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represent it. Those are all brand new problems and they create brand new types of autocracies. And I think that's something the whole world is collectively struggling to deal with. And I don't see any place that's immune to that.

J.Z.: And they discredit even valid news by saying everything is fake.

S.K.: And that's an old tactic. That's a Hitler tactic. *Die Lügenpresse*: the lying press. That's something that he did. It's just so much easier to do now.

I think the next frontier in this is going to be doctored video and audio. As the technology becomes more sophisticated and becomes accessible to governments and their operatives, I think we're in for really horrible video impersonations. We'll see them without knowing we are seeing them, and then afterwards be like, oh my God! Kind of the same way people reacted after the bots in the election cycle. I'm dreading that. It's not like all is lost, we just need to have a sense of what are our values, what are our principles, what are our morals. Are we living up to them? Be honest about what we see. Double check sources. Be skeptical without being completely paranoid. It's sort of a fine line to walk but it's necessary at least that we try.

J.Z.: You say in one of your columns that poverty is lost potential. That the proliferation of low-wage and even no-wage positions, shuts out voices from poor communities by denying them the opportunity to work. You say that mistaking wealth for virtue is a cruelty of our time, with implications for individuals but also society as a whole. Please talk a little about that.

S.K.: Most people acknowledge the inherent unfairness of unpaid work. There's been a resurgence of the labor movement and people starkly looking at the fact that if people are working 40 hours a week you should be paying for their work. If people can't afford to get their foot in the door, that's an unequal hiring practice.

What people don't consider is what kind of world we're missing, what kind of world would we have had these practices not existed to begin with. And all the talent and all the potential that's being missed because of the requirements for unpaid labor and for expensive degrees and for credentialism, too. This is a new phenomenon; that you need to pay tens of thousands of dollars for a piece of paper in certain industries that didn't require it a generation before. It's limiting the talent pool, which limits the transmission of ideas. It limits the people who have structural power from hearing other people's ideas.

It keeps us in this rut. You see so much conformity. I think that's one of the biggest problems with our media. We have a media that's overwhelmingly male, and in terms of political coverage especially, that's overwhelmingly white, that's mostly based in

four cities. That didn't used to be the case at all before the gutting of local news. All those cities are really expensive. And it just contributes to a weird and biased view of what American life is. It fuels a lot of the resentment that Trump and others were able to tap into. If you come from a family of wealth and you're working as a journalist in New York City, where land is in demand and jobs are plentiful, you're going to have a very different perspective than if you're like me living in St. Louis driving by abandoned malls and empty lots and crumbling buildings every day, and seeing a lot of the lack of opportunity and a lot of open suffering. It changes your perspective. I wish we had a more inclusive economy, especially for people working in policy or media that have influence over the lives of millions of people.

J.Z.: What lessons do cities like St. Louis, and on the other end of the spectrum, New York and San Francisco, have to offer a city like Portland? We're dealing with our own gentrification issues, the lack of affordability and the departure of the "creative class."

S.K.: We have these very stark contrasts, between cities like New York or San Francisco, which are very prosperous but also very expensive. They're incredibly difficult to live in unless you have a very high paying job, which most people don't, so most people move there with money saved in advance.

And then cities like St. Louis, where it is possible to buy a house and get by, but the opportunities are few. There are all these places going out of business. The sheer number of people who have gone through long-term unemployment – it's very different than other cities in the U.S. Looking at it you see the apathy. You see that problems will not get fixed. City officials will let neighborhoods rot, deprive people of resources. Of course that happens in places like San Francisco too, or in New York. You have homeless populations, people suffering in poverty there. It's a shared problem.

But there is this inequality stretched out on this geographic scale that didn't used to exist. From the time I was born, in the late '70s and early '80s, people in St. Louis and New York made pretty much the same amount of money. There wasn't this giant discrepancy. And now there is, and the reason why this matters isn't just that this city is richer than the other cities, it's that the cities that are rich tend to have hubs of industry that can transform American life, like technology or policy or media. They're conglomerated in these rich cities, where as St. Louis doesn't have that. And they often exclude people like me. I'm often the token person from the red state.

J.Z.: You say expensive cities are killing creativity, and that it's not just the presence of artistic endeavors, but something more social and cultural, and creates an environment where failure is catastrophic, which reduces risk takers. What's the peril to a city when that happens?

S.K.: That's a huge problem, and it's something that I see paralyzing young people in particular, who are starting out, wanting to make sure that they keep their job, keep their benefits. They'll be in a creative field or an intellectual field, and they'll conform to whatever the standard is.

They'll do whatever gets the most clicks, or the most cash, or put themselves in an exploitative situation where they're churning out a product rather than a work of creative purpose. I think if you are there, what choice do you have? Unless you have independent wealth. You're locked in the system.

I'm not criticizing people who end up in those sorts of jobs, but it is damaging. It's damaging for innovation in general, for creativity in general. It's an extension of what I was saying before, of people getting locked out of opportunities. Whereas in like St. Louis and cities similar to St. Louis – I've heard this from people in Cleveland and Buffalo and Pittsburgh, where the cost of living is lower – there is a creative intellectual community. There's always somehow this idea that's impossible. But we exist. We're here. It's not that only prestigious cities should have a monopoly on progressive thought. I think it is good to be in a place where if you fail, it's not the end of the world. The flip side of that is it's harder to get started, to form all these networks to get started in your profession.

J.Z.: So what do we do? What are the lessons from all this? We can't trust media, corporations own everything, billionaires pull all the strings, and science is discredited by the powers that be. The tenets of common sense are thrown out the window. What's the point in complaining about all this?

S.K.: When you complain, you bring the problems to light, and if you don't complain, then people often don't know the problems exist.

There are people throwing these principles out the window, whether it's Constitutional rights, or concessions of justice, or acknowledgement of science, or basic human kindness. There are people who are attacking that. There are also people fighting back. Focus on the fight. Study the power structure. Try to think like the more evil hearted people and anticipate the tactics in advance. It's pretty easy to predict how they're going to behave. They're doing textbook kleptocratic and autocratic tactics. They're going to look for weaknesses. They're going to try to exploit them, so patch up those weaknesses. Whether it's institutional like our justice system, or just how we treat each other. You can't exploit a problem when the problem isn't that bad.

We need to take a moral stance, to acknowledge what our flaws are, and then we need to try to fix them, and that plays out differently locally, nationally or trans nationally.

People often ask, "What do I do?" And that depends. Where do you live? What are the problems where you live? What are you good at? What do you have to offer people? What makes our world good and interesting is that we are all different and that we all have something to offer and that together it is possible to turn this around. It will take a lot of work, but the first step is to say, how can I help who is suffering. How can I remedy that and go from there?

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The majority of my adult life, America, in my mind, has been in decline. ... I don't think we'll ever be the same. I think the goal should be to be better than what we are, and to try to confront the problems at hand rather than having nostalgia for what came before.