

# Conspiracy theories and conspiracy facts

## *THEY KNEW*

*How a Culture of Conspiracy keeps America Complacent*

Sarah Kendzior

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## **John Newsinger**

**S**arah Kendzior is one of the most interesting commentators writing about contemporary America. Her two previous books, *The View from Flyover Country* (2018) and *Hiding in Plain Sight* (2020), are essential reading for anyone interested in understanding developments in the United States and *THEY KNEW* now joins the list. The book was written in response to the Covid pandemic, and the internet conspiracy theories it generated – but it goes way beyond that. She tries to understand the widespread conspiratorial response to the pandemic in the US, especially in Missouri where she lives, putting it down to ‘an epidemic of disillusionment and distrust so vast it stretches into paralysis’. (p. 16) The pandemic both ‘revealed actual conspiracies by malicious actors’ and, at the same time, encouraged the embrace of ‘conspiracy theories by a frightened population bereft of reliable data’. These internet conspiracy theories were ‘weaponized by propagandists’ and used to accelerate the country’s ‘push from a deeply flawed democracy into a mafia-state autocracy’. (p. 22)

She distinguishes between conspiracies that are real, having actually taken place – what she calls ‘conspiracy facts’ – and conspiracy theories, that in many ways serve to distract from, and cover-up, what is actually going on. As she points out:

Watergate, Iran-Contra, the CIA’s MKUltra mind control experiments, the aborted 1960s false flag Operation Northwoods and other US government plots were all, at some point, labeled wild conspiracy theories – until they were investigated and proven real. Many examples of systemic sexual abuse by the wealthy – Harvey Weinstein’s use of the Israeli mercenary spy group Black Cube to track and silence dozens of Hollywood actresses he assaulted while countless witnesses stayed silent, for example – sounded unbelievable until painstakingly revealed as true. (p. 31)

And, of course, there was the Iran-Contra scandal that was dismissed as a wild conspiracy theory with the journalist who uncovered the crime, Robert Parry, finding it increasingly difficult to get what he had discovered published. Parry later complained of how the 'media and government elites in the 1980s – and in the decades that followed – prevented dark truths from being told'. (p. 53)

Kendzior, who sees her job as investigating 'the conspiracies of the powerful', has earned her denunciation as a CIA agent, an agent of the Kremlin, a member of Hamas, of the Yakuza, of the IRA and of Al Qaeda. She has even been accused of being 'an undercover espionage agent with [her] partner, Beyonce Knowles', protecting the real Tupac Shakur, who is not dead but working for Vladimir Putin. Most hilariously, she has been accused of being the leader of various cults – including the Blue Oyster Cult, actually an 80s rock band – which as she says, would be 'a vastly superior career move'. (p. 37) And, along with all this, have come the inevitable threats to herself and her family.

Chapter 3 of *THEY KNOW*, 'Epstein Wasn't The First', was of particular interest to this reader. Here she looks at how, back in 2017 – while she was investigating Jeffrey Epstein, his activities and those who protected him – she came across the case of Craig Spence, who was previously unknown to her. However, back in the 1980s, Spence – who claimed links with the CIA – was exposed as a blackmailer, organising parties for important people where they were supplied with drugs and prostitutes, including trafficked children. One of his associates, Lawrence King, a rising figure in Reagan's Republican Party, was also involved. The little media attention that there was quickly died down after Spence very conveniently committed suicide on 10 November 1989. Additionally, Gary Caradori, an investigator looking into King's criminal activities, also very conveniently died when his private plane crashed on 11 July 1990. As Kendzior points out, the Discovery Channel was about to air a documentary on the King case, but it was pulled. (We now know it included testimony from 'several Nebraska state politicians as well as alleged victims of the operation (who) said they had been threatened with violence for discussing the case and labelled conspiracy theorists and liars'.) Days after Caradori's death, King was acquitted of sexual abuse, but found guilty of a massive financial fraud. One of those who accused King of sexual abuse, Alisha Owen, was later found guilty of perjury and sentenced to 9 to 15 years in prison, serving four and a half years!

Kendzior goes on to note that both Spence and King were well-known in Republican circles. The guests at Spence's parties including the likes of William Casey, the CIA Director from 1981 until 1987, and Joseph diGenova, 'a US Attorney for the Reagan administration' who 'would go on – with his wife,

Reagan deputy assistant Attorney General Victoria Toensing – to work with mafia-affiliated oligarchs and serve as Donald Trump’s legal adviser in both of his impeachment trials’. Spence was apparently also ‘a good friend of Roy Cohn’, Trump’s mentor in his early years. Cohn was intimate with both the mafia and senior Republican Party members and was believed to operate his own blackmail scam. He provided trafficked children for ‘powerful officials’, filmed the abuse and blackmailed them. One of those who ‘may have been ensnared... was FBI head J. Edgar Hoover’. (pp. 50-51) What amazes Kendzior is that at the time all this was coming out, most of the media was totally uninterested and, within days of Spence’s supposed suicide, all investigation into his activities was closed down. As she observes:

The life and death of Craig Spence was disappeared through a near-uniform media and political blackout. There were no mainstream books, few follow-up articles and no congressional hearings [. . .] Spence is a ghost of history, a spectre at the edges of a storm.

She notes the parallels with Epstein’s career but observes that, whereas at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s the scandal was dealt with by means of effectively burying the crime, today ‘they do it with noise’. (p. 56)

What about Epstein? By the end of the first decade of this century, it was well-known that Epstein was ‘a pedophile rapist and trafficker’. As early as 2008, over forty women had come forward ‘claiming that they were part of an international underage sex crime ring to service the wealthy and the powerful’. Epstein did a plea deal and received an eighteen month sentence but, of course, never actually served a day in prison. It was the US Attorney Alex Acosta who negotiated the Epstein deal – a process that only involved his lawyers (one of whom was Alan Dershowitz) but also the FBI (then headed by Robert Mueller). Acosta later said that he had been informed by intelligence sources that Epstein was an asset and to go easy on him. Acosta went on to serve in the Trump administration as Secretary of Labor. Not only were Epstein’s victims shamefully betrayed, but he was left free to traffick and rape many more young women and girls.

None of this seems to have concerned his important and powerful friends in the slightest. More surprising is that the media were remarkably uninterested in the scandal that continued to unfold before them. One organisation which did show an interest, the Gawker website, published Epstein’s black book in January 2015 and was subsequently ‘sued out of existence by right-wing tech billionaire Peter Thiel’. Indeed, it was not until November 2018 that the *Miami Herald* finally published Julie Brown’s investigation into the man’s activities. Epstein was arrested on 6 July 2019 and conveniently hanged himself in prison

on 9 August, cunningly choosing a time when prison cameras were not working and the guards were asleep, such was his determination not to implicate others. Or perhaps he was overcome with guilt. And if you believe that . . . .

What followed was a veritable 'blitzkrieg' of stories, but these have distracted attention from an important fact. Official enquiries into the activities, over many years, of a paedophile rapist and child trafficker have ceased. It also seems that there will be no enquiry into which important people were taking part in Epstein's rapist escapades, nor into who has been involved in covering it all up. The only one of his accomplices to pay a price is Ghislaine Maxwell. This refusal to investigate a known child trafficker who was a good friend to extremely important people was, as Kendzior insists, a 'bipartisan endeavor', protecting both Democrats and Republicans. (pp. 57-61) It is worth noticing here that one of those accused of taking advantage of Epstein's generosity, in order to rape a thirteen year old girl, was Donald Trump who, the victim claimed, 'threatened to murder her and her family if she told anyone'. When the allegation first came to light, the press 'generally refused to report on the case'. Indeed 'lawyers commented on the near uniform reticence of journalists and officials to explore whether the allegation was true'. Later, in October 2016, after Trump had publicly bragged about sexually assaulting women, the victim decided to hold a press conference and tell her story, but both she and her lawyer 'were threatened with murder, and they called it off'. (p. 78)

And, while this real episode of paedophile rape and underage sex trafficking was taking place, the story being pushed by unofficial Republican sources was that Hillary Clinton was operating a paedophile ring, raping, murdering and eating children as part of a Satanic conspiracy to bring down America. The result was 'Pizzagate'! This is an example of what Kendzior calls 'preemptive narrative inversion', a strategy that was to reach its peak with QAnon. In her words, QAnon provides the plutocrats with an 'alibi', effectively redirecting 'anyone appalled by evidence of elite criminal impunity into a movement that promoted Trump'. (pp. 89, 96)

Kendzior has written a tremendous book that sometimes left this reader gasping: for example, Roy Cohn introducing Rupert Murdoch to Ronald Reagan in January 1993; and the murder/suicide of Danny Casolaro while he was working on his book *The Octopus* and was due to meet an important source in August 1991. The book was intended to expose 'a vast transnational network of corruption stretching from the DOJ to the CIA to the FBI to numerous private law and technology firms around the world'. And then there is our very own Robert Maxwell selling 'compromised computer software produced by the American technology firm Inslaw' to the US government. After Maxwell's murder/suicide in November 1991, his daughters Christine and Isabel took over,

presumably because Ghislaine was busy elsewhere. (pp. 120, 175-176) As far as Kendzior is concerned, 'the Octopus' that Casolaro was investigating when he died, the global kleptocracy with all its tentacles, was a conspiracy fact, not a conspiracy theory, and it dominates our world. Understandably she is pessimistic about the USA's chances of survival, seeing the country as on the road to autocracy and even 'forced dissolution . . . into multiple mafia states'. And then there is the coming climate catastrophe. (p. 158)

There is one important factor missing from her assessment, however. and This is the fact that the American ruling class is divided – that most of its members still support US globalism rather than the isolationism advocated by Trump and some of his followers. She can explain why 6 January happened, but does not explain why it failed, why Joe Biden went on to become President instead of the wholly corrupt and incompetent Trump. The corruption she relentlessly catalogues is, of course, everywhere, including Britain. But the global kleptocracy is bitterly divided – something that is brutally demonstrated by the fact that we are living through a period of wars. Nevertheless, this is an essential book and we must all hope that Sarah Kendzior stays safe.

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His latest book is *Chosen by God:*

*Donald Trump, the Christian Right and American Capitalism,*  
published by Bookmarks. <<https://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk/>>