

# ANATOMY OF A CONSPIRACY THEORY

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## EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED: WHAT PIZZAGATE REVEALS ABOUT THE JEFFREY EPSTEIN SAGA

Since the end of World War II, government operations have acquired a level of secrecy that would not have been tolerated in previous eras. During the Cold War, strategists on both sides of the Iron Curtain knew that images and words counted as much as deeds and facts, and waged a propaganda battle for the hearts and minds of the Third World. NATO and the Warsaw Pact only engaged in active military conflicts over client states a few times — in places like Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan — but information operations to incite, confuse, and demoralize were ongoing. This information war was also waged at home, as both sides worked to manipulate the perceptions and emotions of their own people in order to inoculate them against the propaganda of the enemy. In this kind of information environment, a good conspiracy theory is like a black hole, pulling together disparate facts from all directions. And in this respect, no conspiracy theory compares to the saga of Jeffrey Epstein.

The Epstein story is unusual in that the conspiracy theory is now the mainstream narrative. According to a recent nationwide poll, a majority of Americans do not believe Epstein committed suicide. Among people who do believe he took his own life, a majority believes he was aided by guards or other prison officials who wanted him dead. Epstein's wide-ranging elite connections, the mysterious origin of his wealth, the circumstances of his mysterious death, and his ability to avoid consequences for well-known crimes for many years, are enough to make even the most hardened skeptic question their view of the matter.

Questions regarding how, why, and by whom Epstein was killed, and whether he was in the employ of U.S., or foreign intelligence services, will probably never be answered with undeniable hard evidence. But there is another mystery which is even more troubling. How could a prominent man carrying around a very public child prostitution conviction have remained in the good graces of high society? Having loosely followed the Epstein story for nearly a decade before his 2019 arrest, it was a question I'd pondered many times over the years. Until a satisfying answer emerged from, of all things, the PizzaGate conspiracy theory.

For those who do not remember, Pizzagate started with some emails from a Democratic Party operative named John Podesta. Podesta had been a fixture in Washington D.C. for five decades, working for numerous Democratic politicians and committees through the 1970s and '80s. In 1988 he and his brother Tony started the Podesta Group, which quickly grew into arguably the most powerful Democrat lobbying firm in America. Podesta had met Bill Clinton in 1970, when they both worked for Senator Joseph Duffey; then when Clinton became President, he tapped Podesta to serve in his administration, eventually promoting him to his Chief of Staff in 1998. In 2003, he started the Center for American Progress, one of the Democratic Party's most important private propaganda outfits. John Podesta is one of those people — there is a whole class of them affiliated with both parties — who never runs for office or heads a government agency, but always seems to be around and in the mix in Washington D.C. When Hillary Clinton needed a loyal old hand to manage her 2016 Presidential campaign, Podesta was the obvious choice.

As the election came down to the wire in Fall 2016, WikiLeaks released an archive of emails that had been lifted from John Podesta's personal account. The release of the Podesta emails, and, a few months earlier, the email archive of the Democratic National Committee, by WikiLeaks marked the first time the news organization had involved itself directly in a U.S. political race. The Podesta emails fell into the waiting hands of citizen investigators who had already spent the summer working together on thousands of message boards, Discord servers, and chat rooms to comb through the DNC email trove. Before long, they began to find emails to or from Podesta that did not seem to make much sense at face value, including one asking for \$60,000 worth of hotdogs to be purchased for a party in honor of Barack Obama. Good hotdogs can be had even at retail prices for under a dollar apiece, so \$60,000 seemed to be an excessive amount. Perhaps, thought the researchers, "hotdogs" is a code phrase for something else.

Investigators soon turned up other emails, many of them involving food, and indeed, within the collection of tens of thousands of emails there were a handful that looked pretty bad when the decoder ring was applied to them. Researchers paid special attention to any emails that mentioned *pizza*, which, according to some, had long been used as a code word by pedophiles and traffickers in child pornography. For example, in one email, someone had written to Podesta to alert him that they'd found a handkerchief with a hand-drawn map "that looks pizza related." Lacking a better explanation for why someone would draw a pizza-related map on a handkerchief, the sleuths determined that the email was describing something nefarious to do with children.

People trawled through the Podesta emails looking for any mention of “pizza,” and came across several references to a D.C. restaurant called Comet Ping Pong Pizza. The owner, James Alefantis. Alefantis was a Democratic donor, and the former gay lover of David Brock, founder of *Media Matters*. Somehow, despite being merely a pizza peddler, Alefantis was listed by *GQ Magazine* as one of the 50 Most Powerful People in Washington. People wanted to know more about James Alefantis and soon located his Instagram account. For his Instagram avatar, he had used a picture of an old Roman statue of Antinous, boy-lover of the Emperor Hadrian. His Instagram feed included a picture of a child taped to a table, (who Alefantis will later claim was his godchild) and many other images and comments that looked strange, to say the least, without additional context.

Comet Ping Pong Pizza, which marketed itself as a place for kids, often hosted luridly sexual, surrealist musical acts, such as Heavy Breathing and Sex Stains. Sex Stains has two music videos available on YouTube. One shows the band singing and dancing in a room full of childrens’ toys, including a giant block displaying a symbol that the FBI says pedophiles use to identify each other — a spiral in the shape of a triangle. The video ends with the lead singer on her knees, sweating and breathing heavily, stretching out her hands to highlight the symbol on the block. The same symbol showed up again a few doors down from Alefantis’s joint, in the logo for a nearby restaurant called Besta Pizza (who promptly changed their logo shortly after this was discovered). Someone who’d paid attention in high school French class also pointed out that the name James Alefantis is remarkably similar to the French *j’aime l’enfants*, which means, “I love children.” All this fuel was duly added to the fire.

Insides of the Comet Ping Pong restaurant on Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington D.C.

Comet Ping Pong Pizza is certainly an interesting name for a restaurant. It reminded some people of an old clip of Andrew Breitbart with Greg Gutfeld on *Fox News Channel's Red Eye*, in which the topic of ping pong had been raised. Breitbart had joined the show to celebrate his vindication after accusing former Congressman Anthony Weiner of sexual misconduct. Weiner was married at the time to Hillary Clinton's confidante Huma Abedin, and the Clinton machine had attacked Breitbart with their typical viciousness after he claimed to have proof of Weiner's indiscretions. Breitbart complained that his critics had gone silent since the revelation of the proof that he was right. At one point, Gutfeld said that it was hard to play ping pong without an opponent. Breitbart paused, threw Gutfeld a suspicious look and asked, "Why would you change the subject to the sport of ping pong?... You're weird like that."

Breitbart's appearance on *Red Eye* was aired five years before the Podesta emails kicked off PizzaGate, and five months after he publicly lobbed an even more serious accusation against John Podesta himself. In a February 2011 tweet, Breitbart wrote: "How prog-guru John Podesta isn't a household name as a world-class underage sex slave op cover upper defending unspeakable dregs escapes me." Breitbart, of course, was a well-known conservative bomb thrower, but this was heavy ordnance even by his standards. An accusation like that, against someone with Podesta's status and connections, could have landed Breitbart in court, facing life-ruining libel charges, if he could not back it up. But it turned out that Podesta did not have to take him to court, since Breitbart mysteriously died on the street near his home a short time later. The coroner who performed the autopsy was himself found dead of arsenic poisoning soon after examining Breitbart's body, and a spokesman for the coroner's office subsequently announced that Breitbart had died of "natural causes."

The Podesta emails provided a treasure trove of material for conspiracy theorists. In one message, John and his brother Tony were invited to a culinary art installation by the performance artist Marina Abramovic called *Spirit Cooking*. A quick Google search of Abramovic's name turned up images of her displaying a bloody goat's head and holding a snake in her mouth. The installation included witchy sayings painted in pig's blood on white walls including: "*Mix fresh breast milk with fresh sperm milk, drink on earthquake nights*", "*With a sharp knife, cut deeply into the middle finger of your left hand. Eat the pain*", and "*Fresh morning urine, sprinkle over nightmare dreams*." An effigy of a human infant, completely covered in pig's blood as if a bucket of the stuff had been thrown on it, was placed in the corner of room. In another room small dolls are positioned as if copulating. At one Spirit Cooking event, attended by Lady Gaga, pictures show her with Abramovic, eating something from the belly of a naked model, playing dead in a tub of what looks like blood. Diners drank fluids they were supposed to pretend were blood, human breast milk, and other bodily fluids.

John's brother, Tony Podesta, head honcho of the Podesta Group, is an avid art collector whose hoard contains a number of pieces that are right at home alongside Abramovic's installation. For example, over the central atrium in his home hangs a massive burnished bronze statue by artist Louise Bourgeois. Entitled "Arch of Hysteria", the statue depicts a headless man, bent into an extreme backward arch, like a gymnast beginning a back handspring, which is nearly identical to a photograph taken by serial killer, rapist, and cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer of one of his victims, whose head Dahmer had removed before posing the corpse in an extreme backward arch with all four knees and elbows on the ground. The sculpture weighs over two thousand pounds, and

Podesta said extensive renovation of his house was necessary in order to build in the support needed to hang it from the ceiling. ~~ARCHIVE~~ It was intended to be ~~MEMORIAL~~ part of the house ~~SUPPORT~~ and will never be removed as long as he lives in it. It was later discovered that, although Bourgeois had completed the sculpture about a year after Dahmer's crimes were publicized, sketches of it in her notebooks predated Dahmer's arrest.

The statue was featured in a profile of Podesta's home and art collection in the June 2015 issue of *Washington Life* magazine. Many of his walls were covered in large paintings created as a series by the Serbian artist Biljana Djurdjevic. One of them shows a young girl in a short skirt sitting on a barstool against a tile background. The girl has two black eyes and a dead — or perhaps drugged — look on her face. Another work consists of a huge painting that dominates an entire wall in Podesta's house, called "Synchronized Swimming", which portrays a group of young girls lying in a circle at the bottom of a dilapidated, drained swimming pool. The girls are drawn with the same black doll's eyes, and dead or trancelike look on their faces as they stare up into oblivion. In the same room hangs another large Djurdjevic painting unmistakably depicting two dead young girls, lying on their backs among lily pads in a river or a pond. Djurdjevic admitted in an interview that the series was inspired by stories of child sexual abuse that she had read in the press, and other paintings are much more explicit in their handling of the theme. A few of them show children in their underwear, tied up, bondage-style, against the same tile background. Another shows two young girls in their panties hanging by a strap under their arms. Another shows a lone girl lying unconscious or dead in a river or pond.

A friend who is a butcher remarked that the tile backgrounds used by Djurdjevic in her works reminded him not of swimming pools or bathrooms, but of slaughterhouses in which he had worked. Kill rooms at meat processing plants are almost always tiled, he said, and he sent me several pictures of ones in which he had been employed. Indeed, Djurdjevic's tiled settings did resemble a slaughterhouse. The revelation also shined a light on one painting among Djurdjevic's series that did not seem to belong with the others. Four hooded men wearing butchers' aprons and the long rubber boots and gloves favored by slaughterers sit around a stainless steel butcher's block and stare out at the viewer. One of the butchers is grabbing his groin, while another is holding what appears to be a rosary. A third is covered in a St. George's Cross, and blood runs from one edge of the flag onto the floor.

During a 2004 interview, Podesta named sculptor Patricia Piccinini as one of his favorites. Piccinini creates nightmarish sculptures of deformed children being preyed on by grotesque monsters and demons. One sculpture is of a little girl standing on a bed facing a leering demon with claws wrapped around the child. Another portrays a little boy sleeping in bed, being spooned by a hairless pig monster with bursting pustules containing more monsters growing out of its back. Another shows a deformed child doing a handstand on the back of a horned goat. Piccinini's work is heavy with scrotums, with mouths that look like sphincters or vulvas being played with by small children.

Another artist Podesta mentioned as one of his favorites, is a British illustrator named Kim Noble. Noble has spent much of her life in asylums, suffering from schizophrenia and dissociative identity disorder, or what used to be called multiple personality disorder. Several of Noble's personalities make art, and many of them depict images of gruesome acts of molestation and child abuse. The style of Noble's drawings is that of a kindergartener — scribbles of what amount to stick figures — but her subject matter comes through clear as crystal. Many of the abusers in Noble's drawings do not look human but resemble demons or humanoid monsters. One of them features several adults standing around urinating on the heads of kneeling children. Others show children huddling in cages, while two blacked out adult figures with long, claw-like hands loom over them. Another has a person standing on a platform near two girls hanging from a wall. Several display shockingly direct portrayals of extreme child sexual abuse being committed while other adults look on, and, perhaps, wait their turn. Noble's work is the product of a profoundly sick mind and she cannot be held responsible for what it portrays. Kim Noble herself was raped and brutally abused on a regular basis between the ages of one and three years old. The trauma she experienced broke her young mind apart, and the drawings so admired by Tony Podesta are representations of the nightmares forced upon her as an infant.

"OK, so what?" say many. "They're into transgressive art. That's nothing new. Maybe it's not your thing, maybe it's not mine, but the fact that they enjoy eating dinner off naked corpses in rooms with creepy messages written in pig's blood all over the walls doesn't mean anything except that they're into weird stuff. Just because they collect paintings by an artist who specializes in painting half-naked, abused, and dead children... What's the difference between that and someone listening to heavy metal songs about the devil? Does that make them devil worshippers?"

No, it doesn't. And I am not saying that Marina Abramovic should be prevented by law from creating her art installations, or that Alvin Karpis should be prevented from attending them. Most Americans outside of Silicon Valley do interpret the First Amendment pretty broadly, and a person who wishes to attend Satanic soirees or collect paintings of half-naked, bound, dead and abused children is within his legal rights. But, should such a person have a hand in determining education policy in America? Should he have any say over whether it is appropriate to perform gender reassignment surgery on eight-year-olds, when he has paintings of tied up, dead eight-year-olds on his living room wall?

It is tempting to focus on the sick mind of Podesta himself, but his unashamed public behavior forces us to ask a much larger question: What exactly is going on in Washington D.C.? Podesta obviously feels comfortable hanging these pictures on the walls of a house in which he hosts parties, and which he showed off in a D.C. society magazine. Washington D.C. is a cutthroat city where people are regularly destroyed and rendered untouchable for trivial indiscretions. How could Podesta, a powerful Democrat lobbyist with a Rolodex of enemies acquired over a long career, put his depraved predilections on public display, and expect no repercussions?

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Jeffrey Epstein's residence at 9 East 71st Street in the Manhattan borough, New York City.

How could a man like Jeffrey Epstein remain in the good graces of high society despite a very public conviction for child prostitution?

Famous television news reporters Katie Couric and George Stephanopolous went to Epstein's New York City mansion for dinner less than a year after he was released from prison. (Remember, it was not even Epstein himself, but *his friends* who nicknamed his private plane the "Lolita Express".) As I write this, JP Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon is being deposed over his bank allegedly turning a blind eye to Epstein's crimes. Dimon's best defense might well be to point out that *everyone* turned a blind eye to Epstein's crimes. Epstein even gave an unrepentant interview to *New York Times* reporter James B. Stewart in 2019 in which Stewart wrote: "[Epstein] said criminalizing sex with teenage girls was a cultural aberration and that at times in history it was perfectly acceptable. He pointed out that homosexuality had long been considered a crime and was still punishable by death in some parts of the world."

What are all these powerful and prominent people doing with a monster like Epstein? Taking into account the behavior and inclinations of many people of Epstein's social class, an obvious, if uncomfortable answer presents itself. To these people, Epstein is not a monster. To an ordinary person the idea of the Lolita Express appears shocking (I personally don't know anyone who wouldn't immediately call the police if he found himself surrounded by unrelated underage girls on a private plane named after a novel about a pedophile), but for somebody who sometimes eats dinner off the belly of a bloody mock corpses, at an event hosted by a man with paintings of dead children on his living room walls, it might not be nearly as shocking.

In 2020, *New York Times* foreign correspondent Norimitsu Onishi published an article entitled, "A Pedophile Writer is on Trial, so are the French Elites" about French novelist Gabriel Matzneff, who had been brought up on charges of sexually abusing underage boys and girls. Matzneff had been a star in French literary circles for years, he'd enjoyed the patronage and friendship of celebrity fashion designers, prominent artists, and even former Presidents of France. His books were pornographic novels about pedophilia, which turned out to have drawn on his own experiences with young children. His breakthrough novel, which put him on the map in 1974, was called "Under Sixteen Years Old." But Matzneff's arrest did not dampen the loyalty of his friends, who protested, and, when that failed, appealed for leniency in sentencing. Matzneff himself was unapologetic even in the dock. According to the *Times*, "Mr. Matzneff angrily defended himself, saying that he wrote about what *many* others did in secret, especially in the years following the May 1968 counter-cultural revolution. 'Even the silly things I might have done during those euphoric years of freedom, I wasn't the only one' he said. 'What a hypocrisy.'" Matzneff's crimes had occurred after the expiration of French statutes of limitations, and he is unlikely to spend any time in jail. He remains a member in good standing of high-class French and European society. After listing, and quoting some of Matzneff's backers, the *Times* wrote, "The support of Mr. Matzneff reflected an enduring French contradiction: a nation that is deeply egalitarian, yet with an elite that often distinguishes itself from ordinary people through a different code of morality, a different set of rules, or at least believing it necessary to defend those who did."

Indeed. Matzneff was undoubtedly telling the truth when he complained that his crimes had been committed in good company. From Matzneff to Epstein to Harvey Weinstein to Jimmy Savile, more often than not the exposure of an elite sex criminal is immediately followed by the revelation that their behavior had been an open secret for years. A Leeds city police officer who once caught Savile sitting in a parked car with a 15-year-old girl late at night said that he had not intervened because attitudes were "different" at the time. "They turned a blind eye to 15-year-olds, but never considered that as pedophilia," he said. "You can't blame Leeds City Police for

what everyone in the country was doing. I'm not saying that's right, but it was the attitude at the time. They all knew Jimmy Savile liked them young. IPRA is the culture. MEMBERSHIP ABOUT SUPPORT

After Savile's case made the news, British writer Neil Lyndon penned an article in *The Telegraph* about the culture to which the Leeds officer referred. In the article titled "Should I be worried about how I behaved in the 1970s?" Lyndon, who had worked for years at *BBC*, wrote that "the difference between horribly predatory and exploitative criminal acts such as Jimmy Savile's and our own behavior was blurred, confused, and muddled. We had lost sight of the essential distinction between everybody having a good time together and some people having their abominable idea of a good time at the expense of individuals who couldn't exercise free, adult choice in the matter."

Lyndon wrote that he had nightmares of being picked up by the police for things he had done in earlier decades, and that he knew many ultra-famous men were similarly lying awake at night, "ransacking their memory to ask whether they ever crossed the line between indecency and illegality... Anybody who lived through the post-Pill, pre-AIDS period of the last century and was connected with the worlds of media, politics, and entertainment will have emerged with their undies clean only if they were also wearing a chastity belt. Everyone was banging away on the edge of that line. I did my share... I was told about Savile in 1976. If I — who was of no importance at all in the *BBC* — had heard that Savile was a predatory pedophile, I will bet a pound to a million pennies that senior executives must have heard the same. Yet it never crossed my mind for an instant that there was an important story in Jimmy Savile... Why not?"

Lyndon answers his own question. Jimmy Savile was able to operate in the open because any semblance of moral order had been thrown out the window in the 1960s, and the stories people heard about him were common. Ours is far from the first late-stage decadent civilization to develop an elite that distinguishes itself from *hoi polloi* by flouting their basic moral precepts. Cleopatra allegedly enjoyed pushing pins through the breasts of her servant girls, and was driven to orgasm by their screams. Aleister Crowley did not find an audience for his Sex Magick among peasants, but among the British gentry and upper bourgeoisie — people, in other words, much like John and Tony Podesta, Bill and Hillary Clinton, and the rich and famous friends of Jeffrey Epstein.

Shortly after Epstein's 2019 arrest, Christine Pelosi, a Democratic activist and the daughter of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, tweeted that "it is quite likely that some of our faves are implicated, but we must follow the facts and let the chips fall where they may — whether on Republicans or Democrats." Who did Pelosi have in mind when she wrote this? That is another question to which we are unlikely to get a good answer. But her tweet certainly serves as a powerful reminder that the morally-permissive environment that prevails in elite circles would have

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