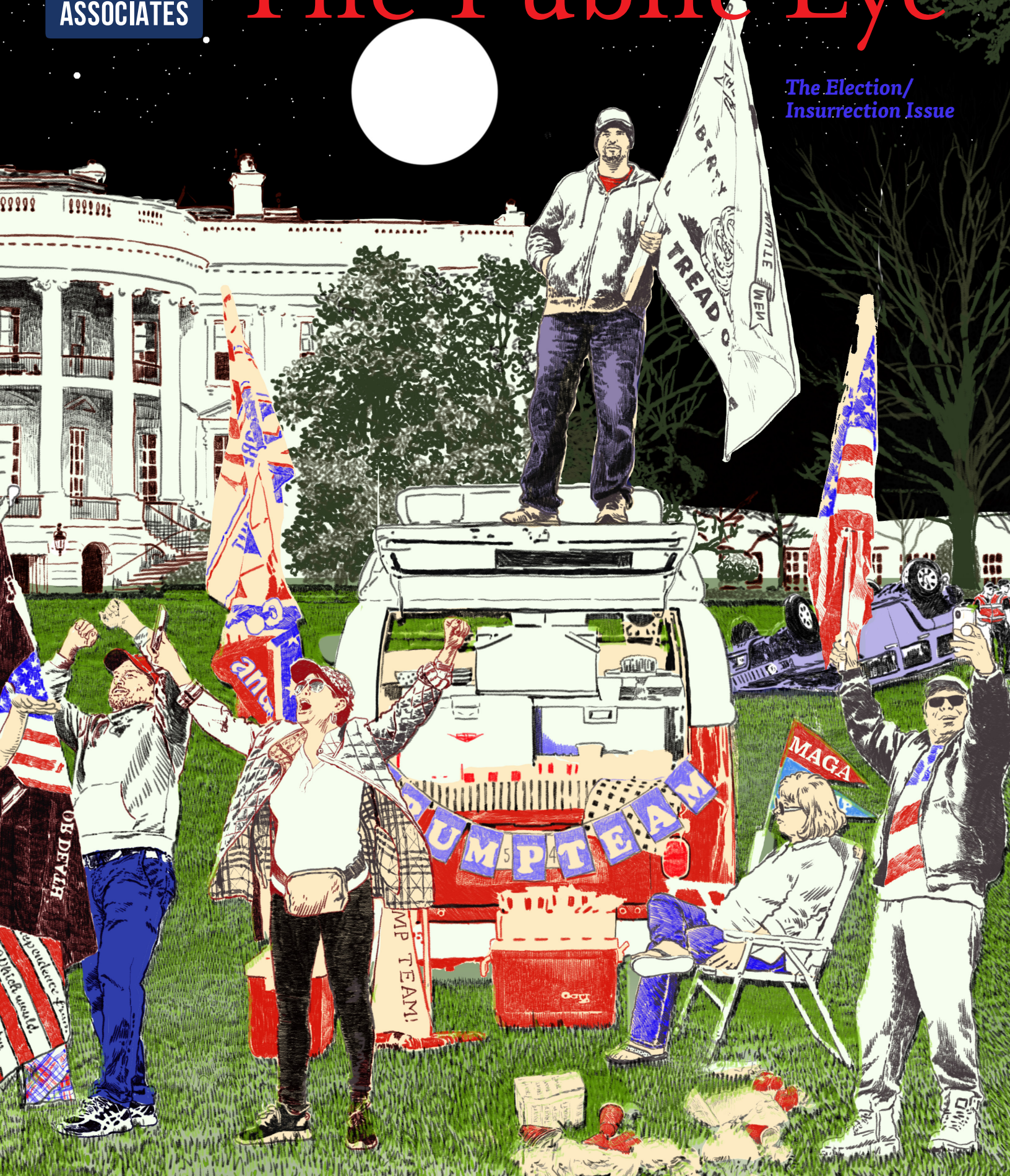


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The Public Eye

*The Election/
Insurrection Issue*



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On January 6, the world watched in horror as many trends PRA has covered for years exploded into the undeniable reality of an attempted coup. The deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol building was the culmination of many things: increasingly militant White supremacism, fed by movement misogyny; Christian nationalism that blends faith, identity, and a grasp for power by any means necessary; the epidemic embrace of conspiracism that allowed Trump and other right-wing leaders to wage a years-long assault on democracy and reality; and much more. For our Winter issue, we've asked PRA staff and friends to reflect on the unsteady ground the U.S. finds itself upon after the 2020 election, both in a staff "annotation" of one iconic image from Jan. 6 (**pg. 22**) and throughout their pieces.

First up is PRA's statement on the insurrection (**pg. 4**): "The relative quiet in the wake of the election apparently lulled many to a sense of security. Yet, White supremacist and 'Patriot' militia organizing often surges when these movements lose ground in the electoral arena, as they shift emphasis from the ballot to the bullet."

In "America First Is Inevitable" (**pg. 5**) Ben Lorber traces the path that movement White nationalism has traveled over the last five years, from the Alt Right's ascent in 2016 to their replacement—after a long and messy "optics war"—with today's America First "Groypers." While the Groypers are, at their core, "the Alt Right warmed over," writes Lorber, they "have strategically modulated their White nationalist beliefs in a careful register of apple-pie Americanism and Christian nationalism—a synthesis they hope will resonate with the zeitgeist of movement conservatism, making it palatable to a much larger constituency."

For our Q&A (**pg. 11**), Tarso Luís Ramos speaks with journalist Talia Lavin, author of the new book *Culture Warlords: My Journey Into the Dark Web of White Supremacy*.

"Reactionary Power in the Union" (**pg. 14**), Ethan Fauré's piece, investigates the role that law enforcement unions—particularly those for ICE and Border Patrol officers—have played in politicizing police work. Throughout the Trump administration, these unions ushered in a new era of outspokenly right-wing immigration enforcement, enmeshing immigration police in the same right-wing media ecosystem that propped up Trump. And as Biden works to undo the abuses of his predecessor, he can expect vehement opposition from these groups.

In a complementary article, "The Long and Tangled History of Law Enforcement and Right-Wing Violence" (**pg. 17**), Naomi Braine explores why it is that the Capitol Police were so unprepared for the mob that attacked them, despite warnings about extensive online planning for the invasion. Part of the answer involves law enforcement support for far-right ideas, and part of it is the historical pattern of downplaying right-wing threats to democracy.

In “Broken Windows’ Policing During COVID-19” (pg. 19), we excerpt a vital new report from the COVID19 Policing Project that looks at how enforcement of coronavirus-related public health orders replicates and expands the failed law enforcement paradigm that unevenly targets populations already most vulnerable to the pandemic.

A huge factor in both the insurrection and the overall state of U.S. politics is the viral spread of conspiracy theories and disinformation. In “Conspiracy for the Masses” (pg. 24) Jaclyn Fox and Carolyn Gallaher showcase original data research into the overlapping QAnon and anti-COVID “lockdown” networks that spread across Facebook over the past year. Their results are both rigorous and chilling: “a conspiracy-based coalition that brings far-right and mainstream operators together” to create “a cohesive counter-narrative about power in the U.S. that is bigger than the sum of its parts.”

In “Class of 2020” (pg. 31) Cloee Cooper assesses the broader slate of far-right political candidates who ran for office last year, highlighting three candidates out of scores who ran on platforms that embraced everything from Christian Dominionism to Patriot movements to QAnon. While the Republican Party has always welcomed some far-right candidates, Cooper writes, “the 2020 election opened the floodgates to insurgents outmaneuvering their establishment counterparts,” and delivers a striking warning about what we can expect from the GOP going forward.

Lastly, although almost every modern Democratic victory has brought accompanying predictions of the Religious Right’s collapse, that’s never been the case, as Frederick Clarkson makes clear in “Still Here” (pg. 35). Despite Trump’s defeat, the results of November’s election show that the Christian Right likely remains the best-organized voting bloc in the U.S.: maintaining their power at the ballot box even as their proportion of the overall population declines, ensuring they remain a force to contend with.

As always, PRA will continue to publish fresh research, reports, and analysis online, so be sure to visit us at politicalresearch.org.

Thank you,
Kathryn Joyce



Statement on the January 6 Insurrection

In the run-up to the 2020 election, Political Research Associates warned that Trump would never concede defeat and that his volatile mix of supporters would take to the streets to contest the results if he lost at the polls. We recognized the danger of an attempted “soft” coup (lacking support of the military or other security forces), helped social justice groups prepare, and for weeks followed the various factions of the U.S. Right that have openly planned actions and threatened political violence.

On January 6, a right-wing mob incited by President Trump breached the Capitol complex in Washington, D.C., forcing lawmakers to delay the traditional certification of the presidential election. Only hours before, Trump had doubled-down on his election-results denial. “We will never give up. We will never concede,” he told his followers during a 70-minute address at the Ellipse, concluding with a call for them to “walk down to the Capitol.” They heard. Proud Boys chanted “1776!” as the crowd became a mob marching to confront Congress. A mixed group of hundreds of White nationalists, militia members, QAnon conspiracists, anti-abortion militants, and MAGA provocateurs brushed past the police and barricades, breaking windows to force their way into the building. In the chaos that followed, legislators were evacuated, and one person, apparently a member of the pro-Trump mob, was shot and killed.

Law enforcement allowed the siege to persist for several hours before clearing rioters from the scene after 5:00 pm ET. President Trump eventually told the lawless crowd to go home in a video address

where he expressed appreciation, stating “we love you, you are very special.” While the pro-Trump mob scaled Capitol walls, destroyed property, taunted police, and assaulted journalists, state capitals in Arizona, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, and other states faced concurrent disturbances by armed or unruly supporters of the President.

Trump and his agents of insurrection threaten the peaceful transfer of presidential power and offer an alternative

rection will soon shift the power balance in Congress, yet we remain engaged in a much deeper struggle over who is an American—who belongs and to whom government is accountable. And, beyond that, who governs.

The relative quiet in the wake of the election apparently lulled many to a sense of security. Yet, White supremacist and “Patriot” militia organizing often surges when these movements lose ground in the electoral arena, as they shift emphasis from the ballot to the bullet. PRA

advises social justice and democracy organizers to prepare for a sustained period of far-right mobilization against the incoming administration—and against social justice movement-building—fueled by conspiracy theories,

bigotry, and rejection of the most basic democratic norms.

Yesterday’s dramatic far-right insurrection marked the first successful assault on the Capitol in over two hundred years. On that same day, the United States recorded a record number of deaths from COVID-19. The quiet violence of systemic racism, patriarchy, and severe economic inequality continue to erode democracy and social justice and create the conditions for right-wing populist and authoritarian movements. These systemic inequalities were not created by and will not come to an end with Trump’s presidency. Rather, we who believe in emancipatory multiracial feminist democracy must both block the further capture of politics and society by authoritarian forces, and continue to build more just and democratic political and economic systems. Certifying the results of the presidential election is mere prelude to the deeper fight for authentic democracy.

The quiet violence of systemic racism, patriarchy, and severe economic inequality continue to erode democracy and social justice and create the conditions for right-wing populist and authoritarian movements.

path to authoritarian rule. Senators Cruz and Hawley and all other leaders attempting to overturn the election share responsibility for this violent assault on democracy and should be held accountable alongside the mobs. A much broader circle of political figures, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Vice President Mike Pence, have been complicit “gravediggers of democracy” and must also be held to account.

Prior expressions of White supremacy, whether from vigilante or state forces, have been deadlier and more painfully endured, but it does not diminish these sacrifices to be alarmed by the dramatic images of a Capitol takeover saturated with racist, misogynist, antisemitic, and anti-democratic symbolism. All of this is intolerable. Our only comfort is rooted in righteous multiracial movement building and unbreakable solidarity. The Black-led progressive victories delivered in Georgia on the same day as the insur-

“America First Is Inevitable”

Nick Fuentes, the Groyper Army, and the Mainstreaming of White Nationalism



Flying the America First flag at the Million MAGA March on November 14, 2020. Credit: Elvert Barnes via Flickr.

On November 19, 2016, days after Donald Trump’s startling election victory, White nationalist Richard Spencer stood in an event space near the White House, feeling the wind of history in his sails. Addressing the approximately 200 attendees of his National Policy Institute’s yearly conference—a hodgepodge of middle-class Millennials, aging White nationalists, neonazis, hipster identitarians, and other Alt Right figures—Spencer yelled, “Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!” Several audience members raised their forearms

in Nazi salutes.¹ Captured on video, the stunt bewildered and frightened the U.S. public and helped lend the Alt Right national infamy.

Four years later, on November 14, 2020, Spencer and the Alt Right had faded from prominence, and Washington’s streets played host to Generation Z’s version of White nationalism. In a corner of the Million MAGA March—a gathering of between 11,000 and 15,000 Trump supporters who’d come to the capital to protest Trump’s electoral loss—22-year-old Nick Fuentes repeatedly bellowed

“America First!” into a megaphone while more than 100 of his followers roared in approval.²

Fuentes’ army of self-described “Groypers”—a name borrowed from their online mascot, a cartoon toad closely related to the Alt Right icon Pepe the Frog—looked like clean-cut, Generation Z, White kids: campus Republican types in polo shirts, jeans, and MAGA hats, wielding American flags and edgy memes on their phones. The Groypers blended into the larger MAGA crowd, distinguished only by their cluster of

blue “America First” flags, while Fuentes, in a speech carefully tailored to appeal to mainstream Trump supporters, championed “the American people, rising up and taking control over our government and over our country once again.”³ There were no audible calls to save the White race from extinction at Fuentes’ rally, though, in endless talk of preserving the “tradition” and “heritage” of “our people

the free-market libertarianism of his early high school years to a “race realism” fixated on narratives of White dispossession and ethnonationalism.⁵ Fuentes, like many others, was energized by what he’d seen: the coalition of Identitarians, National Socialists, Klansmen, neo-Confederates, and militia members that had flexed its collective muscle on the streets of Charlottesville. “The rootless trans-

ment. Trump’s 2016 campaign appeals to White identity politics, anti-globalism, foreign policy isolationism, and economic nationalism had, to their eyes, been co-opted, subverted, and defanged by the “globalist” conservative establishment and donor class: a faction they saw as embodying an anti-White agenda of open borders for immigrants and trade, liberal cosmopolitanism, and slavish support for Israel.

Given this reality, the movement debated whether it should prioritize mainstream respectability—working within the political system to gradually transform conservative institutions and public opinion—or instead develop inward-facing institutions, catering to a seasoned cadre of pure ideologues, often striving for the revolutionary overthrow or collapse of the entire system, by any means necessary.

The vanguardists, or “wignats”—a loose label meaning “Wigger Nationalists,” usually used as a pejorative by critics of the faction—chose the latter path. “Mainstreaming is running out of time,” wrote White nationalist polemicist Brad Griffin, later a vocal critic of the Groyppers, on his blog *Occidental Dissent* in 2018. “We’ve only got around 20 years now until we are an outright racial minority in the United States.”⁸ Convinced that there was “no political solution” capable of halting the quickening demographic extinction of the White race, many advocated violence, including “accelerationist” terror against minorities and the state, up to and including mass shootings.⁹ Some of their supporters even followed through, and a wave of FBI crackdowns against accelerationist terror cells ensued.¹⁰ Many vanguardists came to embrace the bleak pessimism of “the black pill”: movement terminology, riffing off the “red pill” of conservative awakening, to describe despair and hopelessness.¹¹ Many retreated from activism entirely, preaching the virtues of self-transformation, White family-rearing, and off-the-grid homesteading. Total independence had a hopeful upside for the black-pillers: if they got their wish and the American system collapsed, they would be prepared to care for their families, protect their allies, and launch a new White nation.

Convinced that there was “no political solution” capable of halting the quickening demographic extinction of the White race, many advocated violence, including “accelerationist” terror against minorities and the state, up to and including mass shootings.

and our historic nation,” the undertone wasn’t hard to detect.

Still, just as Spencer had four years earlier, Fuentes also seemed to feel himself on the brink of history. “We’ve finally arrived into the Trump faction,” Fuentes exulted the next day, speaking to his Groyppers on his nightly “America First” broadcast on the alternative streaming website DLive. The Million MAGA March, he went on, “was really the moment when America First arrived.”⁴

But what exactly had arrived wasn’t yet clear. While Spencer and Fuentes share an overarching political agenda—saving the “White race” from demographic “extinction”—the 2016 Alt Right and 2020 America First/Groyper movements differ significantly on questions of movement strategy and tactics, optics and orientation. How is it that, over Trump’s four years in office, the once vibrant Alt Right—itself a strategic rebranding of previous White nationalist formations—has shrunk to a shadow of its former self, while Fuentes’ mainstreaming star has continued to rise? What can we learn from the past, and what can we anticipate for the future of U.S. White nationalism?

THE OPTICS WARS

When an 18-year-old Nick Fuentes left his family home in the Chicago suburbs for the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, he’d already completed a journey familiar to many on the Alt Right: traveling from

national elite knows that a tidal wave of white identity is coming,” he proclaimed jubilantly on Facebook on the second day of the rally—the day White nationalist James Alex Fields Jr. murdered counter-protestor Heather Heyer in a car attack that would horrify the country. “The fire rises!”⁶

Over the next year, however, the Alt Right fell into confusion and gradual decline. With the nation shocked by the brazen bigotry on display, the chants of “blood and soil” and “Jews will not replace us,” and Heyer’s murder, public initiatives to limit the spread of the movement took on a new intensity. White nationalist personalities and organizations came under a wave of doxxing and social media deplatforming, and were further stymied by lawsuits, infighting, vigorous counter-demonstrations, and general incompetence. By the time “Unite The Right 2.0” was held the following summer, most leading White nationalist groups had fallen into disarray.⁷

At the same time, tensions within the movement came to a head around a series of strategy debates across the Alt Right’s online ecosystem of blogs, forums, and social media platforms, pivoting around questions of “optics”—debates that continue today. The optimism that once led many to believe the insurgent Trump presidency would serve as a wrecking ball to the conservative establishment, flinging open the gates for dissidents like them, had given way to disillusion-

By contrast, the mainstreamers, who came to be pejoratively called “AmNats” (American Nationalists), recommitted themselves to transforming mainstream institutions. Often maintaining qualified support for the broader movement of Trumpism, groups like Identity Evropa (soon to rebrand itself as the American Identity Movement¹²) attempted to infiltrate local GOP party infrastructure and campus conservative groups, quietly introduce and normalize ideas of White

mainstream.” The critical strategy, he explained, “is we have to start changing our look and aesthetic to blend in...put on the American flag...make the appearance of ‘hey, maybe we can create this new space, maybe there are these new guys...they’re a little bit out there, but they’re not like these other guys [the Alt Right]... There’s maybe this new category’....That’s the kind of uncertainty we have to create.”¹⁶ Soon, Fuentes, joined by Patrick Casey at the head of the Groyper movement,

book of far-right homophobia, transphobia, and antisemitism, chastised conservative leaders for abandoning the culture wars against “anal sex” and “drag queen story hour,” and, to paraphrase common movement parlance, for putting “Israel First” and “America Last.”¹⁸ The goal, with these and future public confrontations, was to drive a wedge between leading right-wing figures, portrayed as emblems of a milquetoast, degenerate conservative establishment—derisively shorthanded as “Conservative, Inc.”—and the movement’s energetic, ultra-nationalist, and youthful future.

The goal, with public confrontations, was to drive a wedge between leading right-wing figures, portrayed as emblems of a milquetoast, degenerate conservative establishment, and the movement’s energetic, ultra-nationalist, and youthful future.

Identitarianism, find recruits, and affect policy.¹³ “There’s nothing wrong with having grandiose visions for the future (e.g. the ethno-state), for these can motivate and inspire,” explained Patrick Casey, Identity Evropa’s executive director and a future Groyper leader, in a series of 2018 tweets. “Nevertheless, we need to focus on concrete, achievable goals that make things better for people of European heritage. And above all else, we must be strategic. Short of a cataclysmic event, incrementalism is the way forward.”¹⁴ Eventually, however, these groups found their momentum stymied by waves of deplatforming and doxxing, their rebranding attempts tarred by unshakeable association with the toxic Alt Right brand.¹⁵

In April 2019, Fuentes outlined his theory of change on a private, members-only episode of his “America First” webcast. The task at hand, he outlined, is to “break away and form a new periphery,” made up of “people who are right on the [White nationalist] issues...[but] don’t have all the baggage, all the crazy stuff, all the fringe extreme ideas, talk about violence, symbology that is repugnant to Americans.” Things could change, he reassured his followers, “if enough people get in there, introduce the talking points, infiltrate, start converting people, and build bridges... Bit by bit we start to break down these walls and we start to get back in...and then one day, we become the

would find an opportunity to put this plan into action.

THE GROYPER REBELLION

In the fall of 2019, the Groyper burst into public view with a series of disruptions of speaking events on college campuses held by the conservative youth outfit Turning Point USA (TPUSA). Night after night, in auditoriums packed with campus conservatives, a bevy of clean-cut young White men holding crucifixes packed the audience Q&A line, bombarding speakers with questions designed to bridge the gap between the culture wars of the mainstream Right and the race war sought by White nationalists. “According to the U.S. Census Bureau population projections, in 2045, Whites will account for less than 50 percent of the population in the United States,” began one Groyper in a question to TPUSA head Charlie Kirk at Ohio State University in October 2019. Given that most non-White groups vote Democratic, he continued, “how can we be sure that said American ideals will be maintained when millions of immigrants come in with majority Democratic support? Can you prove that our White European ideals can be maintained if the country’s majority is no longer made up of White European descendants? If not, should we support mass legal immigration?”¹⁷

Other questions, sourced from the play-

When Groyper heckling shut down a TPUSA event featuring Donald Trump Jr. at UCLA in November 2019, the “Groyper Wars” made international news, and voices across the Right wondered if, in fact, conservatism under Trump was undergoing a seismic, generational lurch even further Right.¹⁹ When the Groyper were barred from attending the annual national gatherings of TPUSA and the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), they held their own suit-and-tie America First conferences outside both events, presenting themselves as a credible counter-hegemonic alternative to establishment conservatism.²⁰ “The America First movement has basically taken the initiative as the central challenger to conservative inc,” Fuentes gloated on the alternative social media site Telegram on March 1, 2020. “We are consolidating the dissident Right sphere behind America First against conservative inc....increasingly this is becoming a central and defining fault line.”²¹

From there, Fuentes continued to cultivate his cadre of Groyper as a largely decentralized network: a motley crew of mostly anonymous online racist trolls and disaffected campus conservatives who clustered around the charismatic personality of Fuentes and his “America First” show. With a laser focus on right-wing youth, the Groyper launched their inaugural America First Students chapter at Kansas State University over the winter of 2020, and planned for a campus speaking tour to further influence young conservatives.²² When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, they doubled down on online organizing, storming the Generation Z

social media app TikTok with a flurry of quickly banned America First accounts and challenging young conservative influencers on the app to public confrontation and debate.²³

In a series of late-night Zoom video salons held with Fuentes beginning in late April 2020, dozens of influential Generation Z conservative tastemakers—in-



Still of Nick Fuentes / "America First: It's Good to be Back!" uploaded on September 1, 2020, by America First Conservatism. Each episode of "America First" averages between 1,000 to 10,000 views. Credit: America First Conservatism/YouTube.com.

cluding the creators of the mega-popular Conservative Hype House, commanding a combined 54 million likes and 1.5 million followers on TikTok alone—reacted variously, with combative disagreement, skepticism, curiosity, and measured sympathy as an affable Fuentes argued patiently for the core tenets of White nationalism. "You need a racial core to

and biological racial differences in intelligence and other faculties, and that liberal notions about multiracial societies threaten to doom 21st-century America to failure. When one interlocutor admitted that "alot of us in Turning Point USA are very sympathetic to Nick and the Groyppers," and asked how they could help "fuse those two worlds together,"

Fuentes advised him to be careful "not to get kicked out, and the easiest way to do that is to be way too open about your sympathies." Instead, Fuentes suggested, "begin to share some of your inquiries or ideas with your fellow Turning Point members and see how they react." The goal was to keep "one foot in one world and one foot in the other," in order to influence future leaders of

U.S. conservatism.²⁴

"WE ARE NOT THE ALT RIGHT"

The spirit of the Groyper movement, at its core, is the Alt Right warmed over: a White nationalist boys' club channeling virulent misogyny, racism, antisemitism, and homophobia into edgy meme warfare, with seasoned Alt Right veterans

Since their entry upon the national stage, the Groyppers have strategically modulated their White nationalist beliefs in a careful register of apple-pie Americanism and Christian nationalism.

anchor the country," Fuentes told his audience that night. In a later call, Fuentes said that in order to protect American greatness, their generation must end immigration, since, as he put it, "you cannot replace the population of the country and have the same country." In order to truly solve racial divisions, he continued, conservatives must accept that disparities in education, income, crime rates, and more are rooted in irreconcilable

in their movement base²⁵ and leadership, and Alt Right figureheads, such as live-streamer Baked Alaska²⁶ and *Daily Stormer* editor Andrew Anglin,²⁷ in their broad movement orbit. Since their entry upon the national stage, however, the Groyppers have strategically modulated their White nationalist beliefs in a careful register of apple-pie Americanism and Christian nationalism—a synthesis that significantly departs from other

strands of White nationalism and which they hope will resonate with the zeitgeist of movement conservatism, making it palatable to a much larger constituency. "We are not the Alt-Right," Fuentes insisted emphatically in November 2019 on Telegram. "[The Alt Right] was a racist, atheist, post-American, revolutionary and transnational movement. America First is a traditionalist, Christian, conservative, reformist, American Nationalist Movement."²⁸

The "White race" Fuentes seeks to conserve, far from some mystical Aryan essence, is American through and through, finding its substance and expression in the inherited history, culture, mythology, and, above all, bloodline of generations of White Americans on U.S. soil. While many White nationalists envision a coming apocalyptic collapse of the existing order and subsequent genesis of a radically new, all-White ethnostate, Fuentes' more modest, and deeply nostalgic, orientation aims to restore a lost "golden age" of White demographic supermajority, while claiming to allow a non-White minority to remain²⁹ and advocating for alliances with right-wing Latinxs in the GOP base.³⁰

This vision allows the Groyppers ample room for coalition-building and some degree of ideological flexibility as they seek to attract disaffected conservatives, including by (very) occasionally highlighting the rare racial minority voice in their overwhelmingly White, and deeply racist, milieu.³¹ Among that small number is Fuentes himself, whose father is half-Mexican and who occasionally identifies as Latino (mostly in an attempt to rebuke charges of White nationalism).³² Other putatively multiracial far-right formations, such as the Proud Boys, claim to champion a non-racial brand of civic nationalist chauvinism.³³ By contrast, the Groyppers, by imbuing buzzwords like "tradition," "heritage," and the "historic American nation" with a distinct, if sometimes subtle, racial core, are engaged in a metapolitical project of dislodging the formally "color-blind" Reaganite conservative consensus, and inserting racial nationalism into the ideas that constitute modern conservatism.

Fervent appeals to a hard-edged, exclu-

sionary Christian nationalism—replete with virulent polemics against gender and sexual “degeneracy,” calls for patriarchal dominance, and Christian control over civic and political life³⁴—allow the mostly Catholic Groypers to graft their campaign to “save the White race” onto an already-established Christian Right framework, lending it the flavor of a militant moral and religious crusade. These appeals also allow Fuentes—who has flirted with Holocaust denial,³⁵ regularly lashes out against “the Jewish media”³⁶ and “world Jewry...running the show,”³⁷ and demonizes conservative Jewish opponents as Christ-haters³⁸ and “luciferian shapeshifter[s]”³⁹—to add overtones of theological anti-Judaism to his populist conspiracism. “This is about the satanic globalist elite,” Fuentes thundered into the megaphone at the Million MAGA March, naming frequent Jewish targets of the Right such as George Soros, “versus us, the people of Christ.”⁴⁰



Richard Spencer (right) at the Freedom of Speech Rally in Washington, D.C., June 25, 2017, exemplifying the “suits, not boots” far-right aesthetic. Credit: Blink O’fanaye via Flickr.

SUITS VS. BOOTS

The Groypers are hardly the first White nationalist formation to choose “suits” over “boots,” in the traditional shorthand for conventional respectability over militant rebellion. Indeed, the contemporary White nationalist movement, as it evolved in the Civil Rights era and beyond, consistently debated the merits of

the violently White supremacist book *The Turner Diaries*—were unimpressed with these mainstreaming efforts, and instead recruited small cadres of dedicated White nationalist foot soldiers into underground counter-institutions.⁴² Over the next several decades, many White nationalists, devastated by the victories of the Civil Rights movement, the rise of the New Left, and other

Groypers, Duke modulated the radical core of his beliefs, playing on fears of White dispossession and victimization felt by a broad segment of White Louisianans.⁴⁴

When Duke won a surprising 55 percent of Louisiana’s White vote as the Republican candidate in the 1991 gubernatorial runoff election, he caught the attention of conservatives around the country, including paleoconservative leader

The Groypers, by imbuing buzzwords like “tradition,” “heritage,” and the “historic American nation” with a distinct racial core, are engaged in a metapolitical project of dislodging the formally “color-blind” Reaganite conservative consensus.

a mainstreaming versus vanguardist approach. In the 1960s, for example, Willis Carto’s Liberty Lobby committed to what one author called a “white supremacist realpolitik”: establishing itself as a Capitol Hill advocacy outfit, becoming active in the presidential campaigns of Barry Goldwater and George Wallace, and seeking to grow its base and build bridges between far-right conservatives and open White nationalists.⁴¹

Movement vanguardists like influential organizer and terror propagandist William Pierce—best known as the au-

thor of the violently White supremacist book *The Turner Diaries*—were unimpressed with these mainstreaming efforts, and instead recruited small cadres of dedicated White nationalist foot soldiers into underground counter-institutions.⁴² Over the next several decades, many White nationalists, devastated by the victories of the Civil Rights movement, the rise of the New Left, and other

During the same time, neonazi and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke also pulled off the most successful White nationalist mainstreaming effort to date, running a series of electoral campaigns for various Louisiana offices that captured national attention. Much like the

pat Buchanan, then launching his own insurgency within the GOP against the interventionist, free-trade, neoconservative consensus. “The way to deal with Mr. Duke,” Buchanan noted as he prepared his own presidential run, “is the way the GOP dealt with the far more formidable challenge of George Wallace. Take a hard look at Duke’s portfolio of winning issues; and expropriate those not in conflict with GOP principles.”⁴⁵

Buchanan’s 1992 campaign, with its direct appeals to White resentment, its populist and isolationist invectives against globalism, and its flirtations with authoritarianism, would enshrine “America First” paleoconservatism on the rightward edge of movement conservatism for decades to come, helping

pave the way for Tea Party populism under Obama and the rise of Trumpism. “The intrepid former Klan wizard,” wrote antifascist author Lenny Zeskind, “had opened the door. But it was Pat Buchanan who walked through.”⁴⁶

Today, it is Fuentes who, in a sense, follows in the footsteps of Buchanan, claiming the paleoconservative legacy as his own as he grafts an explicit racial lens onto the narratives of cultural and civilizational decay popularized by his predecessor, and made mainstream in the era of Trump.

“AMERICA FIRST IS INEVITABLE”

In the final months of 2020, Fuentes continued to speak to sizeable crowds at “Stop the Steal” rallies around the country, and the Groypers’ sustained presence at these events drew a new wave of media attention for the movement.⁴⁷ While most Stop the Steal speakers focused their ire on Democrats, Fuentes consis-

where he’d earned more than \$43,000 in donations in the last two months of 2020 alone.⁵⁵ While the long-term repercussions from that event remain to be seen, in many ways, the Groypers have arrived right on time for the U.S. Right. The Trump revolution unleashed torrents of conspiratorial, authoritarian, populist Christian nationalism that were long brewing in the fractured heart of modern conservatism, catalyzing a mounting process of radicalization across the Right that only stands to accelerate in the wake of the economic and social dislocation caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the bitterness of the Biden victory, and more. And as the conservative coalition reshapes itself in the post-Trump era, there will be no shortage of inroads for mainstreaming movements like the Groypers, and no shortage of recruitment opportunities for vanguardist formations as well. Meanwhile, the results of the 2020 census, to be released in early 2021, may

As the conservative coalition reshapes itself in the post-Trump era, there will be no shortage of inroads for mainstreaming movements like the Groypers, and no shortage of recruitment opportunities for vanguardist formations as well.

tently redirected rage against a Republican establishment that, he insisted, had betrayed and abandoned “King Trump”⁴⁸ in the leader’s hour of greatest need. Calling for Groypers to embed themselves in local GOP infrastructure and run candidates in state and federal primary elections in 2022⁴⁹—a popular insurgent plan to “destroy the GOP” and “replace it from the inside with people who are America First”⁵⁰—Fuentes hoped to use this unstable interregnum to establish a narrative of GOP treason, sharpening the contradictions within electoral conservatism and securing a niche for America First on its far-right flank.

After the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol building, Fuentes—who promoted the rally,⁵¹ floated the prospect of killing legislators to his followers two days before,⁵² and helped incite⁵³ the crowd outside the Capitol—was banned⁵⁴ from his streaming platform DLive,

escalate debates around changing U.S. demographics, with studies already indicating that millions of White people increasingly see themselves as a marginalized and beleaguered racial group.⁵⁶

In a February 2019 members-only broadcast, Fuentes predicted that “Generation Z is going to save us.” As part of the first U.S. generation to be nearly 50 percent people of color, in a cultural milieu where the salience of race relations and identity politics looms large, White members of Generation Z, he argued, “will be the first generation that is truly White”—meaning they will more readily see themselves as a marginalized group, and utilize the language of White identity to articulate perceived group interests and grievances. While acknowledging that much of the generation actually leans liberal to Left, Fuentes insisted that an “extremely vocal minority” could help “change the way that right-wing politics

work and identity politics work in the country.”

“All the ingredients are there,” he continued, “for a real traditionalist, White identitarian movement to rise.”⁵⁷

The vanguardist “wignat” camp, for its part, condemns the Groypers as naive and destined to be co-opted by a GOP that remains structurally incapable of saving the “White race.” Most grudgingly admit, however, that at least for now, their camp has captured the center of gravity for a White nationalist movement at a crossroads. “The divide isn’t really AmNat-Wignat anymore,” acknowledged *CounterCurrents* writer Travis LeBlanc, “so much as it is AmNat versus Not AmNat.”⁵⁸

But in whatever formation, and beyond the vicissitudes of any election cycle, White nationalism continues to pose a full-frontal threat to multiracial democracy. Its threat takes the form not only of tiki-torch marches and sporadic terrorism, but also of mainstreaming efforts like the Groyper movement. Yesterday and today, these efforts have proved themselves capable of winning White nationalist recruits, mobilizing new White conservative constituencies, casting dangerous ideas deeper into the political field, and realigning the conservative consensus for decades to come.

Ben Lorber has worked as an organizer, writer, and movement-builder for over a decade. He has been active in the migrant justice movement, and worked as a community organizer with Grassroots Collaborative, a labor-community coalition fighting for quality public schools, well-resourced neighborhoods, and racial and economic justice in Chicago. From 2015 to 2018, he worked as national campus coordinator with Jewish Voice for Peace, where he helped students organize for Palestinian rights, and developed materials to help expose and explain antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of bigotry. He has written extensively on matters of Jewish history and identity, Middle East peace, and other justice issues for a variety of outlets, including Jacobin, Al Jazeera, In These Times, The Forward, Haaretz, and more.

Culture Warlords

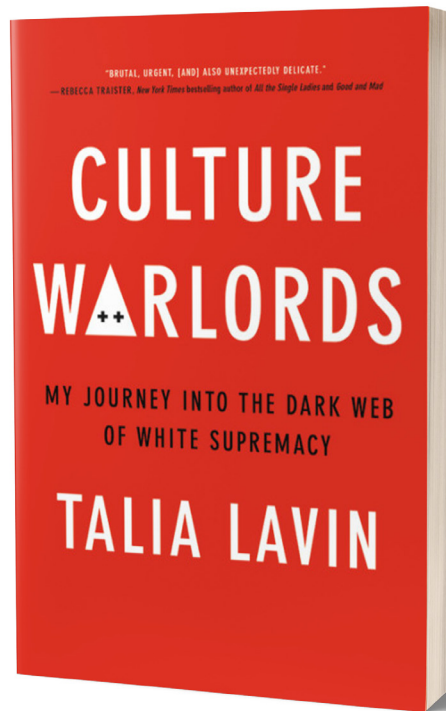
An Author Q&A with Talia Lavin

This fall, anti-fascist journalist Talia Lavin published her first book, *Culture Warlords: My Journey Into the Dark Web of White Supremacy*. The book—reported in a “gonzo” style that at times involved undercover infiltration of online White supremacist networks—reads almost as a travelogue through the racist Far Right, in both literal and figurative ways. Lavin takes readers with her to Ukraine, where she spent a year on a Fulbright scholarship digging into family history, and into the corners of online ecosystems inhabited by antisemites, movement misogynists, White nationalists, and more.

In October, Lavin joined PRA Executive Director Tarso Luís Ramos for an online discussion of her book hosted by the Museum of Jewish Heritage. What follows is an edited excerpt of their conversation.

PRA: Why did you choose to write a book on the modern White supremacist movement, and why in this particular gonzo journalism style?

Lavin: I started writing the book after I was already a known quantity to the Far Right. I had written a number of articles about the Far Right, and I’m a Jewish woman—and that’s a big part of it. I started out trying to engage with these organizations in a more traditional journalistic manner and found the door slammed in my face. Ultimately the choice to go gonzo was a matter of necessity. In order to get a deeper view on these things, and these organizations, I really had to infiltrate. That often involved just



eavesdropping on public chats—not all of it was advanced spycraft of any kind—but sometimes that would lead me to be included in private groups. Sometimes I applied to forums. For example, the largest incel forum on the web asks you to provide a backstory. So I wound up with these fleshed-out alter egos.

It became both a means to understand the rank and file of these movements in ways that went beyond the smooth spokespeople that are very good at pitching their vision for America—in ways that sound less violent than the ideas and rhetoric actually are—and also it enabled me to develop relationships, become more immersed in these worlds, and thus gain a more thorough understanding of them.

Will you tell the story of how you uncovered and exposed the identity of a Ukrainian neonazi who ran a highly

influential online channel glorifying the Christchurch shooter?

I had been surveilling this chat called Brenton Tarrant’s Lads. Brenton Tarrant was the shooter of 51 Muslims at prayer in New Zealand, which was a huge tragedy for that country and a global moment of recognition of the violence inherent in White supremacy. Tarrant also wrote a manifesto that became the direct inspiration for several further acts of terror.

Brenton Tarrant’s Lads was a Ukrainian language channel and I speak some Ukrainian, so I was able to keep an eye on it. One of the things

I noticed was they were distributing translations of the manifesto in Russian and Ukrainian. I had separately joined a public group on Telegram, an encrypted chat app where a lot of White supremacist organizing takes place, called Vorcherschaft Division (the Supremacy Division). It was Americans and Europeans getting together to talk about guns, how much they hate Jews, and engaging in all kinds of stochastic terror, and desire for race war.

I joined under the screen name “Aryan Queen.” I had a very generic stock image with a blond French braid, and I started getting DMs from the gentleman who called himself Der Stürmer (named after Hitler’s favorite tabloid). In order to impress my persona, he revealed that he was one of the administrators of this Ukrainian stochastic terror channel. He set the tone of the dialogue as very flirtatious from the start, so I decided to run

with it, and for five months wound up talking to him. Eventually he gave me a picture of his face, his license plate, told me where he lived and worked. Eventually I felt I had accumulated enough information and I gave it to the investigative site Bellingcat, which published it as “Re-

erful, super cunning, super wealthy opponent that’s everywhere and anywhere. Jews also form the locus of a lot of magical thinking. We’re both the Bolsheviks inculcating your kids in Marxist critical race theory and the capitalists keeping you in poverty. Someone once said anti-

semitism is the socialism of fools, and I think what you see is a funneling of that kind of sentiment into a simpler resentment against Jews.

Anti-blackness is really at the center of White supremacy, of course. The function that antisemitism serves is almost as an ideological linchpin: the idea of the Jew as an omnipotent, world-controlling force.

vealed: The Ukrainian man who runs a neo-nazi terrorist telegram channel.”

He was removed as an administrator, and a couple of weeks later Ukrainian Security Services arrested the people behind the channel. Overall I think sowing dissent in neonazi ranks is a pretty significant thing to be able to do, because these movements use cohesion toward violent ends.

In the book you discuss the ethical challenge of participating in enough hateful discourse to win the trust of the folks you were researching, and making an ethical choice to focus on expressions of antisemitism based on your own Jewish identity. Those of us who study the White nationalist movement understand antisemitism as an ideological pillar of White supremacy: how in the White nationalist imagination, Jews are engineering the mongrelization and downfall of an imagined biologically superior White race, and are puppet masters behind African American accomplishment and self-determination, Global South immigration, multiculturalism, and so on. Could you sketch out this worldview and some of the history behind it?

Anti-blackness is really at the center of White supremacy, of course. The function that antisemitism serves is almost as an ideological linchpin: the idea of the Jew as an omnipotent, world-controlling force. This does two things: first, it enables White men to posit that they are oppressed and fighting against a stronger force, because they have this all-pow-

The idea that Jews equal capital retains its power even 100 years after the publication of *The International Jew* by Henry Ford.

The other factor is the White supremacist idea that Jews have nefariously orchestrated their own assimilation into Whiteness, and seek to dilute it from within. It’s hard to overstate the impressive array of things blamed on Jews, but [in the White supremacist imagination] gay people are a Jewish plot, transness is a Jewish plot, Hollywood diminishing masculinity is a Jewish plot. And Jews are doing all these things to dilute the power of the White race with the ultimate goal—because these are deeply racist people as well as deeply antisemitic people—of creating a mongrelized, mixed-race, “standard citizen” that we are able to control more easily due to our innate cunning. I feel crazy saying this but I’ve seen iterations of these sentiments play out again and again in White supremacist chat rooms.

You mentioned Henry Ford. Can you comment on this sort of legacy in the United States? Any number of historians and analysts have drawn comparisons between our time and the rise of fascism in the first half of the 20th century. What are the most important lineages that you draw from that period of American history to the period we’re living in now?

If you look at *The International Jew*, it was literally distributed at Ford dealerships. You look at *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, that was published in 1903 and was a forgery by Russian security ser-

vices under the Tsar, and yet it still lives on today. It’s sort of a proto-disinformation campaign. It’s a really good example of the ways in which pernicious myths have an attraction that far outstrips reality. The *Protocols* were debunked in their own time, and every decade subsequently; they were debunked by a congressional committee. Yet they retain this attraction because of the simplicity of the worldview they offer.

The idea of an enemy you can pin all your troubles on remains an attractive prospect for a lot of people. That’s why the *Protocols* continue to have appeal online and also why theories like QAnon and the ideological underpinnings of the White Power movement have so much potency still. They speak to a broad human tendency to want to absolve ourselves of our own troubles by finding a scapegoat.

In a section in your book on White supremacist online dating, you describe the geographical and occupational diversity of your erstwhile suitors on WhiteDate.net: large numbers of software engineers, people with jobs, who are nonetheless drawn to and animated by White supremacy. What are some of the myths and realities about the people who make up the White supremacist and White nationalist movements, and why are those myths so persistent?

I think there’s a persistent myth that the only people who join the White Power movement are Toothless Cletuses: someone from the South, uniquely ignorant, uniquely poor, uniquely disenfranchised. What I found from my research, and from reading other people’s work, is that’s just patently not the case. There is no socioeconomic bracket, no level of educational attainment, and no geographical region that is absent from these ideas in American society. There are even people of color who are members of White supremacist groups. Certainly some members of the Proud Boys are people of color and they’ve used this to absolve themselves from accusations of White supremacy.

As to why people cling so tightly to that myth, I think there are two elements. One is the idea that the only reason people turn to these ideas is deep trauma, deep

disaffection, deep inherent damage. I think that is an impulse of Whiteness protecting itself. No matter how broken someone is, you choose your form of brokenness in this world and to choose to inculcate hate in yourself and in the world is the human choice that you're making.

But the second reason I think people

that it's part of the glorious past that they wish to restore.

The other piece of it is that it forms a point of entry for a lot of people. Misogyny can be a deadly hate in its own right, and I spend a lot of time in the book exploring the incel movement: the radicalized misogynist community of involun-

I think there's a persistent myth that the only people who join the White Power movement are Toothless Cletuses: someone from the South, uniquely ignorant, uniquely poor, uniquely disenfranchised. What I found from my research, and from reading other people's work, is that's just patently not the case.

are so attached to this myth, is this desire to push the problem onto the poor and ignorant. To say no one in my nice neighborhood, no one I admire, or no one in my workplace, could be part of these movements. And I think that is again self-absolution. And it really impacts our ability to fight these movements wherever they crop up, which could include your neighborhood.

One of the things that I most appreciate about your book is its focus on misogyny. Despite foundational scholarship on fascism and authoritarianism that clearly links misogyny and gender traditionalism directly to authoritarian personalities, there's nonetheless a tendency within much journalism and scholarship to treat misogyny as an ugly but somehow tangential characteristic rather than a core element and building block of White supremacy.

There's a lot of myth-making that goes into White supremacy. There's always, in every fascist ideology and every form of nationalism, an idealized past that they want to return to, and that forms a lot of their ideological heft and motivation. When it comes to initiating archaic gender roles, that's a major characteristic of all sorts of White nationalist groups. On the one hand, you have the ferocious and unsparing attack on anyone who identifies as feminist, particularly Jewish women and women of color. On the other hand, it forms a major linchpin of White supremacist ideology in the sense

tarily celebrate men. But it also forms a more socially acceptable "gateway hate." Once you have an established class of people it's okay to hate, and a conceptual framework that an element of progressive social ideology is actually a plot to oppress you, then you've gone a lot of the way that it requires to inculcate people into other hates, like hatred of Black people and hatred of Jews.

Since Trump's election in 2016, the tenor of fascistic rhetoric with regard to the Oval Office has changed from triumphant to disillusioned. What is the mood of the White nationalist movement in this kind of crucible moment around the elections?

I think we are potentially looking at a very bloody election season. There's certainly been a distancing from Trump since the triumphant days of 2016. That was a huge recruiting point for White nationalist groups and many new ones formed. But it's very hard to satisfy extremists. And Trump, as much as he's co-opted the Republican Party, has also in some ways enacted a traditional conservative Republican wish list, from tax cuts to pandering to the Christian Right, through his embrace of Israel and Jerusalem. He also has Jews in his cabinet, and gave away his "pure" White daughter to a Jew. This has been a sticking point for White supremacists, so you've seen consequently a move from electoralism into accelerationism: the idea that the worse things get the easier it will be for us to implement our ideology. On the Far Right it

means the more chaos there is, the closer we'll get to rising like a phoenix from the ruins, ethnically cleanse the country, and create a White ethnostate from the horror that we inflict.

When you have Trump out there encouraging vigilante violence, even without slavish adoration of Trump in part of the White Power movement, they can respect and obey a call to create chaos in the accelerationist tradition. There are also elements within the MAGA Right who are militias, who are authoritarians in their own right, and who are willing to wreak whatever havoc is necessary to keep Trump in power. So you have both parts of this nominally anti-state White Power movement, and the "Back the Blue" MAGA people, which has initiated an astonishing amount of violence against protesters over the past three months. You've had dozens of gun attacks, and murders, at protests. You've seen Kyle Rittenhouse, the young man who shot two protesters to death in Kenosha, Wisconsin, embraced fully by the MAGA Right. So a full-throated MAGA embrace of vigilante violence is pretty concerning escalation.

You've also seen Trump himself fanning these flames with armyfortrump.com, encouraging people to intimidate people at the polls. I think if you combine latent MAGA authoritarianism with the violent and well-armed tendencies toward authoritarianism, with the White Power desire for accelerationism and civilizational collapse, you have a really volatile cocktail. I hope to be a Cassandra who is proved horribly wrong by a peaceful transfer of power. I would be delighted to be wrong, but I am very concerned.

Talia Lavin is a freelance writer who has had bylines in The New Yorker, The New Republic, The New York Times Book Review, the Washington Post, the Village Voice, and more. Profoundly anti-racist and a nifty digital native, Lavin possesses the online skills needed to go behind the scenes of the digital White supremacist movement (even if that does mean becoming the frequent target of extremist trolls and Fox News staff).

BY ETHAN FAURÉ

Reactionary Power in the Union

The Repercussions of Politicized Law Enforcement



Counterprotester holding up a “Back the Blue” sign at a protest for racial justice on June 22, 2020. Credit: David Geitgy Sierralupe via Flickr.

On January 6, a right-wing mob took over the U.S. Capitol with relative ease. Among many things this made clear—including the continued threat of far-right violence, reinforced by movement misogyny¹—the coup attempt also demonstrated the significant difference between law enforcement’s reactions to different perceived threats. Since the summer of 2020, social justice protests across the country have often been greeted with overwhelming police force. By contrast, the January 6 insurrection was met, in some instances, with nearly open arms: some Capitol

Police officers posed for selfies with insurrectionists,² while others reportedly provided directions to individual lawmakers’ offices.³ The politicization of law enforcement at all levels, supercharged under the Trump administration, has contributed to these dynamics and is sure to figure in the Right’s broader response to the Biden administration. Federal immigration law enforcement has been particularly susceptible to this politicization, and the result of that will likely figure heavily in the Right’s broader response to the Biden administration’s immigration policies.

In 2016, the unions representing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Border Patrol agents endorsed a presidential candidate for the first time in their history: Donald Trump. In 2020, the National ICE Council⁴ and the National Border Patrol Council (NBPC) doubled down, again endorsing Trump. For two bodies that had never previously weighed in on presidential politics, the endorsements illustrated the increasing stridency of federal immigration enforcement officers in supporting draconian anti-immigrant policies. And as the incoming Biden administration attempts

to reverse some of Trump's most harmful immigration positions—including by re-asserting and expanding deportation relief for immigrant youth and those with Temporary Protected Status, increased refugee resettlement, and eliminating some Trump-era asylum restrictions⁵—they can expect opposition not just from right-wing media and the anti-immigrant movement but also the ICE and Border Patrol unions.

During the Obama administration,

After four years of the White House implementing and promoting their requested policy changes, the unions are now an integral part of the anti-immigrant movement's broader messaging operation and very likely to figure into opposition efforts against the Biden administration.

both the ICE Council and NBPC began waging more public opposition to such policies. Leaders of both unions strayed from their traditional roles of advocating for agents on issues such as salary and benefits and began opining on immigration news of the day and current policy debates on outlets such as Fox and *Breitbart News*, enmeshing themselves in the same right-wing media ecosystem that gave rise to Trump. After four years of the White House implementing and promoting their requested policy changes, the unions are now an integral part of the anti-immigrant movement's broader messaging operation and very likely to figure into opposition efforts against the Biden administration.

The organized anti-immigrant movement was well positioned to assist the two unions. The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and Center for Immigration Studies (CIS)—two leading anti-immigrant organizations founded by the late White nationalist John Tanton—wielded significant influence over the Trump administration's immigration policies,⁶ serving both as outside advisors and establishing a presence within multiple federal agencies.⁷ In early 2017, former employees of FAIR and CIS assumed roles advising leadership of Customs and Border Protection and ICE.⁸ Under their advisement, ICE created a new agency office⁹ to perpetuate fear-mongering narratives about immigrants and crime, refugee resettlement plummeted, and an

“invisible wall”¹⁰ was created within the immigration bureaucracy to halt or dramatically delay many standard immigration processes.

These organizations are poised to remain influential. Some anti-immigrant movement officials who joined the immigration bureaucracy under Trump may remain in government positions under a Biden administration, due to the Trump administration's embrace of “burrowing,” or hiring political appointees into civil

service positions.¹¹ Others may return to or accept new positions at anti-immigrant advocacy organizations, such as Trump's first acting ICE Director Thomas Homan. An Obama-era appointee, Homan rose through the agency's ranks and was selected to lead Trump's ICE during its first 17 months of escalation and increased aversion to oversight.¹² After leaving ICE in 2018, he became a senior fellow at FAIR's legal arm, the Immigration Reform Law Institute.¹³

The anti-immigrant movement's clout within the Trump administration followed its efforts to actively influence multiple levels of law enforcement. Over the last decade, FAIR has worked to cultivate connections with local sheriffs, working with the National Sheriffs' Association¹⁴ to dramatically increase ICE's reach into communities through local cooperation agreements.¹⁵ In 2020, FAIR boasted of having “great relationships with local Border Patrol officers and county sheriffs, who give FAIR inside access to the truth about what is happening on the ground in border states.”¹⁶ The anti-immigrant movement's increased efforts to influence law enforcement officials is a deliberate attempt to add more credibility to an agenda with little public support¹⁷ and to consolidate power within existing government institutions. History suggests leaders of both the ICE Council and NBPC will continue that effort under a Biden administration.

ICE Council President Chris Crane has

worked directly alongside the anti-immigrant movement before. Crane rose to prominence on the anti-immigrant Right by vociferously opposing the Obama Administration's immigration efforts, including the so-called Gang of Eight reform legislation—which, among its many enforcement and militarization provisions, would have provided a path to citizenship for some undocumented immigrants. The bill passed the Senate in 2013, but never came to a vote in the

U.S. House, thanks in large part to Crane, who became conservatives' primary witness against the reforms, speaking at events alongside some of the

bill's main Senate opponents and appearing in congressional hearings three times¹⁸ during debate over the bill.¹⁹ Before 2013, Crane had already been an outspoken anti-immigrant voice, serving as the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit challenging Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) deportation relief program.²⁰ Anti-immigrant organization NumbersUSA funded Crane's lawsuit, and he was represented by future Trump advisor Kris Kobach. (Kobach sought to leverage his relative proximity to the president into higher office, running unsuccessful bids for both Kansas governor and the U.S. Senate during the Trump administration.²¹) Although the lawsuit was dismissed in 2015,²² DACA has been legally contested throughout the Trump administration, and another review of the program is pending before a federal judge in Texas who previously ruled against expanding the program.²³ Regardless of the outcome in that case, Crane surely sees opportunity to again become a prominent opponent of the Biden administration's efforts—particularly as one of the defendants in his 2013 lawsuit, former Director of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Alejandro Mayorkas, is Biden's nominee to lead the Department of Homeland Security.²⁴

Crane's counterpart at the Border Patrol union, NBPC President Brandon Judd, took a less litigious but no less partisan path to prominence on the anti-im-



The Abolish ICE March and Day of Action, Minneapolis, Minnesota, on June 30, 2018. Credit: Fibonacci Blue via Flickr.

migrant Right. Prior to Judd's election to the post in 2013,²⁵ the NBPC website described the construction of border walls and barriers as ineffective and "wasting taxpayer money."²⁶ But after Judd became union president, he reversed the group's position and declared a border wall "an absolute necessity."²⁷ The change underscored the NBPC's strident turn under Judd's leadership, which was also evident in its alignment with right-wing media. In 2015, the union's podcast, "The Green Line,"²⁸ was elevated after it entered into a sponsorship deal with *Breitbart*. In 2016, Judd joined the Trump campaign's presidential transition team, and continued defending the administration in myriad media appearances²⁹—including nearly 70 appearances on Fox News during Trump's presidency, according to Media Matters for America.³⁰ During a January 2020 appearance discussing border barriers, Judd simply stated, "The critics are absolutely wrong."³¹

Trump reciprocated Judd and Crane's support, acknowledging the two in a speech at the Department of Homeland Security shortly after signing several immigration-related executive orders during his first week in office, saying the union leaders would "play a very, very important role going forward."³²

union even more resources for advocacy and opposition. Reportedly approved at Trump's urging, the agreement increased the number of union officials, who can engage in partisan activity, nearly tripling the number of work hours they can devote to union activity. The agreement went into effect mere weeks before the administration sharply curtailed the amount of time other federal workers can devote to union activities.³⁷ The agreement also creates a structural advantage for the NBPC, allowing it to devote a disproportionate amount of time to political activities while fostering a false impression of union support for anti-immigrant measures, as other labor movement advocates point out.

"It's extremely unfortunate that these organizations are taking those sorts of positions that are extremely destructive to the working class and antithetical to what the labor movement ought to stand for," United Electrical Workers Western Region President Carl Rosen told *In These Times* in 2018. "I think it is important for the labor movement as a whole to stand up on the side of justice and condemn organizations taking those positions."³⁸ Much as local police unions have played an outsized role in protecting officers from accountability for police brutality

What followed, of course, was four years of violent and blatant abuses carried out by both agencies, including family separations at the border,³³ forced sterilization of detainees,³⁴ increased militarization of interior enforcement actions,³⁵ and general impunity, as disciplinary systems within the agencies remain woefully inadequate.³⁶

The NBPC's latest collective bargaining agreement, signed in 2019, provides the

and misconduct,³⁹ the ICE and Border Patrol unions have lent their considerable support for continued marginalization of immigrant communities and upholding systems of abuse and social control.

Reversing the Trump administration's most harmful and egregious policies is imperative, but simply returning to Obama-era policies—as many expect Biden to do—is insufficient. Advocates will rightly point out the flaws of a "felons, not families" framework, which keeps most of the mass deportation apparatus in place. At the same time, the incoming administration needs to address the politicization of law enforcement, which has reached a fever pitch, with officers traveling from across the country to participate in the January 6 riots,⁴⁰ and threatening to erase the distinction between state power and far-right social movements.

Our current era of "Back the Blue" backlash to social justice movements has been fostered by years of right-wing, anti-immigrant outreach to law enforcement,⁴¹ reinforcing reactionary beliefs and perceived victimization at all levels. Even modest reform proposals from a centrist administration will invite torrents of opposition from virtually all sectors of the Right. Recognizing the role law enforcement will play in those opposition efforts, repressing social justice movements while bolstering their reactionary allies both within and outside the state, is necessary for any effective response.

Ethan Fauré is a researcher focusing on movements promoting anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and White nationalist ideologies. They joined PRA after working with the Center for New Community for five years, authoring groundbreaking reports on anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim activity in the U.S. Ethan works closely with other researchers, journalists, national organizations, and grassroots activists to deepen their understanding of these forces—informing resistance efforts and their work building power across the country.

The Long and Tangled History of Law Enforcement and Right-Wing Violence



A friendly escort from a police officer for Southern Heritage Confederate Flag demonstrators marching en route to a confederate flag rally in Washington, D.C., on September 5, 2015. Credit: Elvert Barnes via Flickr.

On January 6, the world saw competing representations of the United States, as the Deep South state of Georgia sent two Democrats to the Senate just hours before hundreds of Trump supporters invaded the Capitol with the goal of overturning the presidential election. Much early media coverage of the Capitol skated the line between danger and farce: images of crowds breaking down doors mixed with footage of rioters posing in the rotunda and, of course, the “Q Shaman” in face paint and horned, animal fur hat. More disquieting images emerged throughout the day: a makeshift gallows, a Confederate flag paraded through the halls of Congress, a Capitol police officer taking a selfie with a rioter.

Since the insurrection, public attention has shifted to questions about why the Capitol police were so unprepared despite warnings regarding the extensive online planning of the invasion; about the presence of off-duty police, military, and right-wing state legislators among the rioters; and the enormous gap between law enforcement’s response to racial justice protests over the summer and the right-wing riot on the 6th. Answering these questions requires grappling with the history of both the connections among far-right movements, police, and military forces and U.S. understandings of “terrorism.”

There is a long history of police and military involvement in violent White supremacist organizations in particular and

far-right mobilization in general.¹ The anti-government militia group the Oath Keepers, for example, has long boasted of their success recruiting among the military and police.² The emerging evidence that some Capitol Police officers supported the rioters, and that some of the rioters were off-duty police from other jurisdictions or current or former military,³ are the latest examples of a longstanding pattern.

In a similar vein, the FBI and Department of Homeland Security have a history of simultaneously documenting and obscuring right-wing involvement in domestic terrorism. In 2009, for example, a unit within the DHS created a report on domestic extremists for law enforcement, which was leaked and then quickly with-

drawn under pressure from conservative legislators; DHS subsequently gutted the domestic terrorism unit that produced the report.⁴ In 2017, just days before the “Unite the Right” march in Charlottesville, Virginia, the FBI released a report on “Black Identity Extremists” as a potential terror threat, inventing a category that explicitly targeted Black organizing against police brutality.⁵ More recently, in the summer of 2020, the first draft of an internal DHS report explicitly described White supremacists as the most serious terror threat in the U.S., but subsequent

right actions have been. The presence of armed groups in Michigan, Colorado, and other state capitals in 2020 was largely framed in terms of political polarization and resistance to public health measures such as masks and business closures, but these explanations collapse in the face of the Capitol invasion.

The law enforcement and media have responded to the gravity of the invasion and pressure from politicians who were legitimately horrified by what took place. There has been ongoing coverage in mainstream media exposing the links

joined the Klan didn’t see its violence as disqualifying, even if they did not engage in it themselves.¹⁰ In 2020, just over 74 million Americans voted for Trump; the White nationalism central to Trumpism has the potential to accept and promote violence as a response to societal changes and the (slowly) increasing representative diversity within the executive and legislative branches.

U.S. society has normalized very high levels of violence, much of it linked to right-wing actors and groups. There is the relentless violence toward abortion clinics and providers; mass shootings largely perpetrated by White men; the militarization of police forces and their structural violence toward communities of color. Similarly, the reality of far-right violence has been sidelined within operational understandings of “domestic terrorism”—something that both results from and enhances the normalization of White, right-wing violence overall.

A powerful response to what happened on January 6, and the risks we face as a society, would be to challenge the normalization of violence in the U.S. We don’t need new laws or police powers focused on domestic terrorism, or to further restrict access to public space; we certainly don’t need to further militarize law enforcement or expand the carceral system. Any increase in the violence of law enforcement will only increase other forms of violence in society, and will undoubtedly impact the vulnerable more than the powerful. As a society, we need to de-normalize violence, and this process would support the creation of a more just and equitable society.

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The emerging evidence that some Capitol Police officers supported the rioters, and that some of the rioters were off-duty police from other jurisdictions or current or former military, are the latest examples of a longstanding pattern.

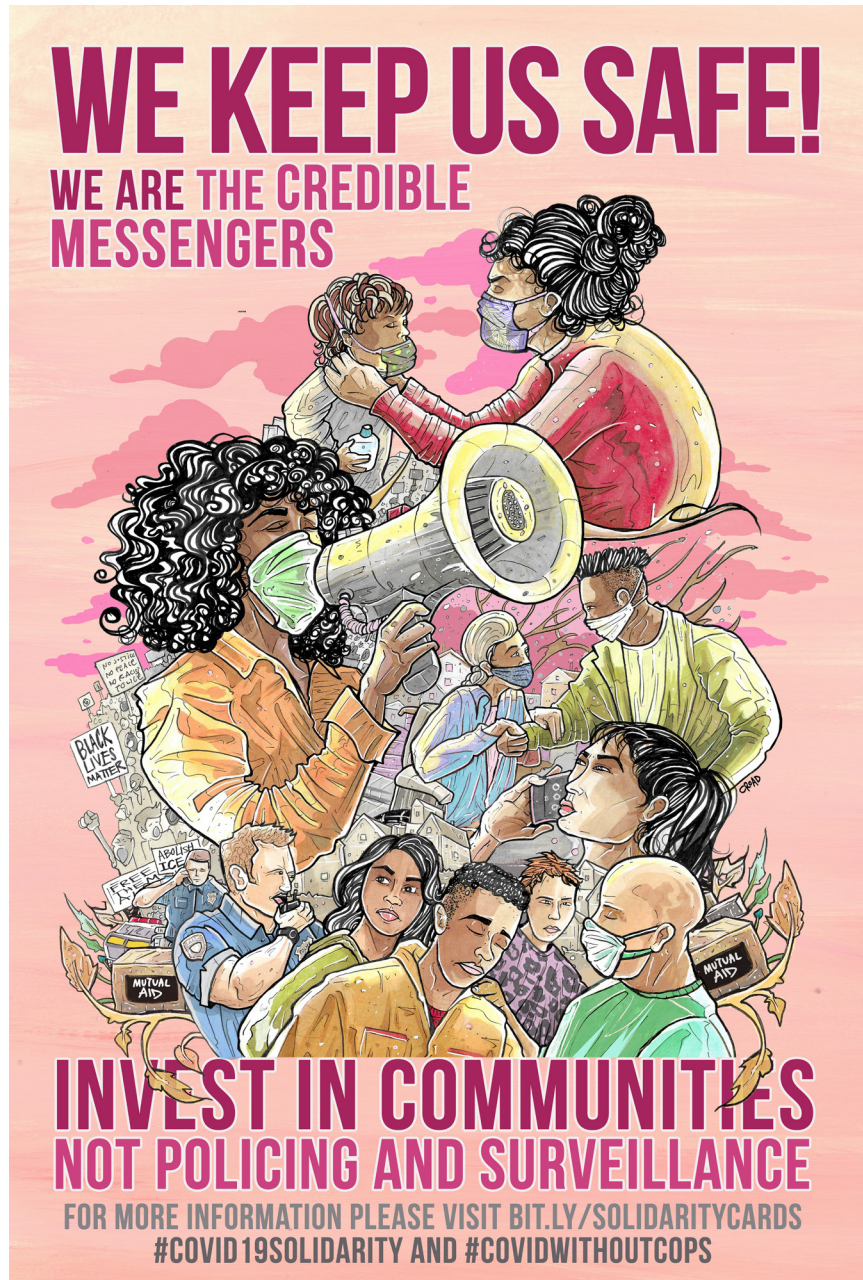
drafts replaced that with the non-specific phrase “domestic violent extremists,”⁶ which seems to invite inclusion of racial justice activists. The recent news that the FBI and DHS had substantial evidence of right-wing planning for January 6, but failed to share it outside those agencies in the expected ways,⁷ including with Washington law enforcement, continues this pattern. FBI officials told reporters that they and DHS decided against sharing a bulletin about the threat out of concern for protecting the First Amendment rights of pro-Trump protesters, although there appeared to be no similar concern regarding the release of intelligence bulletins ahead of Black Lives Matter protests last summer.⁸ All of this makes clear that federal law enforcement both knows about and systematically downplays the risk of politically motivated violence by White supremacist and other far-right movements, and that conservative legislators have played a role in this at times.

The recent insurrection makes visible these longstanding patterns of complicity, but the event itself, and its aftermath, lead us into new territory. This time, White supremacists and the Far Right invaded and shut down Congress, killed a member of the Capitol Police, and threatened to murder the vice president—all at the instigation of the sitting president. This level of assault cannot be covered up or downplayed the way previous far-

between far-right movements, law enforcement, and the military, as well as the failures of federal law enforcement in response to events that were openly planned on social media. Probably related to this, there have also been highly visible nationwide investigations and arrests, including of police and members of the military, as well as significant vetting of the National Guard troops brought in for the Biden-Harris inauguration.⁹

The central challenge now is to consider the implications of this moment going forward. Right-wing movements grew significantly under the Trump administration, and that may continue over the next few years. Their successful invasion of the Capitol, with the encouragement of President Trump and perhaps multiple legislators, may well enhance their numbers as well as their sense of power and entitlement; the arrests and heightened scrutiny from—and of—law enforcement may strengthen the power of anti-government militias within the Far Right. The very elements many Americans find shocking, such as the participation of law enforcement and the middle class, may destigmatize the Far Right for some people and aid recruitment for a time. During the 1920s and early ’30s, the Ku Klux Klan functioned as a national fraternal organization without changing its ideology or rejecting violent terrorism; many White American Protestants who

“Broken Windows” Policing During COVID-19



Poster by Cristina C. Carrera (@croadcore)

In November, the country breathed a sigh of relief when then-President Elect Joe Biden appointed a Coronavirus Task Force populated by experts, signaling a return to science and, hopefully, a critical change in managing the pandemic, even as the death toll continued to rise. On his first day in office, Biden enacted a series of COVID-19 related

executive orders, including one establishing a federal mask mandate for all federal offices and properties, as well as certain forms of public transit, and incentives for states and localities to do the same.

on the \$2,000 survival payments promised to voters in Georgia while the country faces a looming eviction and foreclosure crisis, unprecedented unemployment, and food insecurity.

But these moves also beg the question of who will enforce them and how? And at the same time, Biden is in the midst of shortchanging people

As we enter the second year of the coronavirus pandemic, the U.S. stands at a crossroads. How will we move forward? With more pandemic policing and abandonment of Black, Indigenous, incarcerated, disabled, low-income, and unhoused communities to the ravages of a deadly pandemic? Or with deep investments in community supports,

storms around the globe. Instead of meeting these life-threatening conditions with investments in health, safety, and survival, policymakers have used the pandemic as a pretext for expanding policing, criminalization and surveillance, placing individuals and communities at increased risk of violence, illness, and death.

people—while former U.S. President Trump, police, and white nationalist militias defiantly disregard public health orders and practices with impunity.² As the pandemic persisted, and a second, larger wave of infection was predicted, authorities doubled down on policing and punishment by continuing to impose exorbi-

Criminalization is increasingly the default response to every harm, conflict, and need, and the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. As infection rates rose, jurisdictions across the U.S. and around the world began enforcing emergency “shelter-in-place,” “social distancing,” and quarantine orders through aggressive surveillance and policing tactics, steep fines, criminal charges, and harsh penalties.

protection, prevention, and recovery?

What follows is an edited excerpt of the COVID-19 Policing Project’s report, *Unmasked: Impacts of Pandemic Policing*, released in October 2020. Its findings offer a cautionary tale around public health enforcement and illustrates the need to pursue a different path forward, beyond policing and organized abandonment of the communities most devastated by the coronavirus pandemic.

– Andrea Ritchie

EXCERPT

UNMASKED: IMPACTS OF PANDEMIC POLICING

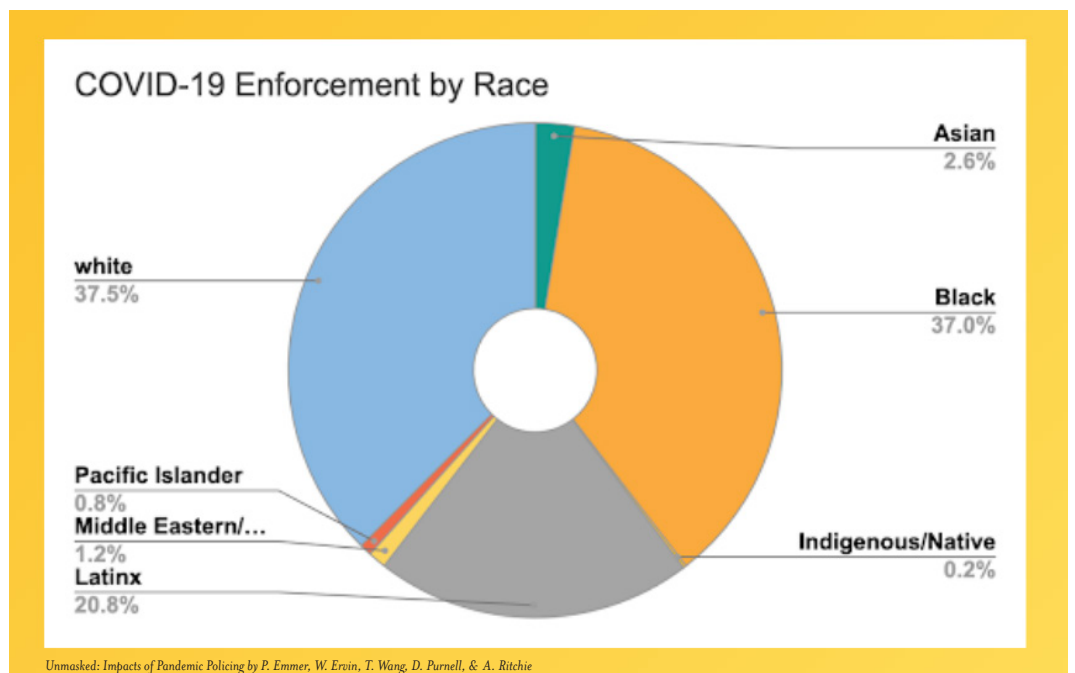
As of this report’s release in October 2020, the U.S. death toll from COVID-19 was approaching a quarter-of-a-million people, many of whom died trapped in jails, prisons, ICE detention centers, and nursing facilities, or from lack of medical care and widespread structural failures in prevention, detection, treatment, and economic support at every level of government.

We are living through multiple intersecting pandemics—the coronavirus pandemic; the unprecedented economic crisis it has precipitated, featuring record unemployment and looming mass evictions; the ongoing pandemic of police violence; and an intensifying climate crisis producing raging wildfires, mudslides, and

Criminalization is increasingly the default response to every harm, conflict, and need, and the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception.¹ As infection rates rose, jurisdictions across the U.S. and around the world began enforcing emergency “shelter-in-place,” “social distancing,” and quarantine orders through aggressive surveillance and policing tactics, steep fines, criminal charges, and harsh penalties. Consistent with existing policing practices, enforcement has focused on communities hardest hit by both the pandemic and economic crisis it has caused—Black, Indigenous and Brown communities, migrants, essential workers, low- and no-income, unhoused, young, and disabled

tant fines and offering people financial rewards to turn in community members who violate public health orders instead of reaching out to support them.

Delegating the task of protecting our communities’ health to law enforcement is counterproductive at best, and enables new forms and contexts of criminalization and police violence. Enforcement of mask and social-distancing orders involves police officers—who in many jurisdictions don’t or inconsistently wear masks—violating social distancing guidance to harass, ticket, and take people into custody in jail facilities that have experienced some of the highest infection rates in the country. Even a brief encounter



with an officer or short detention in a police car can dramatically increase risk of infection, and that risk increases the longer a person spends in a holding cell or jail where social distancing is impossi-

specifically identifies youth of color, unhoused people, women standing on corners, street vendors, and drinking in public, among other things, as indicators of disorder that must be removed through

There is another way, beyond the binary of surveillance and punitive enforcement and abandonment of all public health efforts in a rush to reopen.

ble, and there is little or no access to soap, water, and sanitizer. In a number of cases that have come to light, officers have enforced public health orders using physical violence, further threatening public health.

Instead of offering our communities the information and support we need to stay safe, policymakers are conflating public health with policing, slashing funding for medical care and social service programs while increasing or maintaining police budgets. The federal government allocated \$850 million per state for local law enforcement from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, while offering individuals a one-time \$1,200 economic stimulus payment intended to keep a faltering economy alive, instead of long-term income support enabling individuals to survive. Adding insult to injury, in addition to criminalizing non-compliance with public health orders, legislators seized on the pandemic to further penalize abortion, survival, and protest.

In many respects, police enforcement of coronavirus-related public health orders replicates and expands “broken windows” policing, a paradigm and set of policing practices focused on “order maintenance.”³ The theory was first articulated by right-wing social scientists George Kelling and James Q. Wilson in a 1986 article in *The Atlantic*. Built on flimsy premises and since largely debunked, broken windows policing has nevertheless taken hold across the U.S. and globally. At its core, broken windows policing labels individuals, behaviors and communities as signs of “disorder” that must immediately be rooted out, policed, and punished on the baseless presumption that, if left unchecked, an escalation of violence will inevitably ensue. The theory

enforcement of an ever-expanding list of offenses, criminalizing otherwise lawful conduct in public spaces. Throughout its existence, “broken windows” policing enforcement has disproportionately focused on Black, Brown, queer, trans, unhoused, street vending, and sex trading people and communities, as reflected in stark racial disparities in citations and arrests.

Pandemic policing has now superimposed a new presumption of “public health disorder” on the very people whose mere public presence is already framed as dangerous to the public health and “order” under the “broken windows” framework. This has led to widespread harassment, citation, and physical violence against Black and Brown people in the context of enforcing actual or perceived non-compliance with public health orders, while white people engage in identical behavior, often defiantly and aggressively, with impunity. It has also exposed Black people to harassment, charges and arrests for both appearing masked in public—long considered a broken windows offense—and *not* wearing a mask in public—a violation of current public health policies.⁴

Our analysis of media reports found multiple cases illuminating these parallels. At the height of enforcement of stay-at-home, social distancing and mask orders, police regularly stopped people for violating public health orders and then charged them with “broken windows” offenses. For instance, in New York City, police were repeatedly observed in predominantly Black working-class neighborhoods approaching people standing outside their homes, ostensibly to enforce mask or social distancing requirements, and then writing tickets for “open container” violations. In contrast, resi-

dents photographed NYPD officers in affluent white areas of the city handing out masks as people picnicked.⁵

In Chicago, police officers stationed on street corners in majority-Black and Latinx neighborhoods required people to show ID before being allowed to enter their own residential blocks. While this was justified as a measure to promote social distancing, it was actually an extension of a program to police so-called “criminal loitering” in the area.⁶ Conversely, Black, Brown, Indigenous, migrant, disabled, queer, trans, sex working, and unhoused people whom police had initially arrested, cited, or stopped for broken windows offenses (such as disorderly conduct, drug possession, loitering, open container, or other “quality of life” crimes), were then subject to additional charges of violating social distancing, gathering limits, mask-wearing, and curfew mandates.

There is another way, beyond the binary of surveillance and punitive enforcement and abandonment of all public health efforts in a rush to reopen. Through public education; universal, no-cost, accessible, and high-quality health care; widespread dissemination of up-to-date and reliable public health information; safe housing; rent and mortgage cancellation; income support and unemployment benefits; worker protections; and resourcing community-based organizations, credible messengers and individuals, we can provide individuals and communities with the support necessary to protect ourselves, each other, and our communities, now and in the long term.

For more information and to download the complete report, please visit covid-19policing.com.

The COVID19 Policing Project, co-founded by Andrea J. Ritchie and Derecka Purnell and housed at the Community Resource Hub, tracks coronavirus-related public health orders and enforcement actions, producing regular updates and policy recommendations relating to policing and criminalization in the context of the pandemic. For more information please visit [COVID-19policing.com](https://covid-19policing.com).

While “Back the Blue” sentiment reigned supreme in the MAGA movement during the summer of 2020’s Black Lives Matter uprising, by January 6, repeated clashes with police at right-wing protests led many Proud Boys, White nationalist “Groyppers,” and other MAGA supporters to arrive in Washington ready to battle law enforcement. During the insurrection, one police officer was killed by a crowd that, paradoxically, flew “Thin Blue Line” flags as they stormed police barricades.

One insurrectionist flies the Revolutionary War-era “Appeal to Heaven” flag, since adopted as the marker of the eco-fascist “Pine Tree Party” movement (among other far-right groups). As environmentalism is reintroduced to federal governance under Biden, we will likely see the growth of eco-fascist movements on the Far Right that couch White nationalism in the language of ecological preservation: that the expulsion of non-White immigrant populations and the eradication of vulnerable communities are necessary to the curbing of environmental degradation.

Dozens of current and former police officers and military service members were among the mob that stormed the Capitol. Their participation underscores how pervasive right-wing ideology is among law enforcement and state forces. Removing these individuals from their positions is needed, but must occur alongside systemic changes to address inequities.

Several members of Congress, and their staff and families, were diagnosed with COVID-19 after retreating to a secure area in the Capitol complex. Many others in the safe room were not wearing masks, and refused to do so when asked. Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), whose husband has since tested positive, chose to leave the secure area in order to minimize her own risk of contracting the virus.

Why were there so few Capitol Police on January 6, given that the FBI and right-wing researchers around the country knew for months that protesters were planning on storming the Capitol that day? The lack of police presence and ability to oppose the far-right protesters demonstrated a sharp racial and ideological disparity, prompting national conversations on what the response would have been if the protesters came from the Black Lives Matter movement instead. The events at the Capitol laid bare law enforcement sympathy for Trump, MAGA protesters, and far-right forces more broadly. But while some have responded by calling for more police and heightened surveillance as the solution to far-right insurgencies, those calls would exacerbate the very systems that oppress communities of color.

The January 6th Insurrection

A Snapshot



Many responses to the insurrection, including that of President Biden, amounted to the declaration: “This isn’t America.” But what really is America? Isn’t America the country that stole land from Native people? The country that fought a war because they couldn’t agree on abolishing slavery? The insurrection is only more evidence that people in power can’t take no for an answer. White men are afraid of losing the power they’ve held since the inception of the United States and seem willing to do anything to hold on to that power. So isn’t this precisely what “America” is?



Supporters of President Trump storm the United States Capitol building in Washington, D.C., on January 6, 2021. Credit: Evelyn Hockstein for The Washington Post via Getty Images.

Jacob Anthony Chansley, the horn-helmeted “Q Shaman,” is being held for his participation in the insurrection. Chansley’s hunger strike against the unavailability of organic food in custody has been widely mocked, overshadowing important conversations about the weaponization of food access as a form of carceral control, largely wielded against people of color.

The familiar Betsy Ross flag that features a circle of 13 white stars on a blue canton is one of the more nuanced symbols of White supremacy. Along with the Gadsden “Don’t Tread on Me” flag, it’s been adopted by elements of the Patriot and militia movements since the 1990s. It combines nostalgia for a lost world—when men were men, Indigenous genocide was in, and Black people were enslaved—with a wide-eyed schoolbook enthusiasm for the “spirit of ’76.” Far subtler than the Confederate flag, the Betsy Ross flag speaks to a call to arms in defense of an idealized past—visually amplifying the chants of “1776” by a mass of Proud Boys as they marched toward the Capitol building. The 13-star circle is also integral to the logo of the III Percenters, the largest militia group in the contemporary U.S.

Betsy DeVos, Trump’s Secretary of Education, was one of a number of cabinet members to resign citing the violent insurrection. DeVos used her term to undermine protections for LGBTQ students, students of color, and survivors of school-based violence and harassment.

The mob that stormed the Capitol was at least partly incited and unleashed by Christian Right leaders who have long sought to delegitimize and ultimately overcome the ideas and institutions of constitutional democracy that still stand in the way of their theocratic objectives. In the days and weeks before the insurrection, leaders of the Christian Right sought to overturn the election and helped lead the “Jericho Marches” at the U.S. and state capitols that set the stage for the siege. The significance of their choice of biblical metaphor should not go unremarked. In the biblical story of Jericho, God commands the Israelite army, carrying the Ark of the Covenant (which contained the original Ten Commandments), to invade and conquer the city. When they did, they slaughtered everyone inside.

After the insurrection, multiple platforms banned Trump for incitement of violence and quickly deplatformed other right-wing people and groups as well. Vast amounts of disinformation have been spread via social media for years, feeding bigotry and intolerance. QAnon, many adherents of which participated in the insurrection, relied on YouTube and Facebook to grow the movement’s numbers; Twitter was rife with right-wing messages. Some observers responded that deplatforming is the bare minimum that social media companies can do, even if it’s merely a gesture at this point. Others noted that while governments and private companies have different rights and responsibilities around free speech and platform safety, increased surveillance and policing by either will disproportionately harm Black, Brown, and other people of color, LGBTQ people, sex workers, and political dissidents of all stripes.

Conspiracy for the Masses

Mapping a QAnon Lockdown Network



A QAnon flag at the Second Amendment rally in Virginia in January 2020. Credit: Anthony Crider via Flickr.

In late April 2020, Jessica Prim left her home in Peoria, Illinois, and headed east to New York Harbor, where the U.S. Navy hospital ship *Comfort* was docked. She arrived at midday on April 29. Although the *Comfort* was serving as a field hospital for COVID-19 patients, Prim was convinced it was holding so-called “mole children”: the rescued victims of a child sex-trafficking cabal led by Democrats. Prim, who live-streamed her trip and part of her arrest, brought along 18 knives and promised to “take out” the cabal’s supposed leader,

Hillary Clinton, and her “assistants,” Joe Biden and Tony Podesta.¹ When she was arrested, Prim told police that she felt that President Trump had been speaking directly to her at his coronavirus press conferences.² Journalists who combed Prim’s social media feed after her arrest found numerous references to the conspiracy theory turned mass delusion known as QAnon.

Although Democrats play villains in QAnon’s sex-trafficking conspiracy theory, the plot line closely follows an antisemitic myth from the Middle Ages, known

as the Blood Libel,³ which held that Jews killed Christian children and used their blood in religious ceremonies. Updated variants of the Blood Libel recur throughout history, but the QAnon version is especially dangerous because of its crowd-sourced character and lightning-quick diffusion. It combines discordant elements but papers over them with a stark hero/villain framing. And it is shared so widely on social media platforms (including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, among others) that recipients don’t always know they’re reading verifiably

false information.⁴ Scholars with West Point's Combatting Terrorism Center estimate that Prim made her trip to New York only 20 days after she first encountered QAnon misinformation online.⁵

The spread of QAnon conspiracy theories is also aided by elected officials in the Republican Party. This is striking given the party's recent history. After World War II, Republican activists slowly pushed conspiracy theories to the margins of the party. The New Right political

large, dense, and politically aligned with President Trump and other mainstream⁸ right-wing actors. It also had a sizeable international component, with groups based in Africa, Asia, Eurasia, and Latin America.⁹

Unsurprisingly, the network's dominant narrative focused on the "Deep State." There is no one definition of the "Deep State," of course. In emerging democracies, or semi-authoritarian regimes, the term often refers to private

Updated variants of the Blood Libel recur throughout history, but the QAnon version is especially dangerous because of its crowd-sourced character and lightning-quick diffusion.

coalition that consolidated in the run-up to Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, for example, gained political power in part by expelling conspiratorial actors from the Republican Party, right-leaning think tanks, and conservative publications, and aggressively policing those who tried to reintroduce them.⁶ And for 30 years that's largely where they stayed. But today, the firewall between the Far Right⁷ and mainstream conservatism is collapsing.

Given this shift, we were curious if conspiracy theories are now acting as a unifying force on the Right writ large, allowing groups that are operationally independent and ideologically suspicious of one another to bang the same rhetorical drum. A conspiracy-based coalition that brings far-right and mainstream operators together could create a cohesive counter-narrative about power in the U.S. that is bigger than the sum of its parts.

To explore the possibility, we mapped a QAnon Facebook network, looking at what misinformation was shared and what other actors in the Facebook universe were sharing the same content. This allowed us to identify which groups along the right-wing spectrum were connected through conspiracist thought. We chose late April 2020, a time when far-right activity was heating up across the spectrum, from Prim's QAnon-inspired trip to New York City to widespread protests against COVID-related lockdowns.

The QAnon network we mapped was

forces that hold sway over government actions (such as narco-trafficking groups in Mexico or crime syndicates in Turkey).¹⁰ Trump often used the term in reference to holdovers from the Obama administration, whom he accused of trying to derail his presidency.¹¹ QAnon's definition is broader, emphasizing global elites who want to undermine American power and control its citizens, but leaving open who these elites are, from civil servants to billionaires, with little distinction as to nationality. Bill Gates (born in the U.S.) and George Soros (a native of Hungary) are both frequent targets. The definition's emphasis on unchecked power is also general enough to resonate with ideologies across the Right, from mainstream complaints about China as a world power to far-right suspicions of government overreach.

CONNECTIVE TISSUE FOR A FRACTIOUS RIGHT?

Donald Trump's 2016 presidential run sparked a resurgence of far-right activism in the U.S. For many far-right groups, Trump was something of a political unicorn—a presidential candidate they actually *liked* and wanted to support. As the Anti-Defamation League's Mark Pitcavage explains with reference to the militia movement, "He was the first major party candidate they had ever supported who got elected...they were quite jubilant when he won."¹²

Despite the upsurge, the various groups

that comprise the Far Right historically have shown little appetite or ability to work together. A primary obstacle to far-right unity is ideology, and what that means for enemy identification. White supremacists point primarily to Black and Hispanic Americans. Neonazis believe Jews are the enemy. Other groups, like the Proud Boys, see "Antifa" as their main threat.¹³ Far-right groups also differ on how they view the role of government. Traditional militias¹⁴ believe that the federal government is dangerous, no matter which party is in power. Some White nationalists, by contrast, support a strong federal government, so long as it is run by and for White people.

While misogyny is common across the Far Right, there are also disagreements about the role women should play in achieving movement goals. Militia groups usually welcome women into their ranks, though they're often assigned to administrative roles,¹⁵ while the Proud Boys think women should be housewives and leave the fighting to men.¹⁶ For their part, incels (involuntary celibates)¹⁷ are deeply suspicious of women, with some even supporting violence against women who refuse to have sex with them.¹⁸

Recent attempts to unify groups on the Far Right have also failed. The 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, is a case in point. The rally was organized by Jason Kessler and Richard Spencer to bring together White nationalists, neonazis, neo-Confederates, and militia groups, but after a rally goer killed counterprotester Heather Heyer, the finger pointing began.¹⁹ A few days after the event, the leader of one militia group that attended the rally distanced his group from the rally's organizers, calling Kessler a "piece of shit" and a "dirtbag."²⁰

These divides dilute the power of the Far Right today. However, Trump's popularity among them, and conspiracy theories designed to defend and lionize him, have the potential to bring far-right and mainstream operators into rhetorical sync. Even if these groups disagree on ideology, strategy, and tactics, broad acceptance of misinformation on one half of the political spectrum represents a real threat to American democracy.

WHAT MAKES SOMETHING A CONSPIRACY THEORY?

In its simplest form, a conspiracy is a “secret plot by two or more powerful actors.” Some conspiracies are criminal, designed to break a law (two people conspiring to rob a bank), while others are political, meant to undermine powerful people, organizations, or even states.²¹ In politics, the word *conspiracy* is often shorthand for fanciful or far-fetched explanations, but of course, some conspiracies are true. In the social sciences, the term “conspiracy theory” is typically used for an alleged conspiracy that is pa-

QAnon’s definition is broad, emphasizing global elites who want to undermine American power and control its citizens, but leaving open who these elites are, from civil servants to billionaires, with little distinction as to nationality.

tently false, or for which there is sparse or unconvincing evidence.²²

Conspiracy theories often question the narratives that powerful people use to explain or justify their actions. They are divisive by design. As far-right expert Chip Berlet explains,²³ conspiracy theories tend to divide the world into a besieged “us” and a threatening “them”—frequently an otherized group such as immigrants, homeless people, or racial, religious, and sexual minorities. Not surprisingly, calls to action are often cast in do-or-die terms.

Many political conspiracy theories are broad by design. At the individual level they allow people to connect the actions of distant power brokers to their everyday, lived experiences.

Why people believe conspiracy theories is the subject of debate, but at a macro level, conspiracy theories are manifestations of adherents’ worries, fears, and lived experiences. As Jesse Walker, author of the 2013 book *The United States of Paranoia: A Conspiracy Theory*, explains, a conspiracy theory “says something true about the anxieties and experiences

of the people who believe and repeat it, even if it says nothing true about the objects of the theory itself.”²⁴

RIGHT-WING CONSPIRACY THEORIES SINCE 1970

In 1964 historian Richard Hofstadter coined the term “the paranoid style”²⁵ to describe what he saw as a propensity toward conspiratorial thinking on the fringes of U.S. politics. People who study conspiracy theories take issue with Hofstadter’s assessment that conspiracies are just a fringe phenomenon.²⁶ They also note that the post-war liberal consensus that allowed people on both sides of the

aisle to agree on what was and wasn’t a conspiracy theory has eroded (if it ever existed at all).²⁷

However, Hofstadter’s assumption of a stable middle ground is useful for understanding how conspiratorial views were relegated to the margins of the Political Right after World War II. After the war, far-right groups had considerable sway in the Republican Party. Initially, they trained their ire on Roosevelt’s New Deal program. Friedrich Hayek’s book, *The Road to Serfdom*, for example,

As the Cold War progressed, right-wing conspiracists pointed to a new antagonist—“cosmopolitan” leftists. Wrapping an American flag around antisemitic and anti-elitist sentiments, they promised to rid the U.S. of its internal enemies.

described the New Deal as the first step toward government bondage, and provided bones onto which right-wing conspiracists could add flesh. As the Cold War progressed, right-wing conspiracists pointed to a new antagonist—“cosmopolitan”²⁸ leftists. Wrapping an American flag around antisemitic and anti-elitist sentiments, they promised to rid the U.S. of its internal enemies.

Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Red Scare is a case in point. The ostensible targets of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) were Communists, for example, but Jews were disproportionately affected.²⁹ The actors, directors, and screenwriters hauled before the committee were depicted (using age-old antisemitic tropes) as having divided loyalties and being in cahoots with foreign governments. Republicans ended the Red Scare with a black eye. Senator McCarthy was formally censured by the Senate, and the party’s unity was unnecessarily frayed. Young conservatives took note: conspiracism didn’t pay.

The rebirth of the Right that began in earnest after the Red Scare rested on two pillars: marginalizing conspiratorial-minded groups, and building a new coalition of evangelicals, big business, and neoconservatives. Early leaders in this nascent coalition, which would come to be known as the New Right, believed conspiracy theories would doom Republican chances at the ballot box. The Right had to fight the Left with ideas, not convoluted stories with muddled plotlines. As New Right historian Sara Diamond notes, the New Right started as an intellectual movement and morphed into a social one.³⁰ William F. Buckley led the charge. In 1964 he used his perch as editor at *National Review* to excoriate the John Birch Society’s founder Robert Welch, convincing Welch’s supporters, most notably Barry Goldwater,

to push the organization out of the Republican fold.³¹ So-called neo-conservatives, many of whom were Jewish, also refused to countenance explicit antisemitism in the party.³² By the 1970s, conspiracies had been

largely pushed aside.

Conspiracies continued to circulate on the fringe, however, and echoed the old Right’s isolationism and antisemitism. The most influential was the Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG). ZOG was an Americanized version of a conspiracy that began in Czarist Russia with the publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—the notorious forgery, purportedly

written by Jewish leaders, describing efforts to manipulate countries across the globe.³³ The book was a hoax, but it was reprinted in multiple languages—including, in the U.S., by Henry Ford—used to justify pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe, and later deployed to support Nazism.

working with Mexico's government to recapture Southwestern territories that once had been Mexican. The second contended that then-Presidents Vincente Fox and George W. Bush were plotting to combine Mexico, the U.S., and Canada into a single nation. Although the actors were different, the presumed goal was

U.S. militias, Christian Dominionists, and ethnonationalists.⁴⁰ These groups' focus shifted the movement toward anti-government conspiracism, presaging the rise of "Deep State" rhetoric that would catch fire a decade later. Surprisingly, though the term was popularized in 2014 by a Republican staffer and Tea Party critic,⁴¹ it only entered mainstream discourse after Trump used it to label his enemies, and QAnon and other far-right groups amplified it across social media.

In other words, QAnon conspiracy theories aren't seeping into the mainstream; rather, they start there. And they are spreading internationally, as 20 percent of the core Q Lockdown network was comprised of international groups.

Although ZOG predated the rise of the U.S. militia movement, in the 1980s and '90s, these groups updated the theory for their own purposes. This time their target was the "New World Order" (NWO), a change that provided some rhetorical distance from antisemitism. They also referred to its presumed leaders as "bankers" or "global elites" instead of "Jews" and "Zionists." And they shifted their attention from banks to international organizations, arguing that U.S. leaders were using groups like the United Nations and multilateral trade pacts like the North American Free Trade Agreement to undermine American economic dominance and pave the way for occupation by UN troops.

The NWO resonated in and beyond the militia movement because it reframed the ZOG conspiracy theory for America's postindustrial landscape, providing an explanation for why politicians signed trade deals that cost U.S. jobs and devastated local communities.³⁴ The conspiracy theory was also broad enough to justify opposition to the ongoing paramilitarization of federal police, which began before 9/11 but ramped up considerably in its wake.³⁵ Federal sieges in Waco, Texas, and Ruby Ridge, Idaho, were held up as evidence that the NWO was preparing for imminent takeover and would soon seize law-abiding citizens' guns.

The 1990s also saw the rise of related conspiracy theories, including the Plan de Aztlan and its later spin-off, the North American Union (NUA).³⁶ The first theory posited that Mexican Americans were

similar to that posited in the NWO: global elites scheming to undermine U.S. sovereignty.

Although the New Right coalition had purposefully marginalized conspiratorial voices, by the late '90s, these conspiracies began to slowly creep into the mainstream Right. After the Waco and Ruby Ridge sieges, for example, then-Republican congresswoman Helen Chenoweth (R-ID) held hearings about alleged sightings of black helicopters, which militia groups believe are owned/controlled by the UN.³⁷ In the early 2000s, Republican congressmen Tom Tancredo (R-CO) and Virgil Goode (R-VA) publicly expressed belief in the North American Union conspiracy theory.³⁸

The seep of conspiratorial thinking into the mainstream Right accelerated with the growth of the Tea Party after the 2008 recession. While initial Tea Party groups were focused on opposition to the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) signed into law by George Bush and continued by Barack Obama,³⁹ many local affiliates were quickly overtaken by activists aligned with

MAPPING THE NETWORK

A network, defined most basically, is a collection of people who interact with one another around a common purpose or point of interest. Like a high school, not everyone in a network knows each other, but they tend to share the same information. Also like schools, networks



Pizzagate, the conspiracy theory that charged Democrats are running a child sex-trafficking cabal, figures centrally in the QAnon claims circulating on Facebook. Credit: Becker1999 via Flickr.

have a pecking order. Dominant actors—the cool kids of the network—establish priorities and a sense of what is important, and have the largest platforms for communicating those ideas. Networks also have key conduits that keep different parts of the network connected—like meme-sharing accounts that unite mainstream Republican groups with far-right, international, and even Leftist groups.

government also allows its conspiracy theories to resonate with militias, sovereign citizens, and Trump supporters. Likewise, its underlying antisemitism, homophobia, and racism allow it to connect to neonazis and White nationalists. But the often-coded language also means many people who interface with QAnon conspiracy theories have little idea of the ideologies of hate and extremism that

less likely to see something else. It also offers the illusion of grassroots momentum: fostering the sense that a particular post—and the narrative it's advancing—gained prominence organically. For these reasons, studying link-sharing in the QAnon Facebook network provides a valuable window into how different segments of the Right have built a rhetorical coalition around the “Deep State” conspiracy theory.

Q LOCKDOWN NETWORK

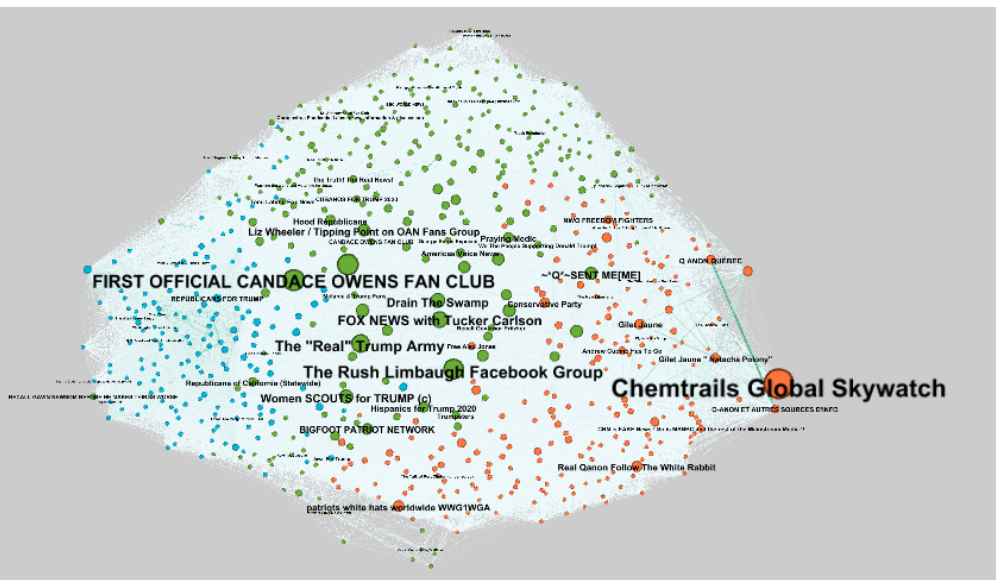
Network Structure

Our first step was to select Facebook groups associated with QAnon. We settled on 23 groups,⁴⁷ with a combined membership of 387,416 accounts. We then extracted all of these groups' posts with links during the week of April 14, 2020, when anti-lockdown protests were in high gear. Finally, we looked⁴⁸ for other Facebook groups—of any type—that shared the same links within six seconds. These groups constituted our “Q Lockdown” network.

The network we mapped was very large—it contained 6,872 distinct Facebook groups, 369.5 million accounts,⁴⁹ and 1.2 million connections (i.e., the total number of connections between groups in the network). When we filtered out⁵⁰ groups that have relatively few connections with other members of the network, we were left with a core of 623 groups, 51.4 million accounts, and 95,000 connections between them.

The core of the Q Lockdown network was dense, with 95,132 connections between groups, accounting for nearly half of all possible connections.⁵¹ Dense networks are ideal for spreading misinformation, because if a few groups are removed from the network (e.g., for violating Facebook policies), there are still plenty of other connections in place to circulate information across the network.

The network's membership was also notably partisan, with almost half the core groups defining themselves in political terms, citing “Trump,” “MAGA,” “drain the swamp,” or other conservative terminology in their names. By contrast, only 4 percent of groups had names that aligned with Patriot or militia ideology,⁵²



Q Lockdown network map, created by authors Jaclyn Fox & Carolyn Gallaher using Gephi (gephi.org).

We chose QAnon as our focus because of its dominance in the conspiracist marketplace. No one knows exactly when QAnon began, but its preeminent origin story⁴² suggests it was born on October 30, 2017, when an anonymous poster named Q claimed Hillary Clinton would be arrested later that afternoon. Q's prediction proved incorrect, but the account won a following by claiming to have a high-level security clearance (level Q in the Department of Energy) and personal knowledge of “Deep State” operatives. Today, QAnon is associated with hundreds of unique conspiracies about topics as diverse as “mole children,” vaccines, and Central American refugees.⁴³

QAnon's dominance is due in part to its structure as a participatory, crowdsourced initiative. Although Q periodically drops hints (so called breadcrumbs or “Q-drops”), adherents are encouraged to “do their own research.”⁴⁴ This allows ordinary users to shape conspiracies as they see fit. Q's suspicion of the federal

underlie them; many don't even know they're reading QAnon material.

For our analysis we mapped⁴⁵ the social network of QAnon Facebook groups during mid-April 2020, when anti-lockdown protests were occurring across the country. Our goal was to find out how big the network was, how dense it was, and what its dominant groups were. We also wanted to know what they shared with each other.

Networks can be defined by place, theme, or through evidence of coordination, such as users who share the same posts or use the same hashtags. We looked at the latter, specifically using coordinated link-sharing behavior—in nonexpert's terms, links that get shared by multiple actors in a network within a narrow time frame.⁴⁶ This behavior allows network members to quickly establish a driving narrative about something and reinforce it through repetition, ensuring not only that more people will see the chosen narrative, but also that they're

and many of which referenced Trump in their name.⁵³

Partisan groups were also the network's key actors. Eight of the top-10 link-sharing groups were Trump-aligned or clearly conservative,⁵⁴ as were nine of the 10 groups that had the most direct connec-

25,000 email addresses and passwords from the Gates Foundation, the National Institute of Health, and the World Health Organization.⁵⁸

China played the role of malevolent international actor. The top-shared links that mentioned China were usually from

well.

To answer our question, we downloaded the names of all Facebook groups who used the hashtag #stopthesteal just before and after the election.⁶⁰ We found that 14 percent of the network's core groups had also spread conspiracy theories about the election, including four groups⁶¹ that are among the lockdown network's most dominant actors.⁶² This suggests that support for Donald Trump is a central feature of QAnon followers. Further, these groups are well placed to spread disinformation across the entire right of the political spectrum, uniting otherwise fractious right-wing groups. Finally, it's worth noting that this core network of disinformation spreaders remained intact even after multiple Facebook purges of QAnon groups.

ARE WE IN A POST-TRUTH WORLD?

Richard Hofstadter's critics were right to call into question his claim that conspiracy theories only exist on the fringes of American life. After all, nearly 10 percent of Americans still don't believe we landed on the moon,⁶³ and so many people refuse to believe Elvis Presley is dead that Wikipedia has a page devoted to Elvis sightings since his death.⁶⁴ But when we focus on the political sphere, Hofstadter's underlying assumption, that conspiracy theories thrive on the fringes because there exists a stable middle ready to reject them, isn't as off-base as some have suggested.

The New Right political coalition *did* effectively banish far-right conspiracy theories to the margins of their movement in the 1970s. That, in turn, allowed Republicans to participate in democratic government, not because they agreed with their Democratic rivals' ideology or policies, but because they held democratic principles in common and followed the same political rulebook. None of this is to romanticize the New Right coalition—conspiratorial voices were always present and sometimes indulged. Pat Buchanan was a frequent Republican pundit on Sunday news shows well into the 2000s, even though he was also one of the GOP's leading conspiracy theorists. But he was never able to break into the top tier of the party. Indeed, after he failed to win his

Instead, even though QAnon's main goal feels mostly apolitical—designed to sow chaos and defend the capricious interests of one man—it has become synonymous with a major political party.

tions with other groups in the network.⁵⁵ These findings suggest that the content QAnon is sharing is not a fringe phenomenon, but a thoroughly mainstream one.

In other words, QAnon conspiracy theories aren't seeping into the mainstream; rather, they start there. And they are spreading internationally, as 20 percent of the core Q Lockdown network was comprised of international groups.

The Conspiracy Theories They Shared

We also analyzed the top 50 links shared by the Q Lockdown network⁵⁶ to see if any key themes or patterns emerged. No one story or issue dominated the top 50 posts, but we found that the "Deep State" was the network's primary concern. Many of their posts included tropes common in previous eras of anti-government conspiracism, including global puppet masters, international bad will toward the U.S., and domestic enablers of U.S. decline.

The puppet master role was filled by Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft and a current philanthropist focused on public health. In the eighth-most shared link, a video of a livestreamed anti-lockdown protest, Gates was described as a "master psychopath that wants to kill [us] all." Gates's name also came up in a conspiratorial video that suggested he wanted to use COVID-19 vaccinations to implant tracking devices in Americans.⁵⁷ This conspiracy has become one of the most enduring of COVID-19 and is a potential public health nightmare as individuals worried about government surveillance vow to refuse vaccinations. Other stories included a *Washington Post* article that raised questions about the hacking of

conservative outlets, such as Fox News or the UK's *Express News*, TV personalities such as Glenn Beck, or Trump-aligned politicians such as Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-TX). Most links accused China of either intentionally creating the COVID-19 virus in a lab, or accidentally doing so and then trying to cover its tracks. Although scientists believe the virus moved to humans naturally, almost 30 percent of Americans surveyed in April believed COVID -19 was created in a lab.⁵⁹ Links pushed by QAnon actors are helping to keep this conspiracy alive.

U.S. mayors and governors were often depicted as stooges, allowing Gates, Democrats, and even China to use COVID-19 as an excuse to tighten their grip on the population. In one video link, for example, Trump supporter Candace Owens likens being forced to wear a mask in Whole Foods to tyranny. Another top-50 link to an NPR article quoted Attorney General Barr promising to take steps to curtail governors' public health restrictions "if we think one goes too far" or became "burdens on civil liberties."

After the Election

Given the fact that most states eventually loosened public health restrictions, we wanted to assess whether any of the Facebook groups in our Q Lockdown network moved on to another conspiracy—namely, President Trump's baseless claims of election fraud. This could demonstrate whether the network came together specifically around pandemic-related issues, or if QAnon conspiracism is sticky enough to draw together disparate right-wing groups around other "Deep State" themes as



Stop the Steal Rally at St. Paul, Minnesota, on January 6 2020. Credit: Chad Davis via Flickr.

Republican presidential primary campaigns in 1992 and 1996, he left the party for his third try in 2000.⁶⁵ However imperfect, GOP efforts to relegate conspiracism to the fringes worked for decades.

Today, the democratic consensus is in tatters. This consensus wouldn't have stopped QAnon conspiracies from emerging and spreading, but it would have kept them out of government. Instead, even though QAnon's main goal feels mostly apolitical—designed to sow chaos and defend the capricious interests of one man—it has become synonymous with a major political party. It is ironic that the party that once decried moral relativism is now firmly in its thrall.

This shift also puts far-right and mainstream operators into similar discursive space. Although we only found a small percentage of groups with names specifically aligned with militias or other far-right groups, their conspiracy theories—about a tyrannical federal government and the traitorous elites—are now front and center in QAnon-inflected mainstream discourse.

But even if we can't agree on what it is these days, truth has consequences.

When Americans think vaccines are embedded with microchips, too many of them will refuse to take them. If they believe Central American refugees fleeing violence are Soros-funded agents provocateurs, they will villainize and dehumanize them. And when ordinary citizens think Democrats are running a pedophile ring, they will continue to show up at pizza parlors,⁶⁶ Navy ships, and any number of other places, armed and ready to fight.

By giving QAnon groups space on its platform, Facebook has contributed to the erosion of the most precious resource in any democracy: a shared consensus on what is true, right, and decent. Despite Facebook's promise to tackle disinformation, its focus on sporadic removals of groups for repeated content violations as opposed to outright movement bans gives members the chance to turn to back-up accounts, create new groups, and continue to thrive.⁶⁷ And Facebook's lax approach means QAnon groups can evade purge detection by continually changing their names to more neutral-sounding titles such as news organizations, celebrities, or even children's movies.⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, many of

the actors in our initial Q Lockdown network study survived Facebook's summer purges, and went on to spread lies about the 2020 presidential election.

It's worth noting that, by early January 2021, 22 of the 23 QAnon groups used in our initial list were removed from Facebook. However, while the explicitly Q-focused pages were taken down, mainstream accounts such as Fox News, Candace Owens, and Trump supporting groups remained, circulating disinformation behind a veil of normalcy. This reality of conspiratorial narratives flooding mainstream discourse makes stemming their flow all the more difficult.

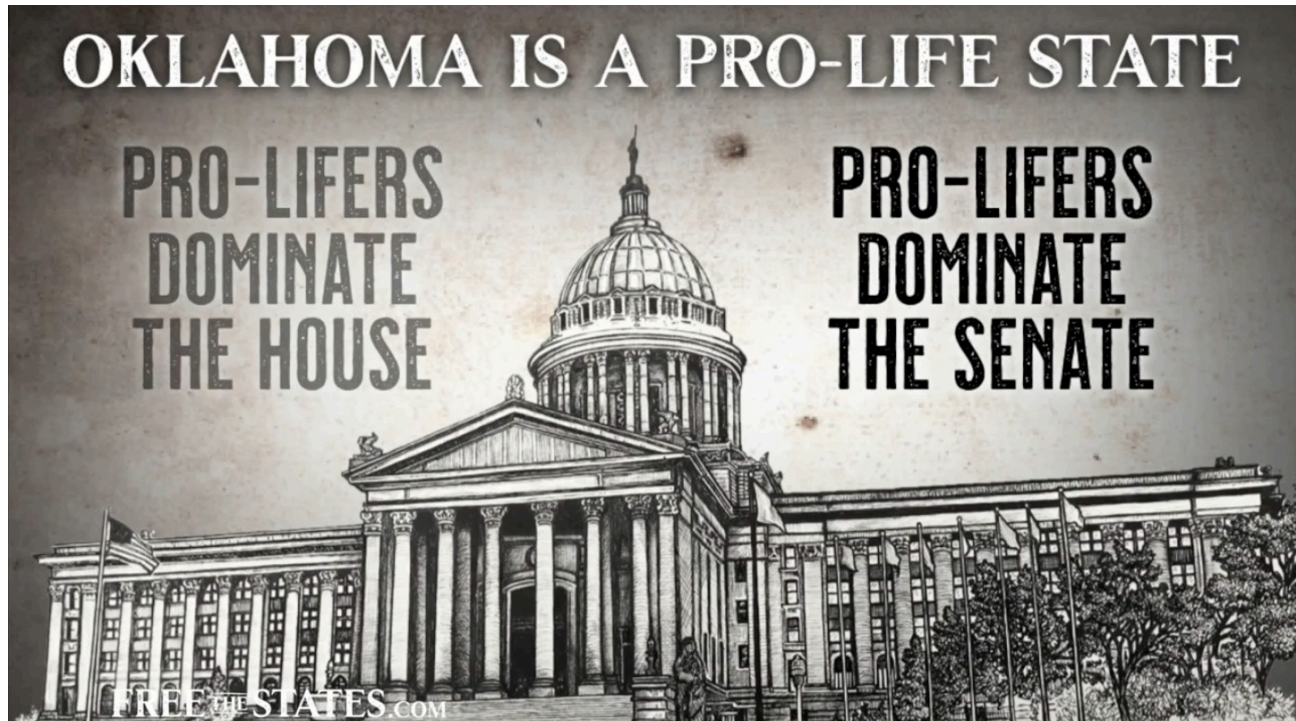
Facebook's failure to rein in misinformation is even more frightening when we consider the international composition of the Q Lockdown network we mapped. QAnon is creating a global following for far-fetched conspiracies that breed resentment, erode trust, and sow confusion. Tackling global problems—and there are plenty of them—will be harder as a result.

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*Carolyn Gallaher is a professor at American University. She has written about right-wing paramilitaries in the U.S. and Northern Ireland. Her first book, *On the Fault Line: Race, Class and the American Patriot Movement* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), looked at the rise of the Patriot movement in Kentucky after the Oklahoma City bombing. Her second book, *After the Peace: Loyalist Paramilitaries in Postaccord Northern Ireland* (Cornell, 2007), examined why loyalist paramilitaries took nearly 10 years after the 1998 peace agreement to decommission their weapons and stand down their fighters.*

Class of 2020

Far-Right Candidates Reveal Where the GOP Is Headed



Still from the abortion abolitionist organization Free the States' presentation on "The State of Abortion in Oklahoma." The election of abortion abolitionist Warren Hamilton to the Oklahoma State Senate was a major win for the Free the States' strategy to infiltrate local government. Credit: Free the States/YouTube.com

While the Trump administration is over, part of its legacy is helping carve a place for 21st-century far-right movements and ideologies in the halls of government and within Republican ranks that look more like 19th-century throwbacks. In the 2020 election, at least 84 far-right candidates—from Christian Dominionists and White nationalists to supporters of Patriot movements and QAnon—ran for federal office on the GOP ticket.¹ Subscribers to the QAnon conspiracy theory comprised the largest category of this class, but the majority of these candidates also

embraced some combination of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, White nationalist, antisemitic, hard anti-LGBTQ, or far-right militia movements.²

The Republican Party had already welcomed some far-right candidates at the state and federal levels prior to Trump's election, but 2020 opened the floodgates to insurgents outmaneuvering their establishment counterparts.³

Among them were a would-be member of Oklahoma's state legislature backed by militant Christian Right anti-abortion activists; a Florida congressional candidate who rose through the ranks of the

Alt Lite; and Georgia's newly elected representative who campaigned on support for QAnon. These candidates and their campaigns were supported by ascendant far-right social movements that are shifting the GOP in ways that will continue to threaten a racially inclusive and just society long after January 20.

THE EMBOLDENED MILITANTS OF THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Conservative White evangelical Christians delivered the White House to Trump in 2016,⁴ with around 81 percent voting in his favor.⁵ In 2020, some polls

show their support slipped to 76 percent, but they remained an overwhelming part of his coalition,⁶ driven by the belief that Trump would help foster a Christian nation—a conviction bolstered by his appointment of anti-abortion judges to the Supreme Court.⁷ But for some Christian Rightists, that's not enough. A network of anti-abortion militants known as "abortion abolitionists" view the majority of U.S. White evangelicals as mere reformists who compromise with a secular system that fundamentally opposes biblical beliefs.⁸ And this year, these purists began to make political headway.

In February 2020, the country's leading abortion abolitionist group, Free the States, organized a national conference in Oklahoma, where the group is based, to promote a new strategy of working with local and state politicians to introduce model legislation.⁹ Buoyed by Trump's anti-abortion promises, over the last two years, abortion abolitionists have shifted their strategy from solely protesting outside abortion clinics to building inroads with state legislators to introduce bills—in six states so far¹⁰—that would treat abortion at any stage as murder. While none of the bills have yet passed, they form a blueprint for the militant anti-abortion movement to continue working within government to agitate for theocracy.

As 2020 progressed, the movement's political standing advanced again, as nine Republican candidates for Oklahoma's state legislature ran on abortion abolitionist platforms.¹¹ Among them was Warren Hamilton, an Army veteran who ran in District 7¹² on promises to ban abortion and return the state "to our Judeo-Christian foundations."

"We can not let Oklahoma become New York, California, or Virginia, where they celebrate abortion, force co-ed bathrooms and showers on school children, deprive citizens—who've committed no crime—of their God-given, unalienable right to bear arms, and prosecute Biblical Christian doctrine and American patrio-

tism as hate speech," wrote Hamilton in a newspaper announcement launching his campaign last January.¹³

District 7, predominantly White and historically Republican,¹⁴ was represented by incumbent Sen. Larry Boggs, an establishment conservative who prioritized the economy and getting "everybody back to work" amid the COVID-19 shutdowns.¹⁵ Hamilton, whose campaign materials highlighted his outsider status ("I'M NOT A POLITICIAN. I'M A

At a critical meeting to determine the district's Republican nomination, Hamilton and Boggs debated an abortion abolitionist bill that was introduced to the state Senate in 2019, which would have created penalties up to life in prison for anyone involved in an abortion.

SOLDIER," read one), focused on ending abortion and getting people to "turn back to God,"¹⁶ while echoing far-right antisemitic claims, including that liberal philanthropist George Soros is the sole financier of "the liberals" in Oklahoma.¹⁷

At a critical meeting to determine the district's Republican nomination, Hamilton and Boggs debated an abortion abolitionist bill that was introduced to the state Senate in 2019, which would have created penalties up to life in prison for anyone involved in an abortion.¹⁸ State Senator Joseph Silk, the bill's author and a close ally of Oklahoma's abortion abolitionist movement, criticized Boggs for failing to support the bill when it was first introduced.¹⁹ The meeting escalated with a Hamilton supporter shouting at Boggs to "repent," and that he was "perpetuating abortion."²⁰

In late August, Hamilton narrowly defeated Boggs, becoming the district's Republican candidate.²¹ And on November 3, he won the general election in a landslide, with nearly 75 percent of the vote,²² a seeming vindication of the abortion abolitionist strategy to infiltrate local government. Immediately following the election, Free the States posted a celebratory meme on their Facebook page, picturing Hamilton alongside another movement candidate, John Jacob, who'd just won a seat in the Indiana House, exclaiming, "ABOLITIONISTS WIN!"

Within days of assuming office on November 16, Hamilton announced plans to file a new bill—an update to the bill he and Boggs previously debated—in Oklahoma's Senate: the Abolition of Abortion in Oklahoma Act/Equal Protection and Equal Justice Act.²³ And with abortion abolitionist chapters in numerous states—including Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, Oklahoma, Texas, and Washington—Hamilton's victory seems likely to embolden the movement's efforts to advance their agenda within the GOP.

PRA Senior Analyst Frederick Clarkson, who has followed Christian Right legislative strategies for decades, said the

merger of this sector of militant Christians into mainstream Republicanism is noteworthy: "People like this used to have a home in the Constitution Party, but have now found a home in the GOP."²⁴

ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENT STILL BINDS THE RACIST RIGHT

When far-right social media provocateur Laura Loomer won the Republican primary for Florida's 21st congressional seat in August, Alt Lite and Trump supporters flocked to West Palm Beach to celebrate her nomination.²⁵ Attending her victory party was Gavin McInnes, founder and former leader of the misogynist street gang the Proud Boys; disgraced former *Breitbart News* personality Milo Yiannopoulos; and Roger Stone, Trump's close confidant whose 40-month prison sentence for lying to Congress was commuted earlier last year.²⁶ As her general campaign began, challenging incumbent Democrat Rep. Lois Frankel, Loomer enjoyed the support of White nationalist website *VDare*,²⁷ Trump ally Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL), Trump's daughter-in-law Lara Trump, and even Trump himself.

Before her campaign, the 27-year-old Loomer was best known as a "proud Islamophobe" and Alt Lite activist who'd been banned from social media platforms for spreading misinformation and hate speech.²⁸ She first gained notoriety in college, when she informed Gateway

Pundit that an imam was on her campus, insinuating that he was a potential terrorist,²⁹ and worked with far-right media operation Project Veritas, donning undercover disguises and personae to investigate her school's alleged ties to ISIS. McInnes's Proud Boys also have worked closely with Project Veritas.³⁰

A fact-sheet compiled by Georgetown University's Bridge Initiative, which researches Islamophobia, details Loomer's long resume of anti-Muslim activism, from joining anti-Sharia law rallies with ACT for America, to citing dubious studies from the anti-Muslim Center for Security Policy, to writing for anti-Muslim activist Pamela Geller's American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI).³¹ In March 2019, following the Christchurch mosque massacre in New Zealand, where 51 Muslims were murdered by a White nationalist gunman, Loomer wrote on Telegram, "Nobody cares about Christchurch. I especially don't. I care about my social media accounts and the fact that Americans are being silenced more than Christchurch."³²



Left to right: Warren Hamilton, Laura Loomer, and Marjorie Taylor Greene. Credit: Oksenate.gov, Wikimedia Commons, and the United States Congress.

With national polls reporting that more than one in three Americans believe a "Deep State" has worked to undermine Trump, broad support for QAnon candidates points to a reservoir of conspiracist voters who might be captured by Greene-like politicians in the future.

Florida's 21st district has favored Democrats in the last few elections for Congress, so Loomer had little chance in the general, which incumbent Rep. Frankel won handily this November.³³ But Loomer's campaign raised in excess of \$2.2 million—over \$700,000 more than her opponent³⁴—providing her a sizable platform to denounce big tech companies that deplatformed her and issue disingenuous warnings about Muslim terrorism.

Daryle Lamont Jenkins, executive director of the antifascist research group One People's Project, noted that Loomer's success was due less to her own talents

than the mobilization of the far-right movements in Florida that backed her. "For her to get this far is not so much a testament to her, but who's supporting her: the Proud Boys types and the Islamophobes," Jenkins said.³⁵

While Loomer won't join Congress, Jenkins worries that the campaign war chest she amassed will help fund her next venture. "Every time one of these

far-right figures with no chance of winning runs for something, I call it a fundraiser, because ultimately that's what it ends up being," Jenkins said. "It remains to be seen what Loomer will create with that money, but she's doing something with it, that's for sure!"³⁶

THE CANDIDATE FROM Q

Far-right conspiracism long predates the Trump presidency, but a particularly pernicious example has swept through the country since he came into office: QAnon. (See "Conspiracy for the Masses" in this issue.) According to the preeminent QAnon origin story, in October 2017

an anonymous Trump administration insider known as "Q" (for their alleged high-level "Q" security clearance) began sending coded messages positioning Trump as a savior battling a "Deep State" cabal of Democratic and Hollywood elites running a child trafficking ring. Amplified by Trump's flirtations with QAnon supporters, the online community grew into a movement with a mass base of support.³⁷

QAnon stands on the shoulders of earlier far-right conspiracy theories, adopting antisemitic language and framing used within neo-fascist and White nationalist circles that blame a Jewish cabal for social ills and repurpose ancient antisemitic slurs of the Blood Libel.³⁸ These familiar claims are gaining adherents through all kinds of offshoots, such as vaccination anxieties among the New Age health and wellness community,³⁹ allowing the conspiracy to cast a much wider net than typical far-right claims.

In November 2020, the movement graduated beyond the coded support they received from Trump to electing one of their own to Congress: Marjorie Taylor Greene, who successfully defeated her Republican opponent in the primary election for Georgia's 14th district, and praised QAnon as "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take this global cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles out."⁴⁰

Though she was the most successful

example, Greene was far from the only QAnon candidate last year. *The Washington Post* reported that nearly 600,000 people have voted for a QAnon-aligned candidate,⁴¹ and according to Media Matters for America, 46 candidates running for political office in 2020 expressed support for the conspiracy theory.⁴² With national polls reporting that more than one in three Americans believe a “Deep State” has worked to undermine Trump,⁴³ broad support for QAnon candidates points to a reservoir of conspiracist voters who might be captured by Greene-like politicians in the future.

Greene owns a successful construction company with her husband and formerly owned a gym before deciding to run for Congress. As a political outsider and stalwart Trump supporter, she ran on the slogan, “Save America, Stop Socialism.”⁴⁴ Her campaign videos attacked New York’s Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez for proposing policies like the Green New Deal, which, according to Greene, would “plunge us into Communism.”⁴⁵ *Politico* also unearthed a series of racist videos she posted,⁴⁶ in which she variously describes unemployment as the product of “bad choices” and laziness, and claims that she would still feel “proud” of Confederate monuments even if she was Black.⁴⁷

Greene’s social media presence reveals her anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, pro-gun, and anti-LGBTQ ideology. When an unauthorized militia group, United Constitutional Patriots, illegally detained hundreds of migrants at New Mexico’s southern border in 2019, she came to their defense.⁴⁸ In February 2019, she live-streamed an attempt by her and a small crew of MAGA activists to accost Reps. Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib in their congressional offices, accusing them of supporting Sharia law and questioning their legitimacy as congresswomen.⁴⁹ Greene has also amplified anti-LGBTQ institutions such as the Alliance Defending Freedom, a legal group leading efforts to redefine religious liberty as protecting discrimination against LGBTQ communities.⁵⁰

Greene additionally has direct relationships with far-right and paramilitary organizations, which backed her campaign in Georgia. Among them are the Three Percent Security Force militia,⁵¹ which Greene joined at an Atlanta rally against “red flag” gun laws in March 2019, and which publicly congratulated her after her primary win.⁵² Greene also publicly welcomed the endorsement of Larry Pratt, a pivotal militia and Patriot movement leader who led the far-right group Gun Owners of America for 40 years and spoke at a 1992 meeting of neonazis and Ku Klux Klan leaders that helped launch the militia movement of the 1990s.⁵³

After winning her August primary,

It’s clear that Trump’s time in office helped provide a model and pave the way for a wide cast of far-right candidates and movements to force their way into power.

Greene claimed to have distanced herself from QAnon, saying that once she started finding misinformation from Q, she decided to “choose another path.”⁵⁴ Nonetheless, she continues to walk a thin line between plausible deniability and placating her base.⁵⁵ Greene supported QAnon networks in the “Stop the Steal” demonstrations that attempted to discredit the presidential election results and stoked fears of voter fraud in the lead-up to Georgia’s pivotal Senate runoff elections in early January. Trump, who has praised Greene on multiple occasions, professed his love for her and invited her to speak at a rally with him in Georgia.⁵⁶ On January 4, she wore a “Stop the Steal” face-mask while speaking with Republican members of Congress on the steps of the U.S. Capitol,⁵⁷ two days before a mob of far-right MAGA supporters and QAnon⁵⁸ activists stormed the U.S. Capitol, temporarily interrupting Congress’s certification of Joe Biden’s election, and causing the deaths of five people.⁵⁹

Following the insurrection, Greene issued a press release, calling threats to impeach Donald Trump another “coup” from the Democratic Party.⁶⁰ “The new generation of MAGA Republicans will not back down to your threat,” she wrote. “We will not back down from the smear campaigns from the Enemy of the Amer-

ican People, the Fake News. And we will not be silenced by Big Tech who wants to end free speech. We will stand up and defend the 75 Million Americans who you are trying to cancel and ruin the lives of for daring to reject your Marxist ideology.”⁶¹

In late January, Greene came under renewed condemnation after CNN reported that she had supported, on social media, calls for executing Democratic politicians and members of federal law enforcement as well as conspiracy theories that cast school shootings as “false flag” operations.⁶² Video also surfaced of her harassing Parkland mass shooting survivor and gun reform activist David Hogg in 2019.⁶³

Nonetheless, the same week the evidence came to light, Republicans assigned her to the House committee responsible for overseeing education.⁶⁴

It’s clear that Trump’s time in office helped provide a model and pave the way for a wide cast of far-right candidates and movements to force their way into power. Whether they’re Christian militants hoping to erect a theocracy, or conspiracy theorists promoting claims that scapegoat people of color and religious minorities for systemic inequality, the 2020 election made it clear that the GOP has a place for them.

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Still Here

The Christian Right in the 2020 Election



Trump supporter at a rally in Tucson, Arizona, on March 19, 2016. Credit: Johnny Silvercloud via Flickr.

Even amid Trump's defeat, the 2020 election proved that the Christian Right may still be the most powerful, best-organized faction in American politics. The popular stereotype notwithstanding, the election demonstrated that the Christian Right is not entirely White nor entirely evangelical; has adaptable and evolving tactics and strategies; and has a clear plan for growth. But all this can be hard to see, as Family Research Council President Tony Perkins argued in early December, because it conflicts with the "phony storyline that evangelicals turned against Trump in 2020" as well as a "40-year narrative that the religious right is a dying breed."¹

Perkins is right on both counts. And that the likes of Perkins have been (mostly) transparent about their methods,

goals, and achievements—which the rest of society fails to see—is one of the most important takeaways of the 2020 election.

The final vote tally for the 2020 election is expected to be about 155 million: an increase of more than 30 million votes over 2016. Of these, Biden got about 81 million and Trump about 74 million. The large uptick in overall voters benefitted both presidential candidates. But a subtler trend revealed by election returns is that the Christian Right has maintained its role as a power player even as their share of the overall population declined. That is, they remain a vital political force not because their numbers are growing but because they are able to organize to maximize their electoral clout. The overall numbers of Christian Right voters increased in 2020, even as the general

proportion of White evangelical support for Trump stayed about the same. "We essentially have White evangelicals, somewhere around 8 in 10, supporting the president, standing by their candidate, standing by their man," pollster Robert P. Jones told *National Public Radio* right after the election.²

The real numbers may be somewhat murkier. Percentages of the White evangelical vote vary in different polls, with some surveys of early voters and exit polls showing Trump maintaining the roughly 81 percent³ he won with in 2016, and others showing a modest decline to around 76 percent.⁴ But even if the latter figure holds up, it still demonstrates the staying power of the White evangelical voting bloc, since the same poll counts them as 28 percent of the electorate in a year when overall voter participation so

enormously increased.

The 2020 exit polling is consistent with a long-term trend first identified by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI),⁵ which showed that from 2004 to 2018, the White evangelical share of the national vote increased from 23 percent to a steady 26 percent—which it has maintained since 2008—even while their portion of the population declined from 23 to 15 percent.⁶

That the Christian Right has been able to keep pace as a share of the electorate—and in 2020, perhaps even gained—even as the numbers of White evangelical Christians are decreasing in the overall U.S. population, is a remarkable achievement. This is in no small part due to their ever-more sophisticated voter identification, registration, and mobilization capacity, which has continually evolved from its earliest days in the 1980s to the age of Trump.

THE COLORS OF THE COALITION

If the White evangelical demographic is all you look at, White evangelicals are all you see. But that's not all that the Christian Right is. Conservative Catholics count, and the Christian Right and Republicans have been targeting minorities for a long time. Much of the diversity they've achieved to date comes from the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), an emergent regrouping of historically Pentecostal and neo-Charismatic leaders into a loose but deeply theocratic religious network. Contrary to the stereotype of the Christian Right, many of the churches in this movement have been historically multi-racial and multi-ethnic.⁷ Some even have women leaders.

In December, *The New York Times* compared election results in 28,000 precincts in more than 20 cities between 2016 and 2020, finding that “many areas with large populations of Latinos and residents of Asian descent” experienced “a surge in turnout and a shift to the right, often a sizable one.”⁸ Republicans, the *Times* reports, claim that this “represents the beginnings of a realignment of conservative, religious working people in immigrant communities and communities of color into their party.”

To whatever extent this is true, the

Christian Right—including the less-understood NAR—is part of the trend. The Trump campaign made outreach to Latinx and Asian voters a focus in 2020, apparently to great effect. For example, the *Times* reports that while Biden won the Latinx vote overall, Trump improved on his 2016 performance by 61 percent in Miami, 49 percent in Chicago, 33 percent in Dallas, and by similarly large percentages in 15 other cities or metro areas studied by the *Times*.⁹

For several election cycles, the strategic Christian Right organization United in Purpose (UiP) has sought to unite the various factions of the Christian Right in a common electoral direction, centered on sophisticated data analysis that is widely shared in the movement. Under the leadership of former realtor and ex-convict Bill Dallas, the California-headquartered UiP has engaged in deep data mining, and constructed databases and online tools to help the Christian Right meet its strategic goals in the 21st century. In 2014, for example, the group launched a voter registration app that allowed pastors to compare church membership rosters with voter registration files, to identify which congregants could be recruited as voters.¹⁰

By 2016, Dallas, who is a member of the secretive conservative leadership group Council for National Policy,¹¹ had become such a powerbroker that he was tapped to organize the infamous meeting between Trump and evangelical and Christian Right leaders in New York City.¹²

As I reported in 2018, this was the culmination of a longstanding Christian Right effort to track and refine electoral information in the service of Christian Right goals.¹³ In her 2020 book, *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, Katherine Stewart noted how the Christian Right had acquired various databases and integrated them into their own. This included files that were apparently obtained from the public release of a national computer file of 191 million voters in 2015.¹⁴ It's a little unclear exactly how this happened, but it appears that UiP got a hold of those files. As Dallas told the Christian Broadcasting Network in 2016, “We have about 200 million files, so we have pretty much

the whole voting population in our database.” He added, “What we do is we track to see what's going to make somebody either vote one way, or not vote at all.”¹⁵

UiP was also a leader in the Christian Right effort to target evangelical voters of color in 2020. As an investigation by *The Intercept* noted, “UiP's 2020 election plan”—named “Ziklag,” after a town referenced in the Bible—“is a multipronged effort to connect Trump with evangelical leaders and increase support among minority voters through appeals to faith-based messages and church outreach.”¹⁶

CHRISTIAN RIGHT STRATEGY AND THE NAR

A key part of the evolving strategy, tactics, and indeed, the very composition of the Christian Right, is the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), whose leaders receive the title of “Apostle” or “Prophet” in an effort to reassert offices of the early Christian church.¹⁷ Although the NAR receives little press and is largely ignored outside of the Republican Party, it has become a driving element in the Christian Right.

One episode speaks to their centrality in U.S. politics. In 2016, Apostle Joseph Mattera, convener of the United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, one of two top NAR leadership networks, was among the small invitational committee for the Christian Right conclave in New York. Top NAR figures led by Apostle Paula White—Trump's longtime spiritual advisor, who joined the White House staff in November 2019—have been part of Trump's core movement supporters ever since.¹⁸

Christian Right strategist and pollster George Barna has long been part of NAR and was close to its late founder, C. Peter Wagner.¹⁹ (Barna is also coauthor of a book, *U-Turn: Restoring America to the Strength of Its Roots*, with the Christian Right strategist and revisionist historian David Barton, who in turn sits on the board of United in Purpose.) In 2017, Barna's firm, the American Culture and Faith Institute, a division of UiP, advised the Christian Right that it is risky to assume that registering new voters in theologically conservative churches will necessarily net ideologically conserva-

tive voters. “Future registration efforts,” he wrote in his book *The Day Christians Changed America*, “need to be carefully orchestrated to prevent adding numbers to the ‘other side.’”²⁰

The NAR’s most visible role in the 2020 election was Evangelicals for Trump, an official campaign organization, which regularly featured appearances by such NAR figures as Paula White, Todd Lamphere, Pastor of Global Outreach for Paula White Ministries, and the late African American Bishop Harry Jackson.²¹ The group held its launch event in January 2020, at El Rey Jesús (King Jesus Ministry), a Miami megachurch headed by Apostle Guillermo Maldonado, which may be the largest Spanish-speaking congregation in the country.²² El Rey Jesús has eight churches across Florida, and one each in Chicago and Dallas. The location of the launch highlighted the Trump campaign’s efforts to expand their base among the evangelical Latinx community in Florida and beyond.²³

The targeting of Latinx and Asian evangelicals was the logical extension of the long-term plans and organizational capacities of the Christian Right. By 2018 the strategy of the Christian Right could be distilled to a simple principle: grow, sustain, train, diversify, and mobilize the electoral base. Ralph Reed, the early Christian Coalition leader who now heads the Faith and Freedom Coalition, reminded a UiP breakfast at the annual Values Voter Summit that year, “Remember how we were told we were going away? How we would recede as a political force? Not true, because the thing that matters is not your share of the population. That is declining. It’s the share of the electorate. It only matters who actually turns out.”

Reed continued, underscoring how the Christian Right’s evolving strategy, make-up, and success gives them leverage in the GOP:

If you take evangelicals who are 27 percent of the electorate and you add them to the 11 percent of the electorate that are frequent Mass-attending Catholics, folks, it’s 38 percent of the electorate, and 56 percent of the entire Republican vote nationwide. If that vote goes away, the Republican Party ceases to exist as a reliable political party.²⁴

The effort to target conservative Catholic voters was illustrated in 2020 by the Trump-supporting group CatholicVote (whose president Brian Burch works for UiP),²⁵ which used a method called “geofencing” to track the cellphones of Catholic mass-goers, in order to learn where and how often they attended church, and then to combine this data with voter registration status and voting history, generating profiles for targeted outreach in swing states. (Geofencing has also been used to track evangelical churchgoers.²⁶)

Another tactic deployed by the Christian Right is “ballot harvesting,” which involves collecting sealed absentee ballots from central locations such as churches, and delivering them to election officials. According to a video obtained by *The Washington Post*, Ralph Reed told a meeting of the Council for National Policy in February 2020 that the Faith and Freedom Coalition “is going to be harvesting ballots in churches,” adding, “We’re going to be specifically going in not only to White evangelical churches, but into Hispanic and Asian churches, and collecting those ballots.”²⁷

WORDS, NOT DEEDS

While in the long run-up to the election, a handful of prominent evangelical Trump critics made news calling on the faithful to reconsider their support for the president, there’s no indication that this swayed many voters. Perhaps the most prominent such voice was then-*Christianity Today* editor Mark Galli, who received wide attention following his December 2019 editorial blasting Trump’s morality and calling for his removal from office. Galli wrote:

[T]his president has dumbed down the idea of morality in his administration. He has hired and fired a number of people who are now convicted criminals. He himself has admitted to immoral actions in business and his relationship with women, about which he remains proud. His Twitter feed alone—with its habitual string of mischaracterizations, lies, and slanders—is a near perfect example of a human being who is morally lost and confused. ...That he should be removed, we believe, is not a

matter of partisan loyalties but loyalty to the Creator of the Ten Commandments.²⁸

But as *The New York Times* reported the next day, “No leaders in the evangelical movement said they could see any clear signs of an organized resistance to Mr. Trump rising from the editorial.”²⁹ Nor did any significant evangelical resistance emerge at any time during the 2020 campaign. Although Trump was concerned enough to try to counter Galli’s editorial by featuring Cissie Graham Lynch—a granddaughter of Billy Graham, the founder of *Christianity Today*—at the Evangelicals for Trump campaign in early 2020,³⁰ in the end, the key metrics changed little from 2016. In November, White evangelicals accounted for about 40 percent of Trump’s overall votes.³¹ And while it is likely that some of their number defected from Trump, they didn’t abandon down ticket races. Instead of the anti-Trump landslide Democrats hoped would flip a number of state legislative chambers, the party ended up losing about 137 state legislative seats overall,³² as well as both chambers of the New Hampshire legislature.

The 2020 election season demonstrates that the more things change, the more things stay the same. The mainstream narratives that downplay the significance of the organized Christian Right, ignore the role of the NAR, and measure Republican success and failure narrowly by whatever White evangelicals may do, is missing the forest for the trees.

Frederick Clarkson has written about politics and religion for more than three decades. His work has appeared in a wide range of publications from Mother Jones, Church & State, and Ms. Magazine to The Christian Science Monitor, Salon, and Religion Dispatches. He has worked as an investigative editor at Planned Parenthood Federation of America; as Communications Director at the Institute for Democracy Studies; and co-founded the group blog Talk to Action. He is the author, co-author, or editor of several books, including Dispatches from the Religious Left: The Future of Faith and Politics in America and Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy.

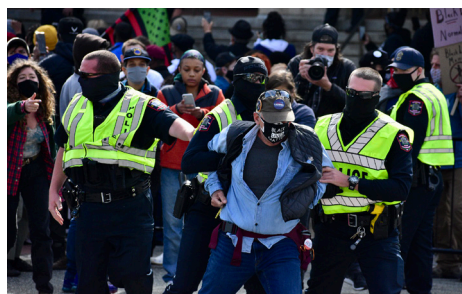
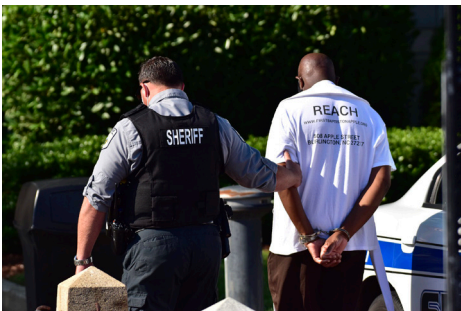
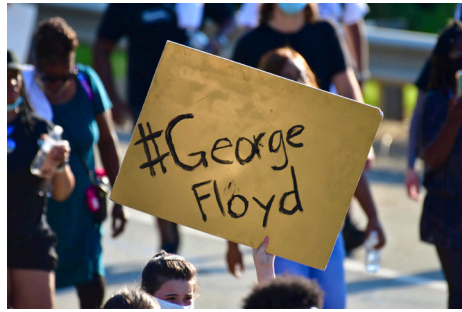
2020: A Year in Pictures

BY ANTHONY CRIDER



From top left, clockwise: Counterprotester at a Criminal Justice Reform rally, November 29, 2020 • Stop the Steal rally at Raleigh, North Carolina, November 14, 2020 • A Second Amendment rally in Virginia, January 20, 2020 • A Second Amendment rally in Virginia, January 20, 2020 • An American and Confederate flag in Pittsboro, NC, February 22, 2020 • Boogaloo Bois and law enforcement at Raleigh, NC, May 1, 2020 • A protester at the ReOpen NC rally, May 7, 2020.

Anthony Crider is a professor of astrophysics at Elon University in North Carolina. He is also a photographer with a keen eye for capturing just the right moment. Photographing both social justice protests and far-right mobilizations, Crider has captured a vision of the contemporary U.S. through the microcosm of his home state. In this compilation, PRA is showcasing the images that reflect both Crider's moving work and what 2020 looked like for our research and editorial teams.



Top to bottom, left to right: Sheriffs at the Raleigh Demands Justice protest, May 30, 2020 • Arrested protester at the March for Justice and Community rally, July 11, 2020 • Arrested protester at the Call to Action speaker meeting, July 25, 2020 • Arrested protesters at the March to the Polls in Graham, NC, October 31, 2020 • A Banner at the Peaceful Walk for Justice at Haw River, NC, June 7, 2020 • Protesters at the March and Peaceful Protest in Elon, NC, October 24, 2020 • Girls dancing at a BLM rally in NC, June 12, 2020 • Arrested protester at the March to the Polls in Graham, NC, October 31, 2020 • Police pepper spraying protesters at the March to the Polls in Graham, NC, October 31, 2020 • Racial Justice protesters in NC, May 31, 2020 • Protesters at the Raleigh Demands Justice protest at Raleigh, NC, May 30, 2020 • Protesters at the Raleigh Demands Justice protest at Raleigh, NC, May 30, 2020.

