God, but now it's been passed over to us. Thanks for the Bible." I can remember that on my mom's side, I was periodically exposed to Sunday school, and pretty much the Old Testament was always presented as if somehow it was the history of, for lack of better term, Europeans in some way. It was a Christian history. It was all the prequel to that. First, the term Hebrew was always used, never Jews. So the ancient Hebrews, and somehow the Hebrews just became the Christians, and I don't know, the Jews, they didn't get a memo or something.

Lex Fridman

So it's basically like, Christianity, the prequel, is the Old Testament.

Rick Spence

Well, they just take over. "We have the special dispensation now. Thank you very much." You're an artifact.

Lex Fridman

So it's interesting. So this whole narrative that I would say is a viral meme started, as you described, in 300 BC. It just carried on in various forms and morphed itself and arrived after the Industrial Revolution in a new form to the 19th and 20th century, and then somehow captivated everybody's imagination.

Rick Spence

I think that modern antisemitism is very much a creation of the modern world and the Industrial Revolution. It's largely a creation of Jewish emancipation. It's the nasty flip side of that. All of the restrictions, they're thrown off, but now also you become the focus of much more attention than what you had before. Prior to that, you had the ghettoization, which worked both ways. I mean, there were rabbis who praised the ghettos as a protection of Jews against the outside world, because inside we can live our life as we wish and we're unmolested. The great fear is that if we were absorbed into this larger world, we'll lose our identity. That sort of question comes up in the 18th century in things like the Haskalah movement in Germany, because the German Jews were always at the cutting edge of assimilation and modernity. And Moses Mendelssohn was an example of that, arguing that we just need to become Germans. So as much as possible, synagogues should look like Lutheran churches. Things should be given in good German. We need to become Jewish Germans. We don't want to become a group of people who are apart in that way, and that has created great tensions ever since. One of the essential points that seems to me in antisemitism, anti-Jew-ism is that all the Jews are in this together. Isn't that one of the things? Okay. They're always talking about as if they're collective. Jews this, Jews that as if it's a single, undifferentiated mass of people who all move and speak in the same way. From my personal experience, not being Jewish, it's incredibly diverse in many ways, really. One of the things that anti-Semitism proposes is a continuity or a singularity of Jewish identity that never existed.

Lex Fridman

Just like you said, in one hand, there's a good story, in the other hand is the truth, and oftentimes the good story wins out. And there's something about the idea that there's a cabal of people, whatever they are, in this case, our discussion is Jews seeking world domination, controlling everybody is somehow a compelling story. It gives us a direction of a people to fight, of a people to hate on which we project our pain, because life is difficult. Life for most is full of suffering. And so we channel that suffering into hatred towards the other. Maybe if you can just zoom out, what do you, from this particular discussion, learn about human nature that we pick the other in this way? We divide each other up in groups and then construct stories. And we like constructing those stories, and they become really viral and sexy to us. And then we use those stories to channel our hatred towards the other.

Rick Spence

Well, yeah. Jews aren't the only recipient of that. I mean, anytime you hear people talking about Jews this or that, white people this or that, black people this or that, Asians this or that, where they're an undifferentiated mass, who apparently all share something in common, well, then nobody's really thinking. And the other thing you'll find is that people who will express those views when pressed will argue that, "Oh, well, if they actually know anybody from those groups, those are okay." It's like Nazis. They go, "This is an okay Jew. They're all right." They would always be constantly making exceptions in one form. What

they actually met an actual human being, and they seemed to be fairly normal, well, they were okay. So what it was that they hated weren't actual people for the most part, it was just this golliwog vision that they had of them. You're not even talking about real people. I don't know. What does that tell you about human nature? Well, okay, in 70 odd years, what have I learned about my fellow creatures? One, I don't actually understand them any better than I ever did. In fact, less so. I would say this, when I was 17, I thought I had the world much more figured out than I do now. Completely deluded. But it seemed to make much more sense, and I could categorize things. Basic take upon human beings, most people, most of the time are polite, cooperative and kind until they're not. And the exact tipping point and moment in which they go from one to the other is unpredictable.

Lex Fridman

God, that's brilliantly put. Speaking of the tipping point, you gave a series of lectures on murderers, crimes in the 20th century. One of the crimes that you described is the Manson family murders, and that combines a lot of the elements of what we've been talking about and a lot of the elements of the human nature that you just described. So can you just tell the story at a high level as you understand it?

Rick Spence

The Manson family. Well, you begin with Charles Manson, who's the key element in this, and Charles Manson for most of his life up until the time that he's around 33, is an unexceptional, petty criminal. In and out of prison, reform school from an early age, not really associated with violent crimes. He did stuff like steal cars, write bad checks, became an unsuccessful pimp and drug dealer. So around 1967, he gets out of his latest stint in federal lockup in Terminal Island near Los Angeles, California. By that time, he has learned how to play the guitar, has ambitions to become a musician, and also has proclaimed himself a Scientologist, not that he ever seems to have practiced, but that's what he would claim that he was. Self-educated himself in prison to a certain degree. So when he gets out of prison in '67, he was a model prisoner. He behaved himself and seemed... You can imagine his life is going in a completely different direction. And here, again, I'm going to say something good about Charles Manson, which is that he actually was a decent singer. If you really listened to some of the stuff he did... He's not a great singer, but other people got recording contracts with less talent than he had, and he could play a guitar. The Beach Boys actually do record one of his songs without him.

Lex Fridman

How would you evaluate Hitler's painting compared to Charles Manson's-

Rick Spence

Well, you're supposed to say it's terrible. It looks average to me.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's a landscape.

Rick Spence

If you didn't know it was Hitler, I don't know what people would say about it.

Lex Fridman

I'm sorry for the distraction.

Rick Spence

He's an average painter. That's what it was. It's nothing like crazy, genocidal, maniac paintings. You don't really have those. So Manson, he could have done that. He made certain inroads into the music industry, and if he hadn't been such a weirdo, he might've gotten further with it. But his life could have taken a different turn. So this is one of the questions I have. Where did a guy who's an unexceptional career petty criminal suddenly emerge into some sort of criminal mastermind, a Svengali who can bend all of these people to his will and get them to go out and commit murder? That's a real shift that you have. So the first thing that could tell you that something odd is going on is he gets out of prison in LA County and he's on parole. Parolees are supposed to have a job, not supposed to leave the jurisdiction of their parole. He heads straight for the Bay Area, violates parole right off the bat. Two weeks later, he drifts into the parole office in the Bay Area, whereupon he should have been arrested and sent back to Terminal Island, but instead they just assign him a [inaudible 02:30:57]. I don't know, maybe things were easier then in some way. So he gets assigned a parole officer, Michael Smith. Michael Smith is initially handling a number of parolees. But after a while, once he takes on Manson, he only has one parolee he's supervising, Charlie Manson, which is odd. Then you also find out that Michael Smith, in addition to being a parole officer, is a graduate student at the University of California studying group dynamics, especially the influence of drugs on gangs in groups. He's also connected to the Hayett Ashbury Free Clinic, which is a place where the influence of... Because Hayett Ashbury had lots of drugs and lots of groups. So Charlie Manson never gets a regular job, hangs around with young girls, ex-cons, engages in criminal activity. He is repeatedly arrested, but nothing ever sticks for the next couple of years. Who gets that type of thing? Who gets a get out of jail free card? Informants. So here is what? Again, this is speculation, but Manson at some point after he got out of prison is getting this treatment because he is recruited as a confidential informant.

Lex Fridman

For who?

Rick Spence

For who? That's the interesting question. So, probably not for any local police departments. My best suspicion is probably the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, precursor to the DEA.

Federal parolee, federal parole officer, graduate student in drugs and group dynamics. And eventually with permission, he goes back down to LA. And what is he part of when he's there? Well, he's on the fringes of the music industry. The Wilsons and elsewhere, which also brings him to the fringes of the film industry. So one of the things, if you're looking in terms of Hollywood music industry elites in the flow of... Oh, and he's also dealing in drugs and girls. So an early version of Jeffrey Epstein. Manson attracted lots of underage runaways and trained them, used them, also associating with biker gangs who produced the drugs, et cetera. So that's part of it. He's an informant in the movement of drugs basically within the film and music industries. And he's given pretty much a free rein at that point. What then happens in August of 1969 is that there are these murders. First, Sharon Tate and her friends in Cielo Drive. I think everybody has probably pretty much heard that story before. And of course, the question is why Cielo Drive? Why Sharon, Tate, Frykowski and the rest of them? Manson was familiar with the place. He had been there before. Members of the family had been there before, so he knew where it was. It wasn't an easy place to find. The original house is no longer there, but the same property and a house is built there. And if you didn't know where it was... It's not some place, "Let's just go for a drive in the Hollywood Hills and murder people in a house." Well, that isn't the one that you would come across. There are lots of connections there. Wojciech Frykowski was one of the people killed at the Cielo Drive house, was involved in drug dealing. That's a possible connection between the two, probably a fairly likely one. Probably not unfortunate Sharon Tate at all. She was probably in the wrong place at the wrong time. Her husband might've been, you never know. And then the next night after the slaughter there... Which by the way, Manson is not at. So this is one of the interesting things about it is, Charles Manson doesn't kill any of these people. His crime is supposedly ordering the killings to be done. He supposedly thought that the killings at the Tate house were sloppy, and he was going to give everybody a crash course in how you apparently commit seemingly random murders. So the next night he takes a group of people over to the LaBianca's house in a different section of LA. You've got Leno, Rosemary LaBianca, the guy is a grocer. His wife runs a dress shop, upper middle class, and they're bound and gagged and hacked to death. As at the Tate residence, various things like piggy are written, various messages in blood, things that are supposed to look like cat's paws. Because one of the groups trying to be framed for this was the idea was the Black Panthers. So the general story that comes out in the subsequent trial is that this was all a part of something called Helter Skelter, which supposedly was an idea that... That sounds like a Beatles song. That's where he got it from. He thought the Beatles were talking to him through their music and that there was going to be an apocalyptic race war, and this was all part of a plan to set this off. So this is why the Black Panthers were trying to be implicated in this. Although, how it was supposed to do that is never really explained. Here is what I think was really happening, what really happened and how I think it fits together. Before Sharon Tate and her friends or the LaBiancas were killed, there was a murder by members of the family of some of the same people involved in the later killings of a musician, drug manufacturer by the name of Gary Hinman. So Manson, again was involved in the drug trade, and Hinman made them. He was a cook, basically, and he brewed them up in

his basement, sold the drugs to Manson, who sold them to biker gangs like the Straight Satans, which was one of the groups that he used, and they distributed them elsewhere. Well, one day, the Straight Satans show up and complain that the last batch of meth or whatever it was that they got from Manson, had made some of their brothers very, very ill, and they were quite unhappy about that, and they wanted their \$2,000 back. Manson had gotten those drugs from Gary Hinman. So he is unhappy, and he sends Bobby Beausoleil, and a couple of the girls over to Hinman's place to get the money from him. As the story is later relayed, I think by Susan Atkins, Hinman denied that there was anything wrong with his drugs and refused to pay up, which led to a interrogation torture session in which he was killed. And the idea was here, what are we going to do with that? Well, one of the other groups that Hinman had sold drugs to were, guess what? People associated with the Black Panthers. So we'll leave these things up and they will do it. So it's Bobby Beausoleil who then takes Hinman's car and decides to drive it up the coast, by the way, with a bloody knife with Hinman's blood and hair on it, and blood on the seats in the car, and then he pulls it off the road and decides to sleep it off, and he gets busted. So, find Hinman's body, find Beausoleil in Hinman's car with a bloody knife with him. He gets arrested. So Beausoleil was very popular with some of the girls. There's consternation in the family that Bobby has been arrested. So how can we possibly get Bobby out of jail? Copycat killings. So if we go kill more people and we make it look the same, then see, Bobby couldn't possibly have done it. Now, see, he just borrowed the car. Okay, he stole the car, but the knife was already in... He didn't have anything to do with this. So that to me makes the most sense out of what followed.

Lex Fridman

How often do people talk about that theory? That's an interesting theory.

Rick Spence

Well, it's there. It's just not the one that... Bugliosi obviously wanted to go with Helter Skelter because again, it was a story that people could understand. It was sensational and it would catch on. Also, another probable issue in that was that his star witness was Linda Kasabian. Linda Kasabian, she was present at both the Tate and LaBianca murders. She didn't participate in the killings, according to her. She drives the car. But everybody else talked about what had happened. Well, okay, she turns [inaudible 02:40:19] evidence and gets total immunity, and it's largely in her testimony that all the rest of the case is based. Now, if you start throwing into the equation that she proclaimed her love for Bobby Beausoleil, and that she, according to others, was the chief proponent of the copycat killings, well then that would get messy. Now, there's one guy that's at the center of this, it's Charles Manson. He ordered all of this done to ignite a race war, even though, how would any of that do it?

Lex Fridman

So that doesn't make sense. But he is nevertheless at the center of this because he's the glue of the family. Right?

Rick Spence

He exerts a tremendous amount of psychological control over them.

Lex Fridman

How was he able to do that? Sorry to interrupt. Because you said he was a petty criminal. It does seem he was pretty prolific in his petty crimes. He did a lot of them.

Rick Spence

He had a lot of access to LSD. Which he started getting at the free clinic in San Francisco. So lots of it floating around. Some descriptions of the family at Spahn Ranch is that people were basically taking acid on a daily basis, which by the way was also a potential problem with Linda Kasabian's testimony since she also admitted to being high most of the time, and also thinking she was a witch. Where do you want to go with that? See, if Manson wasn't Manson, if he hadn't actually acted like the crazed hippie, psycho goofball that Bugliosi painted him as being, then Kasabian's testimony wouldn't have been as strong because you could... I mean, the first thing against her is you've got an immunity for telling the story the prosecution wants. That's a little iffy, and we won't even bring in the witch and the drugs and being in love with Bobby Beausoleil. So if Manson had been dressed like you, sitting there in a suit and tie, and behaved himself and spoken normally... This isn't to say that he wasn't guilty as hell. So what he supposedly did to inspire all of these killings, and I think that's probably beginning with the Hinman killing, he told him to go over there and get the money one way or the other. I don't know whether he told him, "If you don't get the money, kill him." But, Hinman's dead. And then he might also have seen the value in terms of having copycat killings as a way of throwing off any other blame. The other story you get is that one of the people who had lived at the Cielo house where Sharon Tate was before, was a record producer by the name of Terry Melcher. Melcher supposedly, as the general story goes, had welched on a deal with Manson in terms of a record contract. He screwed over Manson in some sort of a record deal, and Manson wanted to get revenge and sent them to kill everybody in the house, which again, doesn't make much sense. One, Manson knew that Melcher wasn't living there anymore. He probably knew where Melcher was living. If he wanted to get Melcher, he could have found him. It wasn't that difficult to do. And so it's not revenge on Terry Melcher that drew him there. He was familiar with the house. So if the idea was to simply commit random killings that would muddy the whole waters with the Hinman killing, then you might pick some place you knew of. He knew the place was [inaudible 02:44:23]. There would be someone there, and you really didn't care, in the same way that the LaBiancas seemed to have been. Manson was familiar with that because it supposedly had been the scene of creepy crawling. This is little interesting things that the family would be taught to do. Creepy crawling is when you sneak into somebody's house at night while they're there asleep, or when they're not there, and you move things around. So when they get up in the morning or they come home, they'll suddenly notice that someone has been in their house, which will freak them out, which is the whole point of that.

Lex Fridman

But it doesn't seem like the murder or the creepy crawling was the... Well, creepy crawling maybe. But it doesn't seem like the murder... Like some of the other people you've covered like the Zodiac Killer, the murder is the goal. Maybe there's some psychopathic artistry to the murder that the Zodiac Killer had and the messaging behind that. But it seems like, at least the way you're describing it with the Charles Manson family, the murder was just... They just had a basic disregard for human life, and the murder was a consequence of operating in the drug underworld.

Rick Spence

So Manson set up a base, I think called the Spahn Movie Ranch, which was an old movie ranch out on the northwest edge of LA, and they just camped out there. He used the girls, in particular, "Squeaky" Fromme to get the owner or operator, George Spahn to let them hang out there. Basically, she slept with him, and he was perfectly happy to let them hang out. They also had a place out in the desert that they had. They dealt in credit card fraud, stolen cars. It was a chop shop that they ran out of the place. So he had a fairly good little criminal gig going, which with the protection he had probably would've... The one thing they couldn't cover him on was murder.

Lex Fridman

So you think if he was an informer, you think there was still a connection between DEA, FBI, CIA, whatever with him throughout this until he committed murder?

Rick Spence

Well, the real question is... There is a book written on this by Tom O'Neill called Chaos. I'm not necessarily saying it's the easiest thing to get through. There's a lot of material there. I don't think O'Neill necessarily knows what to make of some of the stuff he came up with, but he does a very good job of demolishing the whole Bugliosi narrative. One of the people he mentions is a name that I had run into elsewhere, and so I really paid attention to it when I saw it again. And the name is Reeve Whitson. Reeve Whitson shows up on the fringes, even though he has no judicial function. He hangs around Bugliosi in the prosecution. He's just there. In the same way that he was one of these guys... He grew his hair long, wore bell-bottoms, hung around the music community and elsewhere in Hollywood, but no one could tell you exactly what he did. I know what he did later. A decade later, he shows up as a CIA officer in Central America. So Reeve Whitson, later in his career at least, is CIA. What was he in 1969? What is he doing in this? The other thing about it is he appears to have been the person who called... There's a little question of when the bodies at Cielo Drive are discovered. So the general story is that Sharon Tate's housekeeper shows up around 8:30 in the morning, finds the bloody scene and goes screaming next door. But there was another fellow who knew... I think the owner of the house is a photographer. Last name may be Hatami. He gets a call earlier in the morning saying that there'd been murders there, and the person he recalls calling him is Reeve Whitson. So someone had been at the house before

the bodies were discovered, and they had not called the police. So I don't know what's going on there, but it's a curious situation. And Manson in a lot of ways, self-immolates himself. I mean, his behavior at the trial is bizarre. It's threatening, it's disruptive. He's got his girls out on the street carving X's in their forehead, carrying knives. One of the attorneys, initially, his attorney, Ron Hughes, becomes Van Houten's attorney. And he figures out that the three girls, supposedly on Charlie's insistence, are going to confess. They'll confess that it was all their idea and Charlie had nothing to do with it. Hughes doesn't like this because his defense for her is that she was under his influence and therefore not responsible for her own actions. He was having psychic control, so he refuses to go along with it. There's a break in the trial. He goes camping up in the mountains with some friends, disappears during a rainstorm, and then some months later, his decomposed remains are found. Rumors, always the rumors. What would history be without rumors? Members of the family, they were off at Ron Hughes because he messed up Charlie's idea to get him off and so they killed him. Maybe they did. Maybe he drowned. That's absolutely impossible to say. You've got that story. There's a guy named Juan Flynn, who was an employee at the Spahn Ranch, didn't like Manson, held Manson responsible for the murder of his boss. He would testify that Manson told him that he had ordered all the killings, and that Manson also admitted that he had killed 35 people. Maybe he did. On the other hand, Juan Flynn didn't like him, and other than his word had no real proof of what he was saying. So please understand me in this case, is that unlike some people who argue that Charles Manson got a raw deal, I don't think that's the case. I think that he influenced tremendous influence over the people there through drugs. Sex was another frequent component in it. He had a real whammy over a lot of these people's minds. I'm not sure how. That still puzzles me. He was a scrawny guy and he wasn't physically intimidating. I mean, even a lot of women wouldn't be physically intimidated by him. But he nevertheless had this real psychological power. And if you look around him, the male followers he had were fairly big guys. So he could get people to do what he wanted. And again, to me, the simplest explanation for this is that it began with the Hinman killing, and probably on Manson's instigation the others were copycat killings to throw off what was going on. If I was a cop, that's what I would focus on because that seems to make the most sense.

Lex Fridman

It still is fascinating that he's able to have that much psychological control over those people without having a very clear ideology. So, it's a cult.

Rick Spence

Yes. The great focus on Charlie, the leader. The excessive devotion.

Lex Fridman

But there's not an ideology behind that, like something like Scientology or some kind of religious or some kind of... I don't know, utopian ideology. Nothing like this?

Rick Spence

No. I think that Madison, again, was essentially a criminal. He had a sociopathic mindset, and he hit upon a pretty good deal.

Lex Fridman

But how do people convince anybody of anything? With a cult, usually you have either an ideology or you have maybe personal relations, like you said, sex and drugs. But underneath that, can you really keep people with sex and drugs? You have to convince them that you love them in some deep sense. There's a commune of love.

Rick Spence

You have a lot of people there in the cult. They have some sort of, what we like to call dysfunctional families. A lot of the females in particular seem to have come from more or less middle-class families, but those are full of dysfunction. Their parents didn't love them. They were semi-runaways. And now they had this whole family. A lot of the younger women had children, some of them by Manson, some of them by the others. They bonded together.

Lex Fridman

And again, we return to that pull towards belonging that gets us humans into trouble. So it does seem that there was a few crimes around this time. So, the Zodiac Killer.

Rick Spence

Well, California, where I'm from... I remember this period vividly. By the way, the Tate LaBianca killings occurred on my birthday, the year I graduated from high school. So I remember this.

Lex Fridman

Happy birthday.

Rick Spence

A term which has been used for that... There's a writer by the name of Todd Wood who's [inaudible 02:54:34]... I wish I'd come up with this. Killerfornia. Which is a chronicle of these serial killers and disappearances in the late sixties and seventies. So you've got the Zodiac, you've got other ones. I mean, I hate to say it, I'm not trying to be flippant about it, but I mean, young female hitchhikers were disappearing at an alarming rate in Northern California. There are bodies that have never been attributed. Some think that they're- That have never been attributed. Some think that they're the Zodiac's victims, but it was a dangerous time. Edmund Kemper, the co-ed killer was another one. There were a lot of creepy psychopaths running around. I don't know whether it was something in the water or what was going on, but it was a menacing in some cases. Hitchhiking, especially if you were alone and female, was not something you wanted to do in much of the Golden State, certainly not up around the Bay Area. So a lot of these strange killings that were going on,

the Zodiac, it's one of those things where you have these people who have theories about it, and if you don't share their theory, then you're part of the problem in some form or another. So I'm not sure, for instance, that the Zodiac killings were all committed by the same person. I think there might've been multiple people involved. And the first killings are all of couples. It's very clear that they... I remember in my examination of it, one of the things I was looking at specifically, what else is there to say about this Zodiac killings? What I was going to look at is that there are all of these accusations that there was an occult aspect to it, that there was some sort of ritualistic aspect. So I looked at different things, locations, victims, phases of the moon. That's always worth looking at. I didn't find much correspondence in any of those. In one of the killings, I think the one in Lake Berryessa, he does appear in this kind of weird hooded costume. He's got his symbol that sort of compass or aiming reticle circle with a cross through it. It can mean a variety of things. He used guns and he used knives, but he certainly had to think for couples. Except in the last of the killings, which is of a cab driver in downtown San Francisco, who he shoots in full view of witnesses, which is completely atypical.

Lex Fridman

And also when he was stabbing the victims, it doesn't seem like he was very good at it. Or if the goal was to kill them, he wasn't very good at it because some of them survived.

Rick Spence

Yeah, he's not particularly thorough about it. He seems to have had much more.... More of the violence seems to be directed at the females than the males.

Lex Fridman

So I mean, there's a couple of questions to ask here. First of all, did people see his face?

Rick Spence

There is a composite drawing of his face, which I think is based upon the Stine killing, the cab driver killing, where there were people who saw him or who claimed that they saw him. The other ones were all when it was fairly dark. I'm not sure that anyone else got a look at his face. The one that occurred in the daylight at Berryessa, he was wearing a mask. So there's something in common initially in the targeting of victims, which doesn't in the last case. Then after that, there's just these different cases of where there's a pretty good case to be made. A woman who claims, I think she and a small child were picked up. Her car broke down, she got a flat tire, and she was picked up by this guy who she got a very sort of strange vibe from who eventually just let her go. Well, that might've been the Zodiac. It might not have been.

Lex Fridman

You do this kind of rigorous look saying like, okay, what is the actual facts that we know? Reduce it to the thing that we know for sure. And in speaking about his motivation, he said that he was collecting souls.

Rick Spence

Souls for the afterlife.

Lex Fridman

For the afterlife.

Rick Spence

That's kind of a cultie.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I mean that's what I believe. Is it the Vikings or the Romans? They believed this in battle.

Rick Spence

You're essentially making sacrificial victims, and they will be your ghostly servants in the afterlife.

Lex Fridman

Do you think he actually believed that?

Rick Spence

Who knows? I mean, here's the question. Was he making that up just to be scary or is that what his actual? That's what he's saying his motivation is. So let's take him at face value rather than trying to wish that into the cornfield to get rid of it. Let's just take it at face. So he's claiming that he's killing these people in order to acquire slave servants in the afterlife. He will subsequently go on to claim many more victims, I'm not sure, 44 eventually he will have before he just kind of vanishes. One of the really interesting clues to me when I was looking at that case, which I didn't find anybody else that tended to make much of it, is that it all has to do with this kind of Halloween card that he sends to the press in San Francisco. And it's talking about sort of rope by gun by fire, and there's this whole sort of wheel, like the zodiacs. But what this is drawn from, where he got this from is from a Tim Holt Western comic book published in 1951, and you see the same thing in the cover. It's Wheel of Fortune, but with different forms of grisly death on it. And all of the things that he mentioned are shown on the cover of this. So whoever put together that card saw that comic book. Well, that's kind of an interesting clue. So does that mean he's a comic book collector? When would he have... I mean, that one and also where he got the idea from, and so he's incorporating these things from. Then there are of course his codes, which people have,

which aren't all that difficult to decipher probably because they weren't meant to be. The other thing that you find often with serial or psychopathic killers is they're toying with the press. I mean, this goes all the way back to Jack the Ripper. They get attention, and then he just disappears.

Lex Fridman

Why do you think he was never caught?

Rick Spence

I don't think they knew who to look for. There was nothing much to go on. There was a guy who was long a suspect, and then eventually they tested his DNA and find it didn't match any of the things that they'd found. Again, it goes back to, I'm not even sure that it's one person who's responsible for all of them.

Lex Fridman

So one of the interesting things you bring up here and our discussion of Manson inspires this, but there does seem to be a connection, a shared inspiration between several killers here, the Zodiac, the Son of Sam later, and the monster of Florence. So is it possible there's some kind of underworld that is connecting these people?

Rick Spence

Well, take the Zodiac and you get his claim that he's collecting souls for the afterlife. There are other things that are occult-ish connected to that. He may have picked some of the killing sites due to their physical location, to their position in a particular place. If you look at the Son of Sam case, of course, David Berkowitz will on and off claim that he was part of a Satanic cult that was carrying out, again, these killings mostly of couples and young women similar to the Zodiac, and that he had only committed some of them and was witnesses to others. And that has really created the whole idea that yes, there is this some kind of Satanic cult, which engages in ritual murders. Then if you go all the way to Florence, you've got murders who go on and off for a long period of time. Again, focusing on couples in isolated areas, which Italian prosecutors ultimately tried to connect to some kind of satanic cult, although I'm not sure they ever made a particularly strong case for that. But that element comes up in all three of them. So you can with a little imagination, argue that those similarities, that those things should come up in each of those cases in different places, either suggest that oddly enough, psychopathic criminals all sort of thinking the same way, or that there is some sort of higher element involved in this, that there's some kind of common inspiration. Here you come back to something similar we were talking before about, do pedophiles exist? Okay, so do satanic cults exist? Well, they do. Okay. There was one in my hometown, apparently quite harmless as far as I know, never did anything. But there are people who robes. Here we come again, robes, cut the head off a chicken, naked woman as an altar. You can get off on that I suppose, if that's your thing. So professed satanists exist, satanic cults exist, serial killers exist, ritual murders exist. Are those things

necessarily connected? No. Could they be connected? Yes. There's nothing. Don't ever tell me that something is just too crazy for people to do because that's crazy talk.

Lex Fridman

You've studied secret societies. You gave a lot of amazing lectures on secret societies. It's fascinating to look at human history through the lens of secret societies because they've permeated all of human history. You've talked about from everything from the Knights Templar to Illuminati, Freemasons, like we brought up. Freemasons lasted a long time. Illuminati, you've talked about in its sort of main form, lasted a short time, but its legend.

Rick Spence

Never gone away.

Lex Fridman

Never gone away. So maybe Illuminati is a really interesting one. What was that?

Rick Spence

Well, the Illuminati that we know started in the 1776. In fact, you can pin it down to a day, the 1st of May, May Day, 1776 in Ingolstadt, Germany, founded by a professor Adam Weishaupt. It wasn't initially called the Illuminati because that's not really the name of the organization. It was called the Order Perfectibilists. Apparently that changed. Weishaupt would say things like never let our organization be known under its real name anywhere, which leaves wondering what's its real name. So Illuminati is simply the plural of Illuminatus, which means one who is illuminated, one who has seen the light. So in Roman times, Christian converts were Illuminati because they had seen the light, anyone who thinks. And there have been organizations called Illuminati. The term is not trademarked, not copyrighted. Anybody who thinks they've seen the light about anything is an Illuminati. So it defines nothing. The symbol of the order was an owl, which interestingly enough is almost identical to the owl which is the emblem of the Bohemian Club.

Lex Fridman

Oh, boy.

Rick Spence

Make of that what you will. I don't make that much out of it because one owl looks pretty much like another owl to me. But compare them, you got to kind of wonder about, there's a little, just a little thing. Maybe there's some kind of connection there. But that supposedly has to do with the connection to the goddess Minerva and the owl was sacred to her and the order was the Minerva of all, the person who was brought in. The number of levels changed over time. There was a higher level, so the order that people at the lower level didn't know about, pretty typical for this. But the thing about Weishaupt was that he was a luminous correspondent with members with his Illuminati, both during the time that it legally existed

in Bavaria and later on. So Weishaupt himself lives, I think until 1830, dies in Gotha, which was ruled by an Illuminati prince. And so nothing ever happens to these. No Illuminati is ever put to death or arrested in prison for any period of time. What happens is that their plan... Well, what was his plan? His plan was to essentially replace all existing religions and governments in the world with a one world order governed by the Illuminati. So to do this, you had to subvert and destroy all the existing order. And he argued the purpose for this is we wish to make men happy and free, but first we must make them good.

Lex Fridman

Oh, right.

Rick Spence

So that's what the order is all about. Of course, he also said things like, oh man, is there nothing that you won't believe? So myth would be used in that. Also thought women should be brought into it. He had a rather interesting view about that was that we should appeal to women in part because women have a chip on their shoulder because they're left out of things. So we should appeal to their vanity on that point and offer that in the future, all things will be open and they will be emancipated. So we should hold out the prospect of female emancipation to attract them because he argued in the short term, there's no better way to influence men than through women. Get women on our side by promising them emancipation, but made sure we'll never actually deliver it to them because the future world will be a boys club. So he talks about these things fairly openly, and this is where you get this idea of some sort of a new world order, which is to be based upon the destruction of the existing order. So there are those who argue that there is a trail of descent that leads from Weishaupt's Illuminati to the Communist manifesto, and in fact, communism itself, that Marxism was simply a further restating of this idea. And you can draw some sort of, I mean, the idea never entirely goes away. The Bavarian government gets a hold of the order's, inner texts. So the story is they're delivered to them. I think that Weishaupt gave them to him. I think he engineered the exposure of his order because it gave him publicity. By being exposed in Bavaria, you gained great renown. And they continued to recruit after this, and the Bavarian government actually bans the Illuminati four different times. Why? Because apparently the first three times didn't work. So the fourth one does. You can notice that it's like Papal bans on Freemasonry. They just go on and on and on because this clearly isn't working.

Lex Fridman

And you actually highlight, speaking of publicity, that there's a difference between visibility and transparency. That a secret society could be visible, it could be known about, it could be quite popular, but you could still have a secrecy within it.

Rick Spence

You have no idea what's going on inside. It's like a black box. If I set a black box on this table, we can see that there is a black box. What's in the black box? A cat? Who knows?

Lex Fridman

In fact, the secrecy might be the very thing that makes it even more popular.

Rick Spence

Adam Weishaupt, again, there is no more convincing than a concealed mystery. Give people a concealed mystery in the thought. So we need to make the order mysterious for that exact reason. Always hold out the possibility that knowledge, special knowledge that no mere mortals have other than you will have in that way. So he senses a lot of things, the use of vanity and ego to recruit people to influence both men and women, it's quite sophisticated and as you might expect from a professor of canon law trained by Jesuits. So I certainly don't think that it ceased when it was banned in Bavaria because everybody just scatters and goes elsewhere like Paris. And then you have the French Revolution.

Lex Fridman

So the idea of the Illuminati to put it crudely, the branding is a really powerful one. And so it makes sense that there's a thread connecting it to this day that a lot of organizations, a lot of secret societies can adopt the branding.

Rick Spence

Anybody can call it. You can go out and form a club, and call it the Illuminati.

Lex Fridman

And if you are effective at it, I think it does attract. It's the chicken or the egg. But powerful people tend to have gigantic egos, and people with gigantic egos tend to like the exclusivity of secret societies. And so it's a gravitational force that pulls powerful people to these societies. It's exclusive.

Rick Spence

Only certain. And you also notice something goes back to when we were talking about much earlier when we were talking about intelligence. Remember MEIS? Ego.

Lex Fridman

Ego, yeah.

Rick Spence

Ease of recruitment and control. That's a great Achilles heel in human beings, the exploitation of ego.

Lex Fridman

And of course, if we go back to the conversation of intelligence agencies, it would be very efficient and beneficial for intelligence agencies to infiltrate the secret societies because that's where the powerful people are.

Rick Spence

Or the secret societies to infiltrate the intelligence agencies.

Lex Fridman

Oh boy. Well, I mean that's actually in all the lectures, I kind of had a sense that intelligence agencies themselves are kind of secret societies, right?

Rick Spence

Well, I'll give you my definition of secret societies, what they come down to. One is that generally their existence isn't secret. It's what they do is secret. It's what's in the box as opposed to the existence of the box. So one of the most important criteria is that they are self-selecting. You just don't join. They pick you. They decide whether or not you're going to, they admit you. And oftentimes they will sort of recruit you. Once you have been recruited, you have to pass tests and initiations, and you also have to swear oaths of loyalty. Those are always very, very critical. So broadly speaking, what the entrance into an intelligence organization does, they decide whether you get in. You just don't automatically get the job. You have to pass tests, a lie detector test, for instance, field training tests, a whole variety of tests. And then you're sworn to secrecy. You never talk about what you do ever. Or there will be dire consequences. So the method is very much the same. And also this idea of creating a kind of insular group. The organization is us, and everyone else is outside of that. We are guardians of special knowledge. See, this is the type of thing that would generally happen if you question whatever any kind of intelligence agency did. Well, we know things that you don't. Why? Because we're the organization that knows things. We collect information, we know the secrets, we guard the secrets. Therefore, if we tell you, you must believe us.

Lex Fridman

I have this sense that there are very powerful secret societies operating today, and we don't really know or understand them. And the conspiracy theories in spirit might have something to them but are actually factually not correct. So an effective, powerful secret society or intelligence agency is not going to let you know anything that it doesn't want you to know, right?

Rick Spence

They'll probably mislead you if you get too close. So I think the question is what's the most powerful or important secret society? Probably the one you don't know about, one that doesn't advertise its existence, the one which is never known anywhere under its real name.

You've got things like the Bohemian Club, you've got the Bilderbergers, which is another formed in the 1950s, largely the creation of a guy by the name of Josef Retinger, Polish, mysterious, appears out of who knows where, a schemer for years, a man expelled from Britain, France and the United States at one point or another, long active in the Mexican labor movement. Retinger is a mysterious figure. In fact, I think there was even a book written about him called *Eminence Grise*, *Grey Eminence*. The fellow who was the front man for the Bilderbergers was Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, who was at one point a Nazi and then a Dutch freedom fighter. All right, take your pick. But Retinger is the moving hand behind the whole thing, and I'll be damned if I can figure out who Retinger is. So the idea is that, well, you get like influential people in media, business, politics, and you bring them together just to talk, to try to find common answers or common questions. It's all very much sort of Western Anglo-European. It's all very closely sort of connected to NATO, the whole concept of a kind of Atlanticist world, which is essentially the Anglo-American combine combined with Western Europe. But you got a bunch of these things. I mean, the Council on Foreign Relations is very similar to that and the Bilderbergers, and there's an overlap with the Bohemian Club. And then you've got the Pinay Cercle or Le Cercle, which is more military, but also linked to the so-called secret Gladio. The idea of the Soviets over around Western Europe, there would be a stay behind organization called Gladio. There'd be these freedom fighters. So the question I have about that is that how many secret organizations do you need? I mean, why all these separate groups which often seem to have the same people into them?

Lex Fridman

Yeah. The closer I look, the more I wonder the same question we asked about the Russian intelligence agencies is where's the center of power? It seems to be very hard to figure out. Does the secrecy scare you?

Rick Spence

Well, I guess on one level I'm comforted that there's somebody actually making decisions as opposed to, I mean, what do you want? Do you want chaos or do you want everything kind of rigidly controlled? And I don't put much stock in the idea that there actually is some small group of people running everything, because if they were, it would operate more efficiently. I do think that there are various disparate groups of people who think that they're running things or try to, and that's what concerns me more than anything else. Well, I hate to go back to them again because what you're bringing up, you go back to the Nazis. They had their whole idea about a new world order, and they only had 12 years to do it. And look what a mess they made. I mean, look at the damage, the physical damage that can be done by an idea inspiring a relatively small group of people controlling a nation based upon some sort of racial or ideological fantasy that has no real basis in reality and yet guides their actions. It's this differentiation that I always make. And I would try to get across to students between always be clear about what you know and what you believe. You don't know many things. You know your name, you know when you were born, you probably know who your father is, but

that's not absolute unless you've had a DNA test and only if you trust DNA tests. So you know who your mother is. You believe this man is your father. Why? Because your mother told you he was. So you believe things generally because someone has told you this is to be true, but you don't really know for sure. Well, because we know so little, we tend to go by beliefs. So we believe in this. We believe in that. You believe that your cult leader is the answer to everything. And it seems to be very, very easy to get people to believe things. And then what happens is that whether or not those beliefs have any real basis in reality, they begin to influence your actions. So here again, regrettably in some ways to bring it back to the Nazis, what were the Nazis convinced of? They were convinced that Jews were basically evil aliens. That's what it comes down to. They weren't really humans. There's some sort of evil contamination which we must eradicate. And they set out to do that.

Lex Fridman

And they were sure that there's just a few problems that can be solved. And once you solve them that you have this beautiful utopia where everything would be just perfect, it'd be great, and we can just get there. And I think it's really strong belief in a global utopia. It just never goes right. It seems like impossible to know the truth in it.

Rick Spence

For some reason, not long ago, I was listening on YouTube to old Wobbly songs, the Workers of the World. I don't know why. I know there was a whole album of Wobbly songs, and there was one of them called Commonwealth of Toil. And like most of them, they're sort of taken from gospel songs. And it's talking about in the future how wonderful everything will be in the Commonwealth of Toil that will be. And now these are revolutionary leftists, in this case, Wobblies. But nonetheless, it's like a prayer for communism everything. Now in the future, everything will be good because the earth will be shared by the toilers. And from each abilities and to each according to his need. And it's this kind of sweet little song in some way. But I'm just sort of imagining this. If I was going to stage that, I'd have this choir of children singing it with a huge hammer and sickle behind them because that's what it's combining. And you can think that the sentiments that express in that song, which are legitimate in some way of all the horrors that then leads to.

Lex Fridman

It is fascinating about humans. A beautiful idea on paper, an innocent little idea about a utopian future can lead to so much suffering and so much destruction and the unintended consequences you see described.

Rick Spence

The law of unintended consequences.

Lex Fridman

And we learn from it. I mean, that's why history is important. We learn from it hopefully.

Rick Spence

Do we?

Lex Fridman

Slowly or slow learn.

Rick Spence

I'm unconvinced of that, but perhaps.

Lex Fridman

Speaking of unconvinced, what gives you hope? If human beings are still here, maybe expanding out into the cosmos 1000, 5,000, 10,000 years from now, what gives you hope about that future, about even being a possible future about it happening?

Rick Spence

Most people are cooperative and kind most of the time. And that's one of those things that can usually be depended upon. And usually you'll get back to what you put into it. Another thing that I have a weird fascination of watching are people who have meltdowns on airplanes because it's just bizarre.

Lex Fridman

That's fascinating to watch.

Rick Spence

The people who will, there's some sort of psychotic break that occurs, and it's always going to end the same way. The cops are going to come on and drag you off the plane. Now. True, and you're going to inconvenience everybody there. And usually at some point, they don't care about that. That's the one little sense of power that they have. So they have some sort of sense of powerlessness. And if their only way of power is just to piss off everybody else on that plane, they're going to go ahead and do it even though it's going to lead nowhere for them.

Lex Fridman

And there's similar sometimes psychological behavior in traffic.

Rick Spence

Well, the road rage thing.

Lex Fridman

The road rage, yeah. It's fascinating.

Rick Spence

And I bet that most, there again, those are all people who up to some point were cooperative and kind and polite, and then they snap. So those are all part of the human makeup as well.

Lex Fridman

But also part of the human makeup, difference between humans and chimps is the ability to get together, cooperate on a mass scale over an idea, create things like the Roman Empire did. Laws that prevent us and protect us from crazy human behavior, manifestations of a man, some type of human.

Rick Spence

Well, human beings are just weird animals all year round. It's just completely peculiar. I'm not sure that we're all together natural.

Lex Fridman

But I think we are all together beautiful. There is something magical about humans, and I hope humans stay here even as we get advanced robots walking around everywhere. More and more intelligent robots that claim to have consciousness, that claim they love you, that increasingly take over our world. I hope this magical things that makes us human still persists.

Rick Spence

Well, let us hope so.

Lex Fridman

Rick, you're an incredible person. You have so much fascinating work, and it's really an awesome.

Rick Spence

I've never had anybody ask me as many interesting questions as you have.

Lex Fridman

Thank you so much.

Rick Spence

Or as many questions.

Lex Fridman

This was so fun. Thank you so much for talking today.

Rick Spence

Well, thank you.

Lex Fridman

Thanks for listening to this conversation with Rick Spence. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, let me leave you words from John F. Kennedy. "The very word secrecy is repugnant in a free and open society. And we are as a people, inherently and historically opposed to secret societies, to secret oaths, and to secret proceedings. We decided long ago that the dangers of excessive and unwarranted concealment of pertinent facts far outweighed the dangers which are cited to justify it." Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.