

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

NAOMI KLEIN & ASTRA TAYLOR: ARE WE ENTERING “END TIMES FASCISM”?

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LAURA FLANDERS: If you've been trying to make sense, as I have, of the chaos that set in ever since Donald Trump took office for the second time and his largest donor, the world's richest man, took a chainsaw to our government, then you may have run across the words Broligarchy, Nerd Reich, Dark Gothic MAGA, cataclysm capitalism, and technofeudalism. These are all attempts to name what's going on. And to that list, our guests Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor are adding end times fascism. In a recent essay for The Guardian, they write that, "Today's rightwing leaders and their rich allies are not just taking advantage of catastrophes, shock-doctrine, and disaster-capitalism style, but simultaneously provoking, planning and seeking to profit off apocalypse." That makes these uniquely dangerous end times, Taylor and Klein argue. But some things do need to end. The Right's nihilistic vision needs to be met by a life-affirming one if we want people, planet, and society to have a future. We [last spoke](#) to award-winning author and journalist Naomi Klein, about her New York Times bestselling book "Doppelganger: "A Trip Into the Mirror World." She's also the author of "The Shock Doctrine," "No Logo," and many more, and is the founding co-director of the University of British Columbia's Centre for Climate Justice. Author, organizer, and filmmaker Astra Taylor was last here talking about her book, "The Age of Insecurity: "Coming Together as Things Fall Apart." She's the co-founder of the Debt Collective and the co-author with Leah Hunt-Hendrix of "Solidarity: "The Past, Present, and Future of a World-Changing Idea." So what is end times fascism, perhaps end times humanism? Do we have a future? Let's dive in. Naomi Klein, Astra Taylor, so glad to have you with us again here on "Laura Flanders & Friends," friends. Welcome. So let's start with the basics. What is end times fascism? Naomi, you wanna take a first swipe?

NAOMI KLEIN: I'd say that it's fascism without a horizon for the future. Some of this draws on the work of Richard Seymour and his work "Disaster Nationalism" where he talks about how the fascists of the 1920s and '30s and '40s in Europe did have a horizon post Armageddon, if you will, right? That there was the blood bath, but then after the blood bath, there was a vision of a kind of a pastoral, peaceful future for those who were the Aryan in-group, right? You just had to get through it. And if you really pay attention, although Trump talks about a golden age and so on, nobody really believes it, right? It is really, I think we're seeing a kind of fascism that is much more nihilistic, that really takes the end of the world for granted.

LAURA FLANDERS: All right, so coming to you, Astra, you begin in the article by describing the freedom cities idea and exploring that project, which many of us have heard nothing about. Can you explain?

ASTRA TAYLOR: It is a fantasy based on this idea of exit. This idea that rich people should be able to exit from nation states, from regulations, and especially from taxes, and start what they call freedom cities, which are really sort of hyper capitalist, often now sort of cryptocurrency-aligned cities or nation states. It's a fantasy that has been brewing on the sort of libertarian tech Right for the last few decades. They found themselves at the heart of power with the Trump administration. And so on the campaign trail, Trump sort of unexpectedly made a promise that he would forward an agenda of freedom cities on federal lands. And so the people involved in this have been on kind of a lobbying blitz trying to take this promise and make it reality. And what we say is that it is emblematic of this fantasy of abandoning this world, right? Abandoning all obligations. And that it is a sort of metaphor for what these end times fascists are all about. And the idea is that, you know, if you're wealthy, you should be able to again, you know, exit from society and go somewhere where the laws don't apply to you. And so, you know, the tech billionaires, people like Peter Thiel, Balaji Srinivasan is another one of them, talk about sovereign individuals, right? That basically there's gonna be a special set of people who live like gods while the rest of us sort of suffer and toil. And so we, you know, think that this idea of freedom cities needs to be taken seriously in this moment because what they're trying to do is sort of reinvent the old ambitions and privileges of empire and imperialism and create, you know, sort of hyper corporate crypto fiefdoms where again, laws, regulations, taxes don't apply to them.

LAURA FLANDERS: One in Honduras is this one, [Próspera](#).

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LAURA FLANDERS: So they don't really care about government 'cause they're not gonna be subject to it. Is that the idea, Naomi?

NAOMI KLEIN: The reason why we're really paying close attention to this, and these ideas have been, as Astra said, they've been percolating for a long time. Peter Thiel is almost always involved as a funder in some way or another. There was this idea, seasteading for a while back. I've followed it because there's somebody else who's always involved who is the grandson of Milton Friedman, Patri Friedman. So it's kind of the logical extension of just deregulated capitalism. You know, Milton Friedman didn't really see much of a role for the state except for protection of private property and policing. But there's increasingly been a subtext of prepperism in all of these projects, right? Now, a lot of the same people who are behind Próspera, are now interested in creating a corporate fiefdom, corporate nation state in Greenland, right? So, you know, they're thinking a lot about critical minerals. They're thinking about renewable energy, like they're thinking about how to be self-sufficient. So yes, it's about liberation from regulation and taxation, but it's also about liberation from the consequences of accelerated capitalism. They're worried about climate change, they're worried about pandemics, they're worried about... I mean, it's kind of a [bunker mentality](#), right? So a lot of the people who are behind this also have their own luxury bunkers. You know, they don't wanna be in the mess with everybody else.

LAURA FLANDERS: They also like the idea of corporate towns, presumably, where they get to make up the rules and regulate or not as they wish. We've seen some of that with SpaceX's effort, its own corporate town down in [Brownsville, Texas](#). It's a fascinating can of worms that you open up there. It also reminds me a little bit of settler mentality, that you're just gonna create a big fence and arm yourself and who cares if anybody wants you to be there.

NAOMI KLEIN: It's more than that, Laura. They actually call it tech Zionism, right? And I think that that underlines the fact that, you know, under colonialism, the creation of nation states is pretty arbitrary. You know, it is just kind of like guy with book decides to form country, and that's what they see in Israel, right? They're like that proves that you can create a country out of a book. They're bunkering down and this is what we need to pay attention to. And that's why I think they see what they see in Israel. They see a bunker state, right? And we see Trump talking about a golden dome, which is modeled on Israel's Iron Dome, right? Like the idea that you can have a kind of an apartheid state, wealthy, high-tech fortress as a way to weather the storms that you yourself are unleashing. A lot of this also has to do with AI, frankly. And the fact that, you know... And this is why I think we're seeing more and more of what we're calling end times fascism coming out of Silicon Valley is this is the next bubble. This is where the money is. And everybody involved knows that [AI is absolutely incompatible](#) with any of the climate targets, the net zero targets. These are not our old climate deniers, right? They absolutely know that at the heart of their business model is a destabilization of life on Earth, which means in the near term

that many, many more people are going to have to move, try to find safety, which is why they're absolutely focused on borders and migration.

LAURA FLANDERS: The other thing that seems to have come back, no holes barred, is machismo and misogyny. And we've talked about bros, this isn't an accident.

ASTRA TAYLOR: One thing we touch on in the piece is the self-conscious attacks on empathy from these guys. So you actually have someone like Elon Musk saying that empathy is the fundamental weakness of western civilization. You have a new wave of Christian influencers writing books about toxic empathy. And so this stigmatization of concern for others, right? And in a machismo kind of vein. So you have a figure like Mark Zuckerberg who told Joe Rogan, we wanna bring back aggression. What was so enlightening for me about working on this piece with Naomi and, you know, she was saying, these people are preppers. They're really preparing for the end of the world, right? They are abandoning this place. They are traitors. And so we respond to them in part by being committed, by committing to where we are, and by being committed to other people. And it sounds very simple, but I think there's something really fundamental and profound about that when you realize the scale to which these folks have decided to embrace this politics of contempt and abandonment. They're not in denial about climate change. They're not in denial about the emergencies we face. They've acknowledged them and they've decided, you know what? We're gonna throw gas on the flames.

NAOMI KLEIN: As you know, and as is the case for you as well, Laura, like, we've been at this for a long time, right? Like, we know the story of how neoliberal capitalism was sold to all of us, right? There was a horizon, there was a future, it was gonna be great. You know, in the '90s, it was like we were gonna build this one world, you know? Remember the IBM ad, solutions for a small planet. I mean, it was this big happy family. It was gonna spread freedom and democracy around the globe. It was its own kind of utopian project. Now, I didn't believe in it and have spent my adult life refuting and making arguments for why this promise was never gonna be fulfilled. But what we need to understand is that the Right has changed too. Even if there are some of the same players, the Right has changed too because they're no longer promising any of that. They have become much, much more extreme because they don't see a future. Like, they don't see a way out. And that is an opportunity for us.

LAURA FLANDERS: Could this be just some kind of ketamine-addled fantasy on their part? Because if you look right now, you've got Google in court possibly facing a breakup. You've got Tesla's value of stock going down like 40% since the beginning of the year. You've got Katy Perry catching hell for going up in that ridiculous jaunt with Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin, and the whole country kind of horrified when the SpaceX rocket rained down garbage across the southeast of this country. What are their chances really? Astra and Naomi, who wants to go?

ASTRA TAYLOR: I think we should take seriously the threat, right? Because our point is that this is a response. End times fascism is a response to real material conditions, right? The planet is warming. We know, for example, that the financial sector is issuing reports. Now they're saying, "Well, we're heading into a world that blows past the Paris Agreement standards, right? And so we're gonna make our investments based on that." We know that AI, whether its promise meets the hype, is going to demand, as Naomi said, you know, increased energy consumption. And they are making sure that that's a federal priority. So, you know, I think the point is that there are these real material realities that are driving this elite political formation that's saying, "Okay, fine, we're gonna bet on the fact that the planet is heating up and the inequality is spiraling.

NAOMI KLEIN: What must it feel like to have this amount of wealth? Like we say it over and over again, like Elon Musk is the richest man alive. We've never seen wealth concentration like this. We could see the first trillionaires. Like the level of wealth that they have, I think is creating panic that is not entirely, as you say, it's not entirely a fever dream because it is true. And I think what pushed, you know, Elon Musk over the edge and to the Right, it's much less having a trans kid. I think that's been overplayed as, you know, their child has said, not a child, a young adult, but that it's the threat of regulation, right? It's that Europe's started to actually regulate these tech companies. There started to be antitrust action in the United States. And one of the weirdest details in our piece is, you know, we started unfortunately listening and reading way too much of Peter Thiel and his colleague Alexander Karp, who's the CEO of Palantir. And there is this new wave of religion sweeping Silicon Valley. And now Peter Thiel, despite his gay party lifestyle, claims that he's actually, you know, a religious Christian and he believes that the Antichrist is here on Earth. And his best guess for who it is Greta Thunberg. And he has said this over and over again, and if you listen to him, it seems completely off the wall. But he reasons it out that Greta, he has said this multiple times, that Greta wants everyone to ride a bicycle, which is, you know, kind of a caricature of Greta's position. You know, she does ride bicycles but, you know, and he says it sounds fine, but the only way her agenda could be fulfilled is with a global government that regulated us, regulated greenhouse gas emissions to the degree that that would be tyranny and that is worse than climate change, right? So they're terrified that we will come to our senses and stop them.

ASTRA TAYLOR: What we try to say in this piece is we should be taking deep offense at this. When Eric Schmidt's testifying in Congress, he's saying, you know, "Hey, the tech industry is going to need to burn all of this energy because we are creating a higher consciousness, something higher than humanity. This, you know, artificial general intelligence." And who is he to say that it's higher than us, right? Who is he to say that we should all be sacrificed for the machine? So, you know, there's potential for something very unifying here, which is to say, yeah, it's not just a humanist movement, it's a more than human movement to say, you know, we want this planet to be protected. We don't care about Mars and a few guys and a few robots blasting off to space, right? We care about this place. So, you know, Naomi brought in this idea of

"hereness" at the end of the piece and just, you know, reckoning with how radical that is when you're facing folks who have given up on the future to say, no, this is about all of us aligning against people who, you know, have some delusion, this lethal and self-serving delusion that we should burn this all down for some intelligence that, you know, is not even animate, that isn't real.

LAURA FLANDERS: Talk more about that hereness concept, Naomi. I've been thinking about it for a long time. This idea that could we not root our sense of citizenship on the planet as opposed to national boundaries or all the rest. You say arts and culture could help us here, are helping us.

NAOMI KLEIN: I [interviewed](#) the amazing musician ANOHNI, ANOHNI of ANOHNI and the Johnsons when she happened to come to Vancouver for a show. And I asked if I could interview her because she sings so powerfully about the apocalyptic sort of fever dreams, right? She has this incredible song called "4 Degrees" where she has this lyric like, "I wanna see it burn, I want to see all the animals die." And she's like in the imaginary. And so I asked her what do you see as the connection between the attack on trans bodies, like hers, and the attacks on the Earth of this project? And she said, "Well, it's all the rapture. This is their fantasy. And it's about escaping the body. It's about escaping the mother." And then she said this thing that I thought just really kind of inspired me. She said, "Have you ever stopped to consider that this might have been her best idea?" As a Jewish person who's finding my own heritage in the Jewish Labor Bund and this idea of hereness, I think so many of us have, if we dig back far enough, traditions that really are about committing to place, right? That are not nationalist, but are really about cherishing the sacredness of here. And if we weave all of that together, I think we might have a really beautiful program. Yeah, originally we were thinking about calling the piece like "The Leavers and the Stayers." Like, they're all leaving in their own minds, right? They don't personally think they're gonna die. They think they're gonna be saved, but they're not interested in saving the rest of us or in appreciating like the actual beauty and wonders of this place, you know? And that is just so obscene. And this is part of the reason why it's important to understand that they're working with very powerful myths, right? That the myth of the rapture, Armageddon, like these are stories that even if you're not religious, you've been exposed to them your whole life. They're encoded in like almost every like Hollywood action movie, you know? And so it's in you, it's in us, it's in our imaginary. But there are other stories that are also in us.

LAURA FLANDERS: What you've just said, Naomi, makes me think, Astra of your book "Solidarity." I mean, talk about other stories and other narratives. I guess the question that I'm left with is how do we build that connectedness? Somebody said called it recently the linked-arm underground. How do we build that other story that isn't just about fear? I worry that the end times is a fear thought, but the staying isn't gonna be easy, but I wanna do it.

ASTRA TAYLOR: Well, by abandoning in the future, they've kind of seceded that to us, right? So one thing we can do is claim the future and start presenting a vision for something beyond this crisis. And you know what? I'm actually really heartened by the fact, I feel like I see the word solidarity everywhere now. I feel like there are surprising people, David Brooks in The New York Times talking about building a wide movement. We can roll our eyes, but the fact is that there's something about this crisis, there's something about the extremism of the people in the White House right now that is causing people to go, "Holy, you know, oh no, we need to actually band together." So I think solidarity is in the air, but, you know, one of the points of the "Solidarity" book is solidarity is not spontaneous. It does have to be built. And it is built through stories and it's built through actions. And so, you know, one of the harrowing things about writing this piece was watching the propaganda, this anti-empathy, anti-immigrant propaganda, watching Kristi Noem's videos, right? Watching the horrible things that the White House is tweeting. You know, people in shackles and their glib portraits of human suffering, looking at what's happening in El Salvador right now. They know that their attitude isn't spontaneous, that they have to engineer this kind of hatred, that they have to work to build the kind of toxic bonds that they're dependent on. So, you know, we need to do that work on our side and tell different stories. But I think there's actually tremendous potential right now and there's the potential for a coalition of allies that's pretty surprising and could be potentially really powerful.

LAURA FLANDERS: I love it. So our closing question is what do you think is the story the future will tell of now? And I guess it indicates where we are on this kind of end times fascism scale that we think there is a future and a story will be told. So what do you think it is, Astra?

ASTRA TAYLOR: Hmm. I'm not sure, I think this is the story that will be told, but I hope this is the story that will be told. And, you know, I'd love this to be a pivot where we actually challenge, you know, there are many types of supremacy that we need to challenge. We need to challenge white supremacy. We need to challenge misogyny, right? Patriarchy. But I think we need to challenge anthropocentrism, this idea that, as Naomi said, there's a great chain of being, and humans are at the top, separate and supreme. I think that is at the root of many of our problems. And challenging that hierarchy and building a politics of interdependence, not just with other humans, but with the natural world, I think could be revolutionary in the best sense of the word.

LAURA FLANDERS: Naomi.

NAOMI KLEIN: I think the story that we might tell, if we do everything that we possibly can in this moment, is that a bunch of very silly, very shallow men thought that daddy was back, but then they found out that mommy was back.

LAURA FLANDERS: You won't escape the mother. The mother rising. Thank you two, it's really been such a pleasure hanging out with you and I feel very actually positive about the

future. I think we can live there, we can get there, we can live there. We have to just do a lot of work. Thank you so much. It's great having you.

NAOMI KLEIN: Thank you so much.

ASTRA TAYLOR: Thank you.

LAURA FLANDERS: The ink on the ballots is barely dry and already the story of Starbase, Texas is being written as a grand triumph for one man, a billionaire with a dream. But what is the dream exactly? With 212 votes in favor and six against, the decision to incorporate this small south Texas sandbar not far from Brownsville was never really in doubt. Nearly all the 280 plus eligible voters are SpaceX employees or their families living in a company town where absolutely everything is driven by the interests of SpaceX. What will be launched here? Well, it's a whole lot more than rockets. What's being launched here is a vision of society, society in which wealth is supreme and the interests of people and the planet come second. And we've seen where that can lead. Success in Starbase will be measured in contracts and launches, not in caring and lives. So the question now is up to us. It's not too late. Starbase is a test site, a test site for the space industry, but also a test site for us. You can find more information and my [full uncut conversation with Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor](#) through subscribing to our free podcast. You can get all the information at the website. In the meantime, stay kind, stay curious, stay here. For "Laura Flanders & Friends," I'm Laura. Thanks for joining us.

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