



**GET IT
TOGETHER**

Troubling
Tales from
the Liberal
Fringe

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

JESSE WATTERS

Get It Together

Troubling Tales from
the Liberal Fringe

Jesse Watters



BROADSIDE BOOKS

Dedication

To Mom and Dad,
You raised me well. I love you.

Epigraph

“Get it together.”

—*my mom*

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Introduction

Humans amaze me. Especially radicals. I've always been drawn to crazy. Or what a college-educated conservative East Coast white guy thinks is crazy. Like a heat-seeking missile, I lock onto them and gaze in awe. Then I ask them questions and listen in a state of wonderment and bewilderment. Trying to reserve judgment. Trying and not always succeeding. The smirk gave it away.

The audience likes the smirk. They know what I'm thinking because it's exactly what they're thinking. Your issues aren't my issues; let's keep it that way. No disrespect. Much love.

This curious and semi-condescending attitude is what's made me a successful cable news personality. Obviously, my ability to deflect and ridicule has helped too. Bake in some fake modesty under the guise of self-depreciation, and you have yourself a winner. Nobody will ever know how insecure I really am.

But do insecure people ask for advice? I sure as hell asked for advice when Fox promoted me to the 7 p.m. hour. Before *Jesse Watters Primetime* launched January 2022, I called around to all the top talent. And listened. This is what they told me.

Bill O'Reilly's show, *The O'Reilly Factor*, always ended with the email segment. Viewers would email comments, and O'Reilly would read chosen ones on-air. They had to "keep it pithy." O'Reilly suggested I bring back that interaction with the audience, which I have. Except now viewers text instead of email. "Keeping that connection with the audience is important," he told me. Also, he advised me to give viewers a window into how I felt each night. What I was thinking about, day-to-day stuff, open up about my personal life a little. Before we end each show with texts, the "Watters Window" segment is usually me venting for twenty seconds. Unscripted. It usually consists of me pontificating about why women don't like taking out the trash (is this only a man's job?), sharing a new diet fad (only eat meat on the bone), or bragging about how I beat my eleven-year-old daughter at Ping-Pong (she's really good).

Sean Hannity told me to "be myself." "You've succeeded by being who you are, don't change that," he said. Hannity explained that he LOVES politics. That's his bread and butter, and he sticks with it. He doesn't get outside his wheelhouse because he doesn't cover stories if they don't interest him. I've noticed that the audience can tell when you cover a story you don't care about, so I've taken Hannity's advice. Every story on *Jesse Watters Primetime* is something I personally am interested in. We covered the cover-up of Paul Pelosi's DUI arrest all summer because, you guessed it, I cared. The audience knew I was invested. So did Pauly P.

Tucker Carlson told me to hit the sauna. "If you're faced with getting your mental health right or preparing for the show, take care of your mental health." Tucker, who dedicated much of his day to reading, writing, and producing the show he hosted at the time, explained that I should "shut out the noise." "Don't read the comment section. Don't read your press clippings. Focus on you, your show, and your family and friends." Tucker revealed he doesn't watch TV. When he wasn't getting his show together, he spent time outside in nature as much as possible. This was a valuable lesson. Balance your body and mind. Looking back, I wish I'd listened more carefully

to this.

Laura Ingraham revealed how challenging the job would be. “My show airs at ten p.m. ET,” she said. “By that time, each hour, all afternoon and evening, has covered the same story. My challenge is, how do I attack a story from a different angle than everyone else?” Laura stressed how important it is to be an original thinker. “How are you going to be different?” She challenged me. How was I going to distinguish my analysis from the pack? Be creative and unique. This requires constant reflection.

Brit Hume told me not to sleep with my assistant. My assistant is a guy, so not an issue.

I cast a wide net inside and outside of Fox. Bob Costas, Bret Baier, Steve Doocy, Anthony Scaramucci, Mark Levin, Greg Gutfeld.

I listened to everyone closely. After we launched *Jesse Watters Primetime* we had great ratings, number three in all of cable news. Averaging over three million viewers a night. I was waking up at 5 a.m., working out, reading, and writing. Getting into the office at 1 p.m. Working, co-hosting *The Five*, hosting *Primetime* at 7 p.m. Coming home, eating dinner, reading, and going to bed. Like a machine.

Then my back went out.

I dropped to the ground in my bathroom. Somehow, I made it to the bedroom. I couldn't stand. I couldn't move. The pain crippled me. I screamed in agony. I was a fit guy in my early forties who ran, swam, and lifted. Now I couldn't walk. The pain was so excruciating my wife called 911. Paramedics rolled me onto a stretcher and wheeled me out of my apartment into an ambulance.

“You must see some crazy stuff here in New York,” I say to the paramedic on the way to the ER. “What's the craziest thing you ever saw?”

“Well, probably the Jeffrey Epstein call,” he answers.

He has my attention now. I forget about the pain for a minute.

“When we got to his cell, it was packed with people. Nobody should have been in there. It should have been empty. People had moved the body. They've moved things around in the cell. He was dead when we arrived, but they made us rush him out to the hospital like he was gonna make it.”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Like, protocol wasn't followed. His cell was a mess; the scene was a mess. People were there who shouldn't have been there. Nobody is supposed to move the body, touch the body. Items in the cell were being messed with. It wasn't normal.”

I'm taking mental notes. But before I can get this guy's contact information, I'm taken out of the ambulance and moved through the hospital doors. Almost booked an exclusive on the way to the emergency room.

They stick me in the middle of the ER behind a curtain. New Yorkers are in there with knife wounds, head injuries, and I'm lying on a stretcher with a bad back. They're pumping me full of narcotics to numb the pain, but it's not feeling great.

Suddenly, there's drama. A hostile homeless woman is making a scene. She's loud. And big. And naked. She apparently needs to use the bathroom. I peel my curtain back to catch the action. The naked homeless woman is crouched on the toilet with the bathroom door open. She refuses to close the door. When nurses suggest she close it, she screams. She has a list of demands. She's demanding a shower. Had she gotten herself taken to the emergency room as a ruse to take a shower? Unclear.

Then all hell breaks loose. The naked homeless woman falls off the toilet and hits her head.

She's bleeding. There's a lot of commotion. Security arrives and a negotiation takes place involving her, her "partner," nurses, and hospital security. I need a private room. I'm getting pretty close to pulling a "don't you know who I am?" Not really, but when the next doctor comes over to ask me my name, I say, "I'm Watters, and this is my world." Doesn't work. The doctor doesn't watch Fox. He just thinks I'm as crazy as the naked homeless woman now.

Eventually I get an MRI, and hole up in the hospital for a few days. It's a severely herniated disc. I get an epidural shot. Doesn't help much. I go back to work. Can barely get in and out of a car. Have to lie down on a couch in my office while dictating scripts. I see a surgeon. I don't want to, but the pain is unbearable and not getting better.

"You need surgery right away," he tells me. "You've lost sensation in your Achilles. You've lost strength in your right leg. The nerve is screaming. We need to operate."

"Okay, doc, I have a speech in DC on Friday. Let's do the surgery Saturday." It was Wednesday.

"You can't risk riding a train to DC. If anything happens you could be paralyzed."

"Emergency surgery it is."

I was getting back surgery at forty-three years old. This was a wake-up call. For the first time in my life, I was scared.

"Sitting is the new smoking," the doctor explained. "Humans aren't designed to sit all day." He continued. "You're sitting all morning, all afternoon, for two hours each show, sitting in between shows . . . and you're sitting in a car driving on weekends. It's destroying your back."

I had been sitting a lot since Fox promoted me to the 7 p.m.

"What kind of chair are you sitting on at your office?"

I texted my assistant Johnny to send me a picture. I'd bought the chair myself. It was a black leather Chesterfield executive swivel desk chair. I bought it for my new office, and Johnny had put it together. I showed the doctor the picture.

"Look at this. The chair is crooked. It's leaning to the left. It's wrecking your back."

Johnny had assembled my chair cockeyed, and it had blown out my back. Another reason not to sleep with my assistant.

I had a microdiscectomy. Surgery went well, and I was out of work for two weeks. *Primetime* had launched in January, and by April I was recuperating from emergency back surgery. It took about five months to fully recover. My lifestyle completely changed. I walked all day. Stretched and planked. Avoided chairs, cars, and unnecessary sitting. Sitting and reading newsfeeds on my phone, sitting at a desk, sitting in front of a computer was going to put me back in the hospital. I had to establish new routines for working and living. I had to listen to my body.

Being aware of my own pain made me aware of other people's pain. When I limped down the street, I noticed others who limped. My eyes were drawn to addicts, foot shufflers, shoulder slumpers. Was I becoming more empathetic? No way. Couldn't be. I was only concerned with myself usually. But could Watters go deeper? This book tries to.

Interviewing wild characters on the street only gets you so deep. It's a ten-minute conversation condensed into a few sound bites for air. Cable TV interviews are even shorter. I wasn't getting close to the core: *Why* do people believe things? *How* did they end up with their worldviews? *What* gave them these radical ideas?

I set out looking to interview out-of-the-mainstream Americans. Not debate them, just listen to their life stories. I'd listen for two hours, three hours, sometimes four. What I found was that their maverick ideology was rooted in personal struggle. I'd always assumed someone's political belief system was based upon the books they'd read or the media they'd consumed. Not entirely.

A big factor in a person's policy preference or political identity? Formative experiences in their youth.

Almost every individual I interviewed had a chaotic childhood. I found that people become dissidents for psychological reasons. Their ideology isn't logical, but the path toward that ideology was. During these interviews I found myself thinking, "Of course you believe this, you have daddy issues."

Sociopathic parents are creating a strange generation. Parents are drug addicts, sex addicts . . . never around. . . . Do you think that child is going to grow up to be a well-adjusted, patriotic voter? Not a chance. Children are being traumatized and then spit out into adulthood. Now they're society's problem. They're our problem. Then their problems become our problems.

No wonder people vote the way they do. No wonder they love anarchy. No wonder they hate. Trace a line directly back to their teenage years. Some were raped. Others were spoiled. A few got no attention at all. So much of their adult crusade is just a reaction to what they experienced growing up.

Many of the characters I interviewed for this project had experienced drugs and alcohol early on. Almost all of them had disastrous parents. Some of the most damaged people had wealthy parents. Money wasn't a major driver of ideology. Class played a larger role, but not in the way you'd think. I noticed much more class rebellion. The family dynamic was key. Sibling rivalries, horrible moms, and ghost dads were consistent features.

Whereas I used to smugly judge oddballs, I began feeling sorry for these people. Even the real nasty and dangerous ideologues I felt sympathetic toward. Because I began to understand them. I understood why they thought about life the way they did. Society would look like that to me too if I had their lives. If my mom was a Mötley Crüe roadie and I took my first hit of crack at fifteen.

People join movements not always because the movement makes logical sense. Oftentimes radicals just want attention. This book examines why. What makes people believe humans are going extinct this century, when the science doesn't say that? Maybe they have a savior complex they developed in college. Certain people join cults. Others are straight-up mentally ill. A few create injustices just to fight them because their life lacks meaning.

This book runs the gamut from true believers to larks. Attention whores to academic nihilists. Abuse runs through most of them, psychic and emotional. A lack of respect of others is often justified. Some don't respect themselves, and there's usually a clear reason why.

Not everyone I was able to crack. Some wouldn't let me, like the communist. The statue toppler spun my head around. Some of these people are generally harmless; they're just bizarre. But by listening I can at least say that I understand them. Understanding is impossible without listening. This format could very well have been a podcast. People really opened up to me. Raw stuff. They cried. Yelled. Laughed. We both got annoyed with each other. But I listened (which is very big of me).

What I discovered is that people have issues. And these issues are getting bigger . . . and crazier. And because the way society is now wired—the internet combined with a strain of political correctness—everything is fair game. All the pillars of Western civilization, social customs, behavioral and legal norms—it's open season. Much of the groundswell is projection. People projecting their problems onto the rest of society. Even though your problems aren't my problems, they are. Because you're making them my problems. We do not need a social revolution because somebody has personal problems. Your issues aren't our revolution. We're

not going to turn everything upside down because somebody needs to act out a revenge fantasy on the father they never had. Get your life under control because you're making the rest of our lives harder. I love you but just chill. We're not on the same journey. We can't pay the price for your problems. Don't pay me back for your suffering. I had nothing to do with it. How to fix it? Here's a start: just be better than your parents. For most of you, that's easy.

The Open Borders Professor

When you think “open borders activist,” you probably think: angry purple-haired twentysomething, probably with daddy issues, screaming at an ICE agent. Political radicalism is driven by a profound unhappiness with life and, ultimately, with one’s place in the world—a rebellion against a system that’s made you miserable and a demand that it change to suit you better.

Hard-left activists get hysterical when things don’t go their way. Pure anguish. If they could only tax the rich, open the border, or abolish private property, their personal unhappiness would be slayed. Radical politics is a projection of one’s fears, insecurities, and inadequacies: I’m not the problem. Society is. There’s a famous scene from *The Simpsons* featuring Principal Skinner saying, “Am I so out of touch? No. It’s the children who are wrong.”

Stereotypes have exceptions, and Joe Carens looks like one of them. The University of Toronto political science professor seems friendly for a lefty—he’s clearly amused to be talking to an off-air Fox News host, but his amusement isn’t condescending, which is good since I enjoy being the condescending one. On its face, his background is about as normal as you could imagine: “I grew up in the United States as a middle-class Catholic kid,” he tells me. An Irish guy from Boston. Like most Massholes, he loved hearing himself talk.

Joe is described as “one of the world’s leading political philosophers on the issue” of immigration. His book *The Ethics of Immigration* is popular in academic circles (meaning nobody’s read it). But I read one of his essays. Joe argues, “borders should generally be open and people should normally be free to leave their country of origin and settle wherever they choose. . . . On what moral grounds can we deny entry to these sorts of people? What gives anyone the right to point guns at them?”

Our conversation begins. “I’m turning seventy-eight in a couple of weeks,” he says. He has a thick but well-kept white beard and a shock-white head of hair. He’s a smile-talker, so at least we have one thing in common. As a young man in the late 1960s, he studied theology at Yale Divinity School. “Then my religious beliefs changed,” explained Joe. “I stopped believing in God.” A theology school that turns Christians into atheists—not a good look for Yale. He couldn’t drop out of grad school because “I’d be drafted.” He either had to go to jail or to Canada. Instead, Joe dodged a bullet and switched majors. He was able to remain at Yale and study political science. While he was there, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke on campus. Joe missed it. He confessed this was one of his biggest regrets in life. “I wasn’t tuned in.”

From there, Joe “taught at Princeton for a few years, and then moved to Toronto for a job where I’ve been for the last thirty-seven years now, which worked out really well for me,” he

says. In 1968, he married “a fellow graduate student . . . in the Divinity School. We stayed married for thirteen years. Then I really fell in love when I was teaching at Princeton with a fellow Princeton professor” (the feminist theorist Jennifer Nedelsky).

“By then, my wife and I had . . . we hadn’t separated, but we were at odds,” Joe says. “I got divorced and got remarried. And that’s stayed. So I’ve been married to [Jennifer] since ’85. So quite a while now.” To recap, Joe stopped believing in God, avoided Vietnam, got divorced, married a feminist theory professor, and moved to Canada, where he pushes open borders. Trudeau, you can keep him.

Along the way, Joe became convinced that the concept of borders—the lines we draw and enforce to delineate where sovereign states begin and end—was fundamentally unfair. Joe’s dream is kind of a goo-goo one-worldism à la the hippie movements of the 1960s. “We’re all vulnerable in various ways,” he says. “What this whole topic reveals is a kind of fundamental problem with the way in which the world has been organized. It’s just not fair to everybody. And we have a responsibility to transform it.”

Joe sounds like a child. “Life isn’t fair,” I explain. “It’s not fair in nature, sports, business, anything. Why base your political philosophy on something that doesn’t exist?”

“Well, it depends on what you mean by political philosophy, and it depends on what you mean by it ‘doesn’t actually exist.’ So the ‘life’s not fair’ slogan, it depends on how that’s used.” I suddenly realize I am interviewing the Canadian Bill Clinton.

“Babies, you, and the people you care about are vulnerable. So, of course, you do what you can to protect them, but you feel angry when people hurt them. We want to live in an order in which people are treated fairly.” Joe’s ‘baby’ talk would make sense later when I found out about his childhood.

When it comes to fairness, I personally consider first what’s fair to the American people, not what’s fair to the world. Unchecked illegal immigration isn’t fair to American workers or American taxpayers. Joe clearly isn’t putting America First.

The paradox of Joe’s open-borderism is that he appeals to American values to substantiate his claim. “Let’s think about the fundamental values that America is based on,” he says. “I was brought up learning about the Statue of Liberty. ‘Give me your tired, your hungry, your poor, your masses, yearning to live free.’ So that was a powerful image of what the country stood for, which I think has been lost in recent years.” Joe’s just made the case for a world without borders by appealing to the values of a particular nation—which, by its very nature, exists within borders. How did this guy get into Yale?

“Would you be okay with millions of Americans walking across into Mexico claiming citizenship, starting to take jobs from Mexicans, dominating their local politics, throwing money around? Mexico wouldn’t think that was fair. Do you think that’s fair to Mexico?” Joe doesn’t want to entertain my hypothetical. He only traffics in his own hypotheticals.

“We have different notions of what the theoretical argument is and how the relationship between hypotheticals and principles works,” he says. Now I’m annoyed. Pure sophistry. Joe pivots. “If we lived in a just world, the problem of controlling immigration would disappear because the truth is most people would rather live in the communities in which they grew up. They speak the language, and that’s where their friends and family are.” Bingo. But then Joe plays the blame game. “We’ve constructed a world in which it is not fair to most of the people who live in it that they feel desperate to leave home.”

“Who constructed the world where people in Guatemala don’t want to live in Guatemala?” I ask.

Joe says, “That’s a complicated question. . . . I try not to engage in those debates.” What?! The highly esteemed political science professor says he “just wants people to reflect.” The professor hasn’t reflected. He just wants others to. Yes, he has tenure.

Joe argues we must “transform the conditions of the global order so that life is reasonable for the vast majority of people where they are born and grow up.” He’s arguing for a liberal utopia, where every country is equal, and nobody wants to migrate, but if some do, they should have the legal right to waltz across the border and claim a different citizenship. I’m smelling some segregation in the air. Joe’s perfect world is one where people born in Zimbabwe stay in Zimbabwe? No integration? Everyone stays put? Is Joe not for diversity?

“It’s a better solution to change the conditions where people live and to reduce the pressures for people to move. And again, I don’t think the United States could [say], ‘Okay, we’re committed to that, and we’ll do that tomorrow.’ That is not the argument at all. It’s getting people to take seriously that aspiration.” But if it’s impossible, naïve, and detrimental to American prosperity—why should we? And if America put its own citizens on the back burner and tried to make life fair and equal in every other country in the world, what would that look like? Would our friends in the Middle East like that? How about China? Hey, Beijing, step aside while Uncle Sam makes your society more fair. Relax, this will only take a minute.

Has the distinguished professor thought any of this through? Of course not. “I’m a political theorist,” he says. “I’m not focusing immediately on debates about public policy.” Okay, Joe, you tell us the world should be fair, and we’ll do the heavy lifting. Joe is trying to imagine a world where if you’re born in either Baghdad or Boston, life is so good that no one ever wants to leave. Oh, and everybody has the same standard of living. When you ask Joe how he’d restructure the world to make things more fair, he says, “That’s outside my area of expertise.”

What is your expertise, Joe? Joe says, “I’m a philosopher.” I started college as a philosophy major at Trinity College. Then I had a professor like Joe, and I switched to history.

How are you going to get people to stay in their own country when the United States keeps offering illegal aliens free stuff? Joe won’t answer. He accuses me of cross-examining him. As I follow Joe’s logic, American taxpayers should pay for housing, food, and college tuition for foreigners . . . in foreign countries.

The abolition of borders in practice, Joe admits, isn’t something we’re going to see anytime soon. It’s “not something that can be done overnight,” he tells me. “I’m not saying, ‘Oh, well, the solution to our problems is open the borders today.’ . . . I mean, there are some proposals on the table, but the idea would be to say, you know what? We have a responsibility to try to move in the direction of change.” Move in the direction of change. Bold.

I try pinning Joe down for the last time. “If someone’s in the country illegally and they get a DUI, should they get deported?” Joe says I’ve abstracted two items. Round two. “What happens if someone sneaks across the border and makes it to San Antonio? Cops catch them. No ID, speaks no English, lies to officers. They’ve been working for cash under the table at a big corporation, driving down wages, sucking up resources from the local community. What do you do with them, Joe? Send them back or let them stay?” Joe says he doesn’t understand the question. He adds that I’m “characterizing the migrant in a negative way.” I apologize to the imaginary migrant.

Joe says, “I don’t want to play that game.” It’s not a game, Joe! It’s the reality of what’s going on!

Joe’s response to pragmatic objections is to zoom back out to the cruising-altitude level. “I just keep insisting, the open borders argument, I say this repeatedly in everything I’ve written

and everything I've said, is not an argument about what public policy ought to be tomorrow," he maintains. He doesn't have the perfect plan because a plan for implementation requires engagement with reality, and reality gets in the way of the utopia that exists at the level of academic abstraction. Joe's detachment from reality is purposeful. He's against "focusing on what's possible in the world." What he's about, he says, is "stepping back and seeing something fundamentally wrong with the overall structure of things and how can we move gradually in that direction."

At this point, I'm convinced Joe the Plumber (RIP) was smarter than Joe the Professor. You don't need to have a PhD to think the world would be better if we all had it good. What do we do with that bit of common sense? Everything out of his mouth is a vague generality. But Watters doesn't quit. "Okay, Joe, you're the president. You're not a professor anymore. You're a person, you're in charge, you're going to do things differently. What are the top three issues you're tackling?"

"We need to address the issue of climate change, and the United States is the problem." Oh boy. Never mind that China is the world's largest carbon emitter; Joe isn't convinced that having America as the world's superpower is good for the world as a whole. Imagine if Canada was the superpower? The second big thing Joe says we need to address is the problem of racism. (Also gender, equality, and sexuality.) He wants same-sex relationships to be acceptable worldwide. Remember, Joe is now the president of the United States, and global gay marriage is a top issue. And finally, number three, the big thing Joe wants to do differently is fix income inequality. Joe says he wants to give more money to Third World countries. Sometimes they steal it, but who cares? Joe wants capitalism to benefit poor countries.

I'm not mad at Joe. I'm disappointed. When he had the chance to step up to the plate and really show me something, he whiffed. An Ivy League-educated professor who's spent decades reflecting on the major issues of humanity, Joe gives me boilerplate. Climate change, racism, and income inequality. How do we solve these problems? Joe doesn't know. A job is waiting for him at MSNBC if he wants one. Even sadder, Democrat politicians are heavily influenced by professors like Joe. Pointing in the direction of fairness and virtue . . . without a workable plan to get there . . . while slamming the status quo as inherently unfair . . . is what the shallow left represents.

Wait a second. Joe is pretty privileged. Pretty elite. Peak privilege. What's his role as a privileged person to help the vulnerable?

"Joe, do you feel guilty about your white privilege?"

Joe admits he feels a little guilty about his privilege. Ivy League-educated, straight, white male, able-bodied tenured professor living comfortably in North America. Joe says he does feel conscious of his privilege, and he "doesn't deserve it."

"I'm a white male, but I don't want there to be male privileges," he declares. "My wife is a feminist theorist, so I am deeply committed to gender equality." He doesn't explain how he demonstrates his commitment to gender equality. Maybe he does the dishes, and his wife mows the lawn, I don't know.

Joe says he sees racism every day in academic life, "in all kinds of ways."

I didn't know the University of Toronto was awash in racism. It's weird since it's likely staffed entirely with progressives. I ask Joe how he fights racial injustice at his university. He claims he confronts it. I ask for an example. Joe's example wasn't what I expected.

Joe explains that a fellow professor was turned down for tenure, and he's helping them with the appeals process. Not really the Selma March. I ask if this professor was black. No, Joe says,

but “they identify as a person of color.” How does Joe know they were rejected for tenure because of their race? Joe doesn’t know, and admits “they might have been turned down for other reasons.” So Joe’s assuming they were denied tenure because they were a person of color? Unclear. But Joe is an ally of a professor who identifies as a person of color on a tenure track.

It appears Joe’s asking the entire world to restructure everything to be more fair, but Joe’s not doing much in his own life to fight injustice at all.

Does Joe have another example of how he personally fights injustice? He digs deep and scratches his bearded chin. Aha! Yes, he does!

Someone was going to be appointed to a position at the law school, but “some donors objected because that person had written about Palestinian human rights.” I ask, and yes, Joe concedes they were Jewish donors. After this kerfuffle at the law school, a report was written. Joe wrote a critique of the report. How many critiques have you written about internal law school reports summarizing squabbles with Jewish donors? I didn’t think so. These are the brave sacrifices political science professors make in Toronto.

I ask Joe what his thoughts are on Israel, and he says, “Look, I have lots of Jewish friends.” Careful, buddy. “Look, I think Israel’s got deep problems now, and the treatment of Palestinians . . .”

You know the rest.

Joe’s guiding principle—a constant refrain throughout our conversation—is fairness. He longs for a world that’s fair. “What I try to say is, look, if we find ourselves in a world, we have to reflect upon whether we think the institutions that exist, however they came about—are these just or fair or are they not? And if they’re unfair, we should try to change them to make them fairer. So that should be the question. The world you find yourself in, you didn’t create it no matter who you are, but you have to decide whether you’re going to perpetuate it or change it.”

I have a hunch something happened to Joe. That something might be why he’s focused on fighting unfairness.

I take a shot. “Were you ever molested as a child?”

“I’m not one hundred percent sure. I think I was sexually abused. I do think that happened, but I don’t have clear memories. I’ve been in therapy, so it’s not something I can point to. This happened to me at this time, but it did affect my stance in the world, I think.” A Catholic priest is “one possibility, but I haven’t got the specifics about it,” he tells me. “So it could have been a family thing. I’m sure it wasn’t my father, but there was an uncle who’s a possibility. I’m not sure. I do think it was probably connected to that because I have a psychological aversion to being in Catholic churches. That makes sense, psychically, in that connection.”

A renunciation of God after an alleged assault inside of a Catholic church would explain a yearning desire for fairer institutions. A fair institution would protect the most vulnerable. Babies are vulnerable. Was Joe molested as a baby? Who else is vulnerable? “Your tired, your poor, your huddled masses.” His striving for strong institutional protection under the banner of universal amnesty makes sense in the repressed memory of an alleged Catholic Church–related child sexual assault.

When people experience trauma, they often remove themselves from reality. It’s too painful. They have to detach to protect themselves. Joe’s aversion to the unfairness of the here and now; his preference for abstract possibility over practical reality; and his focus on what could be over the nature of what is are all functions of a man who finds comfort in a world of dreams, rather than the world as it is. It’s a compelling dream, in the final analysis. But it remains just that—a dream.

The BLM Supporter

Emily is getting divorced. She's also being sued by everyone in her entire family . . . except her brother.

"Do your lawyers know you're doing this interview?" I ask her.

"No," she says. "They don't need to know everything."

Her lawyers would beg to differ. Because once Emily starts talking, she doesn't stop. And she doesn't give a BLANK. A volcano of attitude, her personality erupts all over you. She'll spill her guts. I'm shocked she hasn't been cast somewhere on reality TV yet. "My energy is nervous energy," she says. "Really, it is."

Pretty, white, in her thirties, she's been "a beauty and fashion publicist for, I don't know, twelve, thirteen years." Her main client is "Crackhead Barney." I wasn't familiar with her work, but Barney's a black woman who dresses up and harasses conservatives. Here's an example of her "work." She films herself lying down in front of a group of pro-gun demonstrators, decked out in green face paint and a purple wig, moaning, "Hnnnggghhh . . . shoot me with your load, baby." "Despite the name, she's not a crackhead," Emily assures me. "She's a performance artist. She's wild. And she intimidates the right wing all day."

Emily, who bills herself as an antiracist activist, doesn't see the ridiculousness of a white woman promoting a black woman playing a crackhead. Emily is literally making money off fake black crackheads. "As a white privileged woman—I will say as well, very privileged, I grew up privileged . . . I never asked to be born, but I was born into a family, a conservative family, very, very conservative. This goes against anything that they would ever stand for." There's more than a little pride in her voice. "So we don't talk anymore."

On paper, Emily makes sense. "I married a finance guy. I did the whole white girl thing—the whole track that my dad had for me." After that, she "did the whole stay-at-home mom thing for a few years" too. These "whole [X] things"—you know, the lifestyles lived by millions of Americans—are usually described alongside dismissive gestures and a knowing smirk, as if to say, I was young and naïve back then. Now I know better.

Emily's sister is an influencer, she tells me. "So a huge part of that also contributes to why I'm doing what I'm doing. Because she gained all this notoriety in New York City for doing drugs. And she's pretty, and she's white, and she comes from a good family. She gets all this press. You would never see that with a black person, for instance. It's pretty privilege. It's white privilege." I'm starting to get the sense that Emily's antiracism has a lot more to do with hating her family than hating white supremacy. "The two of us started to beef online over Covid," Emily says. "And again, she's in the papers and in the *New York Post*, of course, all the time,

who I protest actively. We go to Rupert Murdoch's house, we've protested all over them, which is kind of fun."

Emily and her sister were raised "in this stone, cold mansion—Tim Burton-style, with these stone walls and doors, and everything had these sharp corners," she says. "It was really creepy. It was a Frank Lloyd Wright house. It was kind of like living in a prison, and if you spoke up about anything, [my dad] just would totally retaliate on you. So, he just never wanted us to have friends. We had these ridiculous curfews, couldn't be on the phone, and it was just these rigid rules for no reason. But we knew our friends didn't have those rules."

You can start to see where the hatred for authority is coming from.

Emily's parents were a trip too. Her dad was a psychiatrist; her mom was a psychotherapist. "Talk about privilege, we used to go on these five-star vacations to the Dominican Republic or wherever the hell . . . sponsored by Pfizer . . . and meanwhile, my dad's just like . . . He's a drug dealer. What's the difference? He just has a degree from Duke." She had sleeping problems when she was six, so her "dad sends me to a therapist, and they're crushing up my pills in applesauce . . . as early as I can remember," she says. "My dad wrote prescriptions for my sister for Adderall, and she became an Adderall head." Emily was raised in a pharmacy. "We had drugs, the Prozac, the Viagra all over our house. Dad gave it to friends, family. At one point, he was Washington, DC's top psychiatrist because he prescribed so many drugs." Call it what you want, "the system," "the man," Emily felt oppressed. Her father "wasn't big into females using their voice. So over the last two years, I've learned how to use my voice in different ways."

Emily's left-wing activism began as a revolt against her parents' authority: "Growing up, my dad always told me how to not drive in black neighborhoods. He always wanted me to be two cars behind the car in front of me, so I had to have an exit strategy, if somebody came to rob me or beat me up. Did I really need to be afraid?" Later in life, she'd "bug out" when she drove through black neighborhoods.

When both of your parents are shrinks, everything looks like a disorder. "You couldn't eat a waffle without them thinking that, 'Oh, comfort food, you're depressed, aren't you?' Or I would want to sleep in when I was a teenager, and it's like, 'Oh my God, you must be so depressed.' No, I just want to sleep in. It was unbelievable. And they're both narcissists to the full degree, so it was always about them. So, just pills, pills, pills and just diagnosing us with 'this is what you have, this is what you have.'

"He did all kinds of crazy stuff," Emily says of her dad. "Just anything to shut us up." He "was also incredibly abusive, physically. Only with me. And I think a lot of that was because I had this voice. I had this lip. I mean, I couldn't help myself. When something didn't feel right, or he was doing something wrong, I had to call it out. . . . So I had two siblings, and I was always the one that got my ass kicked, always." He "would beat the crap out of me. And a lot of it had to do with the anger he had towards my mom. But he would take it out on me because I was this very loud-mouth kid."

One night almost turned deadly. "I picked up a knife, and I said, 'If you come closer to me, I'm going to do something with this knife.'"

After the knife incident, Emily's dad made a move. "I was kidnapped in the middle of the night and sent to this therapeutic boarding school in Utah called Cross Creek Manor, and it's run by Mormons. They're a for-profit institution, so your parents pay for you to go to these things. They pay people to kidnap you." Apparently, "Paris Hilton did a documentary about this last year. It's called *This Is Paris*, because Paris was also sent to one of these things. It's to shut you up. It's literally to shut you up."

At the time Emily was sent away, she was fourteen. “I was a virgin, and I’d smoked pot a few times,” she says, and wasn’t suited for the “boarding-school-slash-jail run by Republicans.” You “literally don’t wear shoes. You don’t eat with silverware. You can’t watch TV. You don’t go outside. It’s a cult. They brainwash you. You’re completely, totally brainwashed. You have no contact with the outside world. They read your mail before it goes out. You have to do seminars and programs to get out. And the things they make you do—they make you beat towels to get anger out and scream. You would have to strip naked to prove your worth and your self-esteem. . . . You get thrown in isolation rooms. You’re strip-searched. It’s like jail, and I was only fourteen. I was pretty freaking innocent.” Emily says she felt abandoned and suffered from PTSD.

“I got pregnant when I was fifteen. First guy that I was with, boom. Got pregnant.” When Emily returned from Utah after a year, “my dad allowed me to hang out with one boy from my past—one,” Emily says. “And that’s the guy that I lost my virginity to and got pregnant with a few weeks later. Can’t make this shit up. He chose this person. In a way, it’s funny. Maybe my whole life has been like, how can I piss off my dad? Maybe that’s just kind of connected with me subconsciously because I didn’t really like this guy. He was just the only option.” Immediately, she was shipped off to another “lockup school” out of state, in Pennsylvania, all girls.

But not before she had an abortion. “My dad’s whole thing was trying to create these perfect little Republican conservative daughters,” she says. “But he was a hypocrite about it. My dad is the most pro-lifer you’ve ever met. But when it comes to his kids, no, he’s not. Oh, you’re going to get that abortion, you get that abortion, honey, and you’re going to keep quiet, right?”

Her mom—“a shopaholic,” Emily says—took her to get the abortion. On the way back from the abortion, her mom went shopping. “I remember going to Planned Parenthood, and when we were done, we walked out, and she saw a brand-new Nordstrom Rack that had just opened. And she couldn’t help herself, and had to take me shopping at Nordstrom Rack while I literally had a diaper on, I swear to God, because of the abortion. That’s just how her mind works. My mom just really always thought about herself.” Emily’s mom also “has diabetes and an eating disorder on top of it, so she would never eat. She would pass out in the middle of Nordstrom, just on a Tuesday, and you have to run to Starbucks and get her a sugar packet, rip it open, and down it. So, that happened after the abortion too, in Nordstrom Rack.”

It’s at this point that I ask Emily if I can option the rights to her life story. She laughs. But I’m serious. Pill-popping shopaholic mom passes out at Nordstrom Rack on the way back from taking her daughter to Planned Parenthood. Hollywood would gobble this up. Shame on me for thinking how profitable a dark comedy like this would be. Shame on me for casting Kristen Stewart as Emily. Shame on me for imagining a bidding war between directors Wes Anderson and the Coen brothers. *Shame*.

Emily went to the University of Maryland. “My dad was so disappointed. So disappointed. The goal was to get one of his kids at Duke. He’s a Blue Devil.” Emily, her sister, and her brother never made it to Duke. “Not even close. He also wanted us to be doctors. I could never amount to what he wanted me to be. It was impossible. So I majored in sociology and family studies, again, to my dad’s dismay.”

Where does Emily’s brother appear? “He’s out of all of this; he’s just kind of the third kid, and he just disappears.” Her brother is a teacher. Never amounted to what her father wanted. “My dad used to say, ‘Oh. If you had been a doctor like me, you could have gotten any woman you wanted.’ He would say stuff like that to my brother.” Reminder: the brother is the only family member *not* suing Emily.

Emily eventually married a guy who was the son her dad always wanted, the son he never had. “My brother ultimately just started to disappear, so when [my dad] met my ex, who loves sports, who loves college sports, oh my God, who’s in finance, who makes money, golfs, they became best friends.” Emily is perceptive enough to realize the obvious. “I married my dad, ultimately. I swore that I wasn’t, but I did.”

Emily’s ex didn’t have a ring. “He proposed with a Ring Pop.” How sweet. “I got married at City Hall. I was seven months pregnant. My dad convinced me to get married. I didn’t want to get married, and my dad convinced me because that’s just what you do, so that’s what I did. Then he gave me two hundred thousand dollars for a house in exchange in lieu of a wedding, so he would always use his money as a way to get me to do things, and it worked.

“Then I had a huge, swanky baby shower.”

“How swanky?” I wonder.

“At Lafayette in SoHo.” Swanky. “It was open bar, and we had everybody there.” Everybody.

The marriage fell apart. “He worked 24/7. We started to disconnect. He started to cheat over time.”

Now Emily’s getting a divorce—“which is really fun,” she tells me. Her father was dead set against it. “A lot of my divorce also had to do with the fact that my dad was going to lose my ex, right? So it’s selfish. It’s like it has nothing to do with his daughter. It has everything to do with the fact that he’s going to lose a friendship, and he doesn’t have that many friends.” And now “I ruined my dad’s life again.” That last sentence is delivered with a not-so-subtle hint of satisfaction.

The split sounds nasty. Divorcing her husband is how Emily got into activism. It began “when I hit my ex with a hairbrush,” she says nonchalantly. “The police came and told me to leave the home. Once again, that was never something I should have done. Had I known my rights, I never would’ve left the home.” But “I got slapped with an abandonment charge” because “I did what the police told me to do. So a huge part of my work now, when I’m policing the police, is exactly because of things like that.” Emily was a stay-at-home mom for five years. Now her children have been taken away from her. It’s difficult to pay for divorce attorneys. She’s not good with money. Her dad is suing her. And she missed an important court date. Still, Emily doesn’t dwell much on not seeing her kids, five and seven, which strikes me as odd.

The divorce began right around the time that George Floyd was killed, “so all of that generational trauma” from her conservative upbringing “just hit me like a ton of bricks. All the stuff with Trump just brought it up to the surface.” From there “I started getting into protesting. . . . I just found protests. And then I started to unlearn all the bad stuff that I was taught and how it impacted my life.” Emily is dismantling her white privilege, one BLM protest at a time.

“When I got to New York, everything was closed, and the only thing that was going on were protests. So I would just be walking around with my headphones on, and I would see this massive protest, and I just jumped right in. That’s when I started to find my voice. Then I’d find another one the next day, and another one, and another one. I mean, it’s literally what kept me sane.”

I asked Emily if Black Lives Matter was like a family.

“It was.” Emily purged (or was purged from) her real family and found her voice and a new family on the streets of social justice.

“Dad cut me out two years ago as soon as I started in Black Lives Matter. He thought that