

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:00 Today's episode of Hidden Forces is made possible by listeners like you. For more information about this week's episode or for easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io and subscribe to our free email list. If you're listening to the show on your Apple Podcast app, remember you can give us a review. Each review helps more people find the show and join our amazing community. With that, please enjoy this week's episode.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:47 What's up, everybody? I am very excited to share this week's episode with all of you. My guest, Matt Taibbi, truly needs no introduction. He is someone whose work I've long admired and whose polemical but also highly illustrative and expository commentary has had an important influence on my own development as a writer. His contribution to the public debate during the 2008 financial crisis cannot be understated.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:18 He served as an interpreter for what was, in his own words, "a crime story that most people mistakenly thought of as an economic story." His attacks on those he identified as being chiefly responsible for the crisis were relentless. In a media environment tenanted and owned by government apologists and banking sycophants, they were noticeably ruthless and unforgiving.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:44 In an article he penned in the spring of 2010 titled "The Great American Bubble Machine," Taibbi referred to the invest bank Goldman Sachs as a "great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money". Fortunately for Goldman, Matt has since turned his attention towards the media itself, embarking on an ambitious project to update Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's Manufacturing Consent for the 21st century, as a serialized book that he's been releasing through Sub-stack.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:22 The majority of this conversation deals with the subject of that book, which is a sort of operational manual for those looking to understand how journalists and the media shape social reality. When Manufacturing Consent was first published in 1988, the media landscape was still largely dominated by print and broadcast television. We've gone through two major technological disruptions since, first with cable and now with the internet. I wanted to use this opportunity with Matt to discuss how these changes have altered the traditional pathways through which governments and big business try to shape and control public opinion.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:03:06 Finally, for those of you who are subscribers to our overtime segments, Matt and I discuss the circus that is the media's political coverage, including some amazing stories from his time on the 2016 campaign trail, as well as a scathing critique of his old buddies at Goldman, who are back in the news over their role in a scheme to defraud the Malaysian government and its citizens of billions of dollars through the use of a state-owned investment fund known as 1MDB.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:03:39 If you want access to that conversation, as well as a transcript of the full episode along with this week's 14-page rundown, which includes an updated outline of the propaganda model and a timeline of important events in the evolution of the news business, with charts and links to material reference during my two-hour long recording with Matt, head over to hiddenforces.io or subscribe directly through our Patreon page at patreon.com/hiddenforces.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:04:11 With that, let's get right into my conversation with Matt Taibbi.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:04:19 Matt Taibbi, welcome to Hidden Forces.

Matt Taibbi: 00:04:21 Thank you for having me on.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:04:22 I've wanted to have you on my program for a very long time. The podcast has only been around for two years, but I used to have a television show, and I had desperately wanted you on back then.

Matt Taibbi: 00:04:31 Really?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:04:31 I'm sure I had reached out to you. But, as I said, this was a period where you were a financial rock star. You were writing the most vicious, cutting-edge critiques, particularly of Goldman. You had the famous vampire squid.

Matt Taibbi: 00:04:47 Vampire squid. Yeah, that's going to be on my gravestone, unfortunately.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:04:51 Unfortunately? I will get into this a little bit later because I want to start with your book, Hate, INC., and the propaganda model and Manufacturing Consent, Herman and Chomsky, etc. But...what was that like?

Matt Taibbi: 00:05:02 It was very strange. It was totally accidental. I was covering the presidential campaign in '08. I was on the road with Obama, and McCain, too, to a lesser degree. As the campaign was winding

up, or winding down, my editors assigned me a story about the causes of AIG's collapse. They basically wanted me to do one hit on what happened in the crisis. The idea was basically to do a story that stoned college kids could understand about what caused the financial crisis.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:35 We're talking about, like, October here, before the election?
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:05:38 Yeah, it was just before the election.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:40 When McCain had already gone to Washington in a panic.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:05:42 Yeah, exactly, because I already had this really weird experience of being at the Republican Convention in the middle of AIG's collapse. I think it was AIG. No, it was Lehman's collapse.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:52 Lehman's collapse.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:05:52 And nobody in the press core knew anything about what had caused it. I was polling everybody in the room, like, "Does anybody have a clue about what any of this stuff is?"
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:59 None of the political reporters knew.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:06:00 No. We're talking about the cream of the political crop. These are the top reporters in the country. Not one person could write a sentence that was coherent about what had happened.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:06:10 Fascinating.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:06:10 I was interested in that. Because I didn't want to be ignorant in writing about the crash while I was covering the campaign, I started calling people up before I got assigned that stuff. Then after the election, basically, they put me on that story. I did one story about it, and what we found out is that nobody had ever tried to translate how Wall Street works for ordinary audiences. There isn't a book like that. I mean Liar's Poker is a good book for people.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:06:40 Michael Lewis.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:06:41 By Michael Lewis. But on an ordinary day-to-day basis, the financial crisis is for people in the business. We got such a response from it that I ended up on that beat for eight years after that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:53 AIG was an interesting one because Lehman was popularized, AIG just died, like literally just died and they just resurrected it as a dead body. A carcass that they just used to funnel money basically out on the insurance contracts and make sense of the mess that primarily Joe Cassano's unit created over at AIG FP, right?

Matt Taibbi: 00:07:12 Yeah. It's like three people in London basically destroyed the universe.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:16 And he got all those bonuses paid out because he was integral to figure out what happened.

Matt Taibbi: 00:07:21 Right. He didn't have to repay anything. He's still living in this massive townhouse. He made something like \$200 million over the course of ... He was selling credit default swaps to everybody on the street and was basically Wall Street's bookie at that time. Everybody was buying swaps against subprime mortgage deals.

Matt Taibbi: 00:07:40 AIG basically, their senior leadership, they're all insurance people, they're not financial people. They didn't really understand a lot of the derivative products that Cassano was making. When all these other companies started asking for collateral calls like Goldman, they didn't understand what's going on. The senior leadership didn't understand that they owed all this money, and so AIG went into collapse. The whole purpose of the AIG bailout was to bailout their customers and counterparties.

Matt Taibbi: 00:08:10 That was all really interesting. That took me forever to figure it out. But what was so fascinating about it is that just no one has really ever done that kind of work before, and it was a bizarre experience.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:20 I feel like one of the challenges ... And then we'll get into it later because, like I said, I want to start off with your book. But I feel like one of the challenges would also be, and this just struck me now, it's hard to know what to write this as. Is it a comedy or is it a tragedy? It feels like it's just in limbo between those two in this Neverland.

Matt Taibbi: 00:08:39 Yeah. Well, the whole question of approach was so central to that story because I was really, really struggling in the beginning because I didn't particularly know a whole lot about economics. I didn't study it in college.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:50 That helped you.

Matt Taibbi: 00:08:51 Yeah, it did actually ended up helping because I think there's a point of view issue with this story that comes into play for a lot of reporters. Finally, I ended up talking to a guy who used to work for Credit Suisse. He sat me down and he said, "Your problem is you're trying to understand this isn't an economic story, it's a crime story. When you get that it's a crime story, it'll make more sense to you."

Matt Taibbi: 00:09:12 That actually turns out to be the case because what you find out is that most of this was about they were making a lot of easy money basically selling really bad mortgages to institutional customers that didn't know what they were buying. That's really all it was. Once you got through that, it was really like a black comedy basically, and just a whole bunch of shysters who ... And they're entertainingly loathsome people, too. That was another aspect to the story.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:41 Yeah. We'll get into it because I also want to maybe bring that up-to-date a little bit also.

Matt Taibbi: 00:09:45 Sure.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:45 But speaking of bringing up-to-date, what you have done with your book, Hate, INC., which you'll have to describe to me and to our audience exactly what genre this falls into, because you're writing it in real time and you're releasing chapter-by-chapter. I've read what will end up being what percentage of the book?

Matt Taibbi: 00:10:04 Probably 90%.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:10:05 Okay. I'm pretty close. The book is, as I understand it, an update to Manufacturing Consent, which is a book written by Herman and Chomsky back in 1988. Most people think of it as Chomsky's book.

Matt Taibbi: 00:10:18 Right. It was actually Herman's idea.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:10:19 Herman. That's the thing I did not realize until you interviewed Noam Chomsky. Noam Chomsky, of course, is the famous linguist from MIT, also a very prolific writer and a prolific thinker. You have this amazing quote in your ... I don't know if I've got it here somewhere. Oh, here it is. I've got to say this. This felt so much like Noam Chomsky. You wrote that, "He has a deadpan, dry sense of humor. If you asked him to sum up all of

human history, and now that I think about it, I should have done this, he would probably say something like, 'Unsurprisingly horrible.'" That is him

- Matt Taibbi:** 00:10:58 Yeah, he's very concise and he does have a sense of humor. He's often mistaken for being somebody who's completely humorless, but actually, like a lot of people who put on that front, I'll put Bill Belichick in this category, too-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:13 That's right.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:11:13 ... like there's just enough there that if you are paying attention, he's actually quite funny.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:18 He's dry, he's monotone, but there is this sort of unrelenting honesty.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:11:24 Yeah, with a tinge of absurdity, too.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:26 Yeah. But that brings us back to this problem of how do you write about this in-between tragedy and comedy, what is it? So much of what he writes about deals with that. Yeah, this is an update to *Manufactured Consent*, which you read when you were in college or shortly out of college you said.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:11:41 I was in college. I was probably 18 or 19, right when the book came out.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:46 Right before.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:11:46 So '88, '89.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:48 Right before the Berlin Wall fell and after which you went to-
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:11:51 Russia.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:51 To Russia, which is very interesting. Maybe we can talk about that as well. I read the second version, the updated edition, when I was I think in my last year in college. I also found it profound for many of the reasons that you laid out. I would love for you to maybe start. Why did you want to write this sort of a book that's an update of *Manufactured Consent*? What did you feel needed to be updated?
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:12:15 Well, first of all, I should back up. The media is so central to my life. My father's a reporter. I grew up in a family of reporters. Everybody I knew growing up was in the press. I'd been very

sensitive over the years to how the business has evolved and changed. One of the reasons that Manufacturing Consent was such a big deal for me was that it completely changed how I looked at something that I actually hadn't been paying a lot of attention to my whole life. I mean I went to work with my father from the time I was four years old.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:12:47 You were inside of television broadcast studios and news studios in the early '70s.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:12:51 Yeah. Oh, yeah. My childhood, I say this in the book, was a lot like the movie Anchorman. My dad was one of those guys. He had big mutton chops and he was on TV. But Manufacturing Consent is a really eye-opening book about how we don't have direct censorship in America. There's no political commissar who comes in and red-pencils your copy when you submit it, but there is propaganda, and it's almost all unconscious and it's bureaucratic.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:13:18 What it does is you're artificially narrowing the polls of opinion by carefully monitoring who gets promoted and what kind of material gets on air and does not. As a result, people only see a range of opinion on the big broadcast networks and in the newspapers. That was really eye-opening to me. Because I watch reporters work, I know that they're, for the most part, very honest and diligent and they really care about their jobs. The issue is which reporters get the most space, who's getting assigned to cover what, how big the headline is for X story versus Y story.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:13:53 All of those editorial decisions are the ones that are important, and I just had never paid attention to that before. It was fascinating and that's why I wanted to revisit it because, among other things, the business has changed so much since they wrote that book, mainly because of the internet but because of some other things as well.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:10 He had five filters to his propaganda model, I believe, if I remember correctly. I look back at them, some of those don't seem to have materially changed.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:14:20 Right, right. Some of them have.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:22 But the media is still private. That was one of the filters, that the size and ownership and the fact that it's private.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:14:26 Yeah, exactly.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:28 If anything, those forces have become, I think-

Matt Taibbi: 00:14:30 More concentrated.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:31 ... more concentrated and also there's no longer a taboo in the United States around media news as a source of profit-making, as there used to be perhaps.

Matt Taibbi: 00:14:41 Absolutely. That is a big change. That's a huge change. That's one of the reasons why I wanted to write the book actually, because when he wrote Manufacturing Consent, the profit motive was far more concealed than in the background of big media. There was actually a taboo in the business about even interacting with salespeople. You hear all these stories about the New Yorker, for instance, down the street. There was a legendary tale that almost every reporter's heard that if you were in the sales force, you weren't even allowed on the editorial floor. I can confirm that. You never saw advertising people in the '70s and '80s.

Matt Taibbi: 00:15:17 But then suddenly, with the advent of the 24-hour news cycle and Fox and all these channels, suddenly it became a thing that was totally normal to trying to make money with news. That radically changed everything about reporting because, in the old days, the idea was we told the truth in so far as we understood it, and it was okay if we lost money, because the whole idea behind the original Telecommunications Act or the Communications Act of 1934 was that you lease the public airwaves in exchange for providing a public service. That's all out the window now. That's another big change.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:15:58 CNN was founded, I think, in 1980, correct?

Matt Taibbi: 00:16:01 Right, yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:02 But the doors didn't really fling open until the late '80s, pretty much after Noam Chomsky wrote his book.

Matt Taibbi: 00:16:08 Right, yeah. Exactly.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:09 A lot of that had to do also with some of the deregulation that happened in the telecommunications industry.

Matt Taibbi: 00:16:14 Yeah, there was deregulatory act in 1996, too, that Clinton passed that massively opened the doors for companies to buy each other up. We went from having 35 major media companies in the country to six or something like that.

Matt Taibbi: 00:16:28 But the CNN innovation was really important because what they originally did was basically one broadcast that they repeated 24 times or they repeated 12 times. It wasn't traditionally what we would think of as 24-hour news cycle today. What they ended up doing is they ended up realizing that we can make a lot more money if we emphasize the immediacy of what we're doing, like if we change things constantly.

Matt Taibbi: 00:16:57 The best way to do that, they obviously had to radically change what kind of material they covered because you can't have enough people to script 24 hours of content every day. They started looking for stories that had visual elements or breaking element, so like baby down a well, the cursed disaster or something like-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:16 Does babies even fall down wells anymore?

Matt Taibbi: 00:17:19 I don't know.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:19 That used to be a thing.

Matt Taibbi: 00:17:19 That used to be a thing all the time, you know, one-day massacres.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:21 Now it's a dog because we care more about animals than humans now.

Matt Taibbi: 00:17:25 Right, exactly. Beached whale, are we going to get it back in the water before it dies, that kind of thing. Those were all great news stories. Then they figured out that all of that stuff cost money still. You still had to send a crew out. Even if you're renting it from AP TV or something like that, it still has production value.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:44 The production overhead was tremendous back then. It's much less today. It's expensive for legacy companies, but if we're just strictly talking about the production cost of doing competitive type media today, they've dropped tremendously.

Matt Taibbi: 00:17:57 Oh, yeah, to the floor. You're not hiring union labor to do it all the time and all the technology, obviously, has made it considerably easier than it used to be. You used to have to have a satellite truck everywhere you went. Now the internet's everywhere. It's all different.

Matt Taibbi: 00:18:13 But they figured out that if you don't have an action story that you can put on air, the next best thing is just to have two idiots

on TV arguing with each other, and arguing is a form of action. That became really the template for a lot of modern media, was this Crossfire thing.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:28 It was Crossfire that started that. When did Crossfire begin?
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:18:31 In the mid-'80s. It was probably CNN's answer to a PBS show, The McLaughlin Group.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:37 Which is still on PBS, isn't it?
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:18:38 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:39 Pat Buchanan is on that.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:18:40 Yeah, exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:43 I've seen him on it.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:18:44 Wow!
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:44 I've seen him on it.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:18:45 He's still around. He's like a living fossil or something like that.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:49 He's still around. He's still around.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:18:50 Yeah, yeah. Crossfire was the original template, and it was such a successful show because it allowed TV basically to cover the news like sports. It was one side and another side. We're going to declare a winner at the end and you're going to root for your side. You can never ever have the two people come to an accommodation. They're always fighting. Until next time, when we start fighting again.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:19:13 We trained the audience to think of politics in that way. That became, I think, a lot of the template for what's going on now where it's so tribal in the way we cover politics. That was another thing I wanted to get at.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:19:26 Yeah. That's interesting. This concept of framing, that it's binary. I think you called it Boolean politics.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:19:26 Right, yeah. Exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:19:35 It's binary, there are two sides, and it's not a conversation, it's an argument. That's important because you're coming in as the

audience and you're primed, you're expecting something, and they simply deliver it for you time and time again. I mean Crossfire was a very particular type of show, but CNN as a brand still carried that spirit of objectivity. It's not like it is today, but it was very much indistinguishable in terms of its objectivity from the networks at the time, right?

- Matt Taibbi:** 00:20:02 Right, or even the language that you would read on the front page of the New York Times or the Boston Globe. The emotional attitude of it was distant, flat.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:20:14 They had the news voice.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:20:15 The news voice. There was this lobotomized, emotional slant when you're delivering the information. The idea there ... And this is a commercial strategy. It had nothing to do with ethics. The whole idea was over decades, they had discovered that the best way to get the widest possible audience was to not have a lot of inflection when you're delivering stories. You didn't tip off the audience how you felt about things. That was important.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:20:40 Because you couldn't segment the distribution.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:20:40 Exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:20:45 It was a broadcast system. You were catching everyone's ... The best way to maximize your viewership was to appeal to as many people as possible.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:20:52 Exactly, exactly. You never could tip your hand. You try to stay right down the middle of the road when you chose stories. This was formalized, of course, through things like the fairness standard, where you would literally quote one side and then the other, or you would do one story that maybe lean conservative and another story that would lean liberal. They tried constantly to fill the newscast, especially at the local level, with nonpolitical stories, so lots of cats and trees, lot of weather.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:21:24 There was a moment in the history of media where everybody used to joke in the local affiliates that the highest paid reporter in every city was a helicopter because that's what everybody was spending money on. You would have seven minutes of weather on a 23-minute broadcast.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:21:39 Nowadays, you would never do that. Now it's all like this full, this politically charged rhetorical discourse. They do that intentionally because we're geeking up the audience with

emotion, and we want them to stay that way until they tune in the next time, which could be in 10 minutes, too. People are watching all day long.

- Matt Taibbi:** 00:22:00 It's a major departure from what it used to be. We used to tell audiences to calm down and not worry. Then with the advent of Crossfire, we started this journey towards winding people up for money. That's where the business started to head.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:14 What's interesting, when I've looked back and thought about this ... Because I have also on my own. I've spent some time over the years just thinking about it, naturally, being in this business also. The way I see it, CNN's innovation was ... I mean they were all, of course, innovations that were made possible because of technological changes and regulatory changes. Cable was what they piggy-backed off of. But as you said, CNN, also there was volume. They started off, okay, it was one show, but they repeated it. The point is they gave you more.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:44 What I think the next innovation was, it was the same technology with cable, but what Fox did was they gave you something different. They changed the editorial. That was the great insight of Roger Ailes. By the way, you mentioned 1996, what was it? The Telecommunications Act of 1996. That was two years after the Republican Revolution in Congress with Gingrich.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:23:03 Yeah, the contract of America and all that.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:05 It was the same year that Roger Ailes got hired by Rupert Murdoch to go to Fox and to build Fox News Channel. All this is happening right at the same time.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:23:15 Yeah. That's a fascinating theory because if you look back at Fox broadcast from that time, it's almost like the larval form of Fox. You can see the look, but they didn't quite have the take yet. I talked to some people who worked at Fox stations, the reporters. The women there had to put shoulder pads in their blouses. They had these huge chandelier earrings and a blown out hair and all that stuff. It looked trashy, but they didn't have the political slant yet. Ailes, when he first came on, he vaguely had this idea that he wanted to dumb down the whole thing. But they didn't go for the outright demographic stroking until later.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:53 Before you continue, tell our audience, for those who don't know, tell them a little bit about who Roger Ailes is, because

most people have no clue what his background was. They don't understand his background, both in television as well as his background in politics as a political operative.

- Matt Taibbi:** 00:24:08 Yeah. He worked for the Mike Douglas Show.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:24:11 Mike Douglas Show.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:24:11 But he had a background also as a political speech writer.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:24:13 He helped Nixon. He met Nixon on the Mike Douglas Show.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:24:16 Yeah, exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:24:17 Then later coached him through, I think, the '68 convention.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:24:21 Convention. Yeah, yeah, exactly. He was one of the first people who really understood that politics in the television is going to be dramatically different than it had been before. The image was going to be more important than the "ground game" and all that. He was in-tune with the audience the same way that Nixon was in-tune with what they identified as the silent majority. They realized that, the way that Joe McGinnis, the writer, described it, was Nixon was the president of every place that didn't have a bookstore.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:24:49 Roger Ailes understood that audience. He understood all those towns between big cities that had a chip on their shoulder about something. He wanted to create a product for those people. He even talked about it when he came onto Fox, that, "My audience is 55 to dead."
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:25:03 55 to dead.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:25:03 Yeah. "We're going to create a product for them." It was pretty clear what they ended up doing. They didn't really take off until the Monica Lewinsky scandal.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:25:13 And the 9/11 attacks.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:25:14 And the 9/11 attack. But the Lewinsky thing was really key for them because the other networks were also trying to make a reality show out of that drama, but Fox was the first network to take sides. If you look back, it's interesting. MSNBC made the initial major editorial decision to blow maybe out of proportion a story that essentially ... Well, at the time it was a non-story. I

think if you're looking back, probably there was more to it that they ignored.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:25:46 In the context of today's conversation around Me Too-
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:25:46 Yeah, the Me Too.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:25:46 ... and sexual assault and things like this.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:25:48 But Fox went farther. Fox decided that we're going to make our buck-making characters out of Clinton and out of both of the Clintons. They especially loved Hillary. They loved stories about her. They constantly ran the tape of her talking about how she wouldn't bake cookies and everything like that, because they knew that that would tweak out audiences. That was brilliant.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:26:06 What's interesting is I had read ... And you mentioned the neoconservatism in your book. I had read a book, I don't remember what it was that got me down the path of wanting to uncover the history of the neoconservative movement. A few ideologies, ideological movements, think tanks, I don't even know what you would call neoconservatism, but have had a greater impact on American society in a very short period of time in a key way, of course with the Iraq War and its policy foreign policy.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:26:30 I always assumed that neoconservatism was really focused on foreign policy. But when I studied it, I realized that Irving Kristol and his acolytes or his compadres, or whatever you would call them, that they were actually issue-driven, values-driven former Democrats. They moved over to the Republican Party because of McGovern. They felt the party had gone ape shit under McGovern. They moved it into the Democratic Party. Initially, it was a values-driven thing and was part of this values-driven movement. Then, of course, gets us into talk radio and how that also intersected with Fox. It was part of this giant wave, right?
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:27:06 Yeah. There were tapping into a lot of things. There were things going on in the country that there was a kind of Democrat who had supported John F. Kennedy and had been highly aggressive on the foreign policy stage. Kennedy was really into throwing their power internationally. The Vietnam War changed a lot of that. People came back and they had some very different ideas about how America would behave. For the first time, we had public hearings about the behavior of the intelligence community. That had never happened before. They had the Church-Pike hearings in the '70s.

Matt Taibbi: 00:27:40 These neocons were basically disappointed Democrats who crossed the line and hopped on board with the Reagan Revolution, which had really started with Goldwater in '64. They became this very powerful force in media later on, because the problem that they had was that they weren't a very numerous political group. They were upper class Democrats who had a conservative vision and aggressive foreign policy vision. But they had to somehow have a union with people in flyover country, America. That was Fox did. It delivered that gigantic audience into the hands of this new political movement.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:23 They recruited people into their movement like Dick Cheney and like Donald Rumsfeld, who were Republicans.

Matt Taibbi: 00:28:29 Right. Well, they're coming back now. That's what so interesting, is all these neocon voices who ... They were on top of the world in 2003, like David Frum, Bill Kristol, Irving's son.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:39 Bill Kristol, of course.

Matt Taibbi: 00:28:41 Who's the other one I'm thinking of?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:42 Richard Perle.

Matt Taibbi: 00:28:43 Richard Perle. I mean-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:44 Douglas Feith.

Matt Taibbi: 00:28:45 Feith.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:46 Paul Wolfowitz.

Matt Taibbi: 00:28:47 Wolfowitz. Yeah, exactly. But a lot of those people are now reappearing. You'll see them showing up in think tanks like the Atlantic Council. Because of Trump, the merger now is in the other direction. They're merging now with mainstream Democrats. They're going to be back in seats of power again pretty soon, which is interesting.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:06 Well, the Democrats have become very comfortable with war. They were uncomfortable with it during the Bush years, but it seems again like it only takes a matter of time for people to forget or to change their views. I do want to talk to you about foreign policy at some point, because it's an interesting ... It brings us back to something we haven't talked about yet, but I want to talk about, which is worthy versus unworthy victims in foreign policy.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:27 Noam Chomsky famously discussed that in the context of ... Well, one of the examples was Cambodia and East Timor. It's a great example. But before we get to that, I want to go back to the propaganda model, because we were talking about concentration and private ownership.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:41 One of the other filters that Chomsky wrote about was advertising. I thought about that one a bit and I said, "Well, it still is. Of course, we have advertising." But there is a distinction. It used to be that the papers, the press used to be much more vertically integrated. The content creators were also the distributors, were also the auctioneers of the ad space, classifieds and everything else.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:04 That's been broken apart. The seated authority over the platform is like Facebook and Google. How has that changed that filter? Have you thought about that at all?

Matt Taibbi: 00:30:13 I have. This is an area where I disagree a little bit with Chomsky. We had a little discussion about this because it's exactly as you say. Back in the day, especially newspapers, had their own distribution systems. They had built them up over years. They had their own trucks, they had their own paper kids, they had their own distribution points. That was where their power came from.

Matt Taibbi: 00:30:34 If you wanted to put an ad out and try to get an employee and you wanted to reach everybody within a certain metropolitan area, really the only best bet was the local newspaper. You couldn't put that kind of want ad on a television show. There wasn't enough ad time for that kind of thing. The only people who could get that product in everybody's hands was somebody who had that kind of distribution network. When the internet came along, suddenly you've divorced distribution from content-making because the distribution is the phone line or whatever it is, a cable line now.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:10 It's digitized.

Matt Taibbi: 00:31:11 It's digitized. The distributor, in 75% of cases now, is a social media platform. Those people are swallowing up all the ad dollars. There's this huge disconnect between how much power media companies had back in the day versus how much they have now. Now they are really a step removed from the direct power over content. The social media platforms, internet platforms are really the primary powers on the scene at this point.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:41 You talked a little bit about manufacturing hate, but I think this is an interesting thing to observe, which is that when the content creators who are creating the content, which is then being distributed out and which contains the advertisements for the corporations, which are the clients of the papers, when you break those apart, I think that is a contributor toward this feeding of the hate and the outrage cycle, because the auction is separated. The large corporations, let's say, which want social order are not in the same level of position to shape that order.

Matt Taibbi: 00:32:12 No, they're not. They have far less of a say about what the content is going to be. There are two things going on. Number one, they don't even advertise with the media companies anymore, and that's just not the way it works for the most part. If you're a big advertiser, you're not going to go to, let's say, Rolling Stone magazine. You're much more likely to go to Facebook or Google or something.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:32:34 Or if you go to New York Times or something, it's for native advertising.

Matt Taibbi: 00:32:37 Exactly, yeah. It has to be very specified, because the platforms have so much more intelligence and are so much more efficient in terms of being able to get the eyeballs that you want. They have all that intelligence. You're bypassing completely almost the content creators. You don't even bother to influence them.

Matt Taibbi: 00:32:54 The only area where the content creator comes into play is that the internet platform has to have something to sell that you can stick the ad on top of. Indirectly, you care a little bit about what that content is, but what the platforms will tell you is, "We're going to attach this to whatever turns on that target demographic that you want to sell to." If you're a car company, you're looking for 18 to 36-year-old males, white males in the Midwest, this is the content you want. Nine times out of 10, it turns out to be some kind of very politically charged content. That's the easiest way to get that audience.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:31 I'm going through these ... These are the five filters that you didn't really talk about much in your book, and I want to get them out of the way. The third one was the sourcing of mass media news. That was another one that Chomsky had. I thought that was interesting, too, when I thought about it, because I think Huffington Post, and the brethren of Huff Po, have mitigated the importance of this, I think, in the sense that it's not possible to actually make money, again, to the point ...

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:53 I mean Facebook has optimized this. But you don't need to create your own content. You can basically steal someone else's content, put some crazy headline on it. Now it's clickbait. You don't need to actually do original reporting. If you don't need to do original reporting, it also, by impact, decreases the need for sourcing, which is this thing ... In Chomsky's point about sourcing, is that this corporations like CNN cultivate relationships with the CIA and foreign members of the military, et cetera, and that shapes their reporting.

Matt Taibbi: 00:34:21 Yeah. That's, I think, exactly the thing you're talking about right now. It's part of why there's been such an enormous amount of debate on the Hill in the last couple of years about fake news, because what's really going on is the intelligence agencies are very frustrated at their lack of control-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:39 Over the narrative.

Matt Taibbi: 00:34:39 Over the narrative. They've lost the ability to basically get people to ... They haven't lost it. They're still doing quite well at it actually, but it's just not as easy as it used to be. They don't have that direct lever that they used to have.

Matt Taibbi: 00:34:51 In the old days, you had three networks and you had a couple of newspaper chains. There were only a few truly influential voices that you had to worry about. If you wanted to tell people that, yeah, we were the good guys in Vietnam and we went in there because we were going to save the Democratically elected leader, who, of course, we installed, there was only a handful of people that you had to really worry about. Now, with the advent of the internet and people who had instantaneous audiences like Matt Drudge, it's just out of their control in a way that is new. They're trying to reassert control right now.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:24 They had the faith of the people, too, which they've lost in the spades.

Matt Taibbi: 00:35:27 Oh, totally, yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:29 Understandably.

Matt Taibbi: 00:35:29 Completely.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:30 Understandably. Understandably.

Matt Taibbi: 00:35:30 Deservedly.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:30 Deservedly, in particular after the Iraq War.

Matt Taibbi: 00:35:33 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:34 The Iraq War and the 2008 crisis. The bailout, the way that the Bush administration, in particular with Paulson and then also Bernanke and Geithner. Just the way that they hijacked the printing presses and the government account to bail themselves out and enrich themselves without serious consequence. I think we're living with the aftermath of that today.

Matt Taibbi: 00:35:56 Oh, of course. That's the thing that's so frustrating. Having covered the 2016 election, you can see that people out there were furious and they had some real legitimate reasons to be upset. They had legitimate reasons to be distrustful of the media. I was in those crowds when Donald Trump was turning the crowds against us and saying, "Look at those blood suckers," et cetera, et cetera. That was scary. It wasn't pleasant for the press, but we deserved it. There was a part of me that was like this is karma. We suck. But that's not understood very well.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:29 It's kind of sadomasochism on the trail.

Matt Taibbi: 00:36:31 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:31 I do want to get into that because you've been covering campaigns since when? Howard Dean? You've been embedded in campaign and-

Matt Taibbi: 00:36:36 Yeah. This is going to be my fifth.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:39 Yeah. You have many interesting stories of that. I just wanted to get through this for those who haven't read the book. It's a lot of work to do this, but I think it's worthwhile. We talked about the first three. There was the private, the ownership model, the business model, which is the ad model, and then the sourcing, which is in order to get the information, you need to have the relationships with people. Who are those people? They are the people in the government. These things are the things that filter through the information.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:37:02 The last two are very interesting, these are the ones you focus on, which are flak and organizing religion. Talk to me about these filters and how these have changed and how they relate in the 21st century.

Matt Taibbi: 00:37:15 One has massively accelerated, one has massively decelerated, I would say. Flak is this idea that Chomsky came up with, which is when a news organization or a reporter gets out of line when they say something that's politically unorthodox, like Walter Cronkite coming back from Vietnam and saying we're going to lose. Suddenly the network gets flooded with letters.

Matt Taibbi: 00:37:38 Back then, it came usually from think tanks like Freedom House. They would organize basically primitive astroturfing campaigns to let people know that they were displeased with the coverage. This acted as a policing mechanism against certain kinds of reporters. What ended up happening was news directors and editors learned to self-censor ahead of time. You can guess what kind of content is going to get you in trouble and is going to get those letters coming. They just started to avoid assigning that kind of reporter that kind of story. Flak was important back then. But now it's a thousand-fold.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:15 Amplified. It's been amplified.

Matt Taibbi: 00:38:16 It's been amplified massively by social media, because now I mean you don't have to wait for somebody to actually write a letter or have a meeting about it. It comes at you in 50,000 tweets in a second if you put out something that they don't like.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:29 It's also logarithmic. You don't know how bad it's going to get. It can get really bad, out of control. You could lose your job.

Matt Taibbi: 00:38:35 Oh, yeah. Your career could be over in 10 seconds.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:38 It's frightening.

Matt Taibbi: 00:38:39 It's very frightening to be in the business right now, especially because reporters, for the most part, in the old days, you don't really know what reporters thought in their private lives. You didn't care. They did their little bit, two minutes a day, and then they went home. Now they all have social media presences and they have-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:57 A lot of them have opinions and they feel like they want to share them or they need to share them.

Matt Taibbi: 00:38:59 I obviously do it. A lot of people voluntarily did that. Now their bosses are telling them that it's mandatory basically, like you have to go on Snapchat and Instagram, Twitter. When I first went on the campaign trail in 2004, a typical reporter was maybe doing one hit a day, or two. If you wrote for a

newspaper, maybe you were writing one story. If you work for a cable news network, you were doing a story that would be produced and repeated. Now they're probably doing 15 to 30 pieces of content a day. They're doing vlogs, blogs, tweets.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:39:37 You're more likely to make a mistake when that happens.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:39:39 Oh, yeah. Also, everybody knows who you are now. Your personality comes into play in this massive way, and it reflects upon the organization. Everybody's terrified because if you say one wrong thing, suddenly you can be in the middle of this maelstrom of horribleness that can form in a second. That sort of huge amount of impact in the business.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:40:02 Then what you end up seeing is that people flock to teams. They get into crowds where the safest content is saying, "Those people over there are bad," and you maybe have another group on the other side that is saying the same thing about you. But the most dangerous places to be-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:40:21 Not have a team.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:40:21 Not have a team.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:40:22 Not be aligned.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:40:24 Not be aligned.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:40:25 You're one of the unaligned countries they try to call to war.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:40:27 Exactly, exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:40:28 You made a mess of both houses, a pox on both houses. It's interesting when you say that they're encouraged to. That reminded me of the case of Liz Spayd at the New York Times where she actually went on Tucker Carlson, which was probably a bad idea even though her intentions were good. He really went after her and he went after the New York Times. I found her to be very likable and reasonable, very much so. She expressed, I think, a reasonable disapproval towards reporters who are reporters, who are not opinion writers at the New York Times, who express strong opinions on Twitter. Her view was that they probably should not be doing that. This conversation was after the Trump election. Tucker Carlson was also pointing out that the headline-
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:41:12 The headline was amazing.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:15 What was it?

Matt Taibbi: 00:41:16 It was something like-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:16 How are they going to cope with this election or something like that?

Matt Taibbi: 00:41:18 It was something like Democrats, foreign leaders, and students prepare for Trump presidency. It was something like that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:26 I obviously exposed the bias that the editors had around the significance of what that election meant.

Matt Taibbi: 00:41:30 Well, what they were really doing is signaling, "Here's who are audience is."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:33 Yeah, exactly.

Matt Taibbi: 00:41:34 Which is not a crime necessarily, but-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:38 A problem, though, if you're a national newspaper like the New York Times.

Matt Taibbi: 00:41:41 Of course. Of course, because you're signaling to a whole bunch of other people that we're not for you, which is exactly the opposite of what papers like the Times used to do. That was her point. Her point was ... And it was probably only two years before that, that it would have been extremely unorthodox for the Times to do something like that and for reporters to so openly take a stance. She was basically saying, well, this is a radical change in the business. We should think about what we're doing. I don't know if it's a good idea as the ombudsman. She was the public editor.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:42:15 She was the public editor of the New York Times, yeah.

Matt Taibbi: 00:42:16 But she was drummed out of the business for saying that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:42:19 For basically looking like she had jumped ship, which is horrible, horrible that that ... It's so tribal and so primitive. It's very primitive. It's like something you would expect from a chimpanzee troop. In one sense, I can understand that that doesn't concern you. You've never been aligned in that way. I've said to you that you-

Matt Taibbi: 00:42:37 Well, no. I mean it's dangerous for me. I mean-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:42:39 Well, this is what I wanted to ask you. I do have a question, because your writing style is very combative. You take no prisoners. Does that not concern you today, the way that you write? Does that not worry you?

Matt Taibbi: 00:42:50 Yeah. I mean my life is not simple now because I always made it a point to go after both sides. I would consciously try to pick stories that were institutional in nature, bipartisan. I figured most of the overlooked problems would be-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:09 A strong populist. There was always a strong populist undertone to your writing.

Matt Taibbi: 00:43:13 Yeah. I mean I think the press, when we're doing our jobs best, we probably are trying to represent people who have less power. The press counteracts the power that's institutional.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:26 Punching up. Punching up.

Matt Taibbi: 00:43:27 Punching up, right. You want to look at things from the point of view of ordinary people. But now there's a very, very strong pressure out there to jump on board with narratives. Whereas not that long ago, it was considered a virtue for a reporter ... Like right after Obama got elected, I did a story about how Barack Obama had chosen-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:50 Wall Streeters.

Matt Taibbi: 00:43:50 ... Wall Streeters mostly from Citi Group to run his economic policy. I was very critical of Barack Obama even though I had voted for Barack Obama. But at the time, people were like, "Well, that's really salutary," like that's what a reporter should be doing. If you do something like that now, there are people who are real and people who are not real on social media who will swarm all over you and make your life difficult. That's why there's few people doing that now.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:15 How has that impacted your willingness to do that?

Matt Taibbi: 00:44:18 I definitely think about it more than I used to. I mean I used to reflexively just go wherever stories led. Now I do think twice about what the impact is going to be before I write any story, because it can be extremely unpleasant. I think you have to save your bullets for the best and most important arguments now. It's just so much harder to reach.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:43 Do you resent the fact that you've had to censor yourself like this?

Matt Taibbi: 00:44:46 I mean a little bit, but I've had it easy before then. I think other reporters in other countries obviously have a much more difficult time than I do. I lived in Russia for a long time where people were getting killed for ... They actually had to take a real risk. Now I'm basically risking money, which is not that big a deal.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:04 Another interesting point, though, there, then we'll get to it, that, again, I imagine that the reporters who are risking their lives ... Well, what are you talking about? Are you talking about under the Putin regime or ... I was going to make-

Matt Taibbi: 00:45:14 Both, actually.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:14 Both. Well, I was going to make the point that I imagine that those who are risking their lives during the period where the United States is very close with Russia during the transition after the fall of the wall, those would have been deemed unworthy victims.

Matt Taibbi: 00:45:26 Exactly.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:28 By today's standards, Khashoggi is a worthy victim in the modern narrative. No one would say that his murder is less valuable, but they would say that other murders are.

Matt Taibbi: 00:45:38 Right. Yeah, I know. If you were to ask anybody who lived through the '90s and the early 2000s in Russia, they would tell you that actually probably more journalists got killed in the '90s than under the Putin regime. Now that doesn't mean it wasn't dangerous to be a reporter under Putin, it was. It was also more overtly political. With Putin, you were much more likely to be killed by a gangster than by somebody associated with the government in the '90s. But there were people who were associated with Yeltsin who were murdering journalists left and right in the '90s, and they didn't really appear in the news.

Matt Taibbi: 00:46:12 That was one of the first things that I really noticed. I mean I was young back then. I didn't really know what I was doing, but I thought it was very odd that here we were promoting democracy and freedom and we were supposed to be on the side of the angels and everything, and there were reporters getting blown up by exploding briefcases and we're raising a fuss about it. It's very strange.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:46:32 But, of course, you'd read Noam Chomsky's book by then, so you had some idea.

Matt Taibbi: 00:46:36 I had some idea. Clearly, we were so heavily invested in Boris Yeltsin, a Democrat, that narrative. Anything that counteracted that just didn't show up in the news.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:46:47 Well, I mean one of the most iconic images of that period was Boris Yeltsin standing next to Bill Clinton, smiling, laughing, joking on the White House lawn.

Matt Taibbi: 00:46:55 Oh, of course.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:46:55 That's was one of the iconic images if you were to make a collage of the 1990s. That brings us to organizing religion. That's the fifth filter that Chomsky has. It's a powerful filter. During the Cold War, the filter was anticommunism, right?

Matt Taibbi: 00:47:10 Anticommunism, yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:13 Of course, we had McCarthy, McCarthyism. Powerful examples of that in practice and reasons to be afraid if you're a reporter or anyone really. I think under the Bush years, it became this antiterrorism.

Matt Taibbi: 00:47:29 Antiterrorism, yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:30 What is it today?

Matt Taibbi: 00:47:32 Well, now there's Russia is a foe. You don't want to be called a Putin bot or whatever the term.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:39 A Putin apologist or something.

Matt Taibbi: 00:47:39 A Putin apologist. Yeah, exactly. A denialist. That's bad. There's a cousin to that, which is a fellow traveler. I think you'll see what happened with Tulsi Gabbard last week.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:54 I wanted to ask you about her because she's catching a lot of flak, and I'm just-

Matt Taibbi: 00:47:58 Flak. Yeah, exactly.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:00 She's catching a lot of ... That's what flak is. I mean she seems so reasonable.

Matt Taibbi: 00:48:05 Well, there's-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:06 I don't know much about her and I haven't studied the candidates. I know Elizabeth Warren because she's been around forever, and I've been in finance for a long time. I'm very familiar with her.

Matt Taibbi: 00:48:15 Sure. This upcoming Democratic Primary, there's so much at stake. There's a tremendous amount of fear that Bernie Sanders is going to win the nomination. Part of this is wrapped up in the idea that some people genuinely are afraid that that's going to result in Trump getting reelected because Sanders will be the next McGovern, that's the logic, or he'll be the next Mondale.

Matt Taibbi: 00:48:41 But a lot of it has to do with people who are the political donors in this country are reading the writing on the wall, and they are understanding that there's this huge amount of discontent out there and that people want different kinds of policies. They're frustrated with wealth and equality. There's a lot of anger directed towards billionaires. They're trying to tamp that down as much as possible, that kind of leveling, redistributionist kind of politics.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:09 They're not willing to make the concessions necessary. It brings us back to 2008. The wealth transfer during that period was enormous. They papered it over through asset price appreciation, but the cracks are still there and they're getting amplified. I think the volatility that was dampened in financial markets after 2008 and the fed intervention and the intervention of the government are showing up in our politics, that volatility showing up at the electoral box.

Matt Taibbi: 00:49:35 Absolutely. People aren't stupid. They saw that, okay, I lost my house and 40% of my net worth, or whatever it was after the crash, and nobody bailed me out, but these idiots who did this-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:49 In broad daylight.

Matt Taibbi: 00:49:51 In broad daylight.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:51 I did a show recently where this came to me, and it came to me in the middle of the conversation. I remember that they had put Neel Kashkari in charge of TARP.

Matt Taibbi: 00:49:58 In TARP, yeah. A Goldman person.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:59 Goldman Sachs.

Matt Taibbi: 00:50:00 Yeah, he was eight years old or something like that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:50:02 Yeah. He looks so young. Then he, like all these people, went and started chopping wood for 10 years. He went on a farm-

Matt Taibbi: 00:50:08 He grew a beard. They all grew beards.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:50:11 But now he's back. He's the fed. It's outrageous. It's totally insane.

Matt Taibbi: 00:50:16 Yeah. They're all totally at it. They don't know how bad it looks either, and that's another thing that's amazing to me, because if you actually talk to a lot of these people, they'll say, "Well, who else do you want to put in charge of this? Somebody who doesn't understand this stuff?" Okay, we get that you understand it, but you also massively screwed up the whole situation, and people are mad about it. They've lost the value in their homes, they're being foreclosed on. That whole thing was completely full of fraud, the foreclosure fraud, all that, and there was no consequence.

Matt Taibbi: 00:50:47 People are furious about that stuff. It continues to reverberate through Trumpism, through other movements. I think the Sanders movement is the opposite reflection of that. They're determined to prevent any outbreak of that on the Democratic side. I think Warren, Gabbard, and Sanders are going to get a lot of heat from the traditional commercial media.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:11 Because Warren and Sanders are anti-Wall Street, seen as anti-Wall Street, and Gabbard is antiwar heavily.

Matt Taibbi: 00:51:16 Antiwar, exactly.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:18 She's catching a lot of flak for somehow being a Syrian apologist, as if our policies of intervening in the Middle East have actually made the world better.

Matt Taibbi: 00:51:27 No, they've been a disaster.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:28 Disaster. How much better would things have been if we hadn't invaded Iraq? It's remarkable that the people that we're advocating for these policies, they're still out there advocating today.

Matt Taibbi: 00:51:37 And they have no clue how this plays out there. It's people ... They're sending their kids to the Middle East, and a lot of reporters ... We've been to the Middle East, we've been on these deployments, these are good kids. They're trying to be patriotic, they're trying to do what they're told. Then all of a

sudden, they're put in these terrible positions. They've got to shoot somebody. They don't even know what it's about. They're piloting drones that are crossing borders and they're being told to pull the trigger on somebody because some algorithm tells them that they have to.

- Matt Taibbi:** 00:52:08 This stuff is damaging. That's why you go to those neighborhoods where a lot of veterans are returning home, and those are the places that are the reddest of the red states right now.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:52:16 Also, Matt, I mean do you ever watch these commercials that the military puts together?
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:52:20 Oh, my God. It's like video games.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:52:21 It's like video games.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:52:22 Yeah. That's amazing. They go to video game conventions. They thought about this a long time.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:52:26 Yeah, they target them. They target these young, in particular, testosterone-fueled males right when they're hopped up, "I can do anything."
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:52:36 Yeah, exactly. They say, "Oh, this is going to be exciting. You're going to get to play with these cool toys. It's going to be just like a video game. It's going to be an adventure. You're going to hide behind the wall and the bad guy's going to be ... It's going to be like Fortnite." Everybody thinks that's what it is. Then they go over there and it's completely confusing. You have no idea why you're there. Everybody hates you, and they have reasons they hate you. You don't get those until you've been there for a while.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:53:02 I think it's a very disillusioning experience for a lot of the people. They come back ... And, again, the people who are in power, they just discount word-of-mouth, how that works. Our military deployments overseas are just not popular. When people come home, they don't sing the praises of those adventures.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:53:19 No. A lot of them are damaged emotionally, if not physically. I suppose physically not as much as they used to be. Remember, we're taking a lot of casualties and a lot of people were getting injured during that period before and after the surge.
- Matt Taibbi:** 00:53:32 Right, yeah. Exactly.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:33 Remember?

Matt Taibbi: 00:53:33 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:34 This reminded me of George Carlin, George Carlin's great bit about, well, first of all, we love war. Americans love war. Why? Because we're good at it. But also, he made the point about how ... I think he was speaking about Republicans, but this, I think, applies to both parties, but it applies particularly to Republicans because the right to life advocacy is part of the plank. He said, "Republicans, they don't want you to die." I forget how he said it. He's like, "They care about you as long as you're in the womb. When they get out there, they don't give a shit about you. When you turn 18, they want you to go to war and die."

Matt Taibbi: 00:54:05 Right, yeah. Exactly. That's right. That's right. Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:07 That got me thinking ... This is the thought process. It got me thinking about comedy, it got me thinking about, again, this tension between comedy and tragedy, then it got me thinking about something that you wrote in your book, which I wrote down here as actually the top quote at the very top of this rundown because I thought it was interesting. This is probably a good segue and then we'll follow through to the rest of this rundown.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:27 You wrote: "As news reporting becomes more politicized, more negativistic, less trustworthy, and generally more of a headache to digest, people increasingly are going to turn to narrative as a source of information." Before you wrote that, you made a point about John Stewart and this revolution and comedy that happened around the Bush years, where comedy became a vehicle for truth at a time where the news media was failing that job, that obligation. What you're saying now is that we're moving to this place where narrative becomes a source of information. I'm curious, what did you mean by that?

Matt Taibbi: 00:55:03 I mean I think I was talking about that, that people are going to get their information from movies, from Netflix series, from videos.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:15 Why do you think that is? What's an example maybe of something where you think people are getting their information? Is the quality of information as good because they're getting it from narrative? How does it compare to, let's say, what John Stewart did?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:28 Because I look back when John Stewart was doing his bits, I used to think that's brilliant, he's communicating, or when Colbert is going to the White House and roasting Bush, he's communicating something important to the rest of us, but I also wonder if something isn't lost by using humor, or wasn't lost by using humor, that needed to be delivered seriously. I ask that also in the context of your point about narrative.

Matt Taibbi: 00:55:49 Well, of course, something's lost when you-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:52 Fictionalize.

Matt Taibbi: 00:55:54 And when you do comedy because there's a limit to how much you can inform people that way, because the driving message of all comedy is don't take life too seriously. Everything is absurd. Ultimately, we're all going to die, and that sucks and let's laugh about it. That's at the root of comedy. But if you're asking somebody to take something seriously, you can't make a joke about it. There's a limit to how much you [crosstalk 00:56:19].

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:20 Right, exactly. That's true.

Matt Taibbi: 00:56:22 What Stewart did, I think, was incredibly important and cool. What was so great about it is that he went after both sides, and he's pretty ruthless about it. I actually think he was funnier in a way about the Democrats than he was about the Republicans. He nailed this pretension on that side. That was really interesting. But it instantly becomes not funny when it becomes partisan. Saturday Night Live to me is totally unfunny now.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:47 I agree. Colbert, too. I cannot watch Stephen Colbert's late night show because it's completely one-sided. Jimmy Kimmel's funny because he whacks both sides.

Matt Taibbi: 00:56:56 Yeah, exactly. Colbert, which is disappointing, because his show-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:00 Used to be great.

Matt Taibbi: 00:57:01 ... used to be really funny, in that respect. But you have to have some place for people to go where they can depend on getting the straight dope about things. Where do you go now? I don't know. I'm a news consumer myself, and I've very frustrated right now.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:15 Podcasts.

Matt Taibbi: 00:57:15 Yeah, podcasts. Exactly.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:16 In all honesty, there are certain people ... I mean they're not perfect, but I used to have a conflicted relationship with Sam Harris, but I found him to be a valuable source of information because he brings an intellectual honesty. He's not perfect, but there is an intellectual honesty to his view and an openness and a willingness to be vulnerable to someone else's counterargument. He's not in a position to just attack the other person.

Matt Taibbi: 00:57:39 Yeah. Well, I mean I think there's always value in somebody who tells you exactly who they are and what their opinions are, because it rings truer than somebody who pretends to have no opinion, like a traditional anchorman. They're actually hiding biases that way.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:54 But also, they have tremendous power. Tucker Carlson's a great example. I mean Tucker Carlson brings people on his program. His not alone. I'm just picking him as a good example. He brings them on and it's framed. I mean he's got so much power in that framing. He just starts berating them. It's not a conversation, it's a scolding.

Matt Taibbi: 00:58:13 Yeah, no, it's a performance art.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:14 That's what Rachel Maddow will do and all these other anchors as well, right?

Matt Taibbi: 00:58:17 Absolutely, yeah. Tucker Carlson doesn't bring people on to win.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:24 Or to learn. He doesn't want to learn. He doesn't want learn.

Matt Taibbi: 00:58:25 He doesn't want to learn either. Yeah, exactly. He brings people on to deliver a message that he wants to deliver, and he's going to look good doing it. The only way that people should go on that show is if they understand what they're getting into and they know what the end result is going to be.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:39 Bill O'Reilly was the first person to really do that exceptionally well, right?

Matt Taibbi: 00:58:43 I think Carlson is better at it than Bill is. I mean-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:46 Tucker Carlson is more condescending than anyone else I've seen.

Matt Taibbi: 00:58:49 He's condescending, he's quick.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:49 He's quick-witted, yeah.

Matt Taibbi: 00:58:52 Bill O'Reilly is a C-plus mind. I mean I think he's another Boston person. I grew up around people who worked with him, and he had a shtick. He didn't deviate from it very much. He was kind of a phony. But Bill O'Reilly was trying to sell was, "Oh, I'm a man of the people. I'm one of these guys who hangs out in Patchogue, Long Island. I could play pickup," or whatever it is. He's not. He became a rich dude who pretended not to be one, and it didn't go over well. Tucker Carlson doesn't hide who he is. I think that goes over better on TV.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:59:25 He's also a better writer, and that comes across. Some of his monologues are good, but always, for me, they spin off a little bit. I want to close off one thing before we move on about organizing religions, because I thought about this, and it wasn't clear to me what was, let's say, the organizing religion of today. But there is one that comes to my mind and something that we've covered on the program ... One time with Jonathan Haidt on his book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, another time, we had Robby Soave on after the events that happened at the Lincoln Memorial with the Covington Catholic School kids and the Native American veteran ... this white oppression, this anti-white oppression as an organizing religion.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:00:07 I don't know that there is one dominant religion like there was antiterrorism or anticommunism, but this is a very powerful one that has emerged. I want to take a quote for you because I think it's really interesting. I was actually tweeting about this before, Kamala Harris tweeted it out, because I was basically thinking how does this integrate with American foreign policy. She wrote, "Russia was able to influence our elections because they figured out that racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and transphobia are America's Achilles' heel."

Demetri Kofinas: 01:00:36 By the way, transphobia was not even a thing 10 years ago. I don't know how many people even knew it was something that they would even be afraid of, or America's Achilles' heel. "These issues aren't only civil rights, they're also a matter of national security. We have to deal with that."

Demetri Kofinas: 01:00:53 I have a question. Given everything you know and everything you've read, given what we've been talking about, given this thing about organizing religion, about flak, how does that fit in?

Matt Taibbi: 01:01:03 This is a very dangerous topic. I think one of the things about this new movement with ... It's intersectionality. That's the word everybody's using.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:14 We've covered that on the show. People know what that is. Our listeners know what that is.

Matt Taibbi: 01:01:19 Yeah. It's a campus intellectual movement that probably would not have broken out of academia in the way that it has, except that I think when it becomes interesting is when somebody who's already in power decides to appropriate an ideology. I think what we've seen in recent years is that since Trump came to power, you've seen the mainstream of the Democratic Party and some of the Never Trumper's on the Republican side have draped themselves in some of those themes. It doesn't mean that they're not legitimate, but it's begun to become an organizing political theme. It's not in the same way as maybe anticommunism was once upon a time.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:09 That encompassed all aspects of society, communism or anticommunism, or war against communism, because there was a nation, state, and everything else. It couldn't possibly be that way, but it's got this civil war quality to it.

Matt Taibbi: 01:02:23 Right. There was a huge amount of resentment, certainly from Trump voters in 2016, that I found from people who ... There was an amazing moment in the campaign where Trump was actually plummeting in the polls. It was in August of 2016. Bannon sent him out on this tour around the country to start talking about how he was going to be the savior of the African American community.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:45 I remember that. It was so bizarre. That's interesting.

Matt Taibbi: 01:02:48 It was so weird.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:50 Bannon sent him out to do that, huh?

Matt Taibbi: 01:02:51 Yeah. Bannon sent him out to do that. Bannon became the campaign manager. He does this. He sends Trump on this tour. I was on that tour. It was so weird.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:58 This is after he replaced Manafort? Right after he replaced Manafort?

Matt Taibbi: 01:03:00 Exactly. Exactly. He starts giving these speeches, how, "Oh, I care so much about the African American." What that was really about was he was trying to recapture a segment of the vote that needed psychological permission to vote for him. Initially, a lot of Republicans felt that Trump was too racist to vote for, but

they also hated being labeled as racist for being Republicans. There were a lot of people who were torn.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:03:27 I feel like that made him look more racist when he did that.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:03:30 It did to us, but I think to a lot of Republican voters, they were trying to justify to themselves, they were trying to say, "Hey, I want to express my anger over being painted a racist. Here's somebody who really does care." I mean it was transparently ridiculous, it seemed, at the time, but my point is that this theme is so charged in American society right now for people on all sides. There's a huge amount of resentment out there among people who feel like they're being painted as transphobic, homophobic, racist, white supremacist, all those things. Is it an organizing religion? It's certainly something that people don't want to be on the wrong side of now.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:04:10 Well, most certainly not. It also fits very nicely into this worthy versus unworthy victim system. We talked about intersectionality. Intersectionality is a hierarchy of victimhood, which is born out of these non-linear relationships between groups that intersect. Within this narrative, there are clearly worthy victims, there are unworthy victims, and it's showing up everywhere.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:04:34 Now we're dealing with it, of course, in Virginia. It's the latest state where the governor was in a picture where he says it wasn't him now, but I don't know if it was him or wasn't him. Regardless, it's on his Facebook page of either him in black face or wearing a Ku Klux Klan hood. His deputy governor or lieutenant governor is embroiled in a sexual assault scandal. The attorney general's in it also. It's consuming the society in all sorts of different ways.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:05:00 Anyway, I think it's an interesting one because it shows up, and Kamala Harris had that tweet, and I thought it was also interesting. It's something that we've covered.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:05:07 Just to get to that for a moment, I mean I think most Americans have similar feelings about racism, sexism, all of those things. What's dangerous is when it becomes such a common political tactic. I mean I think right now, there's a tendency to say, "Well, if you're against this politician, you're a racist, you're a white supremacist." I mean that happened with the Bernie Sanders campaign, and that was very damaging to that campaign, I think.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:05:38 I remember that.

Matt Taibbi: 01:05:39 That whole Bernie Bro movement, everything. There's two different things going on. There's the real narrative of racial oppression, which is a very powerful central part of the American story, and is unresolved, clearly. Then there's the other thing where I think that there are people who are using some of those words for political purposes.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:04 Of course.

Matt Taibbi: 01:06:05 I think we're dealing with two different things. I mean I wrote a whole book about the police killing Eric Garner. It's been a huge part of my career was writing about police brutality and things like that.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:15 Well, the massive injustice and incarceration.

Matt Taibbi: 01:06:18 Incarceration rates.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:18 The drug war.

Matt Taibbi: 01:06:19 The differing outcomes in the criminal justice system. All those things are just huge unresolved issues. But I think that's separate from ... There's a rhetorical aspect to this that's going to pop up in the 2020 presidential race that is different from the historical narrative, which is going to be interesting.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:36 That's so scary. The same problem happened in climate change. We talked about it. We had the head of Climate Science at NASA, Gavin Schmidt, on the program. This was another point of the conversation, which is when something is real and there's a substantive part that you need a conversation for, when it becomes politicized, it destroys everything.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:53 But to this point about ... You mentioned Bernie Sanders. What about during the 2008 Clinton-Obama campaign, where Bill Clinton got labeled a racist for ... I think it was him or it was ... I think it was him, for saying something about comparing Obama to Jesse Jackson or something like that. But the point is I mean, look, these guys are politicians. They know how to operate, but-

Matt Taibbi: 01:07:13 That was some stuff that was before the South Carolina primary.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:07:17 It was intentional?

Matt Taibbi: 01:07:19 Well, there were some stuff going on there that was traditionally subtle politics. There was a thing that Hillary said about how Martin Luther King was great, but he needed a president to get things done.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:07:30 Oh, that's interesting. I didn't hear that one. She said that?

Matt Taibbi: 01:07:31 It's not racial ... Is it racial politics?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:07:36 Well, that is kind of racist because what's the comparison between MLK and Obama? Zero. Well, then there's skin color. There's no relationship between the two.

Matt Taibbi: 01:07:44 It's a certain kind of messaging that was going on during that campaign. I think everybody was aware of it. There was the leaking of a picture of Obama in a dashiki.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:07:51 And the Jeremiah Wright stuff. That was heavily racist.

Matt Taibbi: 01:07:53 The Jeremiah Wright stuff. Race played a huge part in that campaign. It was very bitter, it was very ugly, both the Democratic primary and the general elections.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:08:03 And the general elections.

Matt Taibbi: 01:08:04 Yes. I don't know about Bill Clinton specifically, but that was very politically charged.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:08:09 I just remember when James Carville was out there. He was like, "That man doesn't have a racist bone ... " I can't do it. Can you do his accent?

Matt Taibbi: 01:08:14 I can't. I've met him but, yea.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:08:15 I can't. "He doesn't have a racist bone in his body." "Bone," something like that. But, of course, remember, during the Bush years, anything that was anti-Israel was immediately anti-Semitic. That is used constantly. This is nothing new. You know what I mean? It's used all the time.

Matt Taibbi: 01:08:28 Yeah, I know. This is happening right now with the Omar thing, the APEC issue.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:08:32 You know what's interesting, though, I was listening to a New York Times reporter, her last name is Barry, I think. I can't remember. But she was making the point, and I didn't know this was happening, but somehow within this construct of worthy

versus unworthy victims, American Jews and Israelis have lost some of that power that they had in the narrative earlier. She was making this point. She was on The Joe Rogan show, which you were on recently. I wanted to ask you what that was like.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:08:55 But I think that's interesting. Again, it fits into this point, which is there's a substantive reality of all things in the world. The case of Israel and Palestine, where could you find more nuance? You'd be hard-pressed to find a world where there's more nuance where you need less grandstanding, because you've got a real problem, and it's not going to be solved with grandstanding. You know what I mean?
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:09:13 I've actually gotten in trouble for saying that I don't like to talk about Israel and Palestine because I'd never covered it. I think that's the prime example of a story that you could only do if you're deeply in the middle of it and committed to the long game of looking at all sides of it, because it's so filled with subtleties and difficulties.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:09:36 The problem with modern media is that in the Twitter age, we've reduced a lot of things that are extremely complex to a few characters. That always reduces things to the dumbest form in politics. It's been a very negative thing. It's especially dangerous when you start getting race and nationality and patriotism and all those other things involved. Then it gets more dangerous.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:10:01 Well, that also brings something else that you wrote about in Hate, INC., which is not only that everyone's got an opinion, but you better have one. You need to have one. There's that quote I have from you here: "The two most taboo lines in all media in America are "I don't know" and "I don't care".
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:10:16 Right, yeah. Exactly. It's one of the biggest deceptions on television. A million years ago, I got invited to go on CNN for some panel show. I think it had to do with finance I was being asked on.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:10:26 This was before you went through your career change?
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:10:28 No, it was just after that.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:10:29 Just after that.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:10:29 It was probably '09 or something like that.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:10:32 Okay.

Matt Taibbi: 01:10:32 I get asked on. Then at the end of the segment, they asked me a question about Syria or something, or some Middle Eastern thing that had just happened. I said, "Oh, well, I don't cover that. I don't know." I literally just said on the cameras that I can't answer that question, I don't know anything about it. I was never invited on again because that doesn't happen on television. You can't admit that your knowledge base is not a million miles deep.

Matt Taibbi: 01:10:56 Whereas the reality is when I wrote about this ... Look at Wolf Blitzer's Jeopardy performance. These guys don't know anything, for the most part. They just read what's in front of them. It's a huge deception that we know everything, that we're all-knowing. Actually, we learned this stuff 10 minutes ago.

Matt Taibbi: 01:11:10 The other thing about not caring is we can never ever imply that the news isn't the most important thing in your life. Whereas the reality is we should tell people pretty regularly, "Hey, spend more time with your kids." You know what I mean? Smile.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:11:24 Well, as you said, it's bad for you. It's like smoking.

Matt Taibbi: 01:11:26 Yeah, exactly.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:11:27 We're going to go to the overtime soon, Matt, where I want to talk to you about the Goldman scandal, get back to this point about the financial crisis, and some more about politics. But I want to close off, because I wanted the full episode to really be a focus on media, and I think we've done a good job of going through the propaganda model and updating it along the lines of your book.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:11:47 There's one other thing that I want to talk about, because my experience in media, I was blogging right before and during the financial crisis, when you were writing as well, and I had a radio show on 91.5. Then I had the opportunity to create a television show, which I was able to produce on the RT Network. This was a fascinating experience for me because I was in this subversive group. I could never have done a financial program, which is what my show was, Capital Account, if I didn't do it on the RT Network, which had no corporate sponsors.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:12:16 It was a great show and there wasn't any shilling. It was not ... Of course, I didn't talk about Russia. I caught flak for ever mentioning China in a negative way. That was something I had

to learn, obviously I knew about Russia. But other than that, we didn't talk about politics. So, I think it was a valuable show. And so, that gave me an appreciation for networks like RT, like Press TV, like Al Jazeera, and some of these non-aligned networks, like the non-aligned nations.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:12:41 This is something I wanted to talk to you about because we were talking about the evolution of media. We mentioned CNN, we mentioned Fox. They're both children of the technology of cable and culturally impacted by what's going on in the Republican Party, talk radio, et cetera. Then the internet disrupted first the press, newspapers and classifieds, Craig's List, Monster.com, et cetera.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:13:06 Then YouTube was really a watershed for the broadcast cable industry, where all of a sudden you had ... I mean the craziest cases, of course, are like Alex Jones. But you had this revolution in media to now where you've got guys like Joe Rogan. You were on Joe's show. I have no idea. Maybe you can tell us how many millions of viewers and listeners.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:13:25 Oh, it's unbelievable.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:13:25 He's like CBS.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:13:27 Yeah, exactly. He's a one-man CBS basically. The reaction to being on his show compared to being on any of the big three networks is there's no comparison.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:13:37 That's remarkable.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:13:38 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:13:39 That's so remarkable, that is just mind-blowing, because it's literally just this and like shitty cameras, shitty lighting, right?
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:13:48 Yeah, I guess.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:13:49 Yeah. I mean he's not going to tell you it's not. That's part of the appeal. Just like a guy who used to host Fear Factor, he's a comedian, is like a fighter, host, UFC program, an everyday Joe, and his name is Joe, and they got more viewers than any of the networks.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:14:03 Absolutely. What's so interesting about that is the networks still have no clue how little they matter to ordinary people. They still think that what they say not only has importance, but

resonates. They don't get that people hate them, not just a little bit but to an extraordinary degree. Personalities like Joe, you're absolutely right, it's the low tech set up, it's the intimacy of you know who I am, you can see all my flaws, there's not makeup covering everything. You know what I mean? I make mistakes. When I get my interviews, sometimes I don't know what I'm talking about.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:14:46 I'm a dummy.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:14:47 Yeah. I'll admit it. This is for informational purposes, bring people on. The conversations are sometimes good, they sometimes go off in tangents. All that resonates with people a lot more than the intensely produced segments that you get on network television. I constantly struggle with this because I work in this business and I'm dealing with people who just don't see, especially with the political campaign, like the presidential campaign, they just don't see how they turn people off.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:15:17 Well, you're right in Hate, INC. Everyone seems to hate the media. Nobody in the media seems to understand why. Then you proceed to explain. Well, we won't get into that here. I bring this up also because I think a lot about this. I mean I started this show because ... I had a brain tumor and I had developed dementia-
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:15:34 Oh, my God.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:15:35 ... which is why I had ended my work in television and I took so many years off as a result of that. During that time, I put on a conference in New York and I also created a theater company, started putting on off-Broadway productions. But I always wanted to get back into this. I started going to meetups around New York City, because I used to work in tech before I got into any of these stuff, in video games and on the application development side of television.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:16:00 I was looking at some of these emerging technologies that I was interested in, like AR, VR, and then EdTech, too, when I started thinking about what is the future of news, because I did miss this stuff. I started this show because, first of all, I see these media companies as being multimedia now. Vox is a good example. Vox doesn't differentiate between the print and the podcast and the videos. Increasingly, they're all part of the same thing.

Matt Taibbi: 01:16:26 Yeah, you have to do that now if you're one of those companies.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:16:29 Well, I have my own ideas about where media is going or could go, but the last question I wanted to ask you for the episode is what do you see is the future of media? Where is this medium going? What is the future?

Matt Taibbi: 01:16:41 I think there's going to be an enormous showdown coming. There's going to be a moment in time where we're going to have to decide whether there's going to be some kind of Orwellian faucet that people in power are going to get to exercise over all media, or whether we're going to have a system of Joe Rogans being the influential messengers of society, because we've already seen that people in government are incredibly frustrated at the situation right now. Every time that the internet has looked like it's this big democratizing force, there's been a wave of reaction. I think it began really with wiping out Alex Jones, but-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:17:31 How do you feel about the decision? I think we could both agree that he's nuts.

Matt Taibbi: 01:17:35 I think we had an existing system to deal with people like Alex Jones. It didn't work very well in his case. The whole idea is if you do what he did and I think the things that he said about the families were libelous. But we had a system to deal with that speech that extraordinarily effective, but it was intentionally slow.

Matt Taibbi: 01:17:55 We erred on the side of not censoring. For a long time, we had this court-based system that weeded out people who did bad things on the air. This new system where there's a couple of choke points with internet platforms and then we can just zap people is extremely dangerous.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:18:14 It's scary.

Matt Taibbi: 01:18:15 People have no idea how bad that can be. The thing that was really scary about the Alex Jones thing was the coordination. It was all of a sudden five or six of them at once deciding. Now if that becomes formalized and there's some kind of a procedure ... Because you already have a hidden regulation system with media.

Matt Taibbi: 01:18:37 If you do a Google search for whatever, it doesn't matter, the great example is Trotskyism, what will come up will be a New

York Times article about Trotsky or something like that, whereas the leading Trotskyist site in the world, the World Socialist website, will be like 200. They're already making decisions about content that you see. But if they can directly remove obnoxious content and there's only a few platforms, the potential for a 1984 situation is very scary. That's what I worry about. I think we're going to have a moment where we're going to have to decide is that going to happen or not?

- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:19:11 It's too much power. In fact, I was telling you that I'm in the midst of reading Shoshana Zuboff's book, she's going to be my next guest after you, Surveillance Capitalism. It deals exactly with this stuff. I mean I think it's tremendous, it's scary, and it's something that needs to be dealt with. Matt, thank you so much for spending so much time in the episode. Stick around.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:19:30 Oh, thank you, Demetri. Yeah. We should mention if you want to read the book, it's at taibbi.substack.com.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:19:34 Absolutely. In fact, I'm sorry. I'm glad you mentioned that.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:19:36 No, it's okay.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:19:37 Also, give out your Twitter handle, Matt.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:19:38 It's @mtaibbi.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:19:42 What is Substack again, for people that don't know?
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:19:46 Substack is this cool little platform that allows independent writers to ... It's like an email newsletter service. I'm serializing the book. It's going to come out in physical form later this year, but doing it as I go. You can get most of the chapters already. All you have to do is subscribe. Right now most of the book is already online. I co-wrote another with a drug dealer last year. That's online there as well.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:20:08 That's a really cool story. You're also Matt Taibbi. You're a rock star. We didn't have a chance, I wanted to talk to you a little bit about when you and Jeremy Scahill and Glenn Greenwald got together and created The Intercept, or I'd want to know exactly who came first, when.
- Matt Taibbi:** 01:20:21 Yeah, they were first.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:20:22 Right. But it made sense. I mean it made sense to all of us. The three of you made sense. It's because I think you're all

subversive. You're not part of the herd. You differentiate. In that sense, you're a bit of a rock star, so it's always good to follow rock star journalists who write interesting things.

- Matt Taibbi:** 01:20:38 Well, thank you. I don't know. They're more rock starry than me, for sure. That's what I think I would say. But thank you so much for having me on, Demetri. It's been fun.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:20:46 Thank you, Matt.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:20:48 And that was my episode with Matt Taibbi. I want to thank Matt for being on my program. Today's episode of Hidden Forces was recorded at Creative Media Design Studios in New York City. For more information about this week's episode or if you want easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io and subscribe to our free email list.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:21:11 If you want access to overtime segments, episode transcripts, and show rundowns full of links and detailed information related to each and every episode, check out our premium subscription available through the Hidden Forces website, or through our Patreon page.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:21:29 Today's episode was produced by me and edited by Stylianos Nicolaou. For more episodes, you can check out our website at hiddenforces.io. Join the conversation at Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, @HiddenForcesPod, or send me an email. As always, thanks for listening. We'll see you next week.