Twitter Thread by Sarah Kendzior



Sarah Kendzior
@sarahkendzior

The attack on "critical race theory" has little to do with theory and more a fear of:
1) historical accuracy
2) students recognizing a continuous line between atrocities of the US past and present
3) students recognizing parallels between atrocities in the US and other nations

When students learn the full scope of history, good and the bad, and that, as Arendt said, most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be good or evil -- they may have greater expectations for the present. They may sense their place in history and make a choice.

In the epilogue of HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT, I describe taking my children to historical sites around the US out of concern our history would be drastically rewritten in coming years -- but also because kids deserve truth. Knowledge is power. This is what opponents of accuracy fear.

How could brutal practices be embraced by ordinary Americans?

Or, as she put it, "Why did no one stop people from doing bad things?"

The answer you're supposed to give to children—one I heard myself as a child—is "That's just the way things were." You're supposed to say, "Lots of good people owned slaves," or, "It was legal then." You're supposed to pretend that historic injustices have either been resolved or that they were never that bad, that they didn't linger and structure the politics of the present. You're supposed to normalize cruelty, and in doing so exonerate those who practiced it.

But as I tried to answer her question, my mind flashed forward to what my children might be asking thirty years from now, when their own children are trying to figure out what happened to America. How did a president commit impeachable offenses on a weekly basis—refusing to divest from his businesses, abusing private citizens and migrants, obstructing justice—without facing consequences? How did mafia associates infiltrate US institutions right under the nose of federal officials? How did white supremacist groups rise from the shadows into the spotlight, countenanced by the president and his advisers? How could a politician show more respect to foreign dictators than to US veterans and civil rights leaders, yet still be treated as legitimate by his party?

There is no "That's just the way things were" to answer the question of what happened to the United States of America. It's "That's the way things became," as a transnational crime syndicate took the place of government. There is a difference between institutions weakening, as they did throughout the wars and recessions of the twenty-first century, and the institutions that protect