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# The Public Eye



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Last November, PRA worked with writer, professor, and longtime advocate Loretta Ross to convene a conversation about the relationship between gender and White supremacy. For decades, Ross says, too many fight-the-Right organizations neglected to pay attention to this perverse, right-wing version of intersectionality, although its impacts were numerous—evident in overlaps between White supremacist and anti-abortion violence; in family planning campaigns centered on myths of overpopulation; in concepts of White womanhood used to further repression and bigotry; and in how White women themselves formed the backbone of segregationist movements. By contrast, today there is a solid core of researchers and activists working on this issue. At November's meeting, PRA spoke to a number of them (**pg. 3**) about their work, the current stakes, and the way forward.

Our second feature this issue, by Carolyn Gallaher, looks at another dynamic situation: how to understand changes on the political Right (**pg. 9**). Since Trump came to power, numerous conservative commentators—mostly “never Trumpers”—have predicted (or declared) the death of the Republican Party. “Collectively, these views attribute the party's woes either to President Trump, depicted as a hostile interloper, or Republican officials too fearful to challenge him,” writes Gallaher. But what these arguments fail to account for is how much had already changed in the GOP to make Trump's ascent possible. While once, in the 1970s, the New Right managed to unite business elites, evangelicals, and neoconservatives in common purpose, today that coalition is straining under changed realities and a rhetorical glue that no longer binds.

Another part of that changed reality is a Republican Party that has effectively deputized provocative and violent right-wing activists to serve as their militant arm. In her report on the Proud Boys (**pg. 16**), Emily Gorcenski finds that this group of self-declared “Western chauvinists” aren't just acting as vigilante street fighters, but that their mission to “trigger the libs” serves a profound role in the contemporary conservative landscape. “It's a style of antagonistic politics that has already become normalized elsewhere in the Republican Party, as every booming chant of ‘lock her up’ at a Trump rally further entrenches the idea that politics is about obliterating your opponent,” writes Gorcenski. “The Proud Boys and the Alt Lite don't operate separately from this dynamic but within it.”

Finally, in our Q&A for this issue (**pg. 20**), Mariya Strauss talks to Daniel HoSang and Joseph Lowndes, authors of an important new book, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity*. For all of U.S. history, racism and bias have informed the ways in which people are pitted against one another within a winner-takes-all economy. Much of that has boiled down to the deeply racialized idea of “makers and takers.” But in this moment of both rising White supremacism and strange bedfellows alliances on the Right, HoSang and Lowndes offer a roadmap for understanding how race and class work today.

In between issues of *The Public Eye*, PRA publishes articles, features, reports, and more online, so be sure to visit us at [politicalresearch.org](http://politicalresearch.org).

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BY KATHRYN JOYCE

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# The Intersectional Right

## A Roundtable on Gender and White Supremacy



*Blue Mountain Center convening participants, November 2018. Credit: Political Research Associates.*

In the early 1990s, when researcher and activist Loretta Ross was monitoring the White supremacist movement for the Center for Democratic Renewal, a national anti-Ku Klux Klan network, she realized that most fight-the-Right organizations were neglecting a crucial part of the picture: the role of gender. Months after Ross released a report in 1992 documenting the overlaps between the White supremacist and anti-abortion movements, the first abortion provider was shot. With a few exceptions, including PRA founder Jean Hardisty and organizers and writers Suzanne Pharr and Mab Segrest, Ross said, few were paying attention.

“I’ve always regretted that I didn’t have more power at the time to convince the fight-the-Right organizations to take gender more seriously,” said Ross. Today, almost 30 years later that’s no longer the case. “We now have a bench,” said Ross. That is, a critical mass of researchers and activists, as well as a body of research and literature probing this intersection from multiple angles: from the role that White women have played in propping up segregation, to how family planning discussions that center on population fears can facilitate abuse of women of color’s rights, to how anti-abortion activists co-opt the language of anti-racism to castigate reproductive choice.

In November 2018, Ross and PRA convened a diverse group of activists, researchers, and scholars at the Blue Mountain Center, in upstate New York, for a wide-ranging conversation about this relationship, to build off each other’s work, and consider strategies to fight back.

“This retreat was about bringing together people who did opposition research on the anti-abortion movement, the White supremacist movement, the anti-LGBTQ movement, and on and on,” said Ross, “so that we could recognize that we’re fighting the same people but we’re encountering different strategic and tactical choices making them look like they’re differentiated movements.”

“The stakes are way too high for us not to be looking at those intersections,” added former PRA research director Zeina Zaatari, a co-organizer of the retreat, “because it means that our movements continue to be more divided and our ability to really transform the system that we live under, of White supremacy, is constantly weakened.”

PRA interviewed a number of the participants on what that relationship is, why it matters today, and what we should do next.

**PRA: HOW DO YOU SEE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER AND WHITE SUPREMACY IN YOUR OWN WORK?**

*Kenyon Farrow, writer and activist focused on criminal justice, economic justice, and HIV/AIDS issues:* White supremacy has always depended on notions of gender. When you think about the formation of White supremacy, there was already an idea of the inherent value, normalcy, and correctness of White bodies. That also structured how physical bodies of Black people and non-White people, down to their genitalia, and their own notions of gender and identity, were inappropriate and not as correct as the White, European dominant ways of being. So I always say to people that, on some level, White supremacy defines what kind of man or what kind of woman you are, based on the racial hierarchy through White supremacy.

*DuVergne Gaines, director of the Feminist Majority Foundation's National Clinic Access Project:* White supremacists and violent anti-abortion extremists are almost always one and the same, whether we're talking about the Army of God; the sovereign citizen movements; or militias, current and past, that have members that were actively involved in the most egregious acts of violence against reproductive health care providers. The antisemitism that we saw [at the Tree of Life mass shooting] is so closely connected to the vein that runs through the violent anti-abortion extremist movement, which has been very antisemitic since the very beginning. These are also the same groups that have managed to co-opt sacred movements like Civil Rights or Abolition, or use terms like the Holocaust—one of the major groups is "Survivors of the Abortion Holocaust." The appropriation of these terms is so disgusting and widespread. But I don't think that we're making the connection between the violent anti-abortion movement and White supremacists in terms of gender and White supremacy.

*Betsy Hartmann, professor emeritus of*

*development studies, author of The America Syndrome: Apocalypse, War, and Our Call to Greatness:* I've been very concerned about the way Malthusian framings of population issues—the belief that overpopulation is spiraling out of control, creating scarcity of food, water, or other resources—plays out on the bodies of women of color, by trying to reduce their fertility. I'm concerned about how that ideology has been used very strategically by right-wing nativist groups to try to woo liberal environmentalists, by appealing to overpopulation arguments about immigrants. I think this is a way to get liberals and even many people on the Left to accept that it's okay to control other people's fertility for the greater good, or the good of the planet, and to not see the consequences of that kind of thinking in terms of women's bodies: which women's bodies are being targeted, historical policies of population control, and even current policies of population control, which unfortunately is very much alive and well, despite it being cloaked in the discourse of women's rights. Convincing liberals and Leftists or pulling them into these kind of apocalyptic discourses, often based on colonial and racist tropes, doesn't cause White supremacy. But it helps keep it alive, keeps people from seeing their own internal racism, and keeps people from having international solidarity with groups that they should have solidarity with.

*Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, author of Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy:* Historically, we have constructed White supremacy as a masculine kind of political expression: the violent actions of lynching and the Klan, or electoral politics that have been dominated by men—the George Wallaces and the Ross Barnetts of the world. I'm interested in how constructions of motherhood and womanhood have been used, particularly by White women, to further the politics of White supremacy.

My thesis is that White women are segregation's constant gardeners. They both produce and are caretakers of racial segregation in various iterations, particularly in four areas:

1. in social and public welfare, where

White women used those roles and the dictates of their positions to build White supremacy into the progressive-era state;

2. in public education, which in the Jim Crow South meant creating a kind of Jim Crow citizenship, so that generation after generation would learn histories that celebrated a version of the nation's past that elevated White folks and that erased Black achievement;

3. in electoral politics, particularly in the South of the 1920s-'50s, where White Southern women were some of the first deserters of the Democratic Party, encouraging the Democratic South to vote for a Republican president because of the steps that both Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry Truman had taken to dismantle racial segregation; and

4. in Jim Crow storytelling: the ways they tell public stories and shape public narratives that support a larger system of White supremacist politics, like their national crusade against the United Nations, and its multicultural, human rights education, which they cast as an international intrusion on national sovereignty and on family autonomy.

*Suzanne Pharr, activist and longtime member of the Women's Project in Arkansas:* White supremacy is a particular methodology of authoritarianism that builds in Whiteness to the capacity to control people and to control them for economic means, or societal means, for every level of society, and to narrow the lives of people by that kind of control.

I think what you see in the South is a combination of extraordinary male supremacy blending with White supremacy. Because there was already tremendous abuse of women and poor people, the introduction of slavery made it this extraordinary form of oppression. There was fear and danger in the lives of all women, but particularly Black women, in that time, with the constant threat of sexual violence, and the end of your life. To have that so ingrained in the way power and money was produced has had a long, long effect, and made it fertile ground for continuing to grow that. But it also has made it fertile ground for tre-





Loretta Ross at the Blue Mountain Center, November 2018. Credit: Cloee Cooper.

mendous resistance. I think that's why you see the extraordinary power of Black women in the South—that rising up that comes out of having been tested by fire, becoming a stronger steel, a stronger metal. And I think the intensity of that experience and carrying that experience within the culture, in terms of analysis and action, has been the great gift in this century to movement work.

Loretta Ross, co-founder of *SisterSong*, the *National Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective*, co-author of *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organizing for Reproductive Justice*: First of all, we have to look at the relationship between gender and White supremacy by examining the doctrine of blood politics. The Far Right really does believe that they're a mythical Aryan race, and so to maintain the purity of their blood, they have to contain the behaviors of their women. That's the doctrinal basis from which their strategies emanate. One of the things they popularized is an antisemitic claim that Jewish doctors are responsible for genocide of the White race through abortion. They also claim that White people are at risk of racial extinction, and so the only way to repair that is either to increase the White population—which they are trying to do with coerced and forced breeding of White women—and also to reduce the non-White population. They do that not only with violence but through policy, through immigration restrictions, and now through their discus-

sion of repealing the 14th Amendment, which granted birthright citizenship to African Americans and immigrants. So we have a strategy that intersects gender and White supremacy very clearly.

In 1994 I was one of 12 Black women that created the reproductive justice framework. African American women were constantly engaged in a struggle against population control and eugenics, which is what brings us into conversations about White supremacy. We have to fight equally hard for the right to have the kids that we want to have; and then once we have our children, our children are blamed for every ill in American society, including the mortgage crisis; so then we have to fight for the third tenant: the right to raise our children with dignity in safe and healthy environments. So that's reproductive justice: the right to have a kid, not have a kid, to raise your kid.

Mab Segrest, co-founder of *Southerners on New Ground* and *North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence*, author of *Memoir of a Race Traitor: Oppressions around gender and women's roles are as old as humans, whereas race is a particular construct that's very close to 500 years of colonialism. Yet racism—because it was sped by the genocide of indigenous people, by the transatlantic slave trade and plantation system, and the continuing afterlife of slavery in this country—has had a trajectory that dominates the American narrative. And yet*

under it, inside it, on top of it, and always, there are these questions of gender relationships, of constructions of male and female, masculinity and femininity. We've been able to pull back, over my lifetime, and get a clearer sense of their webbed roots, which is now called intersectionality: how they all really are working together, how the factors that constitute our reality are the entanglement of these forces.

Monica Simpson, executive director of *SisterSong*, the *National Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective*: Gender and White supremacy are inextricably linked; you can't talk about one without talking about the other. When we think about reproductive justice, we think about the human right to have the children that we want; to not have children—to end those pregnancies or to prevent pregnancies with dignity, without shame; and to have the children that we have in healthy and safe environments. Ultimately it's about the human right to bodily autonomy.

When we think about the rising rates of maternal mortality in this country and we see Black women dying at rates four times higher than White women in this country, we can't talk about that without thinking about the ways in which White supremacy shows up in health care in general. We can think about that in so many other pieces of our work: abortion access and the lack of access to birth control; the criminalization of folks who are looking to make their own decisions and live their lives in the ways that they want to.

#### **PRA: HOW HAS THE RIGHT USED THIS INTERSECTION?**

DuVergne Gaines: Anti-abortion groups have co-opted the ugly history of our country to try to say that abortion providers are part of the eugenics movement. This is part of the effort to call abortion a "Black genocide"—justifying their White supremacy through race-baiting or accusing the people who are trying to support access for all people of being racist and turning it on its head.

Dr. Barnett Slepian—the victim of one of the most egregious and disturbing assassinations in this country—was

a Jewish physician in upstate New York who [in 1998] was killed in his kitchen by a sharpshooter, James Kopp, who was a member of the violent anti-abortion group Army of God. It was no mistake

the state of Georgia—then unfortunately went across the country—that read, “The most dangerous place for an African-American child is in the mother’s womb.” These images and billboards ran rampant

suffered from. Even now we look at issues of access to medication, we still see these racial and regional gaps in who has access to treatment—particularly in the Deep South, where more than 50 percent of the people in the United States who have HIV live, mostly Black, and do not have proper access to treatment that we know actually saves people’s lives.

*Betsy Hartmann:* I see

an important intersection with environmentalist movements. The women’s movement, women of color groups, the reproductive justice movement, and the environmental justice groups in the U.S. have done a great job in trying to dismantle the old population control ideology and practice. But nevertheless it persists, and Left and liberal environmentalism can buy into it by not looking deeply enough at the structural roots of environmental degradation and climate change. It’s easier to blame rising human numbers than to actually look at powerful corporations, governments, and militaries, and their role in land degradation, and of course fossil fuel’s role in climate change. There’s a whole discourse that blames climate change on overpopulation, as if poor women in Africa are causing climate change. But I think because population control and Malthusian ideology, especially in the policy realm, use numbers and demography strategically, it legitimizes it as if it’s scientific. And so it can be a form of scientific racism that people are not waking up to. You find many well-meaning, good environmentalists out on the frontlines that still have this overpopulation view.

*Mab Segrest:* Sexuality is such a powerful force, such a non-rational force, such a sometimes overpowering force. It can be a very scary force if you’re in a very fundamentalist culture that tells you that sex is sinful and you can go to Hell. So as queers we were able to see up close both the terrors of Christian hegemony—fed by these fears and myths about people’s sexuality—as the Radical Right made abortion and homosexuality into its two issues to draw in evangelical Christian voters.

**“Racism has had a trajectory that dominates the American narrative. And yet under it, inside it, on top of it, and always, there are these questions of gender relationships, of constructions of male and female, masculinity and femininity.”**

that Kopp was targeting that Jewish physician. And [anti-abortion leader] Mark Crutcher was intimately involved with defending Kopp, as part of his legal defense committee.

More than 20 years ago, Life Dynamics, the anti-abortion group led by Crutcher, sent a very antisemitic “bottom feeders” mailing to every single medical school in the country, to potential doctors. The mailing had a cartoon that said, “What would you do if you found yourself in a room with Hitler, Mussolini and an abortionist and you had a gun with only two bullets?” The answer was, “Shoot the abortionist twice,” and the accompanying cartoon had a grotesque caricature of a Jewish male doctor.

Crutcher continues to be involved with the mainstream anti-abortion extremist movement. He was involved with founding the Center for Medical Progress, which produced the smear videos against Planned Parenthood. And he continues to run a website that uses these postcards and cyber-postcards that can be sent anonymously to any physician or anyone in the United States. One of the postcards has this Jewish caricature of a physician in a KKK shroud. There are four or five others that hearken back to that “bottom feeders” mailing.

All that’s been whitewashed or completely ignored by the movement in terms of this deep connection between antisemitism and White supremacy and the promotion or advocacy of violence and dehumanizing of these physicians and health care providers.

*Monica Simpson:* We see lots of examples of how the Right has taken this intersection and used it for their benefit. Around 2010 we had billboards that hit

in our communities and made us have to really stop and address: one, the shaming that was happening, of Black women in particular, shaming folks for their own decision making; and two, to think that this is part of a larger strategy of this right-wing force that we’re up against, that they are using really intentional strategies at this intersection to grab attention, to penetrate the hearts and minds of our communities, and to continue to keep us in a defensive posture—which is exhausting but also prohibits us from really moving proactively.

#### **PRA: DO OTHER INTERSECTIONS COME INTO PLAY WHEN WE THINK ABOUT GENDER AND WHITE SUPREMACISM?**

*Kenyon Farrow:* There are a lot of ways this plays out in terms of sexuality and LGBTQ rights. For a long time, I was focused on the racial dynamics of the marriage equality argument, which relied very heavily on notions of what it meant to be an appropriate gay and lesbian citizen. I used to describe it as well-scrubbed White gays and lesbians who were making the case for same-sex marriage as “we’re just like you, White America!”—to the intended exclusion of people of color family configurations, whether they were queer or not.

Secondly, when you look at gender, White supremacy, and HIV, it plays out in so many ways. Early on in the epidemic, it took women dying of AIDS to push groups like ACT UP to think about the ways in which the social safety net was being structured so that people could get access to Medicare and Medicaid. Or that the case definitions for what an AIDS diagnosis was did not include any of the things that women dying of AIDS

For those of us on the Left of the queer movement, we also saw all of this intersectionally, and saw how the Right was shaping these scapegoating campaigns that would divide us from each other and just throw a big cloud of mystification over what was actually happening with the economy and the development of authoritarian government. So even though there were moments and movements of division that would pit Black Christians against gay people, we saw the connections. I could see how the person in the White Patriot Party, who had harassed and threatened a Black person who applied to be a sergeant in a prison, two years later shot to death three guys that they thought were gay. So it was many of the same actors in the same larger ideology.

#### **PRA: HOW DID THE STAKES FEEL NOW COMPARED TO OTHER TIMES?**

*Kenyon Farrow:* The stakes right now feel higher than they ever have in my lifetime. After Obama's election, with Sarah Palin and the rise of the Tea Party, I actually thought a lot of things that we're seeing now were going to happen on a much faster scale. It took a little bit longer, but this idea that the government, health care, and social safety net infrastructure have been taken over by immigrants and undeserving poor Black people became such a predominant narrative that Trump becoming a candidate makes perfect sense. I think what we're seeing now in terms of naked violence and hostility to Black and Brown people is a result of that period. But I think the stakes, in terms of preventing things from getting even worse and potentially catastrophic, feels like a battle that we all have to be engaged in full on at this point.

*DuVergne Gaines:* I think the stakes right now are incredibly high. We're seeing a moment of mass incarceration, not only of communities of color but immigrant communities, and also this crawling out—from underneath the places we wanted to believe didn't exist but always have—of overtly racist groups and their patronage at the very highest level of government. In 2015, we had the single most violent moment in anti-abortion extremist history with the shooting in

Colorado Springs. And then you have these shootings, whether it's the Charleston shooting or the synagogue shooting. And lest we forget the fact that we expect *Roe v. Wade* as we know it to be overturned. People are literally talking about a "post-*Roe* world." That criminalization of abortion is right in front of us now. And I think that's a terrifying prospect—the way it's encouraged this violent wing and encouraged many to cross that line and feel comfortable doing so. We're seeing clinic invasions. We're seeing death threats on the internet and through social media outlets at unprecedented levels, in the thousands. It's almost impossible to keep track of, it's so prevalent and it seems inevitable: the violence and the fact that it likely will increase. So the stakes are extremely high.

*Betsy Hartmann:* That's a good question and a hard one to answer. In the apocalypse mindset you often think the thing you're living through right now portends the end of the world. I easily slip into that.

I've been trying to think that there have been other really bad times, like the War on Terror and the War on Iraq, the Reagan era and the nuclear era, when we thought the world really might end in the Cold War.

But today I would say that I feel incipient fascism is more possible. I feel the risk of fascism, not just in the United States but in right-wing populist movements around the planet, is very high right now. Of course there's always been weak systems of democratic governance and voter suppression, especially in the South, but we're seeing such a destabilization right now, and a president who really is all about stirring up hate: hate against immigrants, people of color, and women. We've had presidents who relied on the politics of fear. And certainly George Bush Jr. also relied on anti-Islamic fear. But the way it's playing out right now, I think we have to be extremely worried about incipient fascism and also whether the arming of the Right Wing will turn into a stronger paramilitary movement. I don't know. But now is the time to stop it.

*Elizabeth McRae:* One of the shifts in

the way that White segregationist women organized in the late '60s is, when they realized they were losing the legislative and legal battle for legal segregation, they shifted to this colorblind rhetoric. So instead of trying to organize people around segregation, they emphasized constitutionalism, or talked about family values and the erosion of the nuclear family. I think one of the lessons for today is to be really careful about how we understand the political language that's being employed and to understand that something that may appear colorblind on the surface has deep roots in this sort of segregationist and White supremacist politics. After Charlottesville and Unite the Right, White men have become the focus again. And certainly those actions need to be understood and considered. But we also have to be cautious to not miss the ways that, in more subtle or less violent ways, White supremacist politics

**“Trump has broken White solidarity. Our job is to make it a permanent split.”**

is also being reproduced by White women working in the same kinds of capacities that the women in my book were. We're at a moment that's pretty horrifying, and so the tendency for us to look at the violence and miss the other ways it's reproduced is pretty tempting.

*Loretta Ross:* It's dangerous to ask a Black person how we feel about the stakes right now, because we have a different history of engaging with this experiment called democracy. We have a wry saying in the Black community: “At times like these, it's always been times like these.” But I'm concerned that we could squander an opportunity to see how many White people have woken up and have split with White supremacy, if we fail to consolidate and appreciate the gift that Trump has given us—that he has broken White solidarity. Our job is to make it a permanent split. So that the 47 percent who didn't vote for him don't drift backwards because we neglected to seize the strategic opportunity.

One of the problems, and I hope this doesn't sound too cynical, is people who are just newly awakened to the threat of the deconstruction of democracy are not



the best qualified to lead the resistance. We're dealing with an entire Left that's into fascism-denial, when we've been like Chicken Little, forever saying, "They're coming, they're coming," up against a lot of disbelief of the White Left saying that we were overstating the case. Well they're here now. There's a real question of whether the White Left will be humble enough to recognize the errors they made in underestimating the nature

er to be able to combat the forces around this.

The beautiful thing is that so much of our work, especially in reproductive justice, because it is so intersectional, because it is a movement that has been rooted in the human rights frame, we're poised for this. We're ready for this.

#### PRA: WHAT'S THE WAY FORWARD?

Kenyon Farrow: We have to keep fight-

not in support of White supremacy but is also not paralyzed by useless White guilt and the savior complex. I'd really like to see a redefinition of what White womanhood is: that White women have the right to self-determine how their bodies get used, and they don't have to be at the service of the settler colonial state anymore. I don't know if it's going to work, but I know it's necessary, because if people of color could defeat White supremacy, it would be gone. It's going to take White people working with people of color to defeat White supremacy.

Suzanne Pharr: I think we're on the rise. Are we doing great in terms of

policies? No, the policies are beating the hell out of us. But I think we have within us the power to move in a big way. It's simply a matter of organizing. And for me, who usually does doom and gloom, that is kind of amazing. But I believe it to be true. If you mapped all of those progressive forces—from the Civil Rights movement, and those who followed the Civil Rights road, the women's movement, the issues around environment—if you take all of those voices that we call progressive, that's a very large number. In a collective sense it's an unorganized number. But if you could gather all of those forces together, and figure out how we can align ourselves in a certain direction—not all to be doing the same thing, not all to be following the same path, but all looking in the same direction—I think that's what movement is. When you get this critical mass of people looking in the same direction and moving in that direction in all their various ways. ☺

*Kathryn Joyce is an author and journalist based in New York City. She is author of The Child Catchers: Rescue, Trafficking and the New Gospel of Adoption (PublicAffairs, 2013) and Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement (Beacon Press, 2009). Her freelance writing has appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Highline, Pacific Standard, The New Republic, Mother Jones, The Nation, and many other publications.*

**"If you could gather all of those forces together, and figure out how we can align ourselves in a certain direction—not all to be doing the same thing, not all to be following the same path, but all looking in the same direction—I think that's what movement is."**

of the threat. And whether they're prepared to accept that it is the people who are most vulnerable and most threatened who need to lead this struggle.

Mab Segrest: The stakes are higher now than they've been in my lifetime. I can't say they are higher now than they were in 1850 or 1830 for Black people who were in slavery. I think there were no higher stakes than that. But that ideology really has never gone away and in fact even though Confederates lost the war and surrendered, they won the peace in about four or five years. After Reconstruction they were able to reestablish White hegemony by other means and we've never broken that paradigm.

I think most people who have been paying attention for a while, and a lot of people who haven't, are quite alarmed. But the other alarming thing is the diametrically different way people in this country view the same set of incidents. What can galvanize and alarm me and my community doesn't count on the other side. It reminds me of the 1850s.

Monica Simpson: I think we're at a very urgent moment, for us to really dig deep and to think creatively, strategically, and intentionally about this intersection and the ways it shows up in our campaigns and our activism and organizing. Because it is true that our opposition has been at this strategy for a minute and really moving hard and fast on it. That means we have to move faster and harder in order to pull that people power together

ing. And one of the things that I have been hopeful about is that around the country people have mobilized early. From the inauguration on, people have really increased their demonstrations of outrage. I also think that people working from different tactics has been important: having people run for office; grassroots base-building; thinking about media, particularly social media, where we're seeing real Orwellian distortion campaigns, whether they're domestic or come from international actors trying to create more chaos to destabilize the U.S. right now, all of the things that people are doing from different vantage points are going to be increasingly important.

Elizabeth McRae: The defunding of public education began to escalate in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision. And so investing in public education is a way that we can counter some of the Jim Crow storytelling. We—folks that are not for a White supremacist politics—also need to reach out to White women and men who've been schooled in segregationist politics for so long that it seems natural, and begin to denaturalize that. In ways, some communities on the Left have done that, but on the Right there's still that reproductive aspect that needs an intervention.

Loretta Ross: Perhaps because I'm really invested in weakening the opposition as well as strengthening our side, I'm doing a lot of work on trying to help people live Whiteness differently. Whiteness that's



## Aberration or Reflection?

How to Understand Changes on the Political Right



Donald Trump speaks at an Arizona rally in March 2016. Credit: Gage Skidmore/Flickr.

Numerous commentators, mostly on the Right, believe the Republican Party is dying because it has betrayed long-standing conservative principles. J. Bradford DeLong, a neoliberal economist, lays the blame on Donald Trump, whom he describes as “an unhinged, unqualified kleptocrat.”<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Rubin, a conservative columnist for *The Washington Post*, points to the role of White grievance, observing that the Republican Party “has become the caricature the left always said it was—the party of old white men.”<sup>2</sup> Steve Schmidt, who ran the late Senator John McCain’s 2008 presidential campaign, cites craven leadership: “[The GOP] is filled with feckless cowards who disgrace and dishonor the legacies of the

party’s greatest leaders.”<sup>3</sup> Collectively, these views attribute the party’s woes either to President Trump, depicted as a hostile interloper, or Republican officials too fearful to challenge him.

Though Trump has certainly shaken up Republican politics, the narrative that he hijacked the party ignores shifts in the wider conservative movement that made his election possible. Trump’s election was less an aberration than a reflection of changes in the New Right coalition, which brought business elites, evangelicals, and neoconservatives together under the Republican umbrella in the late 1970s and has underpinned the party’s electoral successes ever since.<sup>4</sup>

The balance of power within these three main constituencies has shifted

over the last 15 years. For their part, business leaders have increasingly shown a willingness to embrace selective protectionism,<sup>5</sup> including supporting President Trump’s decision to place tariffs on foreign steel and aluminum. In evangelical quarters, leaders have shifted their focus from religious liberty to Christian “survival”<sup>6</sup> and cheered on authoritarians they see as protectors of the faith. In foreign policy circles, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq upended the neoconservative consensus<sup>7</sup> that U.S. hegemony required a muscular, interventionist approach. The difficulties faced in the Afghan and Iraqi theaters opened up space for paleoconservatives’ to reject not only preemptive war but also security alliances like NATO.

\* The term *paleoconservative* is often used to define conservative ideology that held sway before the Depression in the 1930s. Paleoconservatives tend to support isolationist foreign policy.

The rhetorical glue that bound the New Right together has also changed. Opposition to Communism and an embrace of a meritocratic moral order used to hold the New Right together. Today it is connected by chauvinistic nationalism and support for authoritarian tactics to guarantee its objectives.

Donald Trump's election surprised many, including a good number of dyed-in-the-wool Republicans. But an on-the-ground look at the broader New Right coalition helps make more sense of his victory. The main question for progressives will be how to counter not just Trump, but the wider array of Republicans whose views have aligned with his.

### **BUILDING THE NEW RIGHT COALITION**

In the wake of the Great Depression and World War II, the U.S. Right was on the back foot. Ideologically, the Depression had called into question Republican claims that the economy worked best when left to its own devices, just as the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor made conservative isolationism look misguided-

another and eventually lead them to jointly back Republican Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential bid.

### **Moral Order**

In the early 20th century, White evangelicals were not a coherent political block. After the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925, they became even less so.<sup>10</sup> The defendant in the case, John Thomas Scopes, had been charged with violating the Butler Act, a Tennessee law that prohibited teaching evolution in public schools. The trial was heard in tiny Dayton, Tennessee, but attracted national attention because the opposing sides were argued by William Jennings Bryan, a three-time presidential candidate, and Clarence Darrow, a famous defense attorney. Although the evangelical view prevailed in court (Scopes was found in violation of the Butler Act and fined), the victory was pyrrhic. The national media portrayed evangelicals as backwards and ignorant, and many retreated from politics in response.

By the mid-1950s, however, evan-

gelical activism faced inward, with individual congregations creating so-called segregation academies<sup>11</sup> to educate their children in Whites-only schools.

Evangelical activism scaled up in the '70s in response to the 1973 Supreme Court ruling, *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion. Evangelicals began to voice their opposition in televised sermons and to protest newly opened clinics. They also mobilized in opposition to the then-burgeoning LGBTQ rights movement, arguing that same-sex relations were unnatural and that "flaunting" homosexuality was an affront to common decency.<sup>12</sup> These issues proved a potent mobilizing tool. As Sara Diamond argues:

It was in the realm of reproductive and family policy where issues could resonate both at the most personal, even visceral, level of gender relations, and, on questions of state power and constitutionality, at the level of Congress and the Supreme Court.<sup>13</sup>

Over time, evangelical leaders framed their activism around these issues as a defense of evangelical beliefs and practices in secular society.<sup>†</sup> Indeed, the rhetoric of religious liberty became part of a feedback loop between evangelicals and their Republican benefactors.<sup>14</sup>

Although evangelicals were becoming political in the '70s, their connection to the Republican Party was only formalized in the year before the 1980 presidential election. Several scholars point to a 1979 meeting between four Republican operatives—Paul Weyrich, Howard Phillips, Richard Viguerie, and Ed McAteer—and then-budding televangelist Jerry Falwell.<sup>15</sup> The operatives encouraged Falwell to use his Sunday TV show, *The Old Time Gospel Hour*, to endorse Ronald Reagan, since his positions on abortion were more in line with evangelical views than those of his contender, President Jimmy Carter.<sup>16</sup> They also told Falwell that the

**Although evangelicals were becoming political in the '70s, their connection to the Republican Party was only formalized in the year before the 1980 presidential election.**

ed. By the mid-1950s, the horrors of the Holocaust also discredited right-wing conspiracists who had called World War II a British/Jewish conspiracy.<sup>8</sup>

The Right would begin to rebuild itself in the post-war years, eventually morphing into the New Right. Sociologist Sara Diamond argues that the consolidation of the New Right represented a "state-movement convergence."<sup>9</sup> Central to this view is the idea that the Republican Party did not dictate positions for its base. Instead, these positions were clarified through an ongoing give and take between conservative social movements and Republican leaders. The New Right coalition would bring business leaders, White evangelicals, and foreign policy intellectuals into conversation with one

gelicals were primed to re-enter politics, thanks in part to a long-standing practice of airing sermons on local radio. In 1960 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) helped evangelicals expand their audience by ruling that television networks could start selling airtime to religious organizations. The networks were happy to comply, since demand was low on Sunday mornings, when most religious organizations wanted to broadcast weekly sermons. The television broadcasts also allowed evangelicals to manage their image in ways they'd been unable to do in 1925, and along the way, to build a national identity that would later help leaders trying to politicize evangelicals.

Evangelical leaders' forays into politics began in the 1950s in response to the Su-

<sup>†</sup> White evangelicals' focus on abortion and other social issues also provided avenues for political cooperation with Catholics, who despite their social conservatism, had typically voted Democratic.





Ronald Reagan gives his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, July 1980.  
 Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration/Wikimedia.

focus on abortion would help move some Catholics into the Republic fold. The group agreed to help Falwell establish a non-profit, tax-exempt organization called the Moral Majority so he could reach a larger audience. The meeting served its purpose. Fifty-six percent of White Baptists supported Carter in 1976; only 34 percent did in 1980.<sup>17</sup>

### **Neoliberalism and the Fight to End the New Deal**

Reagan's approach to the economy was captured early in his presidency when he fired 11,345 striking air traffic controllers on August 5, 1981. The move signaled Reagan's definitive break with the Keynesian development model that had dominated both parties since the 1930s. Historians sometimes refer to this period as an industrial golden age between labor and management.<sup>18</sup> Workers agreed to demands to increase their productivity in exchange for a share of profits (e.g., by getting regular raises, better pensions, etc.). The state played the role of arbiter, settling disputes through federal entities such as the National Labor Relations Board, to ensure balance between them.

When Reagan was elected, the Keynesian development model was foundering.

The OPEC oil embargo in the early 1970s, along with stagflation in the late '70s, had softened adherence to the model in business quarters. Although U.S. industry was still profitable, U.S. manufacturers argued that their profit margins were declining because of union demands and burdensome regulations. Reagan firing the air traffic controllers instead of negotiating with their union sent manufacturers a signal: the state would no longer balance the interests of labor and management. Instead, owners would be given preference. Manufacturers felt liberated to shutter factories and move production to right-to-work states in the U.S. South or out of the country. Reagan took a similar approach to banking and finance. Deregulation encouraged and rewarded speculation on Wall Street, giving rise to avenues of capital accumulation divorced from production.

Ideologically, Reagan's opposition to the model rested on two mainstays of right-wing thinking. Like advocates of laissez-faire capitalism before him, Reagan thought the economy worked best with limited state involvement, and rejected the bipartisan consensus that the state had a role to play in avoiding another Great Depression. His opposi-

tion was also rooted in a moral economy of individualism. Reagan believed it was ultimately individuals' responsibility, not the state's, to meet their own economic needs. Government aid, and those who relied upon it, were depicted in negative, often racially charged and gendered terms in both Reagan's campaigns for governor of California and later president.<sup>20</sup> Linda Taylor, an African American woman accused of welfare fraud in Chicago, was a favorite target of Reagan's. Though he never mentioned her by name, the press identified her and covered her case extensively. She became a stand-in for all welfare recipients—a Black "welfare queen" bilking the government.

By the time Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992, deindustrialization was well apace,

and both parties had embraced the neoliberal path charted by Reagan.<sup>21</sup> What set them apart, however marginally, were their views on the social safety net. Unlike earlier periods when the two parties debated whether to cut or expand social services, deliberations in the '90s focused on how much to cut them. Republicans advocated for eliminating programs wholesale, while Democrats countered weakly by supporting limits on the amount and duration of aid.

Although manufacturers had traditionally voted Republican, Reagan's actions expanded his backing among business elites. Freed from obligations to their workers (and the communities where they lived), big business could now cater to stockholders, who made money when companies laid off workers or moved production overseas. The practice of corporate raiding solidified the shift.<sup>22</sup> These, in turn, spurred investment on Wall Street, bringing the world of finance more firmly into the Republican fold.

### **Fighting the Evil Empire**

The rise of neoconservatism was central to the consolidation of the New Right coalition. Unlike evangelicals and busi-

ness elites, however, neoconservatives were less a social movement than an intellectual community. In the 1960s, most neoconservatives lived in New York and traveled in the same literary circles. Many were Jewish and had lost family in the Holocaust.<sup>23</sup> And unlike evangelicals, then largely apolitical, or business leaders who already leaned Republican, neoconservatives were former Democrats.

## **The New Right coalition that allowed Ronald Reagan to win the White House in 1980 is still intact. But the centers of gravity within each constituency have changed radically.**

Initially, their conversion had little to do with foreign policy. Rather, neoconservatives moved to the Right because of growing disillusionment with the welfare state.<sup>24</sup> They questioned whether it was the state's job to guarantee social equality and worried that welfare undermined individualism by creating opportunities for citizens to demand group rights (e.g., for women or African Americans). They were also troubled by the New Left's opposition to the state of Israel—a stance many saw as rooted in antisemitism.<sup>25</sup>

Communism only became a central political concern after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Although the war prompted fears for Jewish security, especially among those touched by the Holocaust, they also saw Israel's struggle with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its presumptive Soviet Communist backers as a microcosm of the battle between freedom and totalitarianism. As Diamond explains, "within that framework, the geopolitical circumstances of Israel and other allies could be elevated to an importance on a par with U.S. 'national security.'"<sup>26</sup> The OPEC oil embargo, which in part gave rise to the war, also put the threat into everyday relief. Long lines at the gas pumps along with rising fuel costs could be recast as a bigger civilizational struggle.

Although many neoconservatives didn't publicly back Reagan, they would become an important part of the New Right coalition during his presidency. They supported both his effort to pare down the welfare state and his willing-

ness to finance so-called freedom fighters in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

The end of the Cold War exposed the fault lines within the foreign policy establishment, especially between neoconservatives and their paleoconservative predecessors, who never abandoned isolationism but begrudgingly remained in the New Right for their shared opposition to Communism. Neoconservatives

were able to maintain their dominance in foreign policy, however, because of their prominence in the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a Reagan-era creation that emphasized the centrality of U.S. involvement to the spread of democracy.<sup>27</sup> From their perch at NED, neoconservatives were able to advocate for interventions in Panama, Bosnia, and Somalia through both the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton presidencies. Under George W. Bush, many neoconservatives held executive appointments and were thus well positioned to advocate for the U.S. invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq following the 9/11 attacks in 2001.<sup>28</sup>

### **Aspiration as Glue**

To bind these heretofore disparate groups together, the New Right needed a shared rhetoric. From the beginning, two issues threatened to undermine the budding coalition. The first was race. Though all three elements of the New Right opposed the Civil Rights movement, they did so on varied grounds. White Citizens' Councils, which relied on White evangelical support, opened Whites-only private (often religious) schools in the 1960s and '70s because they believed court-ordered desegregation would dilute the purity of the White race.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, business elites were more divided on the issue, with greater opposition in the South than in the North. For their part, early neoconservatives supported the Civil Rights movement, but opposed government intervention to undo the inequalities that

prompted it.<sup>30</sup>

But the rhetoric of meritocracy papered over these divides. As a discourse, meritocracy was broadly aspirational. Indeed, Martin Luther King Jr. made frequent overtures to a meritocratic social order, arguing that African Americans only wanted the same rights and freedoms White people were afforded.<sup>31</sup> However, unlike King, the New Right divorced discussions of merit from debates about structural inequality. Flattened of social context, meritocracy was attractive to White people precisely because they could use it to justify their place at the top of the racial hierarchy without resorting to openly racist language, which was becoming socially unacceptable.<sup>32</sup>

Class also threatened the coalition. Although business elites and neoconservative intellectuals tended to come from the upper and upper-middle classes, many evangelicals were working class. Fighting a common enemy—Communists—provided a shared purpose: not only keeping tyranny at bay, but carrying the implicit promise of prosperity. Indeed, although Reagan presided over the country's first period of sustained deindustrialization, and called for cuts to the very programs newly unemployed workers needed, he framed these changes in positive terms as an economic step forward.

Reagan's aspirational rhetoric was especially appealing to evangelicals aligned with the emerging Prosperity Gospel movement, which holds that God rewards the faithful with material wealth. However, even conservative Christians who shunned "prosperity" teachings found something to like in Reagan's message: his insistence on individuals' personal responsibility for their lives and financial circumstances that echoed their judgment-oriented worldview.<sup>33</sup> The clustering of evangelicals in the South and Southwest also meant they were more likely to feel the benefits of neoliberalism than its pain. The decline in auto manufacturing in the Midwest, for example, was matched by its rise in the Southern states. The post-war boom in the defense industry in Southern California provided similar protections to evangelicals in the southwest. As Lisa McGirr,



a historian of the New Right, explains, “conservatives in Orange County enjoyed the fruits of worldly success...their mobilization, then, was not a rural ‘remnant’ of the displaced and maladapted but a gathering around principles that were found to be relevant in the most modern of communities.”<sup>34</sup> Those who doubted the new alignment would have found it difficult to challenge in any case. Within the deeply hierarchical world of evangelicalism, once national leaders like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Oral Roberts endorsed Reagan’s approach, local leaders tended to follow their lead.

Communism was also an attractive enemy for White people who cared little for foreign policy but saw the Civil Rights movement as the defining problem of the day. Indeed, the Communist Party played a prominent role in the Civil Rights struggle in the South, so invoking Communism as a shared enemy allowed segregationists to continue their specific battle under different terminology.

## SEISMIC SHIFTS

The New Right coalition that allowed Ronald Reagan to win the White House in 1980 is still intact. But the centers of gravity within each constituency have changed radically. These changes are ongoing and pre-date the 2016 election. But Trump’s election has likely accelerated them.

### **Not Our Problem—A Paleoconservative Pushback**

After the Cold War ended, paleoconservatives began to push back against the neoconservative paradigm. Prominent paleoconservatives like Pat Buchanan and Phyllis Schlafly, who had remained under the New Right umbrella because of their opposition to Communism, began to openly question their Republican peers for supporting U.S. interventions in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.<sup>35</sup> Although they were more public than they’d been during the Cold War, paleoconservatives would remain on the margins until the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq began to falter.

These wars would upend the neoconservative consensus that foreign intervention was the best use of U.S. hege-

mony. Opposition came from realist and paleoconservative quarters. For their part, realists supported the campaign in Afghanistan, but believed the decision to invade Iraq was foolhardy. With U.S. forces split across two war zones, realists argued that the U.S. had allowed the Taliban to regroup.<sup>36</sup> They also believed containment was the best way to handle Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein because the country’s ethnic divides would make nation-building exceedingly difficult.<sup>37</sup> Paleoconservatives were equally opposed to the U.S.’s misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq, with well-known leaders like Buchanan, Robert Novak, and Justin Raimondo denouncing the wars.<sup>38</sup>

What differentiated the two camps was how they framed their opposition. While realists talked in terms of national interests, paleoconservatives often resorted to conspiracism to explain their opposition. Some, like Raimondo, a devotee of Buchanan’s, argued that Israel had foreknowledge of 9/11 and hadn’t alerted the U.S. in hopes that the attacks would encourage U.S. assistance.<sup>39</sup>

While paleoconservative conspiracies were on the margins 10 years ago, their views are increasingly dominating the Republican Party. Today, it is paleoconservatives and not realists who are ascendant. Although Trump’s approach to foreign intervention can be described as a work in progress, he has found common cause with paleoconservatives, who have openly embraced his isolationist and nativist instincts and hope it will guide how he approaches allies and enemies alike. As Rutgers historian David Greenberg<sup>40</sup> explained in 2016:

The hidden history of Trumpism suggests that the president-elect may be not simply an opportunistic showman but the leader of an at least semi-coherent ideology—a new iteration of the populist and nationalist paleoconservatism that has long lurked in the shadows of American politics. Now, for the first time since the isolationist 1930s, this ideology commands real influence, and for the first time in our history, it will enjoy favor from a sitting president.

To be sure, John Bolton’s appointment as Trump’s third National Security advi-

sor provides evidence that neoconservatives<sup>41</sup> have not entirely disappeared from Trump’s orbit. However, they have been unable to sway Trump’s decision to scale back the U.S. footprint in Syria or as yet to ramp up involvement in Venezuela.

### **Evangelicals Under Siege**

On most issues evangelicals have been remarkably consistent. Abortion has remained a central cause, and arguably their most important voting issue, since the early 1970s.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, when evangelicals added issues to their repertoire, as they did with same-sex marriage in the early 2000s, they framed their opposition using familiar rhetoric.

After 9/11, however, evangelicals turned their attention to Islam. Although their focus was ostensibly about terrorism, religion scholar Richard Cimino argues that Islam is evangelicals’ root concern.<sup>43</sup> Fear of Islam is particularly resonant for evangelicals who subscribe to premillennial eschatology, which holds the Antichrist will begin a war in Israel to thwart the Messiah’s return to earth. Today, many evangelicals believe the Antichrist will be Muslim.<sup>44</sup> Though premillennial eschatology is unique to certain evangelical quarters, they have found common cause with Islamophobic nationalist regimes across the globe.

The War on Terror also exacerbated evangelicals’ tendency to see themselves as under threat from the outside world. Indeed, after 9/11, evangelicals saw themselves as fighting a two-pronged war: the first, their longstanding battle against secularism, now joined by a fight against Islam. Today, evangelicals are increasingly pessimistic about their place in U.S. society, with recent polling suggesting that many evangelicals believe they face greater discrimination than Muslims.<sup>45</sup>

In response, many evangelical leaders changed their approach. Although evangelicals still invoke religious liberty to frame their activism, its meaning has shifted. Historically, evangelicals defined religious liberty with reference to evangelicals’ interactions with secular society. They supported doctors who refused to do abortions, for example, and business owners who refused to of-

fer contraceptives in their employees' healthcare plans. Increasingly, however, religious liberty is also cast in existential terms, as something other religions are gaining at the expense of Christianity. The survival of Christians, then, depends on taking religious liberty away from (or preventing its provision to) other religions, especially Islam.<sup>46</sup> For example, many White evangelicals expressed support for President Trump's decision to ban refugees from Muslim countries,<sup>47</sup> arguing that the U.S. is first and foremost a Christian nation.<sup>48</sup>

As survival has become more central to evangelical definitions of religious liberty, some evangelicals have made common cause with authoritarian leaders who claim to defend Christianity against both secularism and Islam. Evangelicals' embrace of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his war in Chechnya is a case in point. Many scholars believe that Chechnya's war for independence was not, at least initially, driven by religion,<sup>49</sup> but rebels increasingly invoked Islam as a unifying and rationalizing factor over time. By the second Chechen war, Muslim identity had become central to the rebels' cause. Putin, who took power shortly after the start of the second Chechen war, responded with a scorched earth policy and framed the conflict as an Islamic assault on Russia's Christian civilization.<sup>50</sup> The narrative of Christians under siege from Muslims resonated with U.S. evangelicals, many of whom came to see Putin as a defender of the faith.<sup>51</sup> Putin's subsequent attacks on LGBTQ people in Russia only added to his appeal.

Evangelical support for Trump follows a similar pattern. Though Trump—a twice divorced, self-described playboy—hardly exemplifies Christian values, evangelical leaders have embraced his presidency on the grounds that they need a strong leader to protect them. Jerry Falwell Jr., son of the Moral Majority's founder and the president of evangelical Liberty University, explained his support for Trump this way on Twitter:

Conservatives & Christians need to stop electing "nice guys". They might make great Christian leaders but the US needs street fighters like @realDonaldTrump at every level of govern-

ment b/c the liberal fascists Dems are playing for keeps & many Repub leaders are a bunch of wimps!<sup>52</sup>

### **From Neoliberalism to Selective Protectionism**

The neoliberal consensus began to crack after the investment firm Bear Stearns collapsed in March 2008, setting off the Great Recession.<sup>53</sup> On the Right, opposition materialized quickly against then-president George W. Bush's Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, which created the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). TARP allowed the U.S. government to purchase companies' so-called toxic assets to prevent them from collapsing. Through TARP, the government took over mortgage-backed securities held by Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae, AIG, and others. After Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential election, Bush and Obama agreed to use TARP funds to bail out iconic American automobile manufacturers Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors, then near bankruptcy.

Although TARP was supported by two presidents from different parties, the bailouts were widely unpopular across the political spectrum. On the Right, many Republicans opposed them on ideological grounds, arguing that it wasn't the job of government, or the taxpayers who fund it, to pick and choose economic winners. To many neoliberals, the government's response to the crisis represented a return to protectionism.

The Tea Party movement emerged as the Right's first organized response to the bailouts. Chip Berlet, a scholar of the U.S. Right, argues that the Tea Party was initially an "astroturfing" operation<sup>54</sup>—elite propaganda disguised as a grassroots movement. By 2010, however, the Tea Party had morphed into an actual social movement, with chapters across the country. As it grew in size, it shifted Hard Right. While the Tea Party's earliest supporters had been libertarian followers of Ron Paul, newer members hailed from Christian Dominionist circles, militia/Patriot groups, and ethno-nationalist organizations.<sup>55</sup>

Over time, the Tea Party became a counter-subversion movement<sup>56</sup>—that is, one that defends an unequal status

quo and dabbles in conspiracism. Tea Party rhetoric divided the country between "makers" and "takers." To them, the recession happened because people took out loans they couldn't afford, not because big banks had given them unsustainable loans under false premises or because investment firms repackaged those loans into junk products with little concern for their viability. After Obama was elected, Tea Party groups turned their attention to the Affordable Care Act (ACA),<sup>57</sup> which they decried as an abuse of Big Government, evidence of creeping socialism, and a threat to the Constitution.<sup>58</sup> During the ACA fights, which continued throughout Obama's presidency, the movement also turned its sights on Republican Congress members who supported Medicaid expansion under the ACA and fielded primary challengers against Republican candidates deemed insufficiently conservative.

In the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, the movement's unity began to fracture. Though the Koch Brothers had bankrolled much of the Tea Party opposition to the ACA, the industrialist brothers were leery of Trump's protectionism. The movement's rank and file responded differently, vigorously backing Trump's plan to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and place tariffs on Chinese exports. By January 2017 the Tea Party's base was increasingly out of step with its elite backers. They looked to Trump for a new economic consensus that would protect their jobs and their communities against elites, at home and abroad.

### **Rhetorical Glue: Nationalism and Racism**

While aspirational discourses helped bind the New Right's constituencies together in the early 1980s, shared grievances and defensive posturing are more common today. Rhetorically, these sentiments are held together with invocations to a chauvinistic nationalism and support for authoritarian tactics.

Donald Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again" resonated on the Right because it captured the dour outlook that many in the New Right's constituencies have held since the Great Recession. Evangelicals feel under siege. Abortion



remains legal, same-sex marriage is now the law of the land and widely accepted, and Muslims have been elected to Congress. Although many businesses remain supportive of free trade, some believe the rules of the game are stacked in favor of foreign manufacturers and countries like China.<sup>59</sup> And after more than 15 years of war, neoconservatives find themselves at a disadvantage, defending two unpopular wars while paleoconservatives make a play for control of the party's intellectual foreign policy apparatus.

Trump's catchphrase was also popular because he identified clear culprits. It wasn't an outside force that undermined U.S. hegemony, he declared, but internal enemies within both parties who betrayed the citizenry by letting immigrants into the country, signing free trade agreements that shipped good-paying jobs overseas, and spilling blood and treasure in faraway places. In this context, nationalism is a way to reassert strength. However, like most forms of nationalism, chauvinism (in the form of antisemitism, sexism, and racism) is fully embedded within it.

In many quarters of the Right, the status of the country is measured vis-à-vis the status of White men. And right-wing men, overwhelmingly White, are angry. Their understanding of meritocracy—that it would guarantee the “natural” order in which White men sit atop the social and economic hierarchy—appeared false. Indeed, even though the gains of women and people of color have been limited and halting, White men see their successes as a zero-sum game. Minority gain is White men's loss. And, because they view White male hegemony, at home and abroad, as natural and right, they are now willing to more openly defend it, even if they have to use proto-authoritarian tactics to do so.

This rhetoric is on full display across the New Right's three main constituencies. Evangelicals are willing to embrace dictators like Vladimir Putin and Hungary's Viktor Orbán because they believe only strongmen can protect them. Likewise, the Tea Party's base took the movement's astroturfing founders at their pop-

ulist word, and demanded the very thing its wealthy backers hate—protectionism. And while neoconservatives rethink Afghanistan and Iraq, paleoconservatives are actively trying to undo the liberal world order neoconservatives' preemptive wars were meant to guarantee.

#### DEATH OR WAR?

Although many right-of-center commentators believe the Republican Party is dying, a better explanation is that the party's turmoil reflects an ongoing civil war on the Right. This war is occurring within the movement's three main constituencies as well as between the Wash-

**Trump's catchphrase was also popular because he identified clear culprits. It wasn't an outside force that undermined U.S. hegemony, he declared, but internal enemies within both parties who betrayed the citizenry.**

ington Republican establishment and the ascendant forces within each New Right constituency. At the moment, the establishment voices are losing. And even if Trump loses the 2020 election, the revival of a 1980s-era coalition is unlikely.

The question that remains is whether these new centers of gravity will consolidate and if so, how stable they will be. If we use Sara Diamond's idea of a state-movement convergence to frame our analysis, consolidation would mean these new actors will become embedded in the Republican Party's apparatus, and within government more broadly. The likelihood of this happening is uncertain. Though Trump won the presidency, the Republican Party lost more than 30 House seats in the 2018 midterm elections. However, it's also true that within the GOP, views once considered marginal or even traitorous have moved into the mainstream. The Soviet Union, for example, used to serve as a discursive boogeyman on the Right. To discredit an idea, all one had to do was link it to Communism and warn of coming tyranny. Evangelical support for Vladimir Putin and strongmen in other countries once behind the Iron Curtain<sup>60</sup> provides a clear example of how radically and quickly the Right's discourse has changed.

The answer to the stability question is uncertain as well. Though U.S. support for the ongoing campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq is unpopular, it remains to be seen how popular isolationism will remain if Russia or China begin to assume the roles of hegemonic world powers. Likewise, though business elites have largely remained in the Republican fold despite defections in certain industries (or parts of the country) for neoliberal Democrats, the disparate effects of tariffs may engender battles between winners and losers of this new order, as well as between the losers and the party. Lastly, it's also unclear whether the evangelical

sense of besiegement will hold among millennial evangelicals, who have proven more open and tolerant of same-sex marriage and other religions than their elders.<sup>61</sup>

The chaos of the current moment will be difficult no matter how these questions are answered. Progressives must be ready for the worst-case scenario: That in our two-party system, one of those parties has become defined by intolerance—not a bug, but its central feature. ☞

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BY EMILY GORCENSKI

# The Proud Boys

## A Republican Party Street Gang



Gavin McInnes with a group of protesters after giving a speech at the University of California, Berkeley, April 27, 2017. Credit: REUTERS/Stephen Lam.

The Proud Boys became a national focus in October 2018 when independent journalist Sandi Bachom posted video of a violent confrontation in New York City. On October 12 Gavin McInnes, founder of the Proud Boys and exiled co-founder of VICE Media,<sup>1</sup> was the headline speaker for an event at the Metropolitan Republican Club in Manhattan.<sup>2</sup> That morning, the club reported their facility had been vandalized overnight with anarchist graffiti, broken windows, and glued locks, prompting an outcry from the Right, as

New York Republican Party chairman Ed Cox decried the damage as an act of “political violence.” Amid these tensions, McInnes included in his appearance a re-enactment of the 1960 assassination of Japanese socialist leader Inejiro Asanuma by a Japanese nationalist, seeming to foreshadow the actual violence that would follow later that night. After the event, video footage<sup>3</sup> showed a group of Proud Boys following a group of protesters before charging at them. One protester threw what appeared to be a water bottle, and seconds later all three were

thrown to the ground, being punched, kicked, and stomped by several Proud Boys.

The event sparked national alarm about right-wing violence, less than a month before the midterm elections and after a campaign season marked by increasingly inflammatory rhetoric from top Republican officials. Who were the Proud Boys? What were they doing at a Republican event? Was this a sign of increasing right-wing violence? And why didn’t the police arrest the assailants that night?



Until that point, the Proud Boys, launched in 2016, had managed to stand apart from many of the other groups that attended and organized the fatal Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Compared to the White supremacists they sometimes marched alongside, the Proud Boys—self-declared “Western chauvinists” whose core ethos is that they won’t “apologize for creating the modern world”<sup>4</sup>—enjoy comfortable proximity to the conservative mainstream. Existing almost entirely to antagonize left-wing and Democratic opposition, they effectively serve as the Republican Party’s militant arm.

The incident in New York City wasn’t an anomaly. Although the Proud Boys may present themselves as merely an edgy male drinking club, the organization has the hallmarks of an organized gang. According to *Proud Boy Magazine*, membership has four degrees, two of which involve physical violence.<sup>5</sup> To earn the second degree, an initiate must, absurdly, name five breakfast cereals while getting beaten up by his fellow “boys.” The fourth requires getting arrested or physically fighting political opponents.<sup>6</sup>

In the days after the New York fight, McInnes embraced the label, proclaiming, “I started this gang called the Proud Boys,”<sup>7</sup> and acknowledging they have engaged in violence “for fun.”

“I’m done avoiding [violence],” he continued. “I’m taking the low road, I’m punching them in the face.”<sup>8</sup>

### THE LATEST IN A STRING OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS

Since its founding, the Proud Boys have been a steady presence at political rallies around the country. In early 2017, in a series of protests dubbed “the Battle for Berkeley,”<sup>9</sup> the Proud Boys began to make a name for themselves. That March, a Proud Boy named Kyle Chapman was seen hitting a counterprotester in the head with a wooden stick, earning him favor among the Far Right, as well as the battle nickname “Based Stickman.” Chapman went on to form the Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights, which McInnes described on Twitter as the Proud Boys’

“military” wing.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout 2017 and 2018, Proud Boys were also regulars at explosive protests in Portland, Oregon, often partnering with Patriot Prayer, a right-wing organization spearheaded by failed U.S. Senate candidate Joey Gibson, to battle Portland’s large anti-fascist bloc. They were present at a Resist Marxism event that turned violent in Providence, Rhode

**Compared to the White supremacists they sometimes marched alongside, the Proud Boys enjoy comfortable proximity to the conservative mainstream.**

Island.<sup>11</sup> And they played a notable, though complicated, role in the August 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, which made international headlines after a rally-goer drove his car into a crowd of counterprotesters, killing one and injuring many more.<sup>\*</sup>

The Proud Boys were not themselves sponsors of Unite the Right, but one of its main organizers was their own Jason Kessler, a Charlottesville local. Leaked chats obtained by independent media collective Unicorn Riot show that a month before the event, in July 2017, Kessler sought to recruit rally participants from among the “Alt Lite,”<sup>12</sup> an umbrella term for right-wing organizations that some in Alt Right circles consider insufficiently racist to qualify as fully Alt Right.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of Unite the Right was to draw the two factions together, but many Alt Lite groups were shying away. Initially, Proud Boy Kyle Chapman was listed as a speaker at the event, but he backed out. The Proud Boys declined an official organizational role, at first issuing a neutral statement in June saying, “This event isn’t ours, which is why our name is not on the flyer, but we wish them nothing but the best.”<sup>14</sup> But sometime later, the group, which outwardly claims to reject racism, took a harder stance, as the rally’s White supremacist tone drew increasingly bad press. “So here’s the deal Proud Boys,” read an announcement in *Proud Boy Magazine*, “if you want to go to the rally, I can’t stop you. But just don’t fucking wear your Fred Perry or decide to

belt: ‘Proud of Your Boy.’ Remember, we don’t allow racists in Proud Boys, if you decide to rub elbows with those people in colors, you very well could find yourself being disavowed.”<sup>15</sup>

Amid this distancing, rally organizer Kessler, in an attempt to force participation, arranged for a group of Proud Boys and other far-right activists to come to Charlottesville to antagonize protesters,

and called for others to join them. “We’re going to be triggering Antifa to protest and force the Alt-Light’s hand,”<sup>16</sup> he wrote in the chat messages obtained by Unicorn Riot. “Just wear your MAGA hats and blend in as Proud Boys. It’ll be fun.” Several Proud Boys ultimately did attend the rally, seemingly without consequence, despite the earlier threats. And a week after the rally’s violence shocked the country, McInnes publicly disavowed it, saying, “[i]f you know of anyone who is presently a member and who is Alt-Right, they are cut from the club as of right now.”<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps because of these mixed messages, after Unite the Right the Proud Boys managed to avoid most of the mainstream backlash that other White nationalist groups incurred. While Alt Right groups struggled with enormous legal burdens and diminishing support after Unite the Right,<sup>18</sup> the Proud Boys and their affiliate organizations seemed to thrive, holding more rallies around the country and maintaining active social media pages. To understand why, it’s useful to explore the taxonomies of Far Right and White supremacist organizing.

### UNDERSTANDING THE ALT RIGHT SPECTRUM

Far-right organizing circles, including neofascist and White nationalist organizations, are notoriously prone to infighting. The motivation behind the fatal Charlottesville rally was implicit in its name: to visibly unite far-right groups

\* Author disclosure: I was a counterprotester present at the scene during the attack.

in a show of force; further marginalize liberal, progressive, and leftist communities; and strengthen institutional oppression of minorities. The internal chats published by Unicorn Riot<sup>19</sup> show a fractured and bickersome collection of White supremacist organizations, where extensive debate on optics and identity politics was commonplace, and where organizers struggled to keep the most violent impulses of their followers in check.

Since the resurgence of public White nationalism (emboldened, but not invented by, the Trump administration), the Far Right has struggled with different public-facing looks. On one end of the spectrum are militant vanguardists, who eschew social norms in favor of a violent approach that will accelerate social divides and bring out closeted supporters. On the other end are movementarians, who seek to leverage loopholes in free speech principles to inject themselves into normal debate and amass power

***Capitalizing on centrist disdain for the optics of antifascism, the Proud Boys' strategy seems designed to frame the Left, and by extension Democrats, as lawless and violent.***

through political means. Movementarians appeal to a mainstream sense of decorum—often under the pretext of defending the rights of a “victimized” class of White conservatives—while bringing forth reactionary concepts on race, gender, and civil rights.

There are varying schools of thought one can encounter along this spectrum. There's identitarianism, which describes groups like Identity Evropa in the U.S. and Génération Identitaire in Europe, which seek to center White identity and a mythical European heritage as a cultural touchstone around which Western society should build itself. There are ultranationalists, which includes groups like the Rise Above Movement, which seek to establish national identity through forceful exclusion of others. And there's constitutionalism, exhibited in groups like the Oath Keepers or various Patriot movement chapters, which believes the Constitution empowers the people separately from, and to a greater extent than,

state authority.<sup>20</sup>

Ranking these groups as farthest-Right on the political spectrum is pointless. Despite their deep philosophical differences in approaches and tactics, all share a common end-goal: the eradication of civil rights and the establishment of a White patriarchal ethnostate. Regardless of their preferred approach, the Far Right is united by a perception that the status quo is irreparably flawed.

**UNDERSTANDING THE ALT LITE**

The Alt Right is not the only recent development in far-right politics. The Alt Lite is a variant of contemporary conservatism that breaks with the mainstream but publicly claims to reject the explicitly racist identity politics of the White supremacist Alt Right. The Alt Lite is largely a social media-driven phenomenon; their most prominent figures are all sub-mainstream personalities with large online followings: Mike Cernovich, Jack

Posobiec, and of course Gavin McInnes. The Alt Lite movement sometimes uses people of color, women, and sexual minorities—a tiny minority of their movement—to convey their message.

The Proud Boys have become the Alt Lite's preeminent activist organization. Showcasing members of color or leaders' interracial partnerships with non-White girlfriends and wives, the Proud Boys have, to varying degrees of success, passed themselves off as a non-racist organization even as they are regularly filmed beating up anti-racist activists. Indeed, the Proud Boys' “multiculturalism” has caused them to fall out of favor among many White nationalist organizations. The difference is not entirely cosmetic: although Proud Boys' blogs, Facebook pages, and private chats are full of content that is unquestionably racist, it's of a subtler variety than the deeply racial memetics—such as pictures of lynched Black people and Holocaust photos—that Alt Right groups deploy. The Proud

Boys' racism is sometimes only visible through the lens of the politics of privilege and institutional White supremacy.

The absence of undeniably racist symbols such as a Klan hood or a Nazi swastika has given the Proud Boys a level of access to the Republican mainstream (as well as a free pass for militant street activism) that the Alt Right can only dream of. For these reasons, it's too simplistic to view the Proud Boys as yet another White supremacist group. Rather, when the Alt Right and overt White nationalism became too toxic for mainstream Republican tastes after the tragedy in Charlottesville, the Proud Boys filled the gap. Fronting men of color, the organization became the perfect street gang for the GOP to use to continue its antagonism of Leftist politics, and thereby cast progressives as the real “extremists.”

The Alt Lite has openly feuded with the explicitly White supremacist members of the Alt Right. In June 2017, several Alt

Lite figures held a competing rally in Washington, D.C., in an effort to draw attention and support away from an Alt Right event.<sup>21</sup> These public conflicts aside, it is difficult to see a meaningful ideological difference between the Alt Lite and

the Alt Right—both widely criticize social justice movements, mock activists for racial equality, and vociferously support Western hegemony—and the Anti-Defamation League lists McInnes among the Alt Lite members whose separation from the Alt Right is superficial, at best.<sup>22</sup>

**MAINSTREAM REPUBLICANISM'S MILITANT ARM**

The brutal violence at the October event in New York obscured a vital fact: that McInnes and the Proud Boys were in Manhattan at the invitation of members of the Metropolitan Republican Club, a private, but mainstream, Republican organization. Less than a month away from the midterm elections, McInnes's appearance seemed to be less about an earnest presentation of a political viewpoint than provocation for provocation's sake. In the Far Right's parlance, they were there to “trigger the libs.”

As such, the street violence seemed strategic. Capitalizing on centrist disdain



for the optics of antifascism—the black bloc, the anonymity, the violence—these repeated engagements were seemingly designed to frame the Left, and by extension the Democratic Party, as lawless and violent.<sup>23</sup> (In August 2018, ahead of the midterm elections, Trump warned evangelical leaders in a closed-door meeting that, if Democrats won, they would “overturn everything that we’ve done and they’ll do it quickly and violently,” specifically referencing anti-fascist groups.<sup>24</sup>) It’s a style of antagonistic politics that has already become nor-

malized elsewhere in the Republican Party, as every booming chant of “lock her up” at a Trump rally further entrenches the idea that politics is about obliterating your opponent. The Proud Boys and the Alt Lite don’t operate separately from this dynamic but within it, as much of the violence that erupted in Portland occurred at campaign rallies for 2018 Senate candidate Joey Gibson. (Although Gibson’s failed U.S. Senate bid was in Washington State, he held frequent rallies in neighboring Portland.)

Gibson was not the only candidate with far-right ties. Corey Stewart, who has well-documented connections to White nationalists and neo-confederates, including Unite the Right organizer Jason Kessler,<sup>25</sup> won the Republican primary for the U.S. Senate race in Virginia. Patrick Little<sup>26</sup> and Paul Nehlen<sup>27</sup> are open antisemites who ran failed bids for U.S. Congress. Steve King won re-election in Iowa, despite new revelations about his connections to an international neonazi group (and even his seeming openness to Holocaust revisionism).<sup>28</sup> Trump has opened the door to the GOP for neonazis, and they have wasted no time in accepting the invitation.

However, the reality is that most of those candidates lost their races, badly. Although King was re-elected, his margin narrowed substantially in a race that was no contest just weeks before.<sup>29</sup>

It’s increasingly unclear if the Proud Boys-style strategy of inciting violence to discredit the Left works or is sustainable. Tainted by Trump’s candid racism, a wave

of far-right violence, and the Russia investigation, the Republicans lost significant ground in the House. Many White nationalists from the Alt Right, like Richard Spencer and his followers, are facing serious legal troubles, in the form of state<sup>30</sup> and federal<sup>31</sup> criminal charges, as well as a handful of significant civil lawsuits.

**As Far Right politicians have expanded the use of explicit bigotry in political campaigns, they’ve opened a window for other right-wing candidates, couching racist appeals in more euphemistic language, to appear moderate by contrast.**

The Alt Lite’s luck may be running out, as well. After the videos of the violence in New York became national news, 10 Proud Boys were indicted in New York Superior Court. McInnes’s forthright declaration that he had founded the Proud Boys as “a gang” became particularly damning in light of these indictments: members John Kinsman and Maxwell Hare both stand accused of Attempted Gang Assault charges, a serious felony that carries a sentence of up to 15 years in prison. The same week the indictments were returned, the Clark County, Washington, sheriff’s department’s internal investigation into a deputy’s ties to the Proud Boys came to light.<sup>32</sup> The report, which led to the deputy’s firing, asserted that the FBI had designated the Proud Boys as an “extremist organization” with ties to “white nationalism,” though the Bureau denies that it investigates groups based on ideology.<sup>33</sup>

The New York incident is not the only source of legal trouble for the Proud Boys. Former Proud Boy member and Texas attorney Jason Lee Van Dyke is facing a charge of filing a false police report, and was recently re-arrested for failure to appear at a bond review hearing resulting from threats he allegedly made against a defendant in a civil case he filed.<sup>34</sup> And in the most disturbing case yet, Buckley Wolfe, who appeared on social media several times in Proud Boys gear alongside Seattle-area Proud Boys, was arrested on charges of second-degree murder for stabbing his brother in the head with a sword, because, Wolfe claimed,

his brother was turning into a “lizard.” Wolfe’s social media shows his affiliations with the Proud Boys concurrent with a descent into fringe Alt Lite media, including sharing stories from the conspiracy theory movement QAnon.<sup>35</sup>

These legal battles are taking a toll on the Alt Lite leadership. Just a few days after news of the FBI designation sur-

facted, McInnes publicly announced his separation with the Proud Boys,<sup>36</sup> citing hopes that his departure would diminish any sentences the Manhattan 10 might receive. (These defendants face trial in March 2019 and are still considered innocent, so McInnes’ statement seems to curiously presume their conviction.)

Nevertheless, right-wing antagonistic politics haven’t abated. As Far Right politicians have expanded the use of explicit bigotry in political campaigns, they’ve opened a window for other right-wing candidates, couching racist appeals in more euphemistic language, to appear moderate by contrast. As Trump escalates his violent rhetoric, calling journalists the “enemy of the people” and suggesting that any impeachment efforts will result in mass revolt, it seems unlikely that the violent sectors of the Right will stand down. There are plenty of minor figures in these movements, and they will be quick to fill any leadership vacuums that may form in the wake of the October violence. As long as the Republican Party continues to benefit from violent White supremacy, political violence on U.S. streets is sure to continue. ☞

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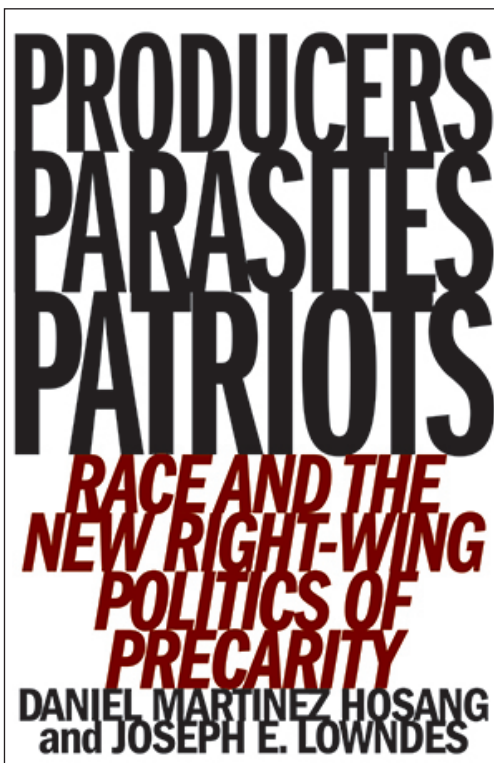
## In Search of New Frames

Q&A with the Authors of *Producers, Parasites, Patriots*

**B**iologically speaking, race isn't real. But the concept of it, and its corollary systems of racialized oppression and bias, have influenced every moment of U.S. political and cultural history. White supremacist thinking dominates our culture in surprisingly nuanced ways, including through narratives that pit people against each other for the purpose of consolidating power and wealth. Enter the deeply raced idea of "makers and takers," also known as "producerism," which proposes that some Americans create value, while others are mere parasites. Since the Nixon and Reagan eras, it's been weaponized to attack African American women. Its echoes are there in J.D. Vance's bestselling 2016 memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy*, which Republican politicians have cited in justifying yet more cuts to the social safety net.<sup>1</sup> And it was nakedly present in Donald Trump's April 2019 tweet, complaining that officials in post-Hurricane Maria Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory, "only take from USA."<sup>2</sup>

A new book by Yale University American Studies professor Daniel HoSang and University of Oregon political science professor Joseph Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity*, offers a framework for interpreting and dismantling racist capitalist oppression without getting bogged down in this treacherous narrative of "makers and takers."

The book's authors also turn a sharp lens on the subtle ways that race gets used in the rise of the White nationalist Alt Right: how, even as these movements are defined by deep racism, there is often also a rhetorical commitment to multiculturalism, even in militias and neofascist groups. From Black Republicans taking on leadership roles in the Heritage Foundation, to White nationalists welcoming people of color, to militia groups invoking Black Lives Matter, this new book maps the political currents eddying beneath these visible movements. The authors spoke to PRA this spring.



*Producers, Parasites, Patriots* by Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes. Cover image courtesy of University of Minnesota Press.

**PRA:** *This book provides a focused lens for interpreting these confusing movements and events. What made you decide to write it?*

Daniel HoSang: We started this book right after the 2002 midterms, when we saw renewed attacks on public sector unions that used familiar language—the claim that mostly White public sector unions were becoming dependent, or parasitic, on the public purse, and that justified dismantling their pensions, contracts, etc. We were struck by how bipartisan this sensibility was, and the ways that both their Whiteness didn't protect them from those attacks, and that [the attacks] wouldn't be legible if not for a long history of [the Right] representing and then undermining women of color. We were also struck by the emergence of several key people of color in the emerging Northwest Far Right street scene, and then corollaries of that within the GOP. Trying to think about those two things together was really the start of the book.

Joseph Lowndes: It was also the beginning of a re-racialization of the White

poor that was happening among both liberal and conservative writers and thinkers, from Charles Murray or Kevin Williamson on the Right, to Robert Putnam as a liberal. Explanations that were once reserved for Black and Brown people now were being used to talk about the White poor: that they were culturally disorganized, morally compromised, maybe genetically inferior. It seemed like in this moment, where it's kind of a new Gilded Age, race was being deployed to do all kinds of different work.

**You talk about the attacks on public sector employees as one real-life result of the "parasitism" narrative—that this is why we hear so much about "lazy" and "greedy" teachers and federal workers. How does that narrative fold along racial lines?**

JL: The language of parasitism and dependency is racialized. It can't just be picked up and put down anywhere. It needs a racial reference. Blackness helps make it meaningful, legible for people. Having done that, you can stretch it out to broader groups. As Dan said, the public sector workers were



ill-equipped to respond because they thought of themselves in producerist terms. The challenge that puts on us is to find ways to think about this that break out of the producer-parasite dyad.

***There are certain categories of public workers and “White” people that are never included in the parasite narrative, like firefighters or police. How carefully are the lines drawn around who is and isn’t a parasite?***

JL: These are deep New Deal (and probably before New Deal) ideas about deserving and non-deserving forms of state support. One side falls on relief and dependency, and the other on “earned entitlements.” People would laugh when Tea Partiers used to say “Hands off my Medicare” or “Hands off my Social Security,” but in a way that’s a coherent logic within the terms of what counts as legitimate or parasitic forms of state support.

DH: We are trying to be clear that parasitism doesn’t refer to any actual social location or relationship of dependence. In some cases, in California, even firefighters became subject to this logic! It’s provisional. They’re trying to see what might stick, who might be raised to stand in for this [parasite] figure so that they can earn consent for the longer-term project, which is continuing to undo state supports.

***There’s a fascinating theme in the book that our understanding of our economic interests, or our sense of ourselves in relation to race and class, is shaped by politics—that no group has a fixed set of interests without first forging them inside of the political process. White supremacists have some handy tools to forge their constituents’ politics: parasitism, producerism, pathologizing the poor. What tools do we have to shape a more unifying narrative?***

DH: Toward the end of the book we try to disrupt this reactionary, crude narrative of the producerist heartland railing against coastal elites. We show the Rural Organizing Project (ROP), in rural Oregon, organizing around issues of immigrant rights and detention, histories of anti-Black subordination, and also on the politics around the militia and public sector workers. Those aren’t just acts of allyship or solidarity, but are [indicators that ROP is] trying to link the increasing precarity of life outside of Oregon’s metropolitan centers to what’s happening in places like Ferguson and on the border. To help people think about their relationship [with the broader country] and generate new kinds of interests, alliances, and expectations.

JL: The analysis of how this works can be important in terms of [how we view] organizing tools. So for instance, in Portland, Patriot Prayer—the leading street-Trumpist, proto-fascist group—had all these people of color. Joey Gibson, its head, identifies as non-White. His number two, Tiny Toese, is Samoan. There are African Americans all over the place in the Proud Boys nationally and in Patriot Prayer in particular. You have anti-racist and anti-fascist activists continually calling them “White supremacists,” and they kept saying, “No we’re not, of course we’re not, look around!” It’s important for us to not be stuck in these old

frames, but to see how you can have these multiracial fascist alliances, because people are complicated. They have complicated backgrounds and can be drawn into different things. There are different kinds of authoritarianism and authoritarian violence, which don’t just organize themselves around race, or organize themselves around race in surprising ways. In order to counter-organize, you have to see clearly what’s actually going on without being stuck in old frames.

***So politics look different for different groups.***

JL: One easy caricature of our position is that it’s open, things can change, and people can adopt different identities. That’s not what we are saying at all. Parasitism—the reason it’s so available for [Hillbilly Elegy author] J.D. Vance, for instance, is that it has such a deep and rich set of meanings and practices attached to it. So forging a new kind of politics is not just a matter of changing the discourse in a superficial way, and hoping people will join on, but it’s through long struggles and new practices with different people working and thinking and acting together to break down old barriers and forge new coalitions.

***How about the new national discourse about reparations? Could that take us in a more fruitful direction?***

DH: There are communities in Eastern Oregon that are experiencing 25 percent unemployment, that are dependent on the state for the basic terms of their lives.<sup>3</sup> But when the militia protestors start saying “Rural lives matter,” the reaction to it is, “That’s completely off limits and should be unspeakable.” Clearly it’s a co-optation of Black political movements and suffering, but we don’t want to foreclose the possibility of [the rural poor] linking up with Black social movements, agendas, and concrete policies, understanding that their precarity could be addressed through that. If we think about reparations as some notion of repair, of historic accountability, of looking to the past to help set an agenda for what is to be distributive, just, and fair, then that has a lot of resonance with what communities in Oregon are trying to think about: what they have the right to claim and expect. So, without weighing in on the particulars of reparation policy proposals as such, but as a way of thinking about how the current crisis has to be interrogated through historic inheritances, I think that’s very generative.

Absent those much more imaginative political traditions, these White communities don’t have much to return to, other than a narrow form of producerism. And they end up occupying a wildlife refuge as a way to vent! Versus turning to traditions that have said, “We understand these forms of abandonment, this is nothing new, and we have a long history of summoning alternative possibilities.”

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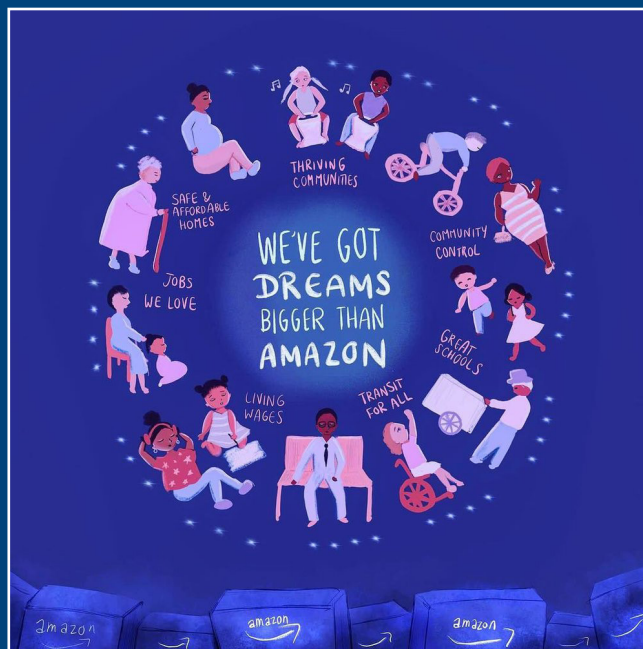


## The Art of Activism: Danbee Kim

Danbee (Deb) Kim is a Chicago-based artist who supports social justice movements and organizations through visual storytelling and design. Originally on the path to become a social worker, Kim now focuses full-time on centering art in movement building. Getting involved in local art communities in Chicago as an adult helped her to reconnect with a creativity she'd practiced since childhood.

Kim is currently a member of For the People (FTP), a collective of Chicago artists of color who use their work to amplify social justice movements. She resists the idea of art as an afterthought. "Art is so crucial because we need imagination to build what we want for the world we want to live in, the world we are fighting for," she said. "Imagination allows us to think of alternative systems, processes, and ways of being that the current status quo is not doing and actually hinder[s] human flourishing."

Kim specializes in visual design, custom illustration, and comics journalism for a variety of campaigns tackling issues such as police violence and mass criminalization. A major-



Danbee Kim, "We've Got Bigger Dreams Than Amazon," 2018, digital illustration. See more at: [danbeekim.com](http://danbeekim.com).

ity of her current work centers racial and economic justice in Chicago. Most recently, Kim created illustrations for the #ReimagineChicago campaign, a movement formed in 2018 in response to gentrification and displacement in the city. The campaign continues to "reimagine what safety, healthy communities, revenue, economy, and neighborhood investment look [like] for our city as opposed to the narrative that funding police increases safety or gentrification is a byproduct of prosperity."

This summer, Kim is launching a creative story-making studio to support "values-based organizations and businesses amplify their work through visual storytelling." She notes

that although her path as an artist sometimes feels vulnerable, "it has also been an incredibly enriching, meaningful journey that has brought me so much joy."

Follow her work on Instagram @by.danbee.

-Gabriel Joffe

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