



**Episode 1,379: Andy Ngo on Hate Crime Hoaxes and Dissident Journalism**

**Guest: Andy Ngo**

**WOODS:** I've had a lot of requests to chat with you, and so as I was telling you before, I give the people what they want, and you are what they want right now. So I want to start off with a specific example of the type of reporting you've been doing, and then I want to get a little bit more general about you, your background, your interests, and so on. But in particular, what's been getting a lot of attention is your work on alleged hate crimes, anti-LGBT hate crimes in the Portland area of all places. Now, where are you based out of?

**NGO:** I am based in Portland.

**WOODS:** Okay, so this is your backyard, indeed. All right, so I've seen you in a number of places talking about this topic, and in fact, I've even heard you on the radio talking about it. Maybe you're tired of giving the background, but it seems like a very important episode to relate. So why don't you tell us what we need to know?

**NGO:** Yes, thank you for having me on to speak about this. So I had a piece that ran in *The New York Post* earlier this week, and it details my investigation into a rash of alleged hate crimes against the LGBT community in Portland that sparked a rather big panic here. So what happened is, in February, a GoFundMe campaign had gone viral detailing how a Portland transactivist named Sophia Gabrielle Stanford had been brutally beat unconscious with a bat by right-wing assailants. And within days, a self-described fat queer activist named Jenny Brusco shared a different viral social media posts alleging that her partner, Brie Jones, had been randomly attacked in another hate crime. Now, Portland is an extremely progressive city, and just the near whisper of being a victim of a hate crime will earn you a lot of attention and sympathy, so there was an outpouring of support. But then that quickly became a panic, and what started off as two allegations of hate attacks then grew 2, 5, 7, 10 and 15. Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler weighed in; ride company Lyft even put out a statement, as well as the Democratic Socialists of America, Portland Chapter. That's a bit of the background, and I can continue if you'd like me to.

**WOODS:** Yeah, as I was reading the — as everything unfolded, and then you've interacted with some of the people who were involved, I thought to myself, I've become a pretty decent interviewer over 1,379 episodes, but I think for this, I think I just need you to tell us the whole story, and then we'll talk.

**NGO:** Sure, okay. So I was skeptical of the claims for a number of reasons. One, we'd just had the Jussie Smollett story fall apart, and then suddenly in Portland, we had a series of Jussie Smollett-like claims. And the stories were becoming more and more absurd. So people were

alleging that there were marauding right-wing gangs driving around our city, attempting to kidnap, beat, and kill LGBT people with weapons, including bats, hammers, wooden planks. And all the while no evidence was being produced; no witnesses were willing to come forward. The two original alleged victims refused to speak to media. And for you listeners who may not be familiar with Portland, Oregon, our politics are actually pretty important here, in that it's a progressive monoculture. In the 2016 election, nearly 75% of the city voted for Hillary Clinton. So just to, I guess, believe that all this had been happening and nobody had any evidence, to me, that was a huge red flag. But speaking out, unfortunately, in this climate makes one a victim blamer or a reactionary, as I was called.

So what I did was I initiated a series of public records requests. And the police report document found that, out of the 15 allegations of hate attacks, only one was actually reported to police. It was the first one, the one by the trans activist Sophia Stanford. And when I finally got that police report, the details in it are entirely different than what was alleged in the GoFundMe. The GoFundMe claimed that she had been randomly beaten in the back of the head with a bat, so badly that she was unconscious and that she needed sensitive physical therapy, counseling, CT scans. And those sensational details, they worked, in that it was viral, and over \$10,000 was raised within days. But looking in the police investigation, what they had found was that she was extremely drunk and belligerent when officers arrived. She even threatened them. She had no idea what happened to her and was apparently so intoxicated that she lost the pistol that she was armed with at the time. More than one officer noted in the reports that it's likely she fell from being drunk. It was only the next day that all these other details of being attacked by a right-wing gang, that came on the GoFundMe and it was never reported to police.

Now, as for the second woman, Jenny Bruso, the one who said her partner was attacked, she had said in her social media posts that she had her reported it. Well, I contacted Portland police, and she did not report it. Neither her nor her partner, actually, neither of them made a phone call to police. The police actually attempted to reach out to them multiple times. They refused to cooperate, did not return the phone calls, and so that investigation was suspended. And as for the 13+ other allegations, there was no evidence that it happened at all, and the police have no idea what people are talking about.

So the details of my investigation were published in *The New York Post* earlier this week, and since then, a lot of people have been very angry at me here just because, well, I think I have burst the bubble of the game that they had been playing. And the thing is, all of this is not a victimless – like there are actually victims involved in this. What happened is, in the panic, what activists ended up doing was they printed out flyers listing names, phone numbers, addresses, and photographs of people they accused of being the attackers. Now, all the men I spoke to who were accused categorically deny, and most of them actually have some evidence to suggest that they weren't even around when these things happened. For example, some of them live hours and hours away or live in a different state. But they've been targeted, and these flyers are actually still all around Portland posted in businesses and public areas, warning people, basically blaming innocent people. And one man that I spoke to named Robert, he started receiving death threats every day, because his address and his phone number was released. So there's not been a single apology by any of these activists for what they've done. The alleged victims, all the ones that I – the alleged victims of the hate crimes, that is, whenever I reached out to any of them, they refused to comment and/or blocked me across my social media.

**WOODS:** Now, I know that on your Twitter feed, which is very interesting and people should follow you, you have talked – and then I've seen you, and I've read the *Daily Caller* and stuff, I've read a lot of links where you're talking about other examples of hate crime hoaxes. Now, I'm pretty certain that one of the responses you would get is that, all right, it's obviously a shame when people invent stories, but it seems perverse to focus exclusively on these, they would say, that why is that your preoccupation when the fact is there are real-life hate crimes going on? I mean, you don't need me to tell you what you're probably hearing a lot. How do you respond to that?

**NGO:** I do hear that line of argument a lot, and I find it frustrating, because hate crime hoaxes do happen, and what they do is they harm actual victims of hate crimes. They make it so that the public are less inclined to believe people. It hardens attitudes, as well, to real issues of racism or homophobia or transphobia. And I find that when people try to find a silver lining in hate hoaxes by saying, for example, as they told me many times, that this may not have happened, but it brought attention to what's really happening to LGBT people, I don't find that a convincing argument. Really what that does is it will incentivize more people to either embellish or lie about being a victim, and we already live in a culture now where victimhood is really mainstream. This was something that I saw as the dominant ethos when I was a student at university, and now I see it really in the mainstream politics. And it's concerning to me. Looking at what happened was Jussie Smollett and all the people who have come out to basically say that, well, he may have lied, but racism and police bias and homophobia are all real, and we need to pay attention to that, is just, in my view, a sick way of looking at this. And we need to center victims, but at the same time, not give up common sense and skepticism and centering caution, as well.

**WOODS:** Tell me about what you observed a number of months ago when you covered the Jordan Peterson event in Portland.

**NGO:** Oh, yeah. So Portland seems to be on the news a lot now for a number of reasons. One, I mentioned earlier that our politics here are important, because as a progressive monoculture, we see many examples of the excesses of the progressive far left. And so last year when Jordan Peterson was on his book tour and he stopped in Portland, there was a large demonstration outside the venue of people accusing him of being transphobic and all the other accusations that he's frequently accused of by activists. In that example, I mean, it was a nonviolent protest. Everything seemed fine. But it's just to me, when I tried speaking to some of these people, they don't even know really what Jordan Peterson writes about; they are basically just sent out activist news releases, essentially, which misrepresent or even lie about Jordan Peterson. And this then motivates people to come out in numbers. And I find that that's kind of how a lot of these activist groups in Portland are able to get sometimes hundreds and thousands of people to show up to a demonstration, is basically to send out the most inflammatory and inaccurate information against their ideological opponents in order to rally people to their side.

**WOODS:** How would you describe your politics?

**NGO:** I used to be really reluctant about talking about my personal politics, just because I used to work in the student paper at Portland State, and that environment made it so that I would have been persona non grata if I had been a bit too vocal. Now that I have moved a bit more into feature writing, as well as essays and commentaries as well, I feel a little bit more comfortable stating that my politics are probably right of center. I think my disillusionment

with progressive politics is really – I'm very disillusioned with the progressive politics that I used to be sympathetic to, just because of the now obsessive focus on identity. And for myself, I happen to carry several minority identities, as being gay and the child of refugees and several other things. But what I see a lot of my progressive activist colleagues in the media doing is using these identities as a way basically to – as if having one of those inimitable characteristics makes you more knowledgeable or makes it so that people should listen to you more. I'm frustrated with that. At the same time, I haven't moved straight into the right wing, just because I find that being center allows me to be critical of the excesses of both sides.

**WOODS:** Well, that's interesting to hear you say, because maybe I thought you still more or less lingered on the left or identified yourself with the left. I've talked to a number of people, for example, Michael Rectenwald, who's a former professor at NYU, who was a Marxist his whole career, and then he began to speak out a little bit against the kind of things that upset you about identity politics and so on, and he found himself targeted like you wouldn't believe, treated like he'd never been born. It was unbelievable what an outcast he became. And that behavior made him go back and reexamine his whole ideological premises, because he wondered, could there be something wrong with the way I think that it leads people to behave this way? And that more than all the anti-Marxist treatises in the world is what got him thinking and changed his mind a bit. So that's interesting to hear you say that.

Now, on the other hand, I do want to tell you that I feel like in the United States, what passes for the right wing is pretty thin gruel. So I can understand why you would look at the right wing as Sean Hannity and Mark Levin; I'm not sure I want to go running into the embrace of those people. But I consider myself to be pretty right of center, but libertarian. And my view is the state just accentuates all these problems. And I think people in general, I think a lot of folks, ordinary folks you talk to, are really tired of the hype- exclusive focus on race constantly. I think there are a lot of people who think the way you do, that this is not actually helping to make people get along better. It's clearly just dividing them and making them more full of resentment.

**NGO:** Yeah, actually some of the most hatred that I get against me is by people who accuse me of being a traitor of some sort, either a traitor to my race or my sexual orientation. And that used to be really hurtful, because to be judged on a characteristic like that, like you would think that that's – I would have thought that somebody who claims to be progressive, that that's not something they would judge another person on. I've now realized that it kind of just comes with the territory of criticizing the progressive far left. I had my own sort of I guess eye-opening moment in 2017, when, at that time, I had been an editor at the student paper, of the PSU *Vanguard*, for about a year.

And then I went to a public interfaith event on campus, and on my personal Twitter, I shared some of the video from that event. One of the videos went viral. It was of the Muslim student sharing his views on the punishment for apostasy, and then four days after that clip was shared, I was fired from the student paper in a secret meeting with an administrator and the editor-in-chief. And they brought up basically the training that I had had as a student editor in regard to social justice ethics, basically about learning about which group are oppressors and victims, and how the media already portrays Islam and Muslims and that I should have factored all those things in before I shared the video. And so to see the student paper that I worked with throw me under the bus and then try to smear my reputation, that for me was a big eye-opener, because it showed me that you would think that progresses would be on the

side of wanting to shine a light on the reality of what it's like for people who live in countries where there's Islamic law, who face persecution for either not believing in the right things or leaving the faith they were born in. But instead, I was smeared as an Islamophobe and some people said that I was racist because of that. But that that whole experience has kind of characterized many other intersectional politics that I've encountered in this city.

**WOODS:** Well, I'm curious now to ask you, then, given that you're saying that you've had a bit of a maybe philosophical evolution, what was the first article you wrote, in which, let's say, you were critical of a movement that you more or less felt like you belonged to, namely the progressive left?

**NGO:** I wrote a pretty long feature story back when I was a student journalist on the persecution of atheist Saudi Arabians. Portland State, where I was a student, has a very large number of international students from Saudi Arabia, and most of them are on government scholarships. And they have a strict, I guess, like code of ethics that they have to live by. And one of them is they have to be religiously observant and Muslim. And I had interviewed some students who are closeted non-Muslims, either converts to another religion or an atheist. And that story I thought would have been really well received in the Portland State community. Instead, a lot of my peers were very upset. They felt that I had singled out an "oppressed marginalized group." I was accused of using like a colonial paradigm in terms of criticizing a culture that's not my own. That was when I was made aware of intersectionality, of how it's not about standing up for so-called progressive ideals; it's about there's really a whole worldview and an ideology, where as long as you have certain identities that intersect, you are ranked either higher or lower in your value and worth. And unfortunately, those who come from an ex-Muslim background, they no longer had a voice in this type of worldview.

**WOODS:** Given your experiences and given where you have been ideologically, I'm curious about how you believe people in the progressive left square, the idea that at least in principle and at least at one time, they genuinely did believe in freedom of speech. And now, it's more — I mean, it's not like they want to shut down all speech, but they obviously have a view that there are certain topics or even certain types of people whose views really, they don't deserve a hearing, or they're automatically disqualified, or this doesn't count as real speech, or this is hatred, or whatever. And it's well beyond what normal people would consider to be truly hateful speech. It could be just an article about crime or something, and then somehow they get hate out of that. I mean, my feeling is, I wonder if they did at one time truly believe in free speech, or if that was just a smokescreen for, *Yeah, I believe in free speech when it's me, but when I'm calling the shots, that's going to be the end of free speech.* Is it really that cynical, or can you cheer me up about how they really think?

**NGO:** So in my two years of documenting the leftist activism in Portland, what I find is that the positions that these groups advocate for, they get more mainstream support in the city — and actually, you don't even just have to look at Portland; you can look at any other progressive place, whether it be an entire city or a university. What happens is you have a small number of activists who are ideologues, who have taken the lead on certain issues and have shamed the majority of people into supporting them.

So for example, for things related to policing, I'm just thinking of, as a microcosm, on Portland State. We're a pretty large university, and we were one of the universities of our size to not have an armed police presence. And so the board of trustees, over a long process and a lot of deliberation, decided to bring in sworn officers to our police force. And that sparked

this huge protests on campus, led by probably maybe less than 50 people, but this small group of 50 people, let's say, was leading the narrative for the tens of thousands of other students. And they set the tone that if you did not oppose the arming of police, you were for the killing of black people, you were for systemic racism. And so they use these tricks, and it's a strategy, really, to make it so that other people who might not agree entirely are left in fear of being ostracized and treated as persona non grata. And it really works.

And then I see that repeated on a larger scale in the city, as well, on a number of other issues. Unfortunately, I don't see a lot of bravery from, I guess, the moderate left in pushing back. If any of them dare to, they get mobbed, either online or in real life. Portland has had a terrible track record of businesses, in particular, being mobbed by social justice activists. You may have heard of the case awhile back of the burrito food cart that was shut down and received death threats because they were run by two white women, and activists accused them of cultural appropriation. They've done the same thing to many other businesses, and so it's made our politicians fearful of this radical fringe, I would say, and nobody seems to be brave enough to push back.

**WOODS:** Well, let me say something for you, just on your behalf, because, you know, you're a soft-spoken guy, but man, you are tough as nails. Some of the assignments you've given yourself, going out and confronting some of these groups, that's not easy. And there are not a lot of people who would have the guts to go out there and do it, and it's really interesting to watch you do it.

Can you tell me something about *Quillette*? Is that how you say it?

**NGO:** It is.

**WOODS:** Because it just seemed like it came out of nowhere, and then I would read one really good article on it, and then somebody would link me to another good article on it, and then I realized: *Everything I read on this thing is good. What is this site?* So how did that get started?

**NGO:** *Quillette* is such an amazing online magazine, and I am so lucky to be connected to it. It was started just in 2015 by a young woman named Claire Lehmann in Australia, and she basically just wanted to open up an online forum where people could submit long-form essays to talk about issues that were either deemed not politically correct or expressing views that might be dissident. And since then, in the three and a half years since, the site has grown exponentially, and we've brought in so many gifted writers, a lot of academics. Sometimes some academics will have to write under a pseudonym in order to protect their careers. What is amazing about working for Claire Lehmann, the editor-in-chief, is that she brings in a lot of talent by people who have been mobbed and kicked out of other places. For example, she gave me a chance to write for the site after I was fired from the student paper, and Clare saw that that was an injustice, and she reached out to me and gave me an opportunity. Likewise, she has done that too many other talent affiliated with the site. And so for your listeners who may not be familiar with it, I highly recommend that you check it out. The site covers a number of issues that you probably won't see in the mainstream publications, but the ideas that express nuance, and because it's online-only, then we're not limited by space or like clickbait titles, as well. We're funded through crowdsource funding, so we don't have to rely on ads and clickbait titles and inflammatory type of coverage in order to get viewers.

**WOODS:** Well, I love it, and I would love to see you guys get more support. You have your own personal Patreon, though, isn't that right?

**NGO:** I do, because I also work as a part-time freelance journalist. And if any of your listeners happen to be in the same field, you know that pieces, many of them, you don't get paid that much for it, but it can take a lot of time in the research and travel and all that. So I crowdfund support so that I can continue doing the writing that I do as a job.

**WOODS:** I've heard such — I've never been to Oregon. It's one of the five states I've never gone to. I've heard wonderful things about Portland, that the politics I might not like, but there's so much that just keeps you there anyways. Is that how you feel about it?

**NGO:** There's a lot of beauty in the city, of course. I know like what's happening a lot right now is people will crap on progressive politics and all the bad side of it, but the same time, I think some people are overlooking some of the great things, like, for example, the welcoming environment, the emphasis on diversity and all that, which were things that I really liked. But now it's crossed over and mutated into something where diversity is meant on a very superficial thing, where, for example, if the space has too many white people, then that's suddenly a problem and then people there are shamed, and it's really more about diversity based on skin color or sexual orientation and so on so forth, those sort of superficial characteristics, not on ideological diversity.

And I hate to repeat a cliché, but I would say that the path to hell is paved with good intentions. What we have is a city council and mayor who are motivated by a desire for social justice, but then, basically, the policies that they have pursued, have empowered the radical extremists in the city, for example Antifa, and allowed them at various times to basically take over parts of downtown with impunity and attack people in the public, without prosecution, without arrest. We've had that. We've also had now a really growing issue with vagrant counts growing in certain areas, which has not just some health issues, but there's security issues as well. And if anybody dare to talk about any of these social issues in a way that's different from the prevailing ideology, you get smeared as heartless, racist, hateful, so on and so forth.

So I love the city, but I tire of its politics. And I would urge political centrists and the Republican Party to look at trying to recapture the hearts and minds of young people. Because here, what I'm seeing every day is the growing movement of socialist sympathizers and even communists as well. And just with my own family background, my parents lived under a communist Vietnam and were severely persecuted, and they fled that. And to see that a lot of my co-city dwellers are looking back on history, either the history of the Vietnam War or the Soviet Union or Cuba or anything like that with such rose-colored glasses is frustrating to me, and I'm wondering who is going to speak out in and bring in their perspective.

**WOODS:** Right. All right, as we wrap up, then, if people would like to get more of your work or start following you to begin with, then Quillette.com is the place to go? Or what should they do? I'll put a link to your personal Patreon for people who are inspired by the work you're doing. I'll put a link to that at [TomWoods.com/1379](https://www.tomwoods.com/1379). But any other link you'd like to supply us, I'll gladly include.

**NGO:** Yeah, I think people can get the most up-to-date updates about what I'm doing on my Twitter, and my handle for that is @MrAndyNgo. I publish at a number of places, so you can find my writings on *Quillette*; you can also find it on *National Review*, as well as Wall Street Journal, and most recently, *The New York Post*.

**WOODS:** Tremendous, okay, so we'll also link to your Twitter account, as well. Well, I appreciate your time. I'm glad to have had a chance to get to know you more or less in this conversation, and continued good luck to you.

**NGO:** Thank you very much for having me on.