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**Jess McIntosh** [00:00:02] Hey, it's Jess. Welcome to our last episode. This is typically where we'd open with some archival audio or paint a scene from the past, but we're doing things a little differently this time.

[00:00:13] We started interviewing people in November of 2019 and production on this episode began in late April. We don't need to tell you, but a lot changed in that timeframe. With the rise of covid-19 in the US, it felt like we had to acknowledge what was happening. Was our story still relevant? We got on the phone with NARAL President Ilyse Hogue back in May to hammer this out.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:00:35] How is the world changed? I mean, when we started production on this series, we were coming out of a terrible legislative session where, you know, a dozen states had tried to ban abortion, criminalized women, criminalized doctors. We were seeing massive amounts of medical disinformation in the context of reproductive health, guiding public policy and the most terrifying of ways. Now, seven, eight months later, we're seeing all of those experiences scaled to a national level and fighting this pandemic.

**Archive** [00:01:13] President Trump saying at one point that this was like the flu, that the flu is actually more deadly than coronavirus so that people didn't need to be worried.

**Archive** [00:01:21] Amid the global pandemic and record unemployment, President Trump is now threatening to shut down Congress.

**Archive** [00:01:28] When somebody is the president of the United States, the authority is total. And that's the way it's got to be.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:01:34] It's the same people. It's the same patterns of relying on ideology and disinformation. The stakes already felt high and they feel even higher. So the mandate to know our truth and get involved is even greater than it was.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:01:51] You may have noticed some noise in the background of Ilyse's audio. Like most of you, Ilyse was sheltering in place.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:01:57] I am in my house, which I'm very fortunate is cozy and comfortable with enough food. And I've got my kids home all day. And they are you know have tried to interrupt this recording multiple times as they do, you know, whenever I am working now and it feels like too much. And again, we are among the most privileged.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:02:23] That was the situation in May. But then after we spoke to Ilyse, the world changed again.

**Archive** [00:02:29] Our top story, protests over the tragic death of George Floyd are entering a second week in the United States with calls for justice and equality continuing to ring loudly across this country.

**Archive** [00:02:42] Washington, D.C. Tuesday, protesters at another generally peaceful rally were forced off the streets with tear gas and stun grenades to clear the way for President Trump to have a photo op outside of a church near the White House.

**Archive** [00:02:58] I think a lot of Americans, most Americans feel horrified and outraged by the brokenness of our criminal justice system. And to watch a police officer murder someone on live TV sitting on their neck, knee on the neck for eight minutes and forty six seconds. But this happened also in the context of Ahmaud Aubrey, murdered while jogging through his community. It happens in the context of Breonna Taylor murdered while sleeping in her own home.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:03:38] We realized that with the timeline of our production and with the news cycle the way that it is, there's never going to be a version of the show that absolutely responds to the news of the day. And yet every shift in American culture has only further illustrated the key point of this project, that the Radical Right ideology is, was and always will be about control and a desire to maintain white male privilege by stoking racism and misogyny.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:04:04] The world is experiencing right now what it's like for those who have constantly been on the receiving end of terrible public policy. And it just shows how untenable what a house of cards has been built in this country in terms of public policy. The whole covid experience has been an absolute illustration of disparities.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:04:36] The idea that more and more of us are on the receiving end of bad policy holds more weight than ever. With Republicans actively undermining public health guidelines and police attacking peaceful protesters at the encouragement of the president, it's never been clearer how little the so-called pro-life party actually cares about protecting human life. And we need to take that clarity to the ballot box in 2020 and beyond.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:05:02] One of the things that we need people to understand is no matter what happens in November of 2020, our work has just begun and we've got to stay involved. The Radical Right got here because they had a 40 year plan and our plan starts in November of 2020. For luck, it definitely doesn't end.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:05:28] Welcome to The Lie That Binds. I'm your host, Jess McIntosh. This is the final episode in our six-part series exploring the insidious history of how the anti-choice movement was built from scratch. Today, we're talking about how to fight back. 2020 is a choice point. But the choice is not just between two presidential candidates. It's between two versions of the next 40 years. Whoever wins in November will have to spend the first few years just digging us out of the hole that we're in. So that future leaders can carry on the work. That's definitely daunting. But if you're feeling despair, then we're not doing our job. We have popular opinion, judicial precedent and grassroots momentum on our side. How do we put those things to good use to not only defeat Trump in 2020, but to safeguard reproductive freedom for the long term? What is our 40 year plan?

**Brianna Wu** [00:06:25] I think most women today are looking at the political landscape and are asking how did we get here?

**Jess McIntosh** [00:06:32] That's Brianna Wu, co-founder of independent video game studio Giant SpaceKat and former 2020 candidate for U.S. House in Massachusetts.

**Brianna Wu** [00:06:40] If you ask me in 2020 how I feel about the state of women's rights, it would be a much darker answer than it might have been in 1996 when I graduated high school. I really feel like women's rights have backslid tremendously in my lifetime.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:06:58] I know we just said not to feel despair about the future, but we do need to grapple with today's bleak state of reproductive rights. Currently, abortion access is severely restricted in over half the country.

**Brianna Wu** [00:07:11] I keep asking myself why that is. And I think over and over about how often reproductive health care and women's rights and our ability to have jobs and be in the workplace--how often that's been a poker chip that's been thrown on the table.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:07:30] The reason reproductive rights keep getting traded away has everything to do with who's sitting at the poker table and who is running the casino.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:07:38] Political power in both parties has largely resided with white men for a long time. Issues of reproductive oppression, misogyny are not central to their existence and experience. So I think that it has been a real challenge to actually get politics of any sort to centralize these issues as ones that not only matter, they matter morally and ethically, but also that actually drive voting patterns and so strategically at sort of political malfeasance, not to actually talk about these issues because you look at who's voting for you when the issues matter to them, even if it doesn't matter to you.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:08:25] It cannot be overstated. Reproductive freedom is a winning issue. And GOP extremism is a damaging liability. If you don't believe that, then look at the twenty election results out of Kentucky.

**Archive** [00:08:36] Further bigness tonight is out of Kentucky, where the Democratic state attorney general, Andy Beshear, has turfed out Republican incumbent Governor Matt Bevin. NBC News has called Andy Beshear the apparent winner in this Kentucky governor's race, which will frankly send shockwaves through not just Kentucky politics, but through national politics for a long time.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:08:58] That's right. Democrat Andy Beshir emerged victorious in the fifth most conservative state in the nation. Where anti-choice group Susan B. Anthony list outspent reproductive rights groups by a massive margin. And he didn't just win. He won big.

**Archive** [00:09:13] The margin of victory here for this year over Bevin in this county, 100,000, almost 100,000 vote difference here.

**Archive** [00:09:20] The turnout, the support level for Brashear was through the roof.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:09:24] As attorney general, Bashear vetoed authoritarian abortion restrictions and proudly aligned himself with reproductive rights activists, including doctors from the state's last remaining abortion clinic. His opponent, Matt Bevin, tried to spin this using every anti-choice trick in the book. But to the surprise of the Radical Right, it actually backfired.

**Archive** [00:09:43] In Kentucky, you saw the Republican governor. He was trying to at first dismantle Obamacare. That didn't work. Voters didn't like that. Then he doubled down on Basheer's support for abortion rights. Voters said, nope, we don't like that.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:09:55] That's the thing. The majority of Americans believe in progressive values, from affordable health care to the right to choose when to have a family. A pro-choice candidate won in deep red Kentucky because it's a pro-choice state. In fact, only 17 percent of Kentucky voters say they would vote for a candidate that supports criminalizing abortion. Yet the Radical Right keeps pushing in that direction. The numbers show that candidates win when they commit to reproductive freedom. But winning elections is only half the battle. We need those candidates to follow through on their commitments once they're in office.

**Brianna Wu** [00:10:29] Let me ask you, how many times have you talked to a man in a position of power and they've sworn up and down how much they love women and support women and believe in choice? Right? That's very common in our party. But then when it comes to actually pass a bill, where is that commitment?

**Jess McIntosh** [00:10:44] The last four decades are riddled with concessions that directly harmed the most vulnerable segments of the progressive base.

**Brianna Wu** [00:10:50] I think the Democratic Party deserves ample critique for how far we've just rolled over on the Hyde Amendment. I was apoplectic when I saw Democrats complicit in making that the norm.

**Loretta Ross** [00:11:01] I find that many people trained in Democratic politics, and I'm talking about Democratic Party politics, spend too much time trying to appease their opponents by selling out their friends. And that has been a losing strategy for a long, long time.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:11:18] That's Loretta Ross, author, professor and lifelong activist for reproductive justice. When politicians try to bargain with the rights of their allies. The progressive coalition falls apart.

**Loretta Ross** [00:11:29] We end up with partial struggles and partial victories. What I call divided rights instead of undivided human rights. And we also end up with movements that are competitive with each other. But I think the most damaging part is that we end up doing our work in a way that hurts our allies so that we end up doing work against racism in a homophobic way. We end up doing work against transphobia in a misogynous way. I mean, all of these are ways that we damage our allies while not defeating our opponents.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:12:08] We can't prioritize appeasing the opposition over protecting our alliances. It leads to losses at every level.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:12:15] When we are thoughtlessly assuming that we can trade off one set of rights for another, we're actually playing into their hands. That doesn't mean that we don't have to accept progress as it comes, because people who are being oppressed and repressed need relief. But it's imperative that the incremental relief that we can actually find for the people we work with needs to be part of a story that actually moves us collectively forward where power builds on itself until all of us have gained the equity, the freedom and the equality that we're striving for.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:13:00] The story that gradually moves us towards a free and equal future has to replace the false narrative that making deals with the Radical Right will eventually pay off.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:13:09] We gain nothing by believing that concessions lead to collaboration with the other side towards common goals. It doesn't exist, right? Like we think we give on Hyde, they're going to leave the rest of abortion alone. Nope. Doesn't happen. Won't happen. Didn't happen. We think we give a little bit on abortion and there of course gonna agree with us on contraception. Nope. Doesn't happen. Didn't happen. Will never happen. It is neither ethical nor politically prudent to preemptively make concessions that actually damage individual lives.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:13:54] We have to be uncompromising when asked to budge. Here's what we should say.

**Brianna Wu** [00:13:59] We don't negotiate on women's rights. End of story. Yeah, we could have a discussion about what the top marginal tax rate should be. But when you're talking about someone's civil rights, I think that's when we have to say we can't have a conversation about this.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:14:15] That's great advice for our elected officials. But this also speaks to the broader misconception that women's rights are somehow separate from the rest of the progressive policy agenda.

**Brianna Wu** [00:14:24] One of the most painful experiences for me running for office, so I'm speaking in front of the Democratic town committee. An older woman stands up and asked me a question. She talks about how scared she is for her, her daughter's access for reproductive health care. The instant that came out of her mouth, the two men that were sitting to the side of her instantly pulled out their phones and started surfing and I've thought so much about that moment. And I don't know if it's because they think that it doesn't involve them or it makes them uncomfortable to think about. But I really wish men were having like, they're the ones that need to be having this conversation, because the truth is, you and I can say, please do A, B and C, and that's just not going to have as much impact as if a guy is with the friend of his who says, 'you know what? We need to stand up and speak up for this more.' They have a power to influence their peers that we just will never have. So I would really challenge men to to speak to your friends. And you said influence for good in the world. It's it's much easier and has less risk for you than it does for any of us.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:15:37] We don't need liberal men to speak up for abortion or against misogyny just for the sake of being good allies. Liberal men need to realize that reproductive freedom is their fight too. The Radical Right weaponizes abortion and misogyny to restrict everyone's rights regardless of gender. So why are mainstream Democrats so willing to bargain with abortion?

**Pamela Merritt** [00:15:58] Stigma is one heck of a drug.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:16:00] That's Pamela Merritt, co-founder and co-director of ReproAction. She's right. Stigma is a part of what leads to these policy concessions.

Progressives have internalized stigma so much that we have unwittingly baked it into our messaging and our policy. So how do we kick our stigma habit?

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:16:17] Some of the solutions are the easiest ones, which is creating what we think of as social permissions for people to have these conversations openly. Destigmatizing the idea that we shouldn't talk about abortion, we should talk about abortion, we should talk about all the things surrounding abortion, we should actually talk about the fact that, like, really abortion stigma is a product of, you know, sex shaming. And this is not something to be ashamed of. This is actually just part of normal life.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:16:46] Playing defense against baseless anti-choice attacks only perpetuate stigma. And in the process, we end up forgetting that abortion is incredibly normal.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:16:55] You know, abortion is one of the safest, most common procedures that a person can have. And this is something that a lot of people have experienced, you know, in many states like my home state of Missouri. People are more likely to have an abortion than to have dental surgery.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:17:13] A lot of people have had experiences with abortion and not just the people who can get pregnant. But very few are open about it. And a big part of that is stigma. Here's Amanda Marcotte, politics writer for Salon and author of the book "Troll Nation."

**Amanda Marcotte** [00:17:27] Americans still have a lot of hangups about sex. Americans still have a lot of hangups about women's bodies. But the only way we end those hang ups is to demonstrate non hung up behavior, right. To model best practices and say, like, look, people have sex. Women have sex. Women's bodies are normal. There's nothing shameful about having a body. There's nothing shameful about having sex. There's nothing shameful about needing reproductive health services. And the more we say it and the more we hold that line, I think the more normal it will become.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:18:00] Normal doesn't necessarily mean easy. The decision to end a pregnancy involves so many different factors and circumstances. It can be complicated and for some people it can be sad, even if they don't regret the decision. Being boldly pro-choice doesn't mean erasing the nuance of this experience. As we build our coalition, we need to strike a balance that acknowledges conflicted feelings within the base without letting progressive leaders off the hook.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:18:27] I think it's really important to differentiate between political and policy concessions and acknowledging conflicted feelings and individuals with whom we actually come to the same conclusion. I think it's important in personal conversations to recognize that evolution takes a long time, that a lot of people have really conflicted emotions when we think about terminating pregnancies because it points to complications in life that are uncomfortable for people and that we can start those conversations with people from a place of like, Wow. Yeah, life gets really messy. It's so uncomfortable to think about some of this stuff, but it's certainly we can agree that when life gets messy, we still want to be in the driver's seat of our own lives and not have decisions dictated by politicians who don't know anything about what we're going through.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:19:25] There is room for a progressive voter with conflicted feelings. But it's unacceptable for elected officials to write their conflicted feelings into law.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:19:33] We don't have to give on the policy or the politics, because at the end of the day, we agree that actually the most complicated stuff is the stuff that least lends itself to blanket solutions.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:19:48] The opposition has repeatedly weaponized our discomfort while taking every opportunity to steal away our rights. We need to stop stepping into that trap. Leaders also have to abandon the stigma embedded in the old talking points.

**Amanda Marcotte** [00:20:01] When I was young, I felt like the pro-choice movement was tumorous in a lot of its rhetoric. It was afraid of offending moderates. There was a very safe, legal and rare kind of framework that was being employed in the 90s. And in the past decade or so, we've seen a lot of younger feminists step forward and say, no, there's nothing wrong with getting an abortion and they're really putting a human face on the topic. I think people are doing a great job and we're seeing it in the polling. I mean, it's like over, what, 75 percent now of Americans think that Roe versus Wade should stay put. That's tremendously positive gains in terms of public opinion shifts.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:20:44] Public opinion is firmly on our side. But a lot of progressive still want to stick with a moderate framework.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:20:51] When people are thinking about how to message about an issue and how to advocate for an issue. The first thing we do is talk ourselves out of it.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:21:01] Pamela Merritt, again.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:21:03] I have never once had somebody want to do something or support something that I am lukewarm on. You know, I my sister used to tease me all the time when she would eat something and if it wasn't really good, she would say, this is really gross. Do you want it? And of course I don't want it. That is never won anybody over.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:21:28] Tepid endorsements need to be replaced with unapologetic support. And yet many progressives are still afraid of offending people.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:21:35] That's coming from a place of shame, of stigma, of sex shaming that is deeply rooted in the puritanical founding of our nation. And we need to acknowledge that you're only as strong as your weakest link. And when we have folks who themselves haven't done the inner work or we have organizations that haven't done the inner work to dismantle some of those biases internally, then it makes it very easy to be put on the defensive when you don't need to be.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:22:04] If you're afraid of losing people by boldly standing up for abortion access, then consider the fact that we have already tried four decades of apologetic appeals. It didn't work. Safe, legal and rare seemed like a big tent strategy to unite moderates from both parties. But in practice, it only emboldened anti-choice leaders.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:22:25] So when I think about abortion and all of the reasons why I support abortion, I think it is an absolutely amazing, wonderful medical procedure that allows for bodily autonomy and for empowerment. People don't really think through and

articulate those reasons because we're surrounded by stigma. And when you do, I have actually personally seen people say 'I've never thought about it that way' or 'I've never approached it that way.'

**Jess McIntosh** [00:22:55] Pamela's direct action work create social permissions for people to talk about why they're pro-choice, and that's something that you can do, too. In past episodes, we've talked about the importance of sharing individual abortion stories, but that doesn't automatically break through the judgment and misogyny aimed at sexual women. Not to mention it puts all the responsibility for starting the conversation on people who can get pregnant. Friends, family, partners, parents, doctors, clergy also need to speak up. You don't need to have had an abortion to talk about why you believe in these rights or to call out the opposition's underlying ideology.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:23:32] They depend on our silence in order to be able to get away with the Trojan horse of abortion, we should ask them the hard questions. And that requires a reshaping of what is permissible to talk about and, you know, sort of political discourse, cultural discourse. But we are the ones that reshaped that.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:23:52] The right is counting on us to avoid difficult conversations, and they're relying on the country's willingness to believe the lie that their authoritarian policies are actually pro-woman.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:24:01] We should never accept the false premise that the opposition is acting out of good faith, that they care about people's health, that they legitimately are concerned about pregnancy and babies and our communities and our families. That is absolutely not what that organizing machine on the other side is doing. And every time we act as if we need to meet them with some sort of negotiation or compromise, we are empowering them and we don't need to.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:24:37] They frequently wrap their lives in a cloak of faux morality and fake principles. The evangelicals framed their fight against desegregation as a matter of religious freedom. Undue burden was packaged in states' rights. These bad-faith arguments try to hide the racist roots of the movement.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:24:54] I always come back to the original goal. Reproductive oppression is a tool of white supremacy and ultimately the anti-abortion movement is a movement that exists to maintain white supremacy.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:25:12] When we deny the white supremacist roots of this movement. We underestimate the opposition strategy.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:25:18] You know, I think one of the things that has potentially inhibited us from strategic coalition building is having a shared analysis of what the other side is actually trying to do and how grounded it is in a common oppression of everyone that is not them.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:25:37] Shared analysis means that progressives need to get on the same page about the Radical Right's tactics, the ideology behind them, and why they're so effective. That means opposition research is vital. Here's Ellie Langford, the director of research at NARAL.



**Ellie Langford** [00:25:52] When we talk about opposition research, I think people often assume that we're talking about looking into candidates records and unearthing scandals that they might have done and that exists. Opposition research is an important part of campaigns, but that's not the type of research that we're doing. What we're really trying to understand is our opposition as the movement. And sometimes I prefer to talk about it as movement tracking or, you know, a more academic analysis, because we need to pull together those pieces that academics have been stringing together for some time, that our allies in the reproductive justice movement have been flagging and translate those to our audiences. We need to do that work to connect the dots, because a lot of this is opaque by design. And it isn't until we call it out and sound the alarm for our members that we're really going to be able to reckon with and undo some of the work that has happened.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:26:54] The anti-abortion movement is not just out there doing work to deny people access to abortion. They, on a whole, are lobbying and supporting political power structures that are decimating our civil rights.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:27:13] In an episode about solutions, it may seem like we're dwelling on the problems. But when it comes to white supremacy and stigma, calling out the problem is a big part of the solution. If we don't call them out, we allow the Trojan horse to succeed and our civil rights get decimated in the process.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:27:30] Part of decimating our civil rights is to take away our ability to determine whether or not to parent. You know, they've cut away in our attacking access to birth control. They're attacking the ACA. They have absolutely done serious damage to the Voting Rights Act. And they put all of these horrible, regressive judges in the federal courts so that no matter what happens in this country and no matter how diverse it becomes, or progressive it becomes, they will have the ability to maintain power. In a core part of that is guaranteeing that the population threat that they feel is a threat to white supremacy is being checked in every way possible. So limiting brown and black people's ability to come into this country and to thrive in this country is directly connected to making sure that there are white babies. And I think any time we discuss them as anything other than a component of advancing white supremacy, we are we are not truly understanding what we're up against and what it's going to take to take them down.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:28:42] Advancing white supremacy and restricting reproductive rights are not separate issues. Both mean reinforcing a system that is designed to disenfranchise and hurt people of color. That is exactly what Radical Right leaders have created. Here's Stacey Abrams.

**Stacey Abrams** [00:28:57] We know that young black children are the least likely to get access to medical care. We know that black families tend to be the least likely to have access to medical services. We know that abortion rates, no matter how you look at them, tend to follow both class and race. But the challenge tends to be how much autonomy does a woman have to make a decision about family planning? And if you're a woman of color, especially a black woman, that autonomy is at its narrowest. And then if you decide you want to plan to have a family, you face the very real risk that in doing so, you are going to not have the support you need and that you risk your life in the state of Georgia having a child.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:29:41] The same politicians who claim to be pro-life do nothing to address the maternal mortality rate or police brutality against black Americans. These

politicians only help reinforce systemic racism. Here's Imani Gandy, senior legal analyst at Rewire.News and co-host of the podcast Boom! Lawyered.

**Imani Gandy** [00:30:00] Part of it, I think, is an effort to maintain a stranglehold on the demographics of this country. You know, there's a huge demographic shift that is ongoing. The white birthrate is not, you know, where white people or at least white supremacists would want it to be. And so I really do think we're in the middle of a sort of renewed race panic.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:30:21] This renewed panic has laid bare the pervasive American racism that many thought was a thing of the past.

**Loretta Ross** [00:30:27] I thought that the country had turned a corner.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:30:31] Loretta Ross again.

**Loretta Ross** [00:30:32] With the civil rights movement and particularly with the election of President Obama. I didn't think that racism was over, but I certainly did not expect the white backlash that ended up in a President Trump because I just thought white people were better than that and I'm unfortunately disappointed. The good news about President Trump, though, if there is any, is that he split wide solidarity down the middle. Certainly half of the white people in America thinks that he walks on water and compare unfavorably to Jesus. But the other half are absolutely disgusted by him and everything he stands for. And that's never occurred before in my lifetime, because historically, white solidarity is far more unified, let's say you don't even at the best of times, it was like 70 percent supported white supremacy, while 30 percent opposed it. But now we have basically a 53 47 split. Fifty 53 percent are on the wrong side of history and 47 percent are trying their best to recover the reputation of white people. But that provides opportunity than historically we've had in the 500 years of America. So I have to be encouraged by that. I don't know if we have the right language to change the hearts and minds of people who only get their news through FOX. But we do have the numbers to overwhelm them if we are strategic about it.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:32:05] Overwhelming their base is key. The Radical Right has indoctrinated a lot of people, but there is still a tremendous portion of the population left to mobilize.

**Amanda Marcotte** [00:32:14] It's very important to understand that they are a minority of Americans and the majority of women, like wide majorities of women, agree with us and even a substantial plurality of men agree with us. And together, that's a very strong coalition in favor of feminism.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:32:34] The Radical Right must know that feminism is strong because they keep trying to steal it.

**Imani Gandy** [00:32:38] It is a powerful tactic to take the sort of tenants and building blocks of feminism and then turn them on their head. I mean, that's what Susan B. Anthony did by naming their organization Susan B. Anthony. Right. If you can take that kind of iconic name, slap it on an anti-choice organization. And then the argument about abortion became about protecting women. So they try to cast their very anti-feminist ideology in feminist terms. And so, therefore, it's creates this tension between anti-choicers and pro-choicers about what feminism really is. I mean, being forced to

defend something that is so obvious as you can't be a feminist and tell other women what they can do with their body when you're forced to have that conversation, you've already almost lost from the get-go because you're being forced to have a conversation that shouldn't be even had in the first place.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:33:29] If they have a theme saying that they're pro women, then as a reproductive justice activist, it is my obligation to call that out and to say that that is an out and out lie, that you cannot be pro-life and be a feminist. You know, there's a reluctance to hold people accountable for the appropriation of certain language, of the manipulation of certain movements, and particularly these bad actors who are really doing that to advance reproductive oppression. And they need to be called to the carpet for it, and particularly in this time when truth is so hard to find.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:34:12] By sowing chaos in every corner of American politics, the Radical Right has destroyed the very nature of facts.

**Ellie Langford** [00:34:18] We undertook this project to try and understand what would be the biggest threats to progressive goals in 2020. And I think one of the things that I keep coming back to is the impact of disinformation.

**Melissa Ryan** [00:34:32] I think the biggest misconception that the overall left has is not understanding that a lot of these disinformation tactics and campaigns are actually about voter suppression.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:34:42] That's Melissa Ryan, digital strategist and writer of the newsletter. Ctrl Alt-right delete.

**Melissa Ryan** [00:34:47] They are about keeping our influencers offline and specifically about keeping our influencers from going to the polls. We know that with foreign state actors, they were trying to suppress the African-American vote. We know the Trump campaign bragged openly about running voter suppression campaigns on digital ads targeting single women and African-American voters. And when folks talk to me about this information, they're generally concerned about, oh, someone who's a Fox News viewer, who now believes in conspiracies and, you know, we've lost that voter. That voter is not coming back.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:35:19] This speaks to a hard reality about fighting disinformation. We're not going to win back the minds of people who have already been indoctrinated.

**Melissa Ryan** [00:35:26] Stop worrying about the Fox News viewers because we have lost those folks. We really need to worry about protecting our base and building our base. So when you're thinking about whether it's digital ad buys or whether it's your outreach strategy, what we have to worry about is our voters and protecting them and not making them susceptible to these kinds of suppression campaigns. You really want to think about mobilizing the people we have and trying to bring more people, particularly young people, into the fold.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:35:56] In Episode 5 we talked about the web of far right groups that amplify those suppression campaigns from mainstream Fox News to fringy online blogs. Key anti-choice groups like Students for Life have echoed memes from the neo-Nazi blog Daily Stormer. And white supremacist hate groups regularly promote anti-choice

arguments. There's not a lot of daylight separating them. What's important to know about these different groups is that they're all extreme. They're all connected. And they're all using the same playbook. One of their key disinformation tactics flood the zone. Making inaccurate information go viral is the whole point of flooding the zone. In 2018, Trump's campaign manager, Steve Bannon, admitted to Vanity Fair that this was their strategy.

**Archive** [00:36:37] Let's put on screen what Bannon said. There's a profanity here. We had to excerpt out, but he says, 'The Democrats don't matter. The real opposition is the media, and the way to deal with them is the flood the zone with...' you know what.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:36:50] Disinformers know that they don't need you to believe the lies. They just need you to doubt the truth. If they put enough bad information out there, then no one knows what's real anymore or even what sources they can trust.

**Angelo Carusone** [00:37:03] It's not just might makes right. It's like whatever goes viral is the better way to deal with it.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:37:07] That's Angelo Carusone, president and CEO of Media Matters, a media watchdog concerned with addressing the problem of right wing disinformation. Even disputing a lie with facts gives the lie a platform. And that's flooding the zone. But the Radical Right is also manipulating tech platforms that are less likely to fact check it all.

**Angelo Carusone** [00:37:25] And so what are they doing? They're doing what they've been doing for the last couple of years, which is cashing in now on an infrastructure that they've already adapted to. What they'll be doing next, and it started to play out as already engaging in and testing with new platforms. So, you know, if you talk to a progressive organizer right now and ask them if they have a TikTok strategy, right, they would look at you bizarrely. You're like, why would you want. What is tick tock if they even know what it is? They would say, why would I use this platform? And yet, you know, the right wing and in particular anti-choice woman is already beginning to seed content there to assess not not persuasion, but rather they're going one step further, which is can we create permission structures to allow other people to think it is acceptable or more acceptable to advocate for amplify extremist anti-choice content and ideas?

**Jess McIntosh** [00:38:17] It's true that we need to catch up with the right in mobilizing the segments of our base who can vote right now. But we can't lose sight of the fact that the opposition is already thinking about how to mobilize the voters of tomorrow. TikTok may seem like a silly online community now, but so did online gamers until the Radical Right saw their potential. For now TikTok may not be converting young people into radical anti-choice activists, but conservative influencers are gaining traction, which gradually normalizes authoritarian ideas. In the face of such an effective recruitment strategy, how do we weaken the effect of their disinformation?

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:38:51] There's so much talk about the role of disinformation in both the sort of fight to criminalize abortion, but also in our elections generally right now. And it's important to remember disinformation are just lies and that the best way to combat it is actually to not pass on anything that you don't know to be true. And, in fact, speak up against things that you know to be false because you are the best mitigator with your network of friends on what they should believe or not.

**Angelo Carusone** [00:39:22] That really matters in the context of social media. You know, because the social part of it makes a difference. And I think back to 2016 and 2016, 40 percent of people that identified as left of center did not post content related to politics or civic engagement on their social media feeds publicly. That number is only eight percent on the conservative side. And when you drill down and find out why, the single biggest reason why people that identified as left of center did not post that stuff publicly, that they did not want to be trolled, harassed or abused, the fear of inciting backlash is legitimate.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:39:53] And we're not recommending that you get on your timeline to start publicly fighting with all your friends and family. In fact, one of the biggest obstacles in dealing with disinformation is how to avoid making people defensive. Pushing back directly on friends or family members can make them dig in their heels and actually solidify the disinformation in their minds. It's important to find common ground.

**Angelo Carusone** [00:40:12] Our own interactions actually do add up in total. And so when more people are speaking up about their own experiences and personalizing it in that way, you're taking it out of the realm of the fact checks at that point, you're making it about people. And that's where you start to speak to people's guts. That's where you start to speak to people's intuition. And I think that I had its whole the simple answer is that we've lost sight of our voice and why it matters. And it's by design. And we need to reconnect those fibers. And, you know, they have the amplification imperative. And what I would just say is the you have to say something imperative.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:40:47] You have to say something. But it's important to think about your approach. Angelo mentioned speaking to people's guts. That's something he heard from Ilyse.

**Angelo Carusone** [00:40:56] She broke it up in three ways, which has always stuck with me, which is how she was saying that, you know, when you communicate, you can communicate to somebody's gut, their heart, or their head. And that one of the things that the anti-choice advocates do so effectively as they speak to people's guts and then they work their way to the head. They don't start with facts. They don't start with the the intellectual appeal of the policy. They start with the gut. So to that end, how you deal with that? Yeah, there's some element of stopping the cheating and the working of the refs. And I think that's a very tactical thing. But at its core, when I look one step back and say what's really enabling this? Well, when you're speaking to people's guts, you're not running very cold, dispassionate ads. You're not you're not pointing to fact checks or the latest debunk. You're you're getting it mostly from word of mouth, which is still the most effective form of communication. And that means and in order to get that, it requires peer to peer. It requires us to talk to each other. Together, we actually have a good bit of power and the ability to fight back against us. I think a lot more easily than people realize. And I am the least optimistic person in the world saying that. So that's a big thing for me to to to just acknowledge, my hat on the table. I want to I want to make that point.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:42:13] Angelo's optimism should offer a glimmer of hope to progressives who feel powerless against the onslaught of disinformation. But it can be exhausting when you feel personally obligated to educate everyone on everything all the time.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:42:25] Look, there's no question fighting every fight is exhausting. I'm a Texan who comes from a family with a broad range of political ideas. And if I fought every

fight, I would never go home again because I would just be too tired. That being said, I think it's really important to sort of define your goals when you think about which fights are worth fighting. We all hold a lot of different goals. If your immediate goal is to get the most people to vote against this repressive administration in November and vote Trump out of office, then it is worth engaging with people who you may never get on board with every single priority that you think is progressive and important. But you can actually get them on board and out from under the disinformation of the right wing that is designed to keep them from voting Democratic in November. And they target people who might actually be thinking it's time to do things a little different. It's time to get a little more active and engaged on things that I care about in order to make them go, you know what? It's not worth it.

[00:43:39] And we have to be the ones saying, you know what? It is worth it. Join us. It's totally worth it. We can actually make change, but change starts in knowing what is the truth and what is a lie.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:43:53] So what do we do? Well, there's a wide range of ways to get involved. All that matters is that you get involved.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:44:01] Their only advantage is our silence and our also sporadic engagement. Only around the big picture things, the big ticket things, the presidential, the Supreme Court. We actually need to think of this as a discipline where every election, every court case from the state level to the Supreme Court matters in terms of gaining and affirming our fundamental freedoms.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:44:31] The energy needs to be put into the streets. It should be movement based energy so that we don't ever get here again.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:44:40] That's Pamela Marriott again, co-founder and co-director of ReproAction.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:44:44] We take direct action with visibility events out in front of anti-abortion fake clinics. We are always trying to organize, to lift up and educate, but also hold bad actors accountable. So we need to do more of this. The opposition is put on the defensive and we have been on the defensive for far too long.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:45:06] The time for defensiveness is over. We stand for freedom and equal opportunity. They stand for control and oppression. They should be forced to answer for their unpopular agenda.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:45:17] The strongest feedback that I have is that I recommend that kind of action for just about everybody. And that it is refreshing. It is exhilarating. It is empowering. And it is so needed.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:45:32] Getting out there means being loud and trusting our allies, even when they're being louder than you're comfortable with.

**Pamela Merritt** [00:45:38] I think that there is a sad history on the left of a really enjoying black people in pictures and in videos, definitely appreciating our ability to lead chants, and get out there and, you know, do good trouble. But absolutely refusing to step back and let us lead and follow. The big test to trusting black women in leadership in progressive

spaces is not when you agree with us, but when you actually aren't quite 100 percent there. But we're telling you, this is how we win. I encounter it all the damn time, where people who themselves have so much privilege, white women, white, progressive bros, who are advocating for either a moderate position on abortion access or, you know, do you have to be so loud about it? Can we take it out of the platform or can we word it this way or that way? They never seem to get until I tell them that they are talking to somebody whose entire life has been made possible by radical, aggressive, progressive, slightly unrealistic, direct action and organizing. And that and that is true of every black woman. We are the fulfillment of our ancestors dreams and we stand on the shoulders of their activism.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:47:08] Progressives have to support their allies specifically because conservatives are waiting for the coalition to buckle under pressure. The Radical Right loves to criticize our anger or portray our direct action as too radical. We can't fall for this.

**Loretta Ross** [00:47:20] Do not protect the powerful from the anger of people. I'm not going to find my rules of engagement dictated by my opponent. They're going to be dictated by my conscience, by my sense of honor and my sense of what's supposed to be effective. One thing that as a black person that I've learned is that we could never believe the lies that white people tell us about us and develop our strategies responding to their lies. All it does is keep us play their chosen turf. Yes, women will be accused of being the most emotional ones. But then we saw what happened with Kavanaugh and every other angry white male in the world. So why are we busy trying to hide or not display our righteous anger? We should be mad as grit and tell them about it. Yes, most organizing is done based on emotional appeals. So to try to do it clinically, to try to strip emotion and counter emotional effects of statistics is always going to be a losing hand.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:48:35] The anti-choice movement has used direct action campaigns for decades, from protesting outside clinics to encouraging violence against providers. They're so loud and so aggressive that it seems like their coalition is much bigger than it actually is.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:48:48] There are more of us than there are of them. So if we show up in our state legislatures, if we show up in town halls for candidates and we actually stand together and say we're here cause we believe in reproductive freedom and justice and we want to know where you stand. We're here because we need you to support bills that increase access to contraception, to abortion, to the ballot, to all of the things that they're fighting. We will win. They depend on our silence and they depend on our apathy in order to be able to move an unpopular agenda.

**Imani Gandy** [00:49:24] If you have time to go to legislative hearings in your state when bills are coming up, go make some noise.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:49:31] Imani Gandy, again.

**Imani Gandy** [00:49:33] You know, if you don't have time to get involved legislatively or if you don't want to become like a law nerd, which we encourage everyone to become law nerds because it's super important. But you can donate to abortion funds. You can call up your local clinic escort group and see if you maybe you have time on a Saturday to help people go get abortions and push through all of the screaming throngs of people who were yelling at them. You can open up your house to someone if you live in an abortion friendly

state so that people who need abortions have a place to stay and they don't have to spend hundreds of dollars on a hotel room. There's just so many lanes for people to travel travel in, depending on whether you're an introvert or an extrovert. I mean, you're probably never going to see me out at a hearing because I'm I don't like a lot of people, but I'm more than happy to do my part by trying to explain how the law works, by talking to people on Twitter, by doing interviews like this, to sort of make people understand that we are in a really serious moment right now and in abortion politics. And we are months away from abortion being, if not all, utterly criminalized, having the access to it's squeezed to such a degree that the legal right to it makes no difference at all.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:50:45] We need everyone to enlist in this fight, even if that just means having informed, respectful conversations with your loved ones.

**Ilyse Hogue** [00:50:53] Well, one person talks. One person talks to their peers, their friends about what's actually really at stake and what the other side is about. And certainly that is about criminalizing abortion, but it also is about moving an agenda that's just quite terrifying and about power and control. But it also means one person asking every single person who's seeking to represent them, where they stand on these issues, what they're going to do about these issues. Breaking the silence that's born of stigma and saying when we center women and our lived experience, including the need to terminate pregnancies. Not exclusively, but including the need to terminate pregnancies, we get better representation, better public policy and actually healthier families. Those are crucial conversations for us to have if we care about progressive values in an equitable society. And that starts with an individual person asking questions of anyone who seeks to represent them from city council all the way to president.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:51:57] And if you don't like their answers, run for office.

**Brianna Wu** [00:52:01] Oh, my gosh, I would. Every woman listening to this podcast, you know, running for Congress is an absolute blast.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:52:07] Brianna Wu, again.

**Brianna Wu** [00:52:09] They lie to you. They tell you, oh, it's a dreadful job. Don't do it. It's so the soul sucking and the opposite is true. It is inspiring. And it forces you to find the best parts of yourself and shine them for people. And what I find the most gratifying about doing this is you meet people that have problems and perspectives you've just never thought about. And they share it with you. And they're trusting you to make it better for them. And it's just it is such an amazing experience. We've got to move from just getting declarations of support from people in power to us actually having the power ourselves. Because I firmly believe if you have a Congress that looks more like 50 percent women and 50 percent men, I do think that women's rights are going to move forward. So I feel very strongly this is not going to get better until more women run for office.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:53:08] The current state of America should be the strongest argument that the status quo does not work. We need real change and real representation. Which brings us back to where we started this episode with Ilyse sheltering in place, reflecting on a global pandemic and how it relates to the story that we've told over the course of the series.



**Ilyse Hogue** [00:53:26] This country is seeing without blinders what a radical fundamentalist ideology capturing the government can do and the devastating effects and that can be channeled into real passion and enthusiasm for change. And that means change in the election in 2020. But the thing I'm hearing the most right now is that change in 2020 should not mean getting back to normal. Normal didn't work, normal didn't work for women, normal didn't work for moms, normal didn't work for families who are trying to live with too few resources. So when we join together and all of our knowledge and all of our passion and choose a different path in 2020, it has to be a really different path and it has to be one that's grounded in knowledge and principles of equity and justice.

**Brianna Wu** [00:54:28] Can I say one last thing? I really would communicate to your listeners this. I know that you have to wake up just like I do every day. And you read the news and you're frustrated and you're scared and you're you're really looking for hope. And I would let you know that that feeling that's inside of you, that that the raw frustration. It's not fear. It is your strength. It is a weapon. And it is so much stronger than the people that are trying to silence you. And what I have seen since running for office leaves me so hopeful because I've seen an entire generation of women stand up and say, I am not going to be treated this way. I refuse to have this be the country that I am living in. And I've seen women stand up and refuse to sit down in every town, every single city, every single state in this country. And I want your listeners to know this is going to get better. But you have to get out there and you have to get involved.

**Jess McIntosh** [00:55:38] There is a lot of simple ways you can help fill out your census. Vote in local elections. Join a peaceful protest. Share this podcast and talk about what you've learned with others. Everyone has a piece of this puzzle. And as Ilyse says, we've got to be eyes wide open. Fighting disinformation, combating stigma and educating people about the history of this movement are the best tools we have. This project is a good start, but it's just the tip of the iceberg. We encourage you to keep engaging and learning. Visit [prochoiceamerica.org](http://prochoiceamerica.org) for a list of resources and ways to take action in your state. Thank you for listening to The Lie that Binds.

[00:56:18] The Lie That Binds a production of NARAL Pro-Choice America and produced by Jackie Danziger. Our associate producer is James Tyson. Our music is by Hannis Brown, mixing in engineering by Kegan Zema. This series is adapted from the book The Lie That Binds by at least Hope with Ellie Langford, published by Strong Arm Press, currently available at [TheLieThatBinds.com](http://TheLieThatBinds.com).