

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:12	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> , I’m Jesse Thorn. Fran Lebowitz is one of the most charming talkers on Earth. She also—as much as anyone can—personifies New York City, or at least a very specific idea of New York City. She speaks plainly. She doesn’t beat around the bush. She walks with purpose. She hates being slowed down by tourists on the sidewalk. She wears pretty much the same thing all the time: jeans, a white button up dress shirt, a custom-made sport coat, and a pair of tortoiseshell glasses.
			Fran has lived in or around New York City pretty much her entire life. In the city, almost all of her adulthood. She’s ostensibly a writer, though she hasn’t published anything for over 20 years. And even that thing she published 20 years ago was a children’s picture book. Instead, she makes her living talking about politics, about New York, about how its changed, about culture. And she is extraordinarily good at it. That’s why Martin Scorsese made her the subject of <i>Pretend It’s a City</i> —it’s a seven-part series about Fran and her relationship with New York.
			Anyway. We would take any opportunity to bring Fran Lebowitz back on <i>Bullseye</i> . This is a great one and we have a really special person to interview Fran Lebowitz: the great Julie Klausner. Julie is the creator and star of the TV show <i>Difficult People</i> . She’s also the co-host of the podcast <i>Double Threat</i> , with our friend Tom Scharpling. And perhaps most importantly—like Fran—Julie has lived in and around New York City pretty much her whole life, too. So.
			<i>[Music fades in.]</i>
			Without further delay: a real super team, Fran Lebowitz in conversation with Julie Klausner.
00:02:10	Music	Transition	Cheerful music with bright synth.
00:02:19	Julie Klausner	Host	Fran Lebowitz! Welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:02:22	Fran Lebowitz	Guest	Thank you.
00:02:24	Julie	Host	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> Two things before we begin: I am a huge fan of yours. I love you madly. And the second thing is, this is no longer about me.
00:02:32	Fran	Guest	Oh, thank you very much. <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:02:34	Julie	Host	So, I wanted to ask you—historically, what is your relationship to television, and did you ever expect to be the star of your own TV show?
00:02:43	Fran	Guest	No. I never did. That I can tell you. I was born in 1950. I know that seems unbelievable to most people, that I’m still here. So, we had a television, but I didn’t really care about it. My sister loved to watch television. My parents watched television every night. I never really

found it that gripping. I still don't. So, through this—television of course changed, you know, throughout this time. I don't know when this started, but—you know, maybe eight or ten years ago—people I knew started constantly talking about television. You know, HBO, Netflix, you know—all these things. "You have to watch this, it's brilliant!" And it's like—it's not that I didn't believe them, I just don't care that much about television. I know it's against the law, but I don't.

The whole time we were making *Pretend It's a City*, I constantly refer to it as a movie. You know. And I still refer to it as a movie and people say to me, "It's not a movie. It's a television series." And to me, it's a movie because Marty makes movies. So, to me, Marty makes movies. Marty made this. It's a movie. You can see it on television. You can also see it on a phone. You know? It's cut up—actually, he made it that way, but I mean it's in episodes like television. But to me, it's a movie.

00:03:57 Julie Host Speaking of film, I wonder what your relationship is with culture now that we can't really leave the apartment and the theaters are closed and movie theaters are closed. What is your relationship to culture right now, during COVID?

00:04:11 Fran Guest Well, I don't see all the stuff that's on the internet, which is apparently where everything is. You know. People keep saying, "This is the worst time for you not to be on the internet, Fran, because everything's on it!" The New York City Ballet's on the internet. You know, the Museum of Modern Art, the exhibitions are on the internet. And so, it's not that I don't believe them. I know that that is true. So, I'm missing these things. That is true. I can imagine that I would like to watch a ballet on the internet. But—some people do. I guess the idea is it's better than not having the ballet. And that is probably true.

To me, yes of course I miss—you know. I miss not just what people call culture, you know—which are, you know, things like movies and—you know, concerts and things like that. I miss the culture of New York. Which has to do with going out even if you're going out to have a beer, not just going—not, you know—going to the opera is a cultural event. Going to have a beer in New York? Also, a cultural event. So, you know, of course I miss these things.

00:05:12 Julie Host Could you tell me what the best and the worst things—or just positive and negative things about COVID in New York City have been, with the quarantine specifically?

00:05:22 Fran Guest I mean, I guess at the beginning of it of course it was totally unfathomable to me. You know. It was—the upside of being old, and there's not many, but the upside is almost everything that happens reminds you of something else. This is the first big thing that's happened in my adult life that didn't remind me of something else. Of course, right away people started saying, "This is like September 11th. This is like AIDs." But those things were not true, and I knew right away they weren't true. I mean, especially it was ridiculous to compare it to AIDs. And I was telling people right away, "This is not like AIDs."

First of all, people care about this. I have news for you: when AIDs started in the '80s? No one cared. I mean, the people who had it cared, but you know, no one else did.

[Julie hums sadly in agreement.]

So, it didn't remind me of anything. It was really hard for me to think about it. I don't mean hard in the sense of emotionally hard. I mean, intellectually hard. I had no way to place this. And I had no context for this at all. Now, unfortunately, everyone understands the context for this, because it's gone on so long. I know, at the beginning, I was highly aware that I was waiting. With New York, I'm waiting. I'm waiting for this to be over. It's been a week! It's been two weeks! This is unbearable. Now it's been ten months. It turns out it's not unbearable. It's bearable. It's horrible, but bearable. And then, now—you know, of course, this couldn't have happened at a worse time. You know. In recent history. Because Donald Trump was president.

We had Donald Trump who allowed it to come here. Then we had Donald Trump who was then in charge of it. Then, in New York, unfortunately we had Bill DeBlasio as the mayor. It's a horrible combination. You know, you have—you know, Trump, who was every awful thing a human can be. And then you have Bill DeBlasio who's incredibly incompetent. So, today, when I watched the inauguration, one of the first things I thought was, "Finish up the speech." Of course, you always feel this with Biden, I hate to say. You know. "Okay, very good. Okay. Let's—thank you—thank you very much." Five times in the speech.

00:07:30 Julie Host
00:07:33 Fran Guest

What were some of your other thoughts, watching the inauguration? Well, you know, I was a little nervous I have to say. You know. I've never felt nervous during a—watching an inauguration. Not nervous like something's gonna happen. I never thought about it! I had never thought about it. Even though, you know, I lived in my lifetime—you know—through the assassination of JFK, of Bobby Kennedy, of Martin Luther King. But I never thought of it in this context ever. And so, I was a little nervous, but mostly I was—the word is—I was impatient. Finish. Go in the White House. Start. You know. The amount that—the things that Biden and this administration have to do? No one could do. If you had Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt and Barack Obama all together, they would be saying, "Fellas. How are we gonna get this done?" And—although, you know, Joe Biden said it's okay. He's got us. And so, you know, we know it's gonna be better, but we hope it's good enough.

00:08:35 Julie Host
00:08:37 Fran Guest

And you don't forgive him for Anita Hill, do you?

Not at all. And also, I did not have to be reminded of Anita Hill during the Cavanaugh hearings. I'm not your forgiving type. You know? In fact, I don't even know what it means. I truthfully do not know what it means to forgive people. I've asked people numerous times, "Well, what do you mean? Do you mean you forget it?" You know?

"No, you don't forget it, but you just let it go."

"Really? Why?" I mean, it's not that I'm opposed to that. Obviously, it's a more—a better way to live. I can see that. It's just not a possibility. So, no. I did not forgive him, and I don't forgive him that.

00:09:12 Julie Host I love how you talk about forgiveness being specifically a Christian notion and that we Jews hold grudges like they're heirlooms.

00:09:20 Fran Guest Well, it is Christian. I mean, first of all, it's not just Christian. It is Christianity. I mean, it is actually—so, before Jesus Christ, there were Jews. I know there were other people, but just for these two groups, there were Jews. And then Jesus Christ—initially a Jew—evolved this idea, this religion, and said, “I will forgive you.” And of course, most people ran. “Oh! Jesus Christ! He's gonna forgive us!” And so, think of who stayed—who didn't. Okay, those are my antecedents. Okay?

[Julie breaks into laughter.]

The ones—it's not just me! You know. It's, like—the people who said, “Forgive—what does that mean? I don't think that's a good idea.”

[Julie starts to pull herself together only to startle into laughter again.]

You know. I don't feel that that is a harsh enough way to live! So, a couple people stayed, and I am descended from those people. *[Chuckles.]* So. You know, I—because I always think that the Jewish God is a judge. You know. I mean, the idea—I happen to be an atheist myself, but I believe in judges. *[Chuckling.]* So, the Jewish God is a judge and Christ is a martyr. These two things don't go together. So, yes.

It's better to forgive. I know that. I'm aware of that. It's that thing where it's like: I know. People seem to think, like, the things that I don't do that other people do or I don't think that—that I—that I think this because I hadn't heard about it. I heard about forgiveness. Believe me. But it's not within me.

[Julie affirms several times.]

Because I'm the smaller person. You know. I mean, my mother—when I was a kid—used to always say, “Can't you be the bigger person?” And I, like, realized it at a certain point—a pretty young age—no. Apparently I can't. I'm by nature the smaller person. And I didn't forgive him Anita—I met Anita Hill a couple years ago. I was very thrilled to meet her. And we instantly discussed Joe Biden. Instantly. It's the first thing I started talking to her about. She has forgiven him more than I have. But she is not Jewish.

[They laugh.]

00:11:31 Jesse Host This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're taking with Fran Lebowitz.

00:11:36 Julie Host Fran, I wanted to ask about being gay in 2021 and how you think—I guess, I don't wanna say complete acceptance, but more widespread acceptance of LGBTQ people has affected community and also art?

00:11:55 Fran Guest I mean, I suppose that—aside from Donald Trump being the president—there's nothing more surprising—not, I mean—in other words, if when I was young anyone had told me this is the way it would be, not just now but even 10 years ago, 20 years ago. I mean, I would have thought that was absurd. Because truthfully,

being gay was the same from like—I don't know, you know—1901 until basically five minutes ago. You know. And so, there was at the—when I was in my early 20s, so in the early '70s—there was a little bit of—there were a few people organizing—they called it a gay liberation. This seemed to me to be ridiculous. Ridiculous. I had no interest in it, first of all. But I also—I thought, "That's just out of the question. That's never gonna happen." That—it never—it seemed totally crazy to waste your time on that. You know. I also—I have to say, I didn't really think of it that way. I didn't really think of it politically. And I actually still don't.

I thought—I was so happy in my early 20s. You know. It was so fun to be gay in New York in the early '70s that I felt like... it's perfect! I didn't care, in other words. Oh, I know that a lot of straight people hate us. You know. I mean, who cares what they think? So—but I realized that not everybody was in the backroom access, you know, in 1970. And I didn't know that so many gay people wanted to be so straight. I mean, I didn't know that. It never occurred to me. So—
You mean like get married and—

00:13:39 Julie Host
00:13:40 Fran Guest

Yeah! I mean get married. That, to me, is like—I promise you that I never heard the phrase gay marriage. Never heard of it. Even the people involved in gay liberation—which was a bigger thing in San Francisco than it was in New York, because in San Francisco there was less to do, so—but I think that—I never heard it. I think the idea of gay marriage came out of AIDs. You know. I could be wrong. I know someone's gonna turn up something where it's—you know, on some little newspaper from, you know, 1969, but I never heard anyone talk about it. I never—it never came into my mind. I never wanted to do it. I never—I don't wanna do it now. I mean, I hardly knew any straight people who were married. You know. I mean, who wanted to get married? You know. So, it seemed like a ridiculous—you know, a ridiculous thing to want.

I think that, you know, AIDs was so terrifying—I mean terrifying—that I think people kind of made these, like, deals: "Okay. If you don't kill me, I promise I'll live this very boring life." So, I think—you know—I absolutely believe and have always believed that people should do whatever they want. You know. Anything people wanna do that doesn't hurt someone else—I'm always against any kind of restrictions. I was against seatbelt laws.

[Julie chuckles.]

You know. I am still against them. I have received in my life two tickets for not wearing a seatbelt. Both times, I wasn't even driving. I was in the tollbooth once and I was in a traffic jam once. So, I think—you know—if I wanna hurtle through the windshield, let me hurtle through the windshield. I was against motorcycle helmet laws. You know. Which I'm terrified for motorcycles. You know. Terrified. I don't wanna get on a motorcycle. I think people should do what they want. You know. And so, if people wanna get married, they should get married. You know. If people, you know, wanna—you know—have, you know, a gender that they were not having that gender at birth, fine. I don't care. I really don't care. I also don't find it as mesmerizing as other people do. I don't find it riveting. But I also absolutely think that freedom is the most important thing to me.

It's always been, you know, the most personal freedom is—for my own life—the most important thing. So, if it's the most important thing for me, to be free, and I define that freedom as, “No, not getting married. No, I'm not living with anyone.” You know. “No, I'm not wearing my seatbelt.” Then if other people define that as, “Yes, I'm getting married. Yes, we're adopting 55 children. Yes, I'm wearing my seat—” Fine. Go ahead.

00:16:20 Julie Host

I just wonder how much maybe this is just something that you perceive of marginalization improving art or improving culture or you're better at something because you're oppressed. And I remember listening to you talking about how you were thrown in jail if you were a man wearing women's clothes and now *RuPaul's Drag Race* is in its 13th season and millions of people watch it and it's a mainstream show and I wonder if you have any thoughts towards whether acceptance affects the quality of work or if that's just sort of a fallacy?

00:16:54 Fran Guest

Well, I think that—you know—these kinds of things are better for the society than they are for the culture. So, obviously it's better for humans to have a more humane environment and, you know, now they do. Now, I—RuPaul I think is younger than me, but not vastly. So, RuPaul probably remembers, you know, when you could be arrested. Alright? May have been arrested. I'm not saying he was; I don't know anything about it. But he could have been. Okay, so it's—is it better to be arrested? Of course, it's not! You know. Is it better to be on TV? Probably. [*Chuckles.*] But it's just the way that the culture is so in advance of the society. You know. I mean, this has been true for like the last 10, 15, 20 years. But the culture cannot make up for the society. You know. Politics is not culture. It's the society. So, we are in an incredibly regressive era. You see that. You know. Not everybody, but enough. It doesn't take a lot. You know. So that—they're—the way that there's a tremendous amount of democracy in the culture and none in—and much less in the society.

You know, so that—if you're asking me, you know, were there better artists? Was there better art when, you know, homosexuals were so marginalized? You know, I—I—I never really use the word oppressed, because oppression to me is like slavery. Okay? These comparisons of things are absurd. Okay? You know. Yes, gay people [*inaudible*], sometimes gay people were killed. It's not the same thing as chattel slavery. It just isn't. You know. So, it is much better for humans, you know, to not have these hardships. But if you're asking me, like, Oscar Wilde—he was a pretty good writer. I mean, now... Oscar Wilde was, you know, incredibly brilliant. He would have been brilliant in a more permissive society. He could have lived in a more permissive society, but he didn't. He could have lived in Paris—much easier, at the time. Much easier, now! It's always been easier in Paris. So, he didn't do that. I don't know why. I'm not that old. He never told me.

But there aren't that many Oscar Wildes in any era. You know. There aren't that many artists ever that good in any era. It looks always like there used to be, because when you look backwards you lump a bunch of people together that were decades apart. You know, that were sometimes a century apart. But one thing that—being certainly a good writer, maybe more than a good painter or,

you know—one of the things that definitely is important is to observe. And people tend to observe only if they have to. In other words, if people are in the middle of life, in a life that accepts them in enough ways—you know—they're less likely to be turning their eye on it so that, you know—that's why you had, for instance—you know, an era in this country—say, just to say comedians, you know. You had in my parent's generation a very high percentage of Jewish comedians. This was an era where there were many, many kinds of jobs Jews couldn't get. And it was not that easy to be a Jew. It was better to be a Jew here without being able to work at US Steel than it was to be—have stayed there and be dead, but there was a lot of prejudice, a lot of antisemitism. And then, you know, as times change, there became a very large number of Black comedians.

You know, here's what there never is—I'm not saying there are none—there's never a large number of upper-class WASP comedians. And there is a reason for that. You know. You may say, "Well, they're not funny." And I would say well, I've known some that were funny, but they don't have to be comedians. Okay? So, it's like—it's like boxing, prizefighting. You know. I'm very opposed to this. People are always surprised at this. I'm really opposed to it. I just can't believe it is legal. However—and most people tell you all the reasons why it should be great, it's an artform, it's like ballet, you know. It's not like ballet because at the ballet no one like gets their head knocked in. And it's done for the amusement of other people. You know, which is horrible. And it's always participated in by poor people. Who becomes a professional boxer? Who decides, "This is my only hope, to get—let someone punch me in the head." You know.

00:21:31 Fran Guest

Again, where are the upper-class WASPs in the boxing ring? They're not to be found. Where are the middle-class people? Not to be found. Because it's a really horrible thing to do. You know. I don't mean horrible immoral, although I think it is, but I mean horrible thing to subject yourself to. So, you know, I think that real writers—and I—and I make this distinction because there are just tons of people now who just thought, "This looks like a good gig." You know. I mean, "This seems like a great profession." You know? "What should I be? A doctor? A lawyer? A writer?"

So, we have massive numbers of people like this. But I think we can just disregard them. There can be numerous reasons why someone would become very observant. You know. You don't have to be oppressed or marginalized or repressed. You could just be unhappy. You could just be in a family where you're just not fitting into that family, even if the family's fine. You know. Maybe you're not fine. You know. People never think about it. They think, you know, "Oh, it's like—I was great, the family was horrible." Sometimes the family's great. You're horrible. So.

[They laugh.]

No one ever thinks of that. But when, you know—whatever causes you to watch instead of participate, that is a necessary thing for a writer.

00:22:46	Jesse	Host	We have even more with Fran Lebowitz still to come. What does Fran think about dining outside? Or the camp exhibit at the Met? Or the bus? I feel like she has really strong opinions about the bus and I haven't even heard them yet. All these and more still to come in a very special Fran Lebowitz lightning round. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:23:11	Music	Transition	Cheerful, bright music.
00:23:13	Jesse	Promo	This message comes from NPR sponsor NerdWallet: a personal finance website and app that helps people make smarter money moves. Have new money goals this year? Whether you want to use credit card points to plan a family vacation abroad—once it's safe—or take advantage of low mortgage rates to refinance and save for your child's education, NerdWallet is the best place to shop financial products to help make your 2021 money goals happen. Discover and compare the smartest credit cards, mortgage lenders, and more at NerdWallet.com .
00:23:50	Promo	Clip	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> Music: Relaxed piano music. Peter Sagal: Hey, my name is Peter Sagal and I'm here to help you with the most pressing problem facing civilization today. There are too many good podcasts to listen to! Now, why not avoid that whole problem by listening to an extremely silly podcast hosted by me. On <i>Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me!</i> it's wisecracks about the week's news, shenanigans, fart jokes, and general silliness. And doesn't that sound pretty great right now? Listen to the <i>Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me!</i> podcast from NPR.
00:24:12	Promo	Clip	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> Music: Upbeat music. Jackie Kashian: I'm going first! It's me, Jackie Kashian. Laura Kilmartin: Man! She's always this bossy. <i>[Jackie and Kyle laugh boisterously as Laura talks.]</i> Laura: I'm Laura Kilmartin. We're a bunch of standup comics and we've been doing comedy, like, 60 years total with both of us. But we look amazing. And uh, we're rocking out. Jackie: We drop every Monday on Max Fun and it's called <i>The Jackie and Laurie Show</i> , and you could listen to it and learn about comedy and learn about anger management and all the things. Laura: And Jackie is married but childless and I'm unmarried but childful. So, together we make one complete woman. Jackie: We did it! Kyle: <i>[Laughing helplessly.]</i> Is that just what's—that's what gonna—? Jackie: Yeah! Yeah! And we try to make Kyle laugh jut like that and say, "Oh my god," every episode.

Kyle: It's a good job. *The Jackie and Laurie Show*. Mondays, only on Maximum Fun.

[Music ends.]

00:25:03	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, you're in for a treat. We're listening to an interview with Fran Lebowitz. Fran is the subject of the new documentary series <i>Pretend It's a City</i> , directed by Martin Scorsese. That's streaming now, on Netflix. Who's interviewing her? None other than fellow New Yorker, Julie Klausner—the writer and actor. Let's dive back in.
00:25:27	Julie	Host	I was watching old interviews. Some maniac has compiled like every interview ever on <i>Letterman</i> of you, of Charles Grodin. So, I was watching every single appearance of yours back-to-back. It's like two and a half hours. And you told a story that is so profoundly disturbing, I wanna see if it's true. Which is that when you were in kindergarten, a teacher put a Band-Aid over your mouth and made you hold a sign saying, "I'm a chatterbox." Is this true?!
00:25:57	Fran	Guest	My first day of school. And I was so looking forward to going to school. You can't imagine. Also, I was—I was not even five years old, because the—I was four years old. Because in the public school system that I attended, they had a cutoff—you know—for the—your age and it was like November 1 st and my birthday's October 27 th . So, I was the youngest—almost a year younger than some kids. So—and I also was extremely small. I did not spring into this full height of 5'4" until I was 18.
			<i>[Julie chuckles.]</i>
			So, I was very short and very young, and I cannot—I can't think of a single thing in my adult life that I anticipated as happily as going to school. So, I went to school—kindergarten. By—we had half days in kindergarten, when I was a child. So, you either went in the morning or the afternoon. So, it was just a half day of school. It's like three hours or three and a half hours. Within an hour I was sitting in the corner with a Band-Aid pasted over my mouth by the kindergarten teacher holding up a sign saying, "I am a chatterbox."
00:27:05	Julie	Host	<i>[Horried.]</i> Oh my god!
00:27:07	Fran	Guest	Because I was talking too much. You know. So, the talking—you know—a lot, the talking too much has always been true of me, even when I was four. All my report cards, you know, would have, "Francis asks too many questions. Francis speaks out of turn. Francis asks too many questions." Every time a report card came my parents would say, "Stop asking too many questions. You ask too many questions. You ask us too many questions." You know. Like, I know it drove my mother—my father wasn't home. He was at work. When I was a child, fathers—they weren't home. They went to work. And when they came home they read the newspaper. So, they were not wild participants in your life. So, that—my mother constantly complained. I asked her too many questions. So, I asked the teacher too many questions and I got a bad grade for this.
00:28:03	Julie	Host	Here's a very clear-cut question that you definitely know the answer to: can you smoke in your apartment?
00:28:09	Fran	Guest	Of course. Not only can you, you must.

00:28:13 Julie Host *[Cackles.]* Because there are apartment buildings where you can't smoke, in New York now.

00:28:20 Fran Guest There are. But I don't live in one. I wouldn't live in one, obviously. You know. I mean, I do not live in a building where you can't smoke in your apartment. I would not live in a building where you can't smoke in your apartment. And I actually—to tell you the truth—it's the most outlandish idea I ever heard. You know. Are there buildings in New York where you can't drink? Are there buildings in New York where you can't eat too much? *[Chuckles.]* I mean, are there buildings in New York—you know, I mean, think of all the bad stuff people do. You know. Uuh... the idea that the smoke goes through the walls to someone else's apartment—I mean, it just—it's—

[Julie laughs.]

00:29:07 Julie Host It's a kind of science that Donald Trump would believe in. You know. It just isn't true. But I know there are such buildings and of course I would not, you know, live in one.

00:29:07 Julie Host Has there been anything pleasant about most of New York City being in quarantine or the fact that there aren't tourists infused or the city isn't as infused with tourists? Have there been any pleasant walks that you've had that you wouldn't have otherwise been able to enjoy?

00:29:23 Fran Guest Well, I find it very pleasant that there aren't any tourists. I know we're not supposed to say this. People are constantly criticizing me for saying this. Now, they say, "You're keeping business out of New York." This idea that I have any effect on actual life is so ridiculous!

[Julie laughs.]

I mean, my whole life I'm telling people what to do, no one has ever done one thing I said. So, people have criticized me, "You're a bad role model." I used to smoke on TV. You can't do it anymore, but you used to be able to smoke on TV. People would say to me, "Don't smoke on TV. You're a bad role model." I'm not a role model. No one does anything I say. I'm like the opposite of a role model. If I smoke on TV maybe everyone's gonna stop smoking. I mean—so, that... I mean, I'm happy that the tourists are gone. I am. I'm not happy the reason they're gone.

[Julie affirms.]

But I'm happy they're gone. I have not once said, "God, wasn't it so much better when there were herds of hillbillies, you know, blocking your way?"

[Julie laughs.]

You know. *[Clears throat.]* No. It wasn't better. So—and, you know, the idea that tourists are necessary to the economy of New York is so ingrained in people that several years ago, there was a homeless guy who was always near the apartment I lived in. This was maybe seven or eight years ago. And you know, he would always ask me for money, I would often give him money. And once, I was giving him some money and he was like taking the money

and some tourist like banged into him and the money fell to the ground and he, like, picked it up and he said—I said—I said, “Ugh, the tourists.”

He goes, “I know. But we need them.”

So, even this guy believed we needed the tourists and that’s why he was doing so well, because we had all these tourists. So, I don’t think we need the tourists. You know. I think that was a mistake in the ‘70s. You know, when they—these however many, four, six men—I don’t know how many, but I know they were men—got in a room and figured out, “The only way we can save New York is to lure these people here.” I was against it then. I’m against it now. I guarantee you that there are—if not the exact same guys, ‘cause those guys might be dead—but a bunch of other guys now figuring out how to do it again.

00:31:41 Julie Host

What were your feelings around the Black Lives Matter protests this summer and how they were handled in New York especially?

00:31:46 Fran Guest

Well, the—my first—my first feeling about Black Lives Matter, at the original time I first saw them, which was a while ago—I was so—I forget the first time I saw them in New York, but it was certainly like several years ago. And I was—I remember, I was crossing 14th Street. I start hearing like chanting or whatever. And I see them, and I stood there, and I see all these kids and I started crying. Because how long’s it been since I saw people in the street in this country? The one other time in the last, like, 30 years or more that I heard chanting outside of my apartment or whatever was when I had an apartment in the middle of, you know, what I used to call NYUistan. It was all NYU students.

[Julie laughs.]

And I looked out—I look out the window and I see all these kids, but I can’t see the signs. I can’t see what—so, I was on the phone with someone. I said, “They’re marching. There’s like a big protest march.”

And he said, “What are they marching as?”

I said, “I don’t know.” I said, “You know, it’s NYU. It’s probably, you know, not enough vegan options in the dining room.” You know. But this surprised me and the fact that it didn’t evaporate surprised me. And the fact that it was so focused. You know, which was not true of, say, Occupy Wallstreet—which was just too nebulous for me. You know, I wasn’t against it but—you know, every time they would explain that they couldn’t explain what it was—two, three times. If you’re telling me, “I can’t explain to you the thing I’m doing because the point of it is to not explain it,” you lost me. So, I wasn’t against it, but I also wasn’t for it. But Black Lives Matter persisted. They persisted. They were right. You know. And they were—it’s like about time. The way that DeBlasio handled it of course was very poorly. Because first of all, you cannot have a mayor who has such a horrible reputation. Not reputation—a horrible relationship with the police department. You just can’t.

You also cannot let a police department act the way this police department acts. And I don't mean in the sense that they're very brutal, because they're certainly not as brutal as many other police departments. But they are so—I don't know what the word is. You know, "We are not gonna do this." You know? There is a man who is the head of the police union, you know, who—I'm telling you, a New York City cop could eat a baby and he would say, "That baby was about to kill the cop! Didn't you see that?"

00:34:11 Julie Host *[Laughs.]* Fran, I don't have much time with you left, so I thought we'd do a quick lightning round, and I would ask you what you think of the following subjects.

00:34:21 Fran Guest

Okay.

00:34:22 Julie Host

Outdoor dining.

00:34:24 Fran Guest

Well, I've been—I have been doing it. In fact, I'm gonna do it tonight. It's about 30 degrees here. Because—not because I like outdoor dining, but because I hate eating in my apartment where the food is the worst in New York.

[Julie chuckles.]

I—as soon as everyone is vaccinated, I'm going back inside to eat, which is where civilized people eat in New York. When you're allowed to.

00:34:47 Julie Host

The camp exhibit at the Met, a couple years ago.

00:34:51 Fran Guest

This is a concept that is just not accessible to most people. And I could see that, there. You know. But you could see that in general, the way people use the word. First of all, it doesn't really exist anymore, because it's been so—I don't know what the word is. So, taken up by the average guy. So, no, they didn't get it.

00:35:11 Julie Host

The bus.

00:35:12 Fran Guest

Well, I prefer the subway because I prefer, you know—when I'm in transit, I prefer not to think, "I could walk faster than this."

[Julie chuckles.]

So—although the subway has its flaws, when it's moving you never think, "I could walk faster than this." 'Cause I couldn't.

00:35:29 Julie Host

Starbucks.

00:35:31 Fran Guest

You know, I do not patronize Starbucks for numerous reasons. One of which is that I happen to be the Albert Einstein of coffee. I make the best coffee, not in New York: in the world. So, I—you know, in my house, in the morning, I make coffee. Sometimes I buy coffee when I'm out. You know. I don't—I don't think it's good coffee, I have to tell you.

00:35:52 Julie Host

Dr. Fauci.

00:35:54 Fran Guest

Dr. Fauci. Uh... I actually—I'm sure he would not remember, but I spent an evening with him, sitting next to him for like 75 hours doing a big AIDs benefit in San Francisco, Washington. So, I already knew who he was. This was—it was probably in the very early '80s. He looks more like he looked then than I do, so that's probably why he wouldn't remember me. I thought that he—I think he—there were days when I thought, "How can you not yell at him? Yell at him." You know. And then I realized, "This is just one of the million reasons you're not a doctor, Fran. Because you could see how carefully they would ask him a question. And instead of saying what you believed profoundly was his real opinion, he would say,

"Weeell," 'cause he—well, it was very clear that he wanted to keep that job. And I—sometimes I would think, "Say the truth. Tell the truth about what this—" And then I would think, "He's gonna get fired. He doesn't wanna get fired." And then I thought, "And guess who else doesn't want him to be fired? You, Fran! So, don't say anything."

[Julie laughs.]

00:37:14	Julie	Host	Because I really want him to keep his job, because he was doing a very good job and it's one thing to do a very good job when other people are doing a good job. And it's one thing to be like the only person doing a good job. You can't let anything happen to this guy. Thank you, Fran. I wish I had more time to spend with you, but this was just such a pleasure. Thank you so much.
00:37:20	Fran	Guest	Thank you! I had a good time.
00:37:22	Jesse	Host	Fran Lebowitz. The TV show about her, <i>Pretend It's a City</i> , is streaming now on Netflix. It is funny, touching, and actually informative as well. Fran was, of course, interviewed by our friend and correspondent, Julie Klausner. Julie also co-hosts the very funny podcast, <i>Double Threat</i> , along with Tom Scharpling. They have had some very great guests lately: Desus & Mero, Andy Kindler, and the guy who played Eddie on <i>The Munsters</i> . Julie is a really brilliant writer, performer, and podcaster. I can't recommend her work enough.
00:37:59	Music	Transition	Bright, relaxed music.
00:38:03	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where there is a... perhaps literal one inch layer of dirt on my car, because they're building two houses across the street. It turns out, once they do that, they're gonna build another house next door. So many houses. People need houses. I understand.
			The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien and Kristen Bennett. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks very much to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it with us. You can also keep up with the show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all of our interviews there.
00:39:01	Promo	Promo	And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff. Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
			[Music fades out.]