KEYNOTE ADDRESS
Rachel Maddow Keynote Speech

I hope everybody had a great lunch we are at the portion of the program that I know many people are eager to hear so please welcome to the stage the moderator for our keynote address our Truman member Monique akala [Applause]

Monique Alcala:
hello good afternoon everyone I am so delighted to be here today to introduce our keynote speaker Rachel Maddow and then also moderate the Q a portion of this conference in just a little bit this is actually really special for me I didn't I don't think I mentioned this to her whenever we're chatting back because I was kind of scared but I did I did um I moved back to Austin like not a couple of years ago and one was because my father was sick and sadly he passed away in October but I remember him telling me a few years ago that he stopped watching the news because of all of the extremist rhetoric and all of the attacks on our country except for Rachel's show

ah so when Truman asked me to do this I was like of course I am I'm a huge fan um but also it's just an incredibly extra special for me just because of that so um very thankful to Truman for asking me to do this so um let's go ahead and introduce our our speaker uh Rachel Maddow is the host of the Emmy award-winning show or The Rachel Maddow Show on MSNBC it was the most successful show launched in MSNBC history immediately boosting ratings in its time period when it debuted in September 2008. I'm sure most of you in the audience know well how great the show is I know I do and how talented Rachel is but did you know she's also the recipient of tons of awards and recognitions like a bunch of Emmys yeah Emmys I mean come on and then she was also named breakout Star by The Washington Post in 2008 whenever the show launched and she was also named one of the top 10 political newcomers by politico.com last year along with former matto show producer Michael Jarvis she executive produced and launched a podcast called Rachel Maddow presents Ultra an eight-part historical nonfiction series that explores the story of a 1944 greats edition trial it caught it even caught the attention of Steven Spielberg's amblin entertainment which has since optioned the film rights for the podcast and will develop a feature film Ultra is the second original podcast from Mado and
Jarvis following their hit series Bag Man which earned the prestigious Dupont Columbia award in addition to all of this Maddow is an author of several books including drift the unmooring of American military power which debuted at number one on the New York Times bestseller list in March of 2012 and blow out corrupted democracy Rogue State Russia and the richest most destructive industry on Earth madal received a bachelor's degree in public policy from Stanford University and she earned her doctorate in political science at Oxford University which he attended on a Rhodes scholarship she lives in New York City and Massachusetts with her partner artist Susan mikula let's welcome to the stage Rachel Madden

Rachel Maddow:

[Music] hi

um I get nervous when I can see the humans to whom I am speaking so these are my reading glasses and you're just an amorphous blob and I'm sorry so any subtle emotions are like if something's happening you're trying to get my attention I need big movements um thank you for that um kind in invitation or introduction one of the things I don't do very often is give speeches and that is in part because I get nervous seeing humans um but it's also because when I have given speeches in the past I am never invited back and that is because I give weird speeches

so this is your fair warning this will be a weird speech um I'm sorry in advance I can tell you right now you're going to have no idea why I'm talking about most of the things that I'm talking about it is a story about bad guys but they are bad guys you haven't heard of and that don't necessarily matter to you it says some unkind things about our namesake um uh president Harry Truman which is probably a bad choice for this room

but stick with me

it wraps around and there are no commercials and there is no guest all right

1789 was the French Revolution typical motto show start right um 1889 was the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution and there was a World's fair that year so naturally they had Paris hosted on the Centennial and what Paris built for the World's Fair in 1889 was the Eiffel Tower and parisians thought it was absolutely hideous they were so glad it was only going to last for the duration of the fair but that is how we got the Eiffel Tower the World's Fair is also how we got the Space Needle in Seattle yeah Seattle has nothing to do with drug use it had to do with him

and had to do with the 1962 World's Fair they built the Space Needle as a centerpiece for the fairgrounds for that year and of course we still have it today and it is obviously awesome we
don't really do worlds fairs anymore not in the same way we used to but they were a really really big deal for a long time 1939 the World's Fair was in New York and that was the World's Fair where the world was introduced to some weird new thing called television they debuted that at the World's Fair also nylon also view Masters you can judge amongst yourselves which of them has had a more important impact on America in the years since that 1939 World's Fair stretched into 1940 and if you think about what was going on in the world at that time there was an interesting reflection of it at that World's Fair as Nazi Germany started invading country after country in Europe and the national Pavilions of all the invaded countries one after the other just started going black just started taking themselves down the first time we got those National Pavilions at a World's fair where countries that have their own area at the fair to build things and show off what was great about their country the first world sphere that did that was one in Chicago in 1892. it was another anniversary it was 400 years since Columbus sailing to the new world so it was like discovery of America they had all these really racist anthropological um uh exhibits to show you know what the world was like before white people got here um but they showed off the first ever Ferris wheel at the 1892 Chicago World's Fair Chicago was super super proud of how that World's Fair went so much so that it to this day is on the Chicago City flag Chicago's Flag is like white with two blue stripes and then it's got four red stars one of the stars is for that World's Fair like in perpetuity it was that important to them which is awkward because at that World's Fair the mayor of Chicago was assassinated um disappointed office Seeker went to his house and killed him they had to change the closing ceremony so it was sad

um lots of things about that that World's Fair make it stand out but the national Pavilions were countries from all over the world would have their own country-specific lavish exhibits and build the thing to show off who they were who they were that that was the real innovation that year and that year to represent the British Empire the British colonies at that fair in Chicago they constructed a huge thing not not like Eiffel Tower big but big it was a fake Buddhist temple

um full-scale Temple um they called it Ceylon Court as in Ceylon Sri Lanka and it was a temporary building constructed just for the fair but it was massive it was 18 000 square feet so like Castle size it was built with rare Hardwoods uh not a single nail was used in the construction it was all held together with pegs this big elaborate thing it cost a million dollars to build it in 1890s dollars so it's like 33 million dollars today just for this big beautiful but weird thing that was just for the fair and then after the fair it was slated to be demolished which of course seems like a waste at least it seemed like a waste to a rich real estate guy in Wisconsin after that World's Fair was over in 1893 he paid to have this 18 000 square foot Temple dismantled packed onto rail cars 24 different rail cars shipped it to Wisconsin and then had it rebuilt on the shores of Geneva Lake in the town of Lake Geneva Wisconsin and once this big 18 000 square foot Temple was assembled on the shore of the lake the real estate guy decided he did not like it and so he sold it to a rich Chicago Banker the rich Chicago Banker then
promptly sold it to the Maytag family as in the Maytag washing machine family they made this million dollar eighteen thousand square foot fake hardwood Temple held together with pigs all taken from the World's Fair they made it part of their estate in Lake Geneva Wisconsin where it fit right in

Lake Geneva by the 1920s and the 1930s was just a real showcase for the ostentatiously rich of the Midwest the Maytag Washington machine family had their huge fake Buddhist temple brought in by Railcar from the World's Fair the Wisconsin Historical Society will still to this day happily sell you postcard images of a big Sri Lankan Temple incongruously perched on the banks of Geneva Lake but other rich people in Lake Geneva had also bought and shipped the Denmark Pavilion from the World's Fair also the Norway Pavilion also for some reason the state of Idaho had a whole building at that World's Fair and somebody in Lake Geneva disassembled it put it on the train drove it to Lake Geneva reassembled it and they lived in the building it was a thing it was like Epcot Center

but this is a place where everybody was kind of outdoing themselves you have the you have the family that owned the Morton Salt Company they built themselves a 13-bedroom mansion in Lake Geneva with 30-foot ceilings the crane family of the plumbing fixtures uh Fortune they built a 22-bedroom Palace in Lake Geneva there was a rich socialite novelist

named Jane Eyre Fairbanks she built a 40-room mansion there that was made to look like it was Stamped Out of gingerbread

still today among this I'm we're coming don't worry

still today Lake Geneva is among the swankiest addresses in that whole part of the country they call it the Switzerland of America there's a mansion in Lake Geneva on the market today that comes it's like 35 million dollars and it comes with a whole separate house on the grounds that's just for the owner's model train set so if that's you and you have the money to spare Lake Geneva is for you but it's in the 1930s Lake Geneva was definitely that era's equivalent of the like show-off Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous kind of place and it was also no Jews allowed

um Lake Geneva is about 70 miles from Chicago and in January 1941 the Lake Geneva Chamber of Commerce put an ad in the Chicago Daily News that said this it said come to the Switzerland of America Lake Geneva Wisconsin right the Chamber of Commerce for complete information catering to a gentile clientele so real estate transactions are what they call restricted in in Lake Geneva which meant restricted to non-Jews only and a lot of places um were in that boat in in the United States in 1941 but Lake Geneva was one of the only places that was advertising it explicitly I mean they're saying overtly in Chicago newspapers come here Chicago money here you can get away from the Jews
a few minutes a few months after that that ad ran in the summer of 1941 a New York Magazine relocated its whole staff its whole operation from Manhattan to Lake Geneva Wisconsin and the explanation offered by the editor was that New York City's mayor was two anti-german the editor told Time magazine that he decided to move his magazine out of New York because of Mayor laguardia's yells that German bombers are coming the decision was explained in blunter terms to a far-right newsletter called America in danger what they said about the move in 1941 was this they said um for some weeks before we left New York our mailbags were rifled New York has a Jew postmaster and a Jew LaGuardia as mayor that magazine that moved their editor told another reporter that he wanted to get his magazine out of New York and into Lake Geneva specifically instead because there was about to be a Civil War in the United States in 1941. he said as long as Roosevelt continued to drive America toward war against Hitler Midwest farmers were going to rise up and lead a civil war and they were going to win because Midwest farmers were the real Heartland stock of America they did not want to fight their blood in Europe and the day was soon approaching when they would rise up they would take up arms overthrow the elites overthrow the U.S government to keep America from fighting Hitler so since that day was coming soon he figured it was better to be in Wisconsin which is going to be the winning side in the Civil War particularly against the east coast and sort of overlooked now even I think by people who are looking at the store history of that time but lots of the more radical Americans who didn't want us to fight in the second world war predicted we would have a civil war here if Roosevelt did get us into it um and and some

of them were sort of saying publicly that they feared that that might happen but some of them were plainly kind of rooting for that

so um as the magazine moved from New York to Lake Geneva you can see um in if you can find old copies of it that it it started to change as a magazine physically it got kind of swanky its covers were glossy and printed in color which was rare at the time because it was expensive it was printed on really high quality paper which is a benefit for those of us looking at this history now because it survived as opposed to pulpey or Publications that have dissolved over time this is a magazine that was long it had lots of pages also interestingly it had no visible means of support it had no ads it did have sort of PSAs telling readers like how to join their local America First committee which was a big mainstream organization advocating to keep America from joining World War II but it didn't have anything that looked like a paid advertisement at all how was it being funded

um for a flavor of what the magazine was like this is a magazine that put Charles Lindbergh on the cover and Henry Ford politicians like the influential Republican senator Gerald Nye and the editorial slant was very aggressively and very emphatically that the U.S shouldn't join the war that neither Germany nor Japan was any threat to us that we should be allied with them if anything it was pointless for our allies to even try to fight Germany in particular which was so much stronger than everybody else militarily it also hinted and sometimes sort of flat out said
particularly in its cartoons that maybe here in America it was just the Jews who were trying to get us into the war not because it was good for America but because Jews always have their own nefarious purposes.

although there was no indication that there were any all that many paying subscribers to this very fancy expensive magazine it was nevertheless printed and mailed out in huge quantities in fact the magazine was sent in bulk to U.S army bases and U.S army airfields and even to combat ships in Port this magazine was called scribner's commentator and it showed up in in bulk quantities on U.S military posts as far afield as the Philippines and Alaska and the Panama Canal Zone and every issue of this thing was like you know Hitler's winning possibly Hitler's right U.S has no hope in fighting against him and certainly no reason to fight against him it's being shipped out in bulk to U.S troops in the field who was paying to produce this thing where was it coming from

in November 1941 so that same year a special grand jury was convened in Washington to investigate the German government's secret propaganda operations inside the United States and a writer for that magazine for scribner's commentator was subpoenaed to testify to the grand jury there were questions for this writer about the distribution of the magazine particularly because it was being sent to U.S troops questions about who was backing the magazine financially when the writer got his subpoena he went on the lamb and there was a national Manhunt to find him he eventually explained that he was on a sudden impulse vacation in the Deep South and had forgotten about the subpoena he was later tried and convicted as a secret foreign agent who was on the payroll of the Japanese government publisher of the magazine was also invited to testify when he was questioned as to how the magazine was funded he had the world's most amazing story he told the grand jury under oath that the way the magazine was funded it's crazy but you got to believe me was by Anonymous gift wrapped Parcels of cash that were left as presents for him at his front door in Lake Geneva he said on one occasion he found inside his front hall hurled through an open window a parcel that was fifteen thousand dollars in cash in twenty dollar bills it was all wrapped up like a present he had no idea who threw it through his window it was just laying there in the hall thank God he left his window open that night then it happened again another fifteen thousand dollars also in twenty dollar bills also wrapped up in gift wrap like a present this time left just inside his front door in Lake Geneva for perspective fifteen thousand dollars then would be about three hundred thousand dollars today and and there was still more he said one day in Lake Geneva a man on the street walked up to him and without a word handed him a parcel three thousand dollars in cash never seen the man before didn't know who he was the man didn't give his name didn't say anything just handed him the money and walked away and that was how they paid for the magazine it was amazing he said another six thousand dollars found wrapped up like a present just sitting on his desk one day he had a habit of leaving his door unlocked in safe Lake Geneva and so who knows it could have been anyone
but that's how he said his expensive glossy magazine was funded. Angels maybe right some some sort of Otherworldly benefactor it was like winning the lottery without even playing it's great four times the publisher explained to the grand jury that no he was not curious about who was dropping off this cash and he didn't see why the jury grand jury should see it as odd either he explained that he was producing a magazine of such compelling quality that didn't just didn't surprise him that Anonymous benefactors would do this

but if it really was like you know Santa um leaving Anonymous gifts at the Lake Geneva house to fund this magazine the prosecutors who were leading the grand jury inquiry had questions they wanted to ask him about that because one of those big Anonymous influxes of cash seemed to coincide with this publisher taking a trip to New York in September of 1941 the guy left Lake Geneva took a train to New York checked into a hotel in New York the hotel Pennsylvania stayed one night then took the train back to Wisconsin the next day and when he arrived back in Wisconsin he went to the bank and deposited fifteen thousand dollars so the prosecutor said to him in front of the grand jury hey in this case it kind of doesn't look like Santa it kind of looks like you went to New York and got 15 grand and brought it back here and put it in the bank and he said no no no that whole trip to New York thing was just a lark it was a big misunderstanding it was a mistake he insisted that actually that was just one of those gift wrapped Parcels of cash and arrived like it always did like a store could dropped off a new baby just randomly dropped off at his house and on that occasion for whatever reason it seemed like so much money he thought it's not safe to deposit in Wisconsin I will buy a train ticket take the money on a train ride to New York put it in a New York bank and come back here and then when he said he got to New York he changed his mind about it he felt silly so instead he took the truth he took the money on a return trip back to Wisconsin and deposited it there that was his explanation you will be shocked to learn it does not appear that his story was true when the war was over in 1946 one of the prosecutors who had been investigating these Nazi propaganda efforts in the United States um he went to Germany to interview captured Nazis because now the war was over right um and these were high-ranking Nazi officials who had actually overseen the Hitler government's efforts to spread Nazi propaganda in the United States and to promote American fascist groups here and so while he was in Germany and he was doing this questioning there were two Nazi officials who admitted in fact that they were Santa they were the leprechauns they were the storks right they had actually been providing funding from the German government in cash for that American Magazine in Lake Geneva Wisconsin also for another broadsheet publication in Lake Geneva that took the same editorial line but that was even more anti-Semitic was Nazi government funded propaganda to try to undermine the American war effort to promote Fascism and especially anti-Semitism here and to keep America from joining the war against the Axis powers it was all based out of this Rich proudly anti-semitic no Jews allowed town in Wisconsin one high-ranking Nazi official admitted to the prosecutor that he was the one who had approved the German government providing the funding a second Nazi official testified that after his boss had approved it he was the one who
physically took it to the hotel Pennsylvania and handed it over to that publisher that night in September 1941 when the prosecutors already knew that guy was there it's a pretty good case right the prosecutor who collected that testimony from those Nazi officials he came back to the U.S and reported to the U.S justice department that Lake Geneva Wisconsin was hosting a magazine and a newspaper that were both funded by the Nazi government the cash Parcels that were used to fund to the magazine so lavishly were not in fact just flying through the window on angel's wings they had been delivered by Nazi officials working at the German consulate in New York prosecutor advised doj that it was his recommendation that at the very least the publisher who had testified about these gift wrapped Parcels to the grand jury he should be put on trial at the very least for perjury and he was he was put on trial for perjury and doj did not take any chances with this case they actually brought the Nazi Witnesses from Germany to Washington to testify in this case the guy who admitted hand delivering the cash the guy who admitted approving the cash deliveries they were brought to testify at the trial and this was core to the substance of the case right so the jury was to consider you know basically which is more likely that this you know it's kind of door number one this pro-german pro-hitler inexplicably lavish expensive magazine was funded by random random Anonymous gift wrap Parcels of money thrown through windows or door number two was it more likely that it was funded by the German government when two officials of that government admit that it was them funded by Magic Leprechauns are funded by Nazis who admit they did it which is it the jury chose door number one must be leprechauns they acquitted the publisher of the magazine of perjury charges jury said they did not believe he lied when he explains to the grand jury his story about the gift-wrapped parcels of cash and random guys just handing him thousands of dollars on the street and walking away without a word they decided that was real

so first of all this is a true story this happened in March that the trial was March 1947. the reason the jury acquitted this guy is because the defense convinced the jury that the Nazi Witnesses must have lied in their testimony according to the defense the Nazis must have been tortured by the Americans when they were questioned in Germany it was only because they were tortured that they gave this false testimony falsely claiming that the German government had funded this magazine now there is no evidence at all other than the defense's claims that this happened but as a defense it worked the magazine guy really was acquitted and if you widen the lens just a tiny little bit you can see why that defense might have worked as I said the trial was held in March 1947. for a couple of months before that in January February of 1947 newspapers in the United States dozens of newspapers including Prestige papers like the New York Times had been running story after story after story about accusations that Nazi prisoners were being abused in American custody in Germany Nazis were being tortured by American interrogators in Germany the line was that the Americans were behaving worse than the Gestapo ever did they were giving these Nazi war crimes defendants the third degree and accusing them of all sorts of things they never did and exacting false confessions from them by third degree tactics those accusations were false Americans were not doing that to German prisoners but the allegations were very scandalous and they got a lot of play in The Press at the time those false accusations
of Nazi prisoners being abused had been invented in Germany by pro-nazi defense lawyers who were defending accused German war criminals and I say they were pro-nazi lawyers because they invented these allegations not just to try to get their clients off the hook it was part of a broader strategy they were trying more broadly to rehabilitate the image of the Nazis trying to discredit the Americans and the Allies trying to make it seem like the allies and the Nazis were all equally bad it was just Victor's Justice it was just that the Germans had lost and so they were now getting a bad rap

in the most Sinister formulation and this was argued not just in Germany but also by Americans here at home the most Sinister formulation of this argument claim was that Jewish American investigators and interrogators were inventing terrible claims about Germans out of spite Jewish American servicemen were out to get German soldiers for Revenge because of what the Germans had done to the Jews and just because the Germans were Christian and Jews were terrible to Christians and so the accusation was under color of the U.S military Jewish GIS were torturing innocent Germans for their own sadistic satisfaction and that was all complete bull but German defense lawyers and American defense lawyers sympathetic to the Nazi defendants they all advanced these claims and the accusations were Amplified by the conservative press here in America and by Americans here at home including some Americans serving in the United States Senate who were trying to get political Advantage out of it by attacking the Army by attacking the administration by aligning themselves with these scandalous false claims and it all contributed in that moment in time in sort of late 46 into 47 to this astonishing run of of commuted sentences and de facto pardons for convicted Nazi war criminals in Germany even though there really wasn't any evidence that Americans had been brutalizing Nazi prisoners the accusations worked though um and you know after months of

those false allegations circulating in the press in Congress it helped collapse some of the Nazi war prosecutions in Germany and this prosecution of this weird Nazi funded Magazine from Lake Geneva Wisconsin that prosecution in March 1947 it contributed to its collapse fell apart for the same reason these false claims that the poor Nazis must have been mistreated by terrible American interrogators who were just out to get them this deception to try to rehabilitate the image of the Nazis and smear the United States particularly to smear Jewish Americans it's a really ugly story and in the moment in March 1947 it was this big embarrassing courtroom loss for the justice department the magazine guys who had conspired with the Germans who had taken orders from Berlin who had so obviously been on the German payroll they absolutely got away with it their editor went on to a long career at Reader's Digest after running this other magazine for the Nazis by the end of his long career he was retired and writing uh genteel racist books about sailing to Tropical Islands I can still get them today on eBay the writer who was convicted as an agent for the Japanese he did a short prison sentence and then went on to a long influential career on the American hard right promoting American support for apartheid and later Holocaust denial the Nazi funded propaganda operation that operated in in Lake Geneva Wisconsin in that rich well-connected deeply anti-semitic town that just disappeared from history
you can buy yourself a 35 million dollar mansion there today with a separate house for your train set

the prosecutor though who uncovered all of this who got this evidence and brought it back to America what happened to him is he was fired by Harry Truman

did I read the room wrong

I'm okay all right

when this prosecutor had gone to Germany and questioned Nazi officials about the work they had done in the United States the Americans they'd funded the Americans they had made plans with against the U.S government that prosecutor came back to the U.S with a pretty good understanding of how Nazi Germany had operated inside our own country he came back with a list of Americans who'd been on the German payroll or who had been working with them and on that list of Americans were two dozen serving U.S senators and members of Congress and on that list of serving Senators was a democratic U.S senator who was a very close friend of President Truman he'd been friends with him when President Truman was in the Senate himself and that year in 1946 President Truman had openly endorsed and campaigned for precisely one Democratic senator who was up for reelection and it was his his friend this Senator his name was Burton wheeler well that Prosecutor's report on what he had discovered in Germany what he had learned from captured Nazis he brought it back to the U.S the report was submitted to the attorney general whose name was Tom Clark who would go on to be a Supreme Court Justice the Attorney General appears to have told President Truman um that his friend Senator wheeler was on the list of Americans who had worked with the Nazis inside the United States Senator wheeler then went to the White House to pay

President Truman a visit and we know from White House Records at the time that they had a two-hour one-on-one meeting at the end of that meeting that same night President Truman summoned his attorney general and told him to fire the prosecutor the guy who had written this justice department report told the Attorney General to bury the report and keep it secret even though the prosecutor had previously been told it would be made public the Attorney General did so that same night at midnight he fired the prosecutor and now today with the benefit of hindsight we know that despite lots of false claims at the time Nazi prisoners were not systematically tortured or brutalized when they were held by U.S forces after the war let alone subjected to some kind of sadistic Revenge plot by Jewish U.S service members it did not happen today with the benefit of hindsight we know that the Nazis were supporting pro-fascist efforts inside the United States they were bankrolling pro-fascist authors and Publications supporting violent U.S fascist groups who stockpiled weapons and planned to try to overthrow the U.S government today with the benefit of hindsight we know that Nazis the Nazis did have Confederates inside the United States including a surprisingly large effort that they ran in
Congress using Nazi funds and and Nazi agents and we now know that those members of Congress were powerful enough they had friends in high enough places that they use their own political influence to get themselves excused from accountability to get the people who had found them out fired

so how does this help us in a national security context today two points on that and then I will sit down the first point is this it would be great to know why President Truman did what he did why fire that prosecutor why order the the burial of that report on Americans who had been working with Nazi Germany we do not know the answer to that for sure because President Truman never explained himself on this point and depending on how you're you're feeling about President Truman at the moment you can come up with a range of potential explanations that range from sort of very very bad to not quite as bad um I think the worst case explanation was one that was offered by a crusading newspaper columnist at the time Drew Pearson who did actually break a lot of factual truth about this story at the time but he also suggested in one of his columns that maybe President Truman ordered this prosecutor fired because of a grudge because that prosecutor had also had a hand in Prosecuting the old corrupt political boss in Missouri to whom Truman owed his start in politics

and I don't think there's any evidence to support that that was President Truman's motivation I've looked into it and I just I don't think it's there but in the absence of any explanation to the contrary that one did circulate in the Press at the time first with Drew Pearson and then more widely and that itself is bad right leaving that out there not offering a contrary reasonable explanation that does feed people's lowest suspicions about why the government takes the actions that it takes corruption is bad the appearance of corruption is also bad in terms of breeding cynicism about our democratic form of government another only slightly less bad explanation is that President Truman fired the prosecutor and buried his report in order to protect his friend Senator wheeler this one I think there's strong support for Senator wheeler was Truman's friend Senator wheeler had been up to his neck in the Nazi scheme in

Congress senator wheeler was all over that Prosecutor's report from Germany and it was right after Senator wheeler had met with Truman at the White House for two hours that Truman ordered the prosecutor fired Senator wheeler had also previously advocated to the justice department that they fire another prosecutor who had been working on the same investigation which would make this the second time Senator wheeler had used his political influence to get a prosecutor fired from this case a case in which he himself was in the crosshairs for something very bad and it's really bad that the justice department gave into that kind of pressure that they did and it's really really bad that Senator wheeler used that kind of pressure in the first place it's also really bad if President Truman helped him do it if president Sherman's friendship with Senator wheeler is why he did what he did why he fired that prosecutor and buried that report that is a conclusion that does not reflect well on President Truman
that said there is also sort of a best case scenario that you could conjure for him which is that by late October 1946 when Truman had the prosecutor fired the big Marquee Nuremberg trials had actually just come to an end uh the U.S Diplomat George Kennen had just sent his Long Telegram about the global Ambitions of the USSR and the need for the United States to contain Soviet Ambitions as a matter of existential importance and so in pure National Security terms in late October 1946 maybe this wasn't the time to be prying open a big ugly old can of worms about us and the Germans and Americans with ties and sympathies on the Nazi side particularly Americans in our government I mean it was very shortly after the end of World War II but we were on by then to fighting communism as our first imperative and what would soon be called the Cold War that was a war in which we wanted West Germany to be on our side as an ally and so maybe that informed Truman's decision as well we don't know we don't know because he never explained himself we know from files at the Truman Library that The Firestorm of press criticism over what Truman did over him firing that prosecutor it had a lot of resonance with the public there are thick stacks of angry letters and telegrams from members of the public and little Civic groups all over the country expressing disgust to the president that he had stood up for this terrible Senator Bert wheeler discussed an anger that Truman had fired the prosecutor demands that President Truman reverse his decision and let the prosecutors report be made public President Truman never responded he never explained himself he just bore The Firestorm and let it pass and maybe that's fine maybe that's fine if it's one ephemeral Scandal during a long presidency with a lot going on one little Firestorm that rages in the moment but then ends if you think of National Security challenges as one-off challenges if you engage each one as unique as a product of its time as inexorably tied to specific contemporaneous context never to be repeated then that's fine you know let it blow over don't explain it if you do not have to

but maybe 80 years down the road at the conference of the Truman Center for National policy maybe in a admittedly weird speech some nerdy American news person with Arcane interests will be pouring over your decisions again looking for some help from history for today because maybe 80 years down the road our country will once again be contending with hard questions about whether it's in the National interest to criminally investigate and prosecute high-ranking influential political figures maybe we will once again be contending with questions about whether a politician steeped in Scandal and voted out of office which Burton wheeler was in 1946 maybe we will be contending with whether that politician should be seen as punished enough by his political loss or whether it would serve Justice and the national interest to put him on trial for serious alleged crimes even after he left office maybe 80 years down the road we'll be contending with questions of the propriety of justice department investigations into hostile foreign powers involving themselves with political contests and political figures in our own country maybe 80 years down the road we will be facing what seemed like new hard questions about how much the public should be allowed to know about those investigations
what we should do with a report to the attorney general laying out the findings of such a congressional investigation into a foreign power interfering in our elections and with our politics

when the justice department under Roosevelt and under Truman contended with ultra-right American zealots and paramilitary groups bent on overthrowing the U.S government and members of Congress who were sympathetic to them

[Applause] for them

[Music]

[Applause]

coming to A substack newsletter near you [Laughter] [Applause]

as I was saying um when the justice department under Roosevelt and under Truman contended with ultra-right American zealots and paramilitary groups bent on overthrowing the U.S government and members of Congress who were sympathetic to them and didn't want them investigated or prosecuted I'm sure they thought in the 1940s that that was a one-off that that could never happen again as such government actions around those controversies up to and including controversial orders by the president himself at the time they went unexplained and undefended because I'm sure it seemed at the time those things were only of temporary interest of temporary importance they didn't need to stand the test of time they were like buildings constructed just for the World's Fair who would ever think they'd still be standing they'd still mean something to all of us all these years later if we have learned nothing else in National Security let it be that there are no real one-offs there are no Black Swan events there was no one American fight against fascism there will not be just one president or ex-president indicted there have been many and there will be more hostile foreign governments that yes interfered in our elections and in our politics and there have been many and there will be more Americans eager to help with that

principal decision making means not only responsibility to the full circumstances at hand in the moment it also means there's a responsibility to the Americans 80 years from now who will be contending Anew contending again with something like this mess that we're in today

at the risk of calling out the pitchforks and the Torches in this room I will I will leave you with this um don't be like Truman in this case if you're going to do something really controversial like firing that prosecutor and burying that red hot report

please explain yourself your country needs you to if not now then 80 years down the road thank you [Applause]
Q&A
hi hi I told you it was long and I told you it was long and boring no no I'm really excited um one I know I'm small but I I when I heard a little bit of scuffling in the front I was I like leapt out of my chair like I was gonna go tackle somebody [Laughter] yes in times of Crisis that's how you know who your real leaders are

so we have a couple of um we have a couple of well actually I'm just gonna start off with our q a and I have one that I want to start off with and I think then we'll move over to audience questions um so love the speech by the way thank you I did um I always love whenever we bring in this type of discourse so um the far-right extremism that we've seen in recent years and the kind that actually translates to domestic Terror attacks feels in many ways imprint unprecedented many of the people who carry out the attacks are portrayed by some as lone wolves or they're brushed off as one-off incidents but the repeated rhetoric that we hear from politicians really points to a larger system of extremism what does a country do to combat this type of violent extremism that seems increasingly ingrained in its own democracy well I know that's it's been the discussion of a lot of the conference already today and I don't I certainly don't have all the answers but I do think that the the one thing that history offers us in terms of combating that spectrum of extremism that you're talking about is that it has it can't just be one thing um you know if you're fighting you know Global imperialistic fascism where you've got a fascist dictatorship invading other countries part of the response probably has to be War right if you're in if you're dealing with people who are engaging in acts of violence here in the United States no matter what they're motivated by violence as a crime and so it needs to be prosecuted as a crime if you're dealing with politicians who are using their first protected constitutionally protected First Amendment rights to advocate for the type of extreme extremism that lends itself to violence the way that you combat protected First Amendment activity even when it's you know advocating for terrible things is that you Advocate against it that you use speech against speech and so there sort of has to be a range um depending on what you're contending with but I think it is helpful for us to talk about and to recognize the way these things interact that um violence and extremism and the efforts to delegitimize

the democratic form of government are things that feed each other and so you have to see them together and attack them together that's great um actually I want to I want to dive a little bit into something that that one of the panels was talking about earlier and that was on diversity and National Security I'm going to ask you one more question then we'll move to questions from the audience so earlier today they emphasize the importance of having a wide variety of voices in the room so when making decisions relevant to National Security yeah despite the evidence that diversity does in fact strengthen decision making diversity initiatives have been sucked into culture wars over this perceived wokeness which has prevented some reforms from being actualized in government what do you see as the most effective arguments in supporting National or diversity and National Security Workforce and in decision making it's interesting I
think that the sort of anti you know Dei anti-woke messaging on the right is completely unreconstructed from the earlier iterations that we've seen of this whether it's anti-affirmative action or it's anti-political correctness or it's I mean just you know every eight years we have a new version of this um and the arguments are always the same which is that you know white people are the real victims and white people are put upon and Christians are the real victims and Christians are put upon and those arguments are the same going back not just decades but Generations um and the the best counter argument to that has always been reality um that you are not building the strongest Workforce you can the strongest Brain Trust you can if you were only tapping part of the population to build it and that irreducible truth which is true both in terms of of gender and race and religion and other forms of diversity is irreducibly true and meritocratically provable in a way that is never um is never disadvantaged in argument and so I think we just need to sort of be prouder of that side of the argument in some ways and recognize that the counter arguments are not novel that they're the same that have always been made and in some cases you can learn good techniques good arguments good tactics even borrow good political ads from the last times that we saw this whether it was in the 90s with the political correctness Panic whether it was the 80s with the anti-affirmative action rise on the right um it's the it's a it's an old song

we have a few more minutes um left for this portion you see people in the audience I can't um I think I see I think I see Charlotte Clymer

um but yeah I I think we can go ahead and move because we had we have quite a large audience hi hello um Rachel first I want to thank you for having Senator Michael Cavanaugh on your show from Nebraska uh for those of you don't know she was a state senator Nebraska who promised a filibuster through the entire session until the trans hate bill was pulled down sadly that did just pass this week along with the 12-week abortion ban it was part of a larger must pass budget Bill and despite all of her efforts and those of her colleagues efforts it did unfortunately pass so my question is really to just have you brainstorm and it's about we seem to always be fighting rear guard movements and having heroic women stand up like Michaela Cavanaugh did how do we get how do we be more proactive in getting National parties especially you know where the right is but even on the left if we do claim to be pro-choice if we do claim to be an ally of the trans community why are we not investing in

the states that now 75 million women have second-class citizenship that trans hate is a part of more than half of our state legislatures how do we just brainstorm how we can get more attention to fighting these battles and getting the money and effort and resources into the states that do have a lot of Michaela Kavanaugh's that don't get on your show thank you for that question I mean I'm I'm not a political strategist and I wouldn't take political advice from me if anything depended on it um I would say that just as an observation um that you I sort of referenced that that a lottery slogan like you can't win if you you can't win if you don't play um you can't you can't win if you don't fight in these fights and I think that it does attract energy and
allies and resources when you fight and when you fight and you occasionally win you can triple down on that and so where the where you've got Senator Kavanaugh's um as in Nebraska standing up and saying articulating beautifully what it is she's doing and why and making excellent arguments and winning the argument even though she lost the fight it's going to attract attention it's going to attract allies it's going to attract resources and so I feel like those of us in the news business who are covering this culture war that we're having as a country need to find the stories of people who are making good arguments and standing up whether or not they're they're likely to win um and there's a there's a space for activism all over the country that does every single time you stand up and you make a good argument whether or not you win that fight you are up you are exposing people to reason to linear thinking that may convince them but may also invite them convince them persuade them to do the same thing themselves so it takes I mean it's it takes leadership I think thank you sorry again not a not a strategist myself

first thank you is it on thank you so much for being a part of true con so happy to be able to have the opportunity to see you in person I'm kind of fangirling right now um I'm a brand new member from Florida and there is a certain nameless political figure that is apparently ruining our great state um I have recently heard that there are some rumors that this certain politician is planning on running for president and also continuing to plan to stay Governor what do you think are some of the political implications if that is allowed to happen uh the question about um Governor DeSantis staying as Governor while he's running for president it's just as a pure matter of messaging it seems like seems like a bad move to me it seems like the sort of thing you do when you think you're running but you think you're going to lose um but yeah you know

um I don't know we'll see there was a there's there is an interesting it's not exact parallel but um in the 1920s um the politician who um FDR was most worried about excuse me in the 1930s the politician that FDR was most worried about was Huey Long who was the populist governor of Louisiana and he was assassinated in 1935 and so FDR never got to find out if long was going to be a contender for the presidency who was really going to give him a run for his money but when um Huey Long who had been the governor essentially the dictatorial governor of Louisiana decided that he wanted to go to Washington because he wanted to get ready for running for president he ran for U.S senator and he won his seat in the U.S Senate and then he effectively just stayed as governor of Louisiana um and there was some like

ostensibly there was a new governor but it was still Huey Long who had his office in the state capitol and who like convened the state legislature and gave them all their bills to pass um and that was one of the things that American fascists most loved about Huey Long that he had no apologies about grabbing hold of every lover of power available to him never letting them go and letting any mores or even laws that would prove that would supposedly preclude it from doing this um actually hold him back that on um unabashed desire to accrue maximum power Without Limits is a bad sign in a in a boyfriend um and uh in a politician of any stripe um
a preschool teacher with those kind of instincts would be a bad teacher you know I was just I think it's a character flock um so yeah we'll see but I think as a short-term matter it seems like a um it seems like an insurance policy for him

we still have time for at least one or two more questions oh

you got it hey Rachel how you doing Happy Pride uh so when Tucker Carlson was unceremoniously kicked off Fox News you did this extraordinary segment of the history of demagogues with big microphones in our country whether it was Coughlin or Limbaugh or Glenn Beck and I think it's pretty clear by now that Mass Communications in this country is very very broken maybe irreparably broken what would you say is a way that we can get back to where we need to be with how mass communications affects all of us

thank you for watching that segment I was really wound up about it um part of the reason I tried to put that news in that context is because I feel like it's important for us to recognize that lots of different generations of Americans lots of different types of communications technology lots of different media environments have produced terrible people who do lots of bad things for the country and we always have megaphones of different stripes and we have people who Master them in ways that are malignant um and the answer I I think is always the same way as competition I mean I don't think there's a way to to regulate speech or media Communications in a way that makes them safe I think that you know within within reason um you know the the first amendment protects even terrible terrible speech again within reason um and if if you're worried in particular about what's happening on TV we should develop and cultivate better talents who aren't malignant on TV and the same goes for radio and the same goes for tick tock and the same goes for Twitter and all the other means by which people are having an impact I I just don't think there is a magic I I don't think they're I don't think there's a key to unlock it um but it's also true that to the extent that there is a sort of fascist style in broadcasting in particular it's attractive it always works you know it's always associated in Western countries with anti-Semitism you need to have some sort of supposedly parasitic other that has ruined everything for the real people right and it's almost always anti-Semitism you often have sexual minorities or other minority groups that can be authorized from the mainstream population that's being lionized being blamed for decadence being blamed for Moral Moral Decay and you need that as part of authoritarian messaging it's always the same it always works the same way and the answer is always to compete and to make sure that human beings get to speak on their own terms and their whole Humanity for who they are

because you can't reduce somebody to an insect or a parasite if you see them as a human and that's in our religious traditions in our rhetorical traditions and our political Traditions I think the thing that calls for the best of us
we have time for one more question when you say that people get very desperate and then it
hurts everybody be careful we can't see you so we don't blame yeah I have no idea how
many hands are up

um hi Rachel very excited also fangirling my sister um if Florida Chapter really excited to have
you here I also really appreciate your very thorough reporting so thank you for that um Mike I
want to actually go back to your speech you spoke a lot about um politicians you know
perpetrating or keeping um Ultra right ideas persistent and when I think about I know a lot of
times in this country we like to go back to World War II and our role there and and what we did
to put the Nazis on trial to really criminalize as you said the violence um and so what I actually
was a fellow Truman member who brought this to my attention as we were thinking about the
current race issues that we deal with still and thinking that there's some you know the unwork
there's there's a lot of work that's undone from the Reconstruction Era and how that has really
started to it really hasn't been dealt with and so now we're still dealing with this idea of racism
we're not shocked we feel it um and so what you're touching on here is human security the
National Security context it's really something that I'm it's like my jam so I if you could speak a
little bit about that because I think here in our own country we didn't do the work that was
necessary there and I recently learned that Dr King actually also um had a foreign policy lens in
his uh his his uh action or what am I trying to say civil

right um long story short if you could speak a little bit about that and and maybe you know as
National Security Professionals how we can in our own spaces really start to peel that onion
back because that's well neat like it's it's been needed for for a long time

um thank you for that question yeah you know in um as the Nazis came to power in Germany
um one of the things they did is they they sent a very promising young lawyer his name was
Heinrich Krieger they sent him to the University of Arkansas she came over from Germany it
was effectively an exchange student but he was here to research American law and write a
book on American law that was about race and citizenship because the Germans the Nazi party
looked at the United States as the biggest and most powerful country in the world that had
race-specific citizenship where you were defiant you were you were defined legally according to
your race and the the benefits and the responsibilities citizenship were accrued to you on the
basis of your what was perceived to be your racial makeup and the Nazis were very inspired by
this and they used Heinrich Krieger's research and the book that he wrote about American not
just American Jim Crow laws but also about American Indian treaties and other laws about
American Immigration policy um involving Asian Americans particular the American treatment of
of Native Americans in all sorts of different levels of the law they used Krieger's study of what
we did here as part of the basis for the Nuremberg laws that they

unveiled in the 1930s that defined German citizenship in a way that did not apply to Jews
because they needed a way to write about race and citizenship in a way that they felt would
stand up in a court the way that it did throughout the Jim Crow South in the United States so we gave him a great idea there um and the idea that um you know we fought them we won we were right they were wrong at a fundamental level that is true but at a deeper level our own failures not only are something that we didn't deal with it's something that fueled the worst of what we then had to fight and so those kind of nuances about American history that reality about what our inheritance what what inheritances that we've offered to the world the the ways that our moral position in the world has bevels on its edges and isn't so clean that to me is um guiding in terms of not being too self-congratulatory about these things and an understanding that our work here at home should humble us but also should be something that has we should recognize has influence around the world so thank you for that question I think that I think human security and National Security um is the right way to look at it thank you thank you thank you so much thank you

and thanks to everybody for joining us and again love the speech and I know that my dad would be totally geeking out at this moment for me so thank you um for everybody we are going to take a coffee break and then please come back and join us for the Vox podcast with Ambassador Thomas Greenfield [Applause] friends please enjoy coffee and snacks in the foyer our program will resume promptly in 15 minutes at 305. again we'll resume promptly in 15 minutes at 305.