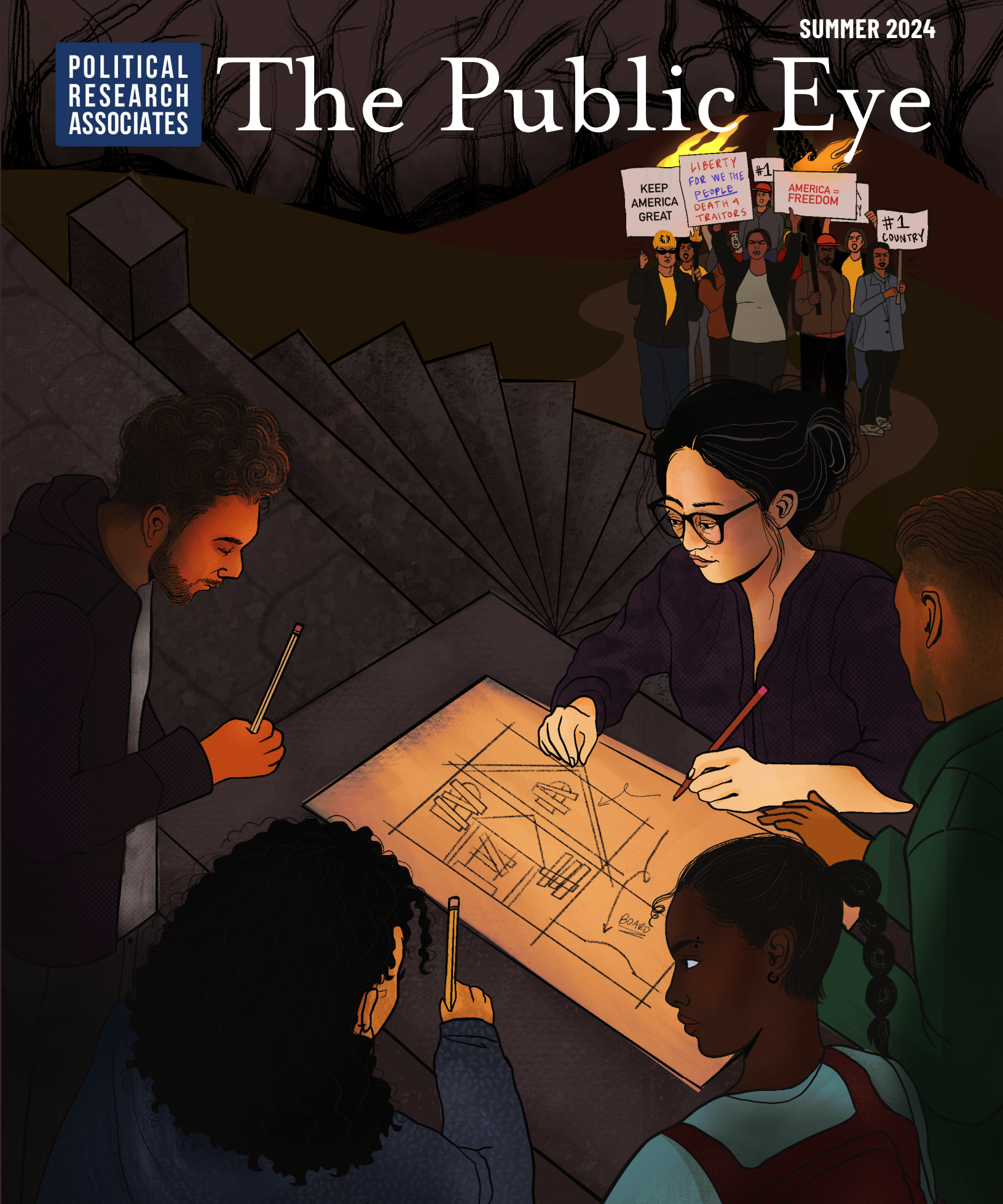


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The Public Eye



Understanding the Rise of the Multiracial Right—And Why It Matters • The Anti-DEI Movement and the Jewish Right • Hindu Supremacy and the Multiracial U.S. Far Right • *Fire Dreams: Making Black Feminist Liberation in the South*

From campaign rallies and assassination attempts to a historic presidential nomination amid anti-war protest, it's been a tumultuous summer for U.S. politics. To some extent, these events have staged an essential question facing the country: Will the U.S. move in the direction of becoming a truly multiracial democracy—or will its leaders and the powerful shore up a White-dominant polity?

At this decisive juncture, *The Public Eye's* latest issue examines the growing phenomenon of a multiracial Far Right in the U.S. and its relationship to White supremacy.

Many political strategists presume that as the U.S. becomes more racially diverse, its politics will become more liberal or progressive by default. But as our first feature, "Understanding the Rise of the Multiracial Right" (p. 3) by scholar Daniel Martinez Hosang, makes clear, the emergence of a multiracial Right belies this claim. HoSang provides a thoughtful framework for understanding this new political development instead of dismissing it. As he writes, "To understand its rise means taking seriously the many reasons why minoritized people and groups are increasingly drawn to right-wing projects aimed at them. It also requires an examination of the changing set of political conditions that are leading many conservative activists and groups to adopt a form of right-wing multiculturalism."

After 2020's racial justice uprisings, far-right operatives honed their latest playbook in so-called culture wars against CRT and "gender ideology." Our next feature, "The Anti-DEI Movement and the Jewish Right" (p. 7), examines how the Right mobilizes right-leaning pro-Israel Jews using this playbook—with a twist. As PRA researcher Ben Lorber observes, "Over the last few years, Jewish and non-Jewish conservatives have developed and circulated a new anti-DEI talking point that would gain significant traction after October 7: DEI, they claimed, was antisemitic." Lorber probes how the Right weaponizes this claim to oppose progressive movements organizing for justice and bolster White supremacy.

Our last feature, "Hindu Supremacy and the Multiracial U.S. Far Right" (p. 12), by PRA partner, Savera, analyzes the complex racial logics underlying the U.S. Hindu Right's efforts to further their supremacist agenda. In organizing around a "Hindu American" identity, Savera writes, a network of Hindu supremacists known as the American Sangh first positioned its leaders as representatives of a U.S. religious minority while concealing their exclusionary politics. In recent years, Hindu supremacists' alignment with White supremacy has become more apparent, as they openly build relationships with the broader Far Right and borrow from it—for instance, by attacking campaigns seeking to end caste discrimination in the U.S. as "Critical Caste Theory."

Supremacist movements share strategies that are rooted in anti-Blackness and Islamophobia. But this issue also offers a visionary counterpoint to the politics of multiracial White supremacy. We conclude with an excerpt from a roundtable on the book *Fire Dreams: Making Black Feminist Liberation in the South* (p. 17), which tells the story of how New Orleans-based Women With A Vision (WWAV) has fought for their communities' liberation by refusing the logics of racial capitalism. Deon Haywood, Laura McTighe, and Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson discuss the book alongside their experiences of surviving and rebuilding after White supremacist arson attacks. Rich with insights about how we might "build the world otherwise," the full discussion will be available online.

Our cover features original artwork by illustrator Gabi Hawkins. In *The Art of Activism* (back cover), Hawkins speaks with PRA about how she interpreted this issue's theme, art's role in movement building, and the artists who inspire her.

Between print issues of *The Public Eye*, visit us at politicalresearch.org and religiondispatches.org for more of our research and reporting on the Right.

Kitana Ananda, Editor

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BY DANIEL MARTINEZ HOSANG

Understanding the Rise of the Multiracial Right— And Why It Matters



Collage of Vivek Ramaswamy, Sonnie Johnson, and Enrique Tarrio (Credit: PRA)

Over the last decade, supporters of the Republican Party and conservative political movements have become more diverse, with the movement attracting increasing numbers of Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans, as well as students and young people of all backgrounds.¹ When the Republican primaries began in early 2024, multiple polls showed unprecedented support from Black and Latino registered voters for the party's presumptive nominee.² A generation ago, a handful of conservatives of color were in the GOP running in federal and state races. In the last few years, there have been many dozens of such candidates.³ Among them, as a recent report noted, were 42 Latinas who competed for House seats as Republicans in 2022, as did 29 Black women.⁴ Many more wait in the wings.

Beyond the realm of electoral politics,

militia and far-right groups—including the Proud Boys, Patriot Prayer, and the “Stop the Steal” movement backing the January 6th siege of the Capitol—have drawn men of color into prominent leadership positions.⁵

Issue-focused groups have also set their sights on persuading people of color to support far-right stances. Anti-abortion groups for the last two decades have framed eliminating the legal right to an abortion as a civil rights issue by emphasizing the voices of young, anti-abortion women of color.⁶ Similarly, 2nd Amendment groups like the NRA and gun manufacturers have expanded their marketing to communities of color,⁷ at a time when Black gun clubs and ownership are surging.⁸

And on the radio, Sirius XM's conservative talk channel features three Black conservatives on their roster of weekly hosts alongside right-wing stalwarts Sean Hannity and Mark Levin.⁹ One of those

hosts, Sonnie Johnson, rose through the right-wing ranks while working with Steve Bannon, Andrew Breitbart, and the Tea Party. Her weekly show, *Sonnie's Corner*, brings together conservatism and hip-hop culture, and elevates the work of young, Black conservative activists.

Even as the presence of people of color grows on the Right, this phenomenon has not received sufficient attention from scholars and journalists—and as a result, it has often been misunderstood. The new multiracial Right's growth is driven by top-down and bottom-up forces.¹⁰ To understand its rise means taking seriously the many reasons why minoritized people and groups are increasingly drawn to right-wing projects aimed at them. It also requires an examination of the changing set of political conditions that are leading many conservative activists and groups to adopt a form of right-wing multiculturalism.

THE RIGHT'S MULTIRACIAL TURN

Establishment conservative groups like the Republican National Committee and the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), Charles Koch's Americans for Prosperity, and Turning Point Action have all invested heavily in outreach to voters and communities of color and conservative candidates of color. The RNC, for example, opened 38 "minority community centers" in 19 states during the 2022 midterm elections.¹¹ More recently, on the south side of Chicago, Black conservative activists opened the Booker T. Washington and Ida B. Wells Renaissance Center to recruit new voters for the local GOP.¹² Similarly, the Koch network has poured millions of dollars into The Libre Initiative's programs to recruit and train conservative Latinos.¹³

Influential right-leaning think tanks increasingly frame their advocacy campaigns in the language of racial justice. For instance, the free market think tank Illinois Policy Institute has argued that racial segregation, poverty, interpersonal violence, high unemployment, education, and other issues can be addressed through conservative, market-based, individual solutions in ways that minimize reliance on public goods and accountability.¹⁴ In backing charter schools, vouchers, and other privatization schemes aimed at

undermining or dismantling public education, they have poured millions into building support for their efforts among Black and Latino parents, students, and elected officials.¹⁵ Immigration-restriction groups like Numbers USA have similarly reinvigorated their efforts to recruit more Black support and leadership, hiring a director of engagement to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and courting greater Black support for restrictive immigration policies.¹⁶

Conservative groups also seek to claim many interests and narratives that have traditionally been the domain of liberals and the Left, declaring that these issues can be solved through right-wing policies. The assertion that charter and voucher schemes can address educational inequality and underfunded public schools is one clear example. Criminal justice reform, proffered by groups like Right on Crime, is another.¹⁷ Others explicitly adopt critiques of neoliberal economic policies, militarism, and different forms of corporate and state predation.¹⁸ In nearly all these cases, the proposed solutions, which focus on individual remedies and market logics, do little to address the underlying issues. But they exploit the contradictions of liberal and left-leaning policy solutions and position liberals as the defenders of a failing status quo.

To be clear, none of these projects change the substantive tenor or trajectory of antidemocratic, right-wing projects seeking to reverse the last half-century of reproductive justice, LGBTQ, feminist, and anti-racist movement victories. As their hidden ties to powerful sectors of capital and deep-pocketed conservative think tanks grow stronger, so does the exploitation of workers, consumers, and debtors on which they thrive.¹⁹

Some of these efforts are also, as critics contend, little more than thinly veiled attempts to mask racism and White chauvinism on the Right—and they often fail to garner any substantive grassroots support.²⁰

But investments in candidates of color and outreach to voters of color, well-funded right-wing projects to court Black and Latino groups, and efforts to lay claim to issues historically championed by the Left reveal a new strategy on the Right. Stated plainly, many sections of the conservative movement, including the Far Right, seek to cleave away people of color and other sections of the progressive base, alert to new openings to build a multiracial right-wing populism.

FROM THE SOUTHERN STRATEGY TO THE MULTIRACIAL RIGHT

Such efforts to recruit people of color to the Far Right entail a significant shift because, for much of the last half century, the Right's dominant political strategy involved demonizing people of color to win White voters.

This wasn't always the case. Through the late 1960s, many Republican candidates, especially in the North, competed to win over Black and Latino voters. The 1964 Civil Rights Act secured as much support among Republican legislators as it did among Democrats.²¹ While the Republican Party and right-wing groups harbored many explicitly racist, nativist, and antisemitic forces, this was also true of the Democratic Party and some progressive groups.²²

However, by 1968, Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon successfully cut into White working- and middle-class support for the Democratic Party by framing protest, urban revolts, and crime as threats to White Americans.²³

In the decades that followed, Republican leaders pinned their electoral hopes

Rally for Trump outside Walter Reed Hospital in October, 2020 (Credit: Blink O'Fangye/Flickr.com)



Many sections of the conservative movement, including the Far Right, seek to cleave away people of color and other sections of the progressive base, alert to new openings to build a multiracial right-wing populism.

on winning large majorities of the White electorate through campaigns that demonized African Americans and Latinos in particular. The examples here are legion: The Southern Strategy of the late 1960s and early 1970s stoked White racial anxiety by framing the dismantling of Jim Crow and the expansion of civil rights as direct threats to White Americans' status and well-being. Beginning in the early 1970s, the GOP also portrayed the Democratic Party as championing "Black interests," in contrast to those of White voters—despite civil rights leaders from Dr. King to Shirley Chisholm to Rev. Jesse Jackson explicitly rejecting such framing and asserting a vision of multiracial, working-class solidarity.²⁴

For the next three decades, Republicans and many conservative groups operated under the assumption that the surest way to win local and national elections was to build supermajorities among White voters, often through explicit racist fearmongering. They made little effort to win support among voters of color or recruit candidates from those communities to run as Republicans. Instead, the GOP used demonizing campaigns—from Ronald Reagan's attacks against "welfare queens" to George H.W. Bush's infamous 1988 "Willie Horton" ad—as part of an intentional strategy to win elections, especially in the South.²⁵ As Republican strategist Kevin Phillips put it in a 1970 interview, "the more [African Americans] who register as Democrats in the South, the sooner the [racist] whites will quit the Democrats and become Republicans."²⁶

The twinned politics of racial demonization and racial colorblindness—the latter an insistence that racism is an artifact of the past—defined conservative politics during this period. Though there were pockets of Black and Latino Republicans and other conservatives of color, they played little role in swaying elections. In this context, Democrats and progressive groups had little competition in attracting support within communities of color.

While President George W. Bush did not trade in this rhetoric as explicitly, and RNC chair Ken Mehlman even apologized for the Southern Strategy in a 2005 address to the NAACP, many voters continued to perceive Republicans and conservatives as hostile to people of color.²⁷ The demonization of President Barack Obama from many quarters of the Tea Party movement, the racist birther movement, and electoral appeals to White racial anxieties remained a mainstay of conservative political discourse and regular grist for right-wing cable shows and talk radio.²⁸

After Mitt Romney lost to incumbent President Obama in 2012, the Republican National Committee issued an "autopsy report" calling for more inclusive appeals to various communities of color. In calling for a new "Growth & Opportunity Project" it declared: "Young voters are increasingly rolling their eyes at what the Party represents, and many minorities wrongly think that Republicans do not like them or want them in the country."²⁹ The report argued that to shift the perception of the Party among women, young voters, and people of color, "the Party must in fact and deed be inclusive and welcoming."³⁰

In this calculus, Republicans would draw in greater numbers of people of color by tamping down their demonizing campaign rhetoric and moderating some of their policy positions, especially around immigration. A chorus of GOP leaders embraced the report's recommendation and findings, and Jeb Bush, among other Republican presidential candidates, took up some of the report's messaging.

Trump, who publicly criticized the report when it was first issued, took a different tack.³¹ He launched his first presidential campaign in 2015 with false references to Mexican immigrants as "rapists" and criminals.³² But unlike the racist vitriol associated with the Southern Strategy, which was explicitly designed to exclude voters and candidates of color from the GOP to curry favor with

White voters, far-right strategists like Steve Bannon maintained that an "inclusive nationalism" based on "America first"-style populism could appeal to some people of color.³³ In contrast to the 2012 RNC leadership's claim in the Growth & Opportunity Project that the GOP could diversify its voter base and win new supporters by moderating its policies and messages, Bannon and Trump's 2016 campaign went in the opposite direction: toward a vision of "law and order" in cities, immigration restriction and militarized borders, isolationist foreign policy, and a trenchant critique of the state and of wealthy elites that could bring in greater numbers of people of color, especially as liberal institutions and policies faced growing skepticism from across the political spectrum.

WHY PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE DRAWN TO THE RIGHT

The multiracial Right's growth cannot be explained from the top down alone. It is also a bottom-up story.

For much of the last two decades, Democratic strategists and liberal pundits have claimed that the nation's growing racial and ethnic diversity would inevitably produce a more progressive electorate.³⁴ In this view, voters of color reflexively embrace the Democratic Party's stated vision of an inclusive, multiracial nation, and favor liberal policy measures that promise racial equality and inclusion.

People of color who defy this expectation and identify as conservative are imagined to be suffering from false consciousness, internalized bias, or a longing to be White rooted in the fantasy of post-racialism.³⁵ If the modern Right is understood to be driven by a singular and undifferentiated racial bias and animus, any incorporation of people of color in their ranks can only be explained as tokenism at best and crass manipulation at worst.

But this argument presumes that the default politics of nearly all people of color in the U.S. will inevitably be a form of racial liberalism, and that most voters of color will naturally gravitate to progressive positions around education, government spending, taxation, health care, and criminal justice reform. Only when

There are other reasons, however, that racial liberalism may no longer be the default politics for many people of color.

they are corrupted by an unsavory influence—falling prey, for instance, to Christian fundamentalism, misogyny, or disinformation—do they betray this baseline.

There are other reasons, however, that racial liberalism may no longer be the default politics for many people of color. As economic and social inequality has grown, and precarity has become a defining condition for tens of millions of households and families, traditional liberal policy solutions have faltered. Modest income redistribution through taxes and social welfare, unionization and labor rights, and anti-discrimination protections have proven anemic in the face of concentrated corporate power and intensified economic predation. While the Right has played a leading role in many of the crises of the last two decades—unending wars, the Great Recession, climate change, the prison industrial complex, premature deaths from addiction and the pandemic—growing numbers of people, including many people of color, are apprehensive about whether prevailing liberal solutions can address these conditions.³⁶

In addition, as a recent report from progressive think tank The Roosevelt Institute explains, the wreckage of neoliberal policies is evident not only in worsening material conditions but also in “mounting despair, mental health problems, overwork, addiction, loneliness and social isolation, and internalized shame are some of the profound negative social and psychological consequences of the neoliberal order.”³⁷ The authors argue that progressives have largely failed to respond to these cultural conditions and the longing many people have for connection and social meaning. The Right, by contrast, while offering few solutions to address the structural inequalities produced by neoliberal forces, has been far more adept and successful in their “cultural responses to the failures of neoliberalism as a means for shaping worldviews, manufacturing consent, and recruiting individuals into its movements, all while

speaking to people’s day-to-day concerns, lived experiences, and discontents.”³⁸

People of color are not immune to such appeals, as a growing body of research and reporting on the multiracial Right makes clear. Shifting material conditions and experiences are reshaping everyday interests, needs, and desires in ways that have allowed the Right to forge new inroads into communities of color.

For example, as sociologist and journalist Anthony Ocampo observed of a 2020 Filipinos for Trump rally, the hundreds of supporters at the event were drawn to it by many issues and interests, ranging from education to abortion to a distrust of the Democratic Party.³⁹ Similarly, as scholar Corey Fields explains in his book *Black Elephants in the Room*, Black Republicans active in local party politics do not see themselves as sacrificing their racialized identities or interests as they embrace conservative principles.⁴⁰

Similar developments are happening among other groups across different regions. In the Rio Grande Valley, some urban areas of Texas, and other parts of the Southwest, growing numbers of Mexican American voters have been drawn rightward.⁴¹ Similar shifts have unfolded among Venezuelan, Dominican, and other Latino voters, sometimes shaped by complex histories of migration and economic crises.

In all these analyses, stereotypes of people of color on the Right as self-hating or longing to be White don’t hold up.

To comprehend the growth of the multiracial Right today requires attention to why different groups of people, in different regions, and around distinct needs and interests, increasingly seek out alternatives to a governing order that seems to them incapable of addressing their problems, their sense of fear and mistrust, and their yearning for connection.

Even if the wealthy backers of far-right groups profit handsomely from conditions of despair and aggrievement, the

Right has been far more adept at positioning themselves in the public imagination as insurgents willing to condemn a failing status quo, while labeling liberals and the Left as accomplices to such failures. Thus, the Right will continue to offer new pathways to people of color, as their presence serves to legitimate the Right’s claims to be principled outsiders standing against elite authority.

Black conservative radio host Sonnie Johnson summed up this position well in suggesting that a shift was taking place in partisan political discourse. As she explained to listeners of her weekly radio show, “The young generation always likes to be the rebels. This puts us in a unique position if we are paying attention and willing to do the work. This puts us in a strategic position because the Left is now the system. The Left is now ‘the Man.’ The Left is now the structure...and it’s only natural for the youth to want to rebel against that. And that rebellion will bring them to conservatism.”⁴²

So far, liberal and progressive responses to the growing multiracial Right have relied on reciting laundry lists of policy accomplishments and recycling outworn stereotypes implying that people of color drawn into right-wing politics are simply racial sellouts and dupes. But such pronouncements do little to help navigate the complex socio-political dynamics behind the multiracial Right’s rise, let alone address the concerns that have enabled those on the Right to position themselves as rebels taking on the status quo.

Instead, absent opportunities for connection and shared political purpose, people from many different backgrounds have found a home in the Far Right, which has become newly energized by today’s social and economic crises. The multiracial Right is thus ultimately part of a broader phenomenon: one in which growing numbers of workers, young people, immigrants, and people of color have come to see far-right groups and movements as capable of speaking to their experiences and anxieties.

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BY BEN LORBER

The Anti-DEI Movement and the Jewish Right

Weaponizing Antisemitism to Defend White Supremacy



Collage of a protester outside a school board meeting in Allamance County, NC, Eric Cohen, Dr. Pamela Paresky, and a protester at a pro-Israel demonstration at George Washington University (Credit: PRA)

“Do you have the courage to truly confront and condemn the ideology driving antisemitism? Or will you offer weak, blame-shifting excuses and yet another responsibility-dodging task force?”

U.S. Representative Virginia Foxx asked this question at a now-infamous December 5, 2023, meeting of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, where she serves as chairwoman. Foxx’s committee had summoned the presidents of Harvard, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania to question them about a purported crisis of antisemitism on their campuses driven, they and many commenters insisted, by widespread student protests against Israel’s assault on Gaza after October 7. Yet it soon became clear that for right-wing congresspeople, the fight against antisemitism was just the beginning. The Left, Foxx complained, “pride[s] itself” on diversity and inclusion,” and Palestine solidarity pro-

tests illustrated the “grave danger” of the “race based ideology of the radical Left.”¹

One month later, Harvard President Claudine Gay resigned amid nonstop public scrutiny brought on by the hearings.² Right-wing activist and Manhattan Institute fellow Christopher Rufo, a driving force behind the anti-CRT panic, called Gay “the symbol of the DEI regime that has conquered American academic life”³ and insisted that “we must not stop until we have abolished DEI ideology from every institution in America.”⁴ Rufo’s victory-lap *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, which scarcely mentioned antisemitism, argued that Gay’s ouster marked the downfall of the “diversity, equity and inclusion bureaucracy” responsible for “the ideological rot within academic institutions.”⁵

For at least two decades, defenders of Israel’s unjust policies have sought to repress the growing movement for Palestinian rights, especially on college campuses, by alleging antisemitism and cracking

down on free speech. Their campaigns have often dovetailed with the U.S. Right’s longstanding attacks on public and higher education. This alliance has been on full display since October 7, as the Right has blamed DEI programs and antiracist pedagogy for a supposed epidemic of campus antisemitism, cynically weaponizing their loud but selective concern to shore up White supremacy. Members of the U.S. Jewish Right have joined this authoritarian coalition of White Christian nationalists and anti-democracy ideologues, which takes advantage of tensions and contradictions involving antisemitism and American Jews’ relationship to Whiteness. By stoking fears of antisemitism and mobilizing racial resentment, the Right seeks to draw pro-Israel American Jews into its ranks, delegitimize racial justice movements, divide progressive coalitions, and neutralize its opposition as it moves closer to power.

Today’s authoritarian Right articulates

a vision of national belonging shaped around the normative contours of White Christian America. But as the Jewish Right's participation in the anti-DEI movement shows, this vision's boundaries can be made porous and flexible, allowing the Right to strategically conscript some members of minoritized groups into its authoritarian coalition. As we navigate profound challenges to our rights and the future of a multiracial democracy that we can't take for granted, it's essential for progressives to understand these divide-and-conquer strategies to effectively counter them.

FROM CRT TO DEI: A RIGHT-WING BACKLASH

The Right's attacks on DEI have been building for some time. The George Floyd uprising in summer 2020 led millions across the U.S. to interrogate the White supremacist underpinnings of policing, prisons and other social structures, and to issue antiracist demands across workplaces, universities, and other institutions.

The U.S. Right didn't take long to mobilize a backlash, focusing White grievance upon the specter of "Critical Race

focal targets, building on efforts to defund public education. Anti-LGBTQ invectives against "groomers" and "gender ideology," outrage over COVID-19 school closures, and other culture war talking points were also added to the mix. The Right has used such campaigns to channel grievance into policy, entrenching authoritarianism and shoring up White supremacy and cisheteropatriarchy amid challenges to these systems. "I've run the same playbook on critical race theory, on gender ideology, on DEI bureaucracy," Rufo explained to *Politico* in January 2024. "This is a universal strategy that can be applied by the right to most issues. I think that we've demonstrated that it can be successful."¹⁰

Whatever the target, core to the Right's strategy is the argument that American culture and its institutions have been captured by a radical, identitarian ideology that sorts individuals into a binary of oppressor and oppressed that demotes White people, Christians and Jews, men, and cis and straight people. In embodying this ideology, the argument goes, DEI "demonizes hard work, merit, family, and the dignity of the individual...[and] seeks

Whatever the target, core to the Right's strategy is the argument that American culture and its institutions have been captured by a radical, identitarian ideology that sorts individuals into a binary of oppressor and oppressed.

Theory." Operatives like Christopher Rufo crafted the narrative,⁶ while an ecosystem of think tanks, academics, politicians, media, and organizing outfits moved messaging and pushed policy.⁷ Soon, conservative legislatures set about banning "CRT" from classrooms, libraries, and work settings.⁸ Other targets soon emerged for the MAGA Right, with buzzwords like "intersectionality," "wokeness," "critical social justice," and "Cultural Marxism" congealing into a catch-all conservative bogeyman responsible for Western civilizational decline.⁹

The anti-CRT crusade soon settled on public schools and higher education as

to undermine what makes America exceptional," as self-described "anti-woke liberal" pundit Bari Weiss put it in November, replacing "colorblindness with race-obsession."¹¹

"Whatever term you use" to describe the new ideology, wrote Weiss, "what's clear is that it has gained power in a conceptual instrument called 'diversity, equity and inclusion.'"

The strategic addition of DEI into the Right's culture-war rotation has lent concrete content to a nebulous abstraction. Whereas "intersectionality" seemed an intangible concept, millions of Americans were intimately familiar with the

DEI programs launched to combat bias and inequity in their workplaces. As DEI-related job openings grew rapidly across sectors in the months and years following the George Floyd uprising, right-wing legislators moved to counter the trend. Since 2023, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 85 bills have been introduced in 28 states and in Congress to ban or restrict DEI initiatives, and 14 have become law.¹² As a result of these laws and political pressure, nearly 190 colleges in 25 states have made changes to their DEI initiatives.¹³ And it's part of a broader effort designed to stifle vital discussions of race, gender, and sexuality in public education.¹⁴

The Right's polemics thus target the very presence of people of color in the workforce and in society, while far-right figures inveigh against the Civil Rights Act and the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. It is clear that the goal, ultimately, is to "repeal the 20th century," as libertarian economist Murray Rothbard, an early influence on the Alt Right, put it in 1992 and as initiatives like Project 2025 seek to actualize today.¹⁵

And where MAGA went, the American Jewish Right followed, translating broader culture-war campaigns into a specific idiom aimed at its base. Over the last few years, Jewish and non-Jewish conservatives have developed and circulated a new anti-DEI talking point that would gain significant traction after October 7: DEI, they claimed, was antisemitic.

THE JEWISH RIGHT TAKES ON DEI

"The age of Jewish liberalism is ending," declared Eric Cohen, executive director of the Tikvah Fund, a conservative American Jewish foundation, at the opening remarks of Tikvah's June 2022 Jewish Leadership Conference in New York.¹⁶ At the conference, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and a who's-who of Jewish Right leaders railed against "woke Neo-Marxism" and "gender ideology" in public education.¹⁷ One year earlier, in 2021, the Maimonides Fund, another right-leaning American Jewish foundation, began publishing *Sapir*, a journal that tackled the subject of "Jews and social justice" in its first issue. "CRT," wrote Dr. Pamela Paresky in the issue, "relies on narratives of greed, appropriation, unmerited priv-

ilege, and hidden power—themes strikingly reminiscent of familiar anti-Jewish conspiracy theories.”¹⁸ That year, the Heritage Foundation’s Center for Education Policy published a series of anti-DEI reports that associated expanding DEI programs with “an increase in anti-Jewish hatred” on campus.¹⁹

With DEI already in the MAGA Right’s crosshairs, the mood on the Jewish Right was growing outrage. “When it comes to advocating for DEI abolition,” wrote conservative pundit Seth Mandel in the flagship neoconservative outlet *Commentary*, “Jewish groups should be the loudest voices in the room.”²⁰

To make the argument that DEI is antisemitic, critics like Paresky claim that it’s guided by an oppressor-oppressed paradigm that perniciously scapegoats Jews as a privileged hyper-White caste in America, a rapacious colonialist cabal in Israel, and monolithic oppressors in either case. The antisemitism of DEI, in their worldview, flows downstream from its anti-Whiteness—“white privilege is bad, and Jewish privilege is even worse,” as one op-ed summarized the caricature.²¹ In the DEI schema, they insist, Jews are not a legible minority and antisemitism is invisibilized or rendered unworthy of solidarity. Even worse, as Paresky’s article suggests, antiracist initiatives like DEI are structurally antisemitic. In this telling, hyperbolic conspiracy theories of Jewish power, not material injustice, are what motivate criticism of a White Jew’s microaggression, or of an Israeli bombing campaign in Gaza.

While a cynical misrepresentation, this narrative effectively mobilizes grievance because it hits on a grain of truth: DEI initiatives, and progressive movements more broadly, do sometimes rely on inadequate schemas to understand antisemitism. In our historical moment, antisemitism in the U.S. doesn’t manifest in the kind of structural income, housing, education, and other disparities that un-

dergird more widely understood systems of oppression like anti-Blackness. And while many bigoted ideologies purport to “punch down” at their targets, antisemitism claims to “punch up” at a nefarious cabal occupying the hidden heights of power. While such conspiracy theories are core to the authoritarian Right, they can also be found in some discussions of power on the Left.

Even so, anti-DEI polemics rely on shallow misunderstandings of Jewish positionality to reinforce the structural White supremacy DEI is meant to interrogate. Threading the needle requires unpacking U.S. Jews’ complex and evolving relationships to structural White supremacy.

ANTISEMITISM, JEWISH IDENTITY, AND WHITE SUPREMACY

As a multiracial religious and cultural minority, Jews have had diverse histories with White supremacy in the U.S. In the early years of settler-colonization, European Jews were generally considered part of the dominant caste eligible for slave ownership alongside, though not fully equal to, European Christians. The 1705 Virginia Slave Codes, for example, forbade Jewish, Muslim, and other non-Christian “infidels” from employing White Christians as servants—marking Christian supremacy vis-à-vis other groups—but not from owning enslaved Africans.²²

Over the centuries, Jewish communities faced varying levels of antisemitic discrimination, exclusion, Othering, and violence, as de jure religious pluralism sat in uneasy tension alongside the Christian majority’s de facto strictures. At the same time, in a polity structured by anti-Blackness and anti-Indigenous genocide, it was generally clear where light-skinned Jews stood on these foundational color lines.²³

Modern antisemitism, which developed as one part of White supremacist, biological racism in late-19th-century Europe, demonized Jewish people as a foreign,

unassimilable race. When fascist movements animated by this ideology took state power in Nazi-occupied Europe, it resulted in genocide. In the U.S. during this period, this antisemitism influenced immigration restriction and resulted in discrimination, far-right mobilization, and violence—but it never became a core, structuring racial logic of state power, as it did in fascist Europe and as anti-Blackness continues to be in the U.S.

In the post-World War II U.S., light-skinned Jews were among the “White ethnics” who benefited from laws that reinscribed and fortified the racial hierarchies of White supremacy. Returning Jewish and Italian war veterans, for example, received housing and education loans through programs like the GI Bill that were simultaneously denied to Black families, fortifying systemic inequities that deepened in the coming decades.²⁴

Antisemitism persists in contemporary U.S. society, especially on the Right, where it is driven by White Christian nationalism, conspiracism, and other factors. At the same time, the majority of U.S. Jews are White. “White Jews may not live at the center of the tent of whiteness, but they are still white,” as Black Jewish writer and cosmologist Chanda Prescod-Weinstein put it in 2019. “When white Jews refuse to acknowledge that they benefit from and participate in white supremacy, they are wasting time that could otherwise be spent upending that white supremacy.”²⁵ Meanwhile, at least 12 to 15 percent of American Jews are Jews of Color of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, according to a 2019 study.²⁶

Anti-DEI campaigns forego grappling with this complex positionality, often by redeploying the rigid binary thinking they claim to reject. For example, in one oft-cited 2021 civil rights complaint against a DEI department at Stanford University, a Jewish staff member resented being asked to join a White affinity group because “as a Jewish person, she does not feel an affinity with white identity,” as described in the complaint.²⁷

But Whiteness is neither a feeling of affinity, as the complainant claims, nor a biological essence, as White nationalists insist.²⁸ “White supremacy” describes a system of laws, policies, and social rela-

A bevy of right-wing legislators, organizations, and movement leaders have since answered Rufo’s call to “attack, delegitimize, and discredit” higher education and the Left by blaming universities’ DEI programs for rampant antisemitism.

To truly uproot antisemitism, we must dismantle the structural foundations of White Christian supremacy in the U.S. that allow antisemitism and all other forms of oppression to flourish.

tions that enshrine and reproduce racialized inequality as a social fact. White U.S. Jews benefit from this system as a material power relation structuring the world in which they live, irrespective of personal identity or affinity, even as they contend with antisemitism. At their best, DEI initiatives can use intersectional frameworks to help unpack these and other complex relationships between antisemitism and White supremacy.

The Right's goal with these attacks, however, is not to deepen understanding but to weaponize antisemitism accusations in service of defending White supremacy. And for these accusations to stick, they needed to incorporate another well-worn culture war target: the movement for justice in Palestine.

THE TURN TO "FIGHTING ANTISEMITISM"

Since Israel began its genocidal assault on Gaza, millions have taken to the streets and campus quads in protests in the U.S. and around the world, in a vibrant grassroots upsurge that has reinvigorated the anti-war movement and helped define a generation of progressive activism. Terrified by this movement, the bipartisan pro-Israel political and media establishment leapt into overdrive. By smearing protesters with hyperbolized accusations of antisemitism,²⁹ they created a climate of neo-McCarthyist repression on college campuses and beyond, with activists fired from jobs and doxxed, justice groups threatened with terrorism investigations and loss of nonprofit status, and students facing police violence on campus.³⁰

Early on, the Far Right saw an opportunity to go on the offense. "Conservatives need to create a strong association between Hamas, BLM, DSA, and academic 'decolonization' in the public mind," tweeted Rufo, the anti-CRT ideologue, on October 13. "Connect the dots, then attack, delegitimize, and discredit. Make the center-left disavow them. Make them political untouchables."³¹ Rufo advocated popularizing an Islamophobic, anti-Pal-

estinian, and racist framing of campus protesters and Leftists as fanatical extremists and civilizational enemies.

A bevy of right-wing legislators, organizations, and movement leaders have since answered Rufo's call to "attack, delegitimize, and discredit" higher education and the Left by blaming universities' DEI programs for rampant antisemitism.³² Jewish Right leaders have played a notable role within this coalition.³³ *Woke Antisemitism* author David Bernstein called on the "Oct. 8 Jew[s],"³⁴ the "newly minted parent activists," to take "hard hitting action that protects their kids" from "coercive DEI" on campus. Maimonides Fund president and *Sapir* publisher Mark Charendoff similarly called on Jewish educators, philanthropists, and activists to take advantage of the "once-in-a-century opportunity to change the face of American higher education" by mounting strategic takeovers of select small colleges to dismantle DEI and reshape educational curricula, mirroring Florida Governor Ron DeSantis's 2023 takeover of the New College of Florida.³⁵

By equating DEI with antisemitism, the Right employs the same approach used to neutralize criticisms of the Israeli state. Israel's defenders first developed the narrative strategy of equating Palestinian rights demands with antisemitism in the 1970s, and it gained momentum in the 21st century to counter the rapid rise of the BDS movement.³⁶ As calls for divestment from corporations complicit in Israel's human rights abuses resounded in university, faith, and civil society settings across the Global North, Israel's defenders scrambled to reframe the narrative—and realized they could effectively derail the conversation by recasting calls to dismantle structural oppression in Israel/Palestine as antisemitism.³⁷

Like the anti-DEI crusade, the pro-Israel movement's relentless pressure campaigns are designed to unconstitutionally restrict speech. They generate a chilling effect across campuses and civil

society, leaving many afraid to voice support of Palestinian rights. These backlash campaigns disproportionately target Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and Black leaders and movements, underscoring the racism fueling right-wing repression.

The twin claims that antiracist activism makes White people inherently unsafe, or that Palestine solidarity activism makes Jews inherently unsafe, function as parallel forms of fragility, weaponizing rhetorical victimhood to squelch efforts to address material injustice. Recognizing this, the Right brought these rhetorical tactics together well before October 7.

Summer 2021 saw widespread protests against an Israeli assault on Gaza roil U.S. campuses and city streets. In December of that year, the Heritage Foundation released a questionable³⁸ report, *The Antisemitism of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Staff at Universities*, which highlighted Israel-critical social media posts from DEI staff at several universities to argue that DEI departments "often contribute to hostile conditions for Jewish students."³⁹ In an accompanying interview, report author Jay Greene revealed Heritage's deeper agenda. "The most important policy solution," he stated, "is we have to starve the beast...we need to begin to really scale back the extent of public subsidy of higher education."⁴⁰

Anti-BDS groups began wading in the waters with a dual-pronged strategy. The 2022 campus report card published by StopAntisemitism, an anti-BDS watchdog, mentioned DEI over three dozen times as a driver of campus antisemitism.⁴¹ Stand-WithUs, another anti-BDS group, sent a letter to university administrators that year pressuring university administrators to incorporate the repressive IHRA definition of antisemitism into their DEI programming.⁴² Meanwhile, the Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law filed a civil rights complaint accusing Stanford's DEI department of antisemitism. In 2023, Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, executive director of the California-based anti-BDS group AMCHA Initiative, published a piece in *Sapir* blaming the "ideological leanings of most DEI programs" for "the blindness of DEI programs to Jewish students and antisemitism."⁴³

The Right won a major victory against antiracist education policy in June 2023,

when the Supreme Court issued a decision that ended affirmative action in university admission policies.⁴⁴ But before this, when MAGA culture warriors came up short in the 2022 midterms, some wondered if the anti-woke crusade was running out of steam.⁴⁵

In the wake of October 7, an emergent moral panic against “campus antisemitism” breathed new wind into DEI critics’ sails. “One of those things we’ve struggled with, those of us who want to reform higher education, is convincing people that there’s a problem,” said Greene, the Heritage report’s author, to the *New York Times* in December 2023. “Historically, they look around and say, ‘Huh, this seems fine.’ Everything they’re seeing right now is that things are not fine.”⁴⁶

RISING ANTISEMITISM AND THE ANTI-DEMOCRATIC RIGHT

Together, the intertwined moral panics against DEI and “campus antisemitism” stand to further the Right’s anti-democratic agenda at a time of unprecedented authoritarian threat. The anti-DEI crusade is one more front in the MAGA movement’s ongoing war to constrict its circle of belonging around the contours of a cis, straight, White Christian America. By aligning that crusade with anti-antisemitism, the Jewish Right is anxious to secure its own spot within that circle of belonging. As they lament the “unfair weight—the weight of Western civilization...upon so few Jewish shoulders,”⁴⁷ as Tikvah leaders Eric Cohen and Elliot Abrams put it in March, they willingly lend their kosher stamp of approval to

a sweeping counter-revolution against the very system of pluralism, church-state separation, and formal equality under the law that has made it possible for American Jews, and all minoritized groups, to at least imagine the possibility of full safety and thriving in the U.S.

As right-wing Jews help the MAGA Right weaponize Jewish pain and fear against Black and Brown people and drive a wedge between American Jews and potential allies, they secure fairweather friends in return. Antisemitism has become increasingly mainstream throughout the MAGA movement, with White Christian nationalists endorsing open or coded tropes of deicide, blood libel, and “great replacement” that could not be uttered in “respectable” conservative discourse even a few years ago. Unsurprisingly, right-wing antisemites like Elon Musk have used this alliance with the Jewish Right to launder their reputations. Weeks after he was criticized for boosting an X post that accused Jews of fomenting “dialectical hatred against whites,”⁴⁸ Musk called DEI “fundamentally antisemitic” in an interview with Ben Shapiro shortly after touring Auschwitz in January 2024.⁴⁹

“Do you have the courage to truly confront and condemn the ideology driving antisemitism?” Representative Foxx’s charge against the university presidents at the December House meeting should in fact be levied instead against the Right, the leadership of the American Jewish establishment, and many liberals today. To truly uproot antisemitism, we must dismantle the structural foundations of White Christian supremacy in the U.S. that allow antisemitism and all other forms of oppression to flourish. Those who join the authoritarian Right in attacking such efforts are dangerously mistaken, and they are dragging the Jewish community—and the country—off a cliff.

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Pro-Palestine encampment at Brown University in April 2024 (Credit: Colonel Glenn/Flickr.com)



BY SAVERA

Hindu Supremacy and the Multiracial U.S. Far Right



Collage of a man on a scooter with a saffron flag, Steve Bannon, and M.S. Golwalkar (Credit: PRA)

In July 2024, hundreds of influential far-right leaders gathered to network at the “National Conservatism” conference, or “NatCon,” in Washington, D.C. While the event was headlined by prominent White supremacists and Christian nationalists such as Stephen Miller and Jack Posobiec, it wasn’t an all-White affair. NatCon4 featured several Indian American speakers,¹ including Saurabh Sharma, the then-Executive Director of the Edmund Burke Foundation, which organized the event, and Vivek Ramaswamy, the former candidate for the 2024 Republican nomination.

Two leaders of India’s Hindu Right were also invited to speak at this year’s NatCon: Ram Madhav, a member of the National Executive of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the all-male paramilitary group that serves as the Hindu supremacist movement’s fountainhead,² and Swapan Dasgupta, of the

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), one of the RSS’s many subsidiary organizations and India’s ruling party for the past decade. Now in leadership positions at the affiliated India Foundation, their presence at the event was strategic. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s regime has sought to emphasize India’s emergence as a world power, and in recent years, Hindu supremacists have staked a claim to leadership of the global Far Right.³

A few months prior to NatCon, Madhav authored an article with precisely this message, writing that “India should steer the global conservative movement.”⁴ In his speech at NatCon, he exclaimed that he and Dasgupta “came here to tell you about the success story of conservatism in India—the defeat of the left-liberal-Marxist-radical Islamist cabal in India.”

Although the 2024 national election results suggest that India’s democratic movements are alive and fighting—the BJP ex-

perienced a surprising setback, and Modi’s third term depends on coalition politics⁵—the Hindu supremacist or *Hindutva*⁶ movement’s size, wealth, century-long political longevity, and hegemonic power is unparalleled.⁷ Global far-right strategists have thus tracked the movement’s rise, its organizational sophistication, and its capture of state power with interest. Steve Bannon, for example, once noted that Modi “was a Trump before Trump.”⁸ Hindu supremacists’ presence at NatCon, as such, extends a growing pattern of far-right actors across the globe collaborating on an authoritarian playbook.⁹

However, the participation of Indian Americans—even *Hindutva* acolytes like Ramaswamy¹⁰—in such an arena raises thornier questions, given their position in the U.S. as ethnic and religious minorities. One NatCon speaker, Doug Wilson, proposed a ban on Hindus entering American elected office just weeks prior.¹¹

Ramaswamy was likewise pilloried by evangelical pastors, despite his strenuous attempts to position himself as a Hindu champion for Judeo-Christian values.¹²

Despite such tensions, there is growing alignment between the Far Right and the Hindutva movement, which is helmed in the U.S. by a network known collectively as the American Sangh.¹³ From the participation of Hindu supremacists in the January 6th insurrection¹⁴ and the involvement of American Sangh leaders in the Edward Blum-led campaign to dismantle affirmative action¹⁵ to the creation of new Political Action Committees (PACs) like the Bannon-led Republican Hindu Coalition,¹⁶ evidence of this convergence continues to emerge.

These proliferating alliances reveal the need for a transnational understanding of the Far Right and the forces bringing various movements together. Examining the American Sangh's convergence with

For over a century, Hindu supremacists have drawn inspiration from American and European fascism. M.S. Golwalkar, the long-serving *Sarsanghchalak*²⁰ (supreme leader) of the RSS, expressed his open admiration for Nazi Germany as a model worthy of emulation.²¹ One of Golwalkar's inspirations and a founding Hindutva ideologue, V.D. Savarkar, explicitly invoked the status of Black Americans while describing his desired positioning of Muslims in India.²² Another ideologue, B.S. Moonje, traveled to Italy in the early 1930s to study Mussolini's Fascist movement—and its influence remains visible in the RSS's paramilitary training, uniforms, and focus on youth indoctrination.²³ Such exchanges were formative in the movement's early decades, which overlapped with late colonial rule, as Hindutva ideologues—largely elite Brahmin men concerned about their political fortunes in a nascent democracy—

THE ORIGINS OF HINDU SUPREMACY IN THE U.S.

Given the RSS's ambitions, it was unsurprising that its organizing extended beyond India's borders. Shortly after India's independence, Golwalkar oversaw the RSS's expansion in Southeast Asia and East Africa.²⁷ In the 1960s, as Indian professionals began to migrate in large numbers to the Global North, he turned his focus there.

On Golwalkar's suggestion, Mahesh Mehta, an RSS *pracharak* (full-time worker), founded the VHP of America (VHP-A), the apex Hindu supremacist organization in the U.S., in 1970.²⁸ Mehta, whose father was an RSS worker, met Golwalkar at the age of 10 and considered him his guru, and built the American Sangh on Golwalkar's explicit orders.²⁹

However, even as Mehta went about building the VHP-A for many decades, the question of how exactly the movement would relate to U.S. politics remained unanswered. The VHP-A's early members had relatively transient ties to their new country. They spoke of the U.S. as their *karmabhoomi* ("land of work"), and their efforts as ultimately in service of their *janmabhoomi* (homeland, "land of birth").

Accordingly, organizations like the VHP-A and the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)³⁰—the direct equivalent of the RSS, which similarly focuses on organizing members in "shakhas" or branches—cultivated an influential set of upper-caste immigrants who often had backgrounds in the Indian Sangh.³¹ Familiar with Indian politics, they mobilized their time and resources to respond to the Sangh's priorities in India and said little about U.S. politics.³² For example, the VHP-A and its affiliates orchestrated tours and conferences in the U.S. for their Indian counterparts, including at crucial junctures when the Sangh felt marginalized or under threat—such as India's Emergency period.³³ In the late 1980s, when the Ram Janmabhoomi movement³⁴ propelled Hindutva into the Indian mainstream, the American Sangh offered political, moral and financial support to the cause.³⁵ They traveled back to India to support the movement,³⁶ and in the late 1990s, created lobbying wings like the Overseas Friends

In contrast to the (relatively) pluralistic visions of India's founders, Hindutva was animated by a racialized understanding of Hindu identity as the basis of Indian nationhood.

the U.S. Far Right requires an analysis of Hindutva's place in U.S. politics and the encounter between racial logics at this juncture. It also raises the specter of much broader developments: the American Sangh's pursuit of power through proximity to Whiteness, the possibility that racial politics within parts of the U.S. Far Right might be less rigid than assumed,¹⁷ and, consequently, the signs of an emerging Multiracial Far Right.

WHAT IS HINDU SUPREMACY?

Hindutva, or Hindu supremacy, is an ethnonationalist political movement that aspires to the absolute political hegemony of Hindus in India and the violent subordination of all minorities in the country.¹⁸ Although its proponents often conflate the movement with the Hindu religion to claim its legitimacy, Hindu supremacy actively seeks to reshape what it means to be Hindu, drawing more on theories of caste and race than faith or spirituality.¹⁹

sought to define Hindu supremacy amid competing imaginations of what India was and could be.

In contrast to the (relatively) pluralistic visions of India's founders, Hindutva was animated by a racialized understanding of Hindu identity as the basis of Indian nationhood. Anxious about the purported degeneracy and weakness of a Hindu race, the movement's leaders promised an assertive and violent Hindu resurgence. As such, the RSS's chilling fascination with European fascism was not just ideological but organizational in its desire to build totalizing organizations that would touch, mold, and eventually replace every layer of society.²⁴ This "organist"²⁵ approach required nothing less than re-socialization through intense physical training, cultural organizing, and an assiduous fixation on Hindu "unity." Once achieved, the RSS's founders believed, political results would follow, like fruit dropping from a ripe tree.²⁶

of the BJP³⁷ and fundraising wings like the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation USA.³⁸ Following the 2002 Gujarat pogroms, which saw over 2,000 Muslims killed under the watch of Gujarat's then-Chief Minister Narendra Modi, the American Sangh mobilized to protect Modi and attack critics of Hindu supremacy.³⁹

CASTE AND WHITENESS

Even if the VHP-A did not name and acknowledge it, the American Sangh's growth was shaped by social structures and policies that orient its current relationship to U.S. politics, and to race and White supremacy. This includes the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which ended decades of Asian exclusion under the 1924 Immigration Act and abolished the national-origins quota. Although the law was in part a hard-won outcome of the Civil Rights Movement, it also explicitly prioritized STEM professionals, structured as it was by Cold War logics.⁴⁰

The early decades of Indian American immigration were therefore dominated by Indian elites: Brahmin and other upper-caste professionals who satisfied

the criteria of the new law, and who had the cultural and financial capital to avail of the opportunity to migrate. These immigrants often belonged to groups that were core to the Hindu Far Right's base,⁴¹ and they came to the U.S. shaped by an imaginary of Whiteness.⁴² Consequently, they understood their migration and success within the parameters of neoliberalism and White supremacy, as expressed in how well they conformed to the category of the "model minority." This pursuit of Whiteness had a precedent. In the early twentieth century, upper-caste immigrants from India made claims to Whiteness—and U.S. citizenship—in court based on their upper-caste or "Aryan" status.⁴³

After 1965, when these mostly caste-privileged Indian immigrants came to the U.S. in large numbers, they were accommodated within a nascent multiculturalism's politics of representation. Because the first post-1965 Indian immigrants were largely upper-caste and Hindu, the norms they brought with them came to define "Indian" culture.⁴⁴ This offered the Hindutva movement an easy en-

try point into U.S. society, and a source of cultural power it has struggled to protect.

AMERICANIZING HINDUTVA

When a coalition of progressive, secular, and multi-faith groups pressured the U.S. government to deny Modi a U.S. visa in 2005 for his oversight of the Gujarat pogrom, the American Sangh had little recourse. Until this point, the movement had little engagement with U.S. politics.

However, years before Modi's visa ban, second-generation American Sangh leaders had already begun to argue for a more sophisticated organizational strategy that could build power within American politics.⁴⁵ They argued that the movement's overt supremacism caused PR embarrassments,⁴⁶ and that the movement's failure to ground itself in U.S. politics prevented them from forging a "Hindu American"—rather than a Hindu or Hindu supremacist—political identity. The new identity would appeal to a new U.S.-raised generation and allow the American Sangh to claim domestic political representation while foreclosing accusations that they were proxies of a foreign network.⁴⁷

Dalit Solidarity Forum and Hindus for Human Rights at a Black Lives Matter protest in Selma, Alabama (Credit: Hindus for Human Rights)



One key figure leading this critique was Mihir Meghani, a U.S.-born co-founder of the American Sangh's student wing, the Hindu Students Council (HSC). By the late 1990s, Meghani was already a veteran of the VHP-A and HSS, and had returned from a stint with the RSS in India, where he attended its upper-tier training camp for overseas Sangh organizers, the Vishwa Sangh Shibir.⁴⁸ Meghani and his colleagues' call for a professionalized, PR-savvy instrument to advance the Hindutva cause in the U.S. eventually took shape in the form of the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), which was founded in 2003 with language that eschewed overt supremacism in favor of "advocacy" for "pluralism," "civil rights," and "human rights."⁴⁹

HAF's strategic moderation allowed the organization to emphasize a minority identity in the U.S. while downplaying its far-right ideology. Doing so allowed HAF to claim to represent all Hindu Americans—a claim often conflated with representation of all Indian Americans—even as it relied on the Hindutva movement for financial, logistical, and political support. Indeed, HAF continued to work with and receive funding from other American Sangh groups, aggressively defended the Modi regime on Capitol Hill, and advanced the movement's casteism and anti-Muslim bigotry within the U.S.⁵⁰

In the process, HAF developed an American articulation of Hindutva that used rights-based language, all while framed in opposition to other communities' civil rights. For example, one of HAF's first major actions, in consort with the HSS in 2005, involved a campaign to rewrite California's history and social science textbooks, particularly on the topic of caste.⁵¹

In the foreign policy sphere, HAF's commitments to minority rights and international religious freedom were similarly selective. HAF repeatedly proved unwilling to apply the same principles to India and the BJP, attacking such efforts as "anti-Hindu" and thus conflating political critiques of Hindu supremacy with a violation of Hindu American rights.⁵² And because the nuances of such intra-community conflict were illegible to those outside the community, HAF often received a pass from uninformed ob-

servers reluctant to choose sides.

THE HINDUTVA MONOPOLY IS CHALLENGED

However, even as organizations like HAF grew, the structural advantages that Hindu supremacists had benefitted from were themselves eroding. Indian migration to the U.S. has become more diverse across class, caste and religion—as is evident in the growing presence of Dalit communities, and in the fact that Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and other faith groups together make up 31 percent of the diaspora,⁵³ significantly more than the equivalent figure in India. Meanwhile, opposition to Hindu supremacy among Hindus has grown, most notably on generational lines.⁵⁴

These groups have developed more expansive articulations of Indian Amer-

The American Sangh's responses to anti-caste activism revealed more of its true nature—and prompted its open alignment with the U.S. Far Right's crusades against equal opportunity.

ican identity, building bridges with other communities of color and with various racial, gender, economic and climate justice movements.⁵⁵ Such exchanges have made internal fissures such as those of caste, class, and religion within the Indian American community more legible. For example, when Hindutva groups formed alliances with the anti-Muslim Far Right after 9/11,⁵⁶ their Islamophobia alienated non-South Asian Muslim groups, making their misalignment with a politics of collective liberation painfully obvious.⁵⁷

This was only made clearer by two further developments. While the American Sangh became more confident and assertive following Modi's election as prime minister in 2014, his regime's growing attacks on minorities also sparked opposition from Hindus, who began organizing against Hindutva grounded in a progressive reading of the Hindu faith. Moreover, those years also witnessed the rapid growth of anti-caste movements in the U.S., from efforts to recognize caste as a protected category in workplaces

and universities to contestations over the content of social studies textbooks in California's public schools.⁵⁸ The American Sangh proved unable to see these anti-caste movements as anything but an existential threat. After all, even admitting the existence of caste would have disturbed the edifice on which U.S. Hindutva is built: the assertion of a homogeneous ethnic identity, without internal differentiations, animated solely by a claim to minority victimhood.

The American Sangh's responses to anti-caste activism revealed more of its true nature—and prompted its open alignment with the U.S. Far Right's crusades against equal opportunity. Explicitly borrowing from White supremacists who opposed the Civil Rights Act and anti-LGBTQ+ bigots seeking bans on gen-

der-affirming healthcare, the American Sangh's rhetoric began to spread the narrative that instituting civil rights and protections for marginalized groups threatens the rights of Hindu communities.⁵⁹ Just as the U.S. Far Right mobilized against "Critical Race Theory" by deeming it "anti-White,"⁶⁰ U.S. Hindu supremacists have used the notion of "Critical Caste Theory"⁶¹ to manufacture a sense of victimhood by falsely claiming that the movement to ban caste discrimination is itself discriminatory against Hindu Americans.⁶²

In mobilizing such narratives, American Hindutva, first framed as an exclusionary defense of Hindu American rights, found its way to overt expressions of supremacy.

TOWARD A REPUBLICAN HINDUTVA

In 2019, when Steve Bannon added his name to the Republican Hindu Coalition, it was a watershed moment. Bannon's approval signaled that the U.S. Far Right was opening up to its Hindutva counterparts. It was likely the first time the word "Republican" was expressed alongside

the identity “Hindu.”⁶³

The support of one of the country’s most well-known White supremacists inspired a range of Hindu supremacists to build power with the Far Right. U.S. Hindutva leaders, including staffers and affiliates of groups like HAF and VHP-A, joined efforts to support the Trump campaign, including formations like “Hindus for Trump.”⁶⁴ It was clear which way the wind was blowing, and the VHP-A, which had been overshadowed by HAF for two decades, took the initiative in spearheading this shift.⁶⁵

For example, in 2019, a year ahead

the more successful among them, like Vivek Ramaswamy, opening the looming possibility that more members of the community could follow his path into the Far Right. Between 2016 and 2020, Indian American support for Trump nearly doubled, from 15 percent to 28 percent.⁷⁰ In 2024, this figure is only expected to grow, led by the Hindu Far Right.

CHALLENGING THE MULTIRACIAL FAR RIGHT

The Hindutva movement’s open embrace of the broader Far Right, while un-

be seen merely as an internal struggle among Indian Americans. The history of the American Sangh exemplifies the ways in which far-right actors of color rely on the isolation of our struggles around lines of identity and the dismissal of some politics as esoteric or distant to burrow into the holes in our democratic coalitions. As events like NatCon offer clear evidence of a far-right convergence, anti-supremacist movements must connect to build power and develop an integrated fight against all forms of supremacy.

The history of the American Sangh exemplifies the ways in which far-right actors of color rely on the isolation of our struggles around lines of identity and the dismissal of some politics as esoteric or distant to burrow into the holes in our democratic coalitions.

of the 2020 elections, VHP-A members helped establish Americans4Hindus, a PAC “set up in response to recent anti-India and anti-Hindu statements and actions by members of the Progressive Caucus (‘PC’) of the Democratic party that have aggrieved a large swath of the Hindu American community.”⁶⁶ A4H platformed a range of White supremacist leaders,⁶⁷ and although the PAC claims to be nonpartisan, it has consistently and almost exclusively endorsed and funded for Republican candidates for office, including Trump himself.⁶⁸

By the 2020s, Hindu supremacist leaders began to openly strategize ways to spark a wholesale shift of the community to the Republican Party. Vibhuti Jha, a VHP-A affiliate, ran for office on a Republican ticket in New York, and began to develop an online platform that called out “HINOs”—“Hindu in Name Only,” a riff on “Republican in Name Only”—who remained in the Democratic Party.⁶⁹

One of Jha’s close associates, Manga Anantatmula, another VHP-A affiliate, played a key role in the successful effort to end affirmative action at the Supreme Court, and has since used her profile to run for office in three Republican primaries. Many others have followed suit, with

surprising, was not inevitable. More than a set of politics imported from India, the movement’s strategic turn emerges out of escalating crises and the Far Right’s growth globally.

Today, only 54 percent of Indian Americans identify as Hindu⁷¹ and support for Hindutva is contested among them.⁷² The American Sangh’s effort to couch Hindutva in the language of liberal multiculturalism appears both increasingly precarious—and, given the Far Right’s ascendancy, far less attractive than an overt politics of reactionary grievance and resentment. The American Sangh’s movement toward the Far Right is likely to accelerate, inspired by the model of the pro-Israel movement⁷³ in its pursuit of a dual positioning: simultaneously White-adjacent and an aggrieved minority. Even if this rightward shift becomes unpopular among Indian Americans, it could be advanced by brute force, wealthy donors, and whatever structural advantages the Hindu Far Right retains. In this regard, the American Sangh looks poised to follow their far-right partners in an anti-democratic pursuit of minority rule.

The path ahead to contest these shifts may not be fully clear, but one thing is: challenging U.S. Hindutva cannot

Savera is a new platform bringing together a multiracial, interfaith, anticaste coalition of organizations and activists to build a new world where all people are able to live in harmony, dignity, and liberation. We are committed to resisting the rising tides of hatred, and combating all forms of supremacist politics, and the intersections between them.

Read Savera’s new report copublished with PRA, HAF Way to Supremacy: How the Hindu American Foundation Rebrands Bigotry As Minority Rights, to learn more about the Hindu supremacist movement in the U.S. and how it’s working with other far-right actors to advance an anti-democratic politics.

BY KITANA ANANDA

Fire Dreams: Making Black Feminist Liberation in the South

A conversation with Deon Haywood, Laura McTighe, and Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson



Collage of people wearing Women With a Vision t-shirts and phoenixes. (Credit: Image: Laura McTighe/Design: PRA)

Fire Dreams: Making Black Feminist Liberation in the South (Duke University Press, 2024) tells the story of New Orleans-based Women With A Vision (WWAV) and the collective's Black feminist liberatory praxis rooted in the U.S. South.

Since 1989, WWAV has organized with Black women, queer and trans communities of color, sex workers, drug users, and people living with HIV/AIDS against the criminalization of their communities. In 2012, on the heels of a major organizing victory, arsonists attacked WWAV's office, destroying their longtime organizing home and physical records of their work. That could have stopped WWAV's work—but it didn't.

In the fire's wake, WWAV decided to document the organization's rebuilding. That led to *Fire Dreams*, a collab-

orative ethnography of WWAV that presents a living archive¹ of the group's work and a toolkit for movement organizers.

As fires blaze across the U.S. and the world, what can movement builders learn from WWAV's relational organizing for health and reproductive justice, and their practice of "research as survival"?

To find out, PRA spoke with WWAV's executive director Deon Haywood; *Fire Dreams* coauthor Laura McTighe, an associate professor of religion at Florida State University and longtime WWAV accomplice; and Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson—then co-executive director of the Highlander Research and Education Center, which was firebombed in 2019—about surviving White supremacist and state violence.

The following is a condensed excerpt from a forthcoming article based on the two-hour roundtable and has been significantly edited for length and clarity. Visit politicalresearch.org for the full article.

Could you tell us about WWAV's intersectional work and how this book came out of it? Why was it important to you to tell this story of making Black queer feminist-led liberation from the South?

Deon Haywood: I'm going to read something we wrote a week ago on my whiteboard to set the stage: "WWAV was founded at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the War on Drug Users. For 35 years, we have used the principles of harm reduction to care for our community. Today, it is no different. We are using

When you want to destroy people's future, you try to obliterate their past.

tools like our Post-Roe Survival Guide² to ensure our community has the resources needed to survive regardless of lawmakers' attacks." I'm reading this as a reminder of where we come from and why we exist to this day.

The book came about because we were targeted. In 2012, I was getting multiple death threats on a weekly basis. I didn't get that until we started looking at policy in post-Katrina Louisiana—how the criminal justice system was using our people as a pawn to get federal dollars, and making the connection to police violence, which we saw happening to so many sex workers, both cis and trans women. They experienced violence on an everyday basis and from police. Our lawmakers, with DOJ funding after Katrina, were saying, *We're gonna catch all of these violent offenders*. They were targeting and picking on sex workers.

We spoke out and met with the DOJ to try to get a consent decree against the local police department here. We held community meetings with trans and cis women, and queer people who had experienced police violence. Sometimes it was standing room only.

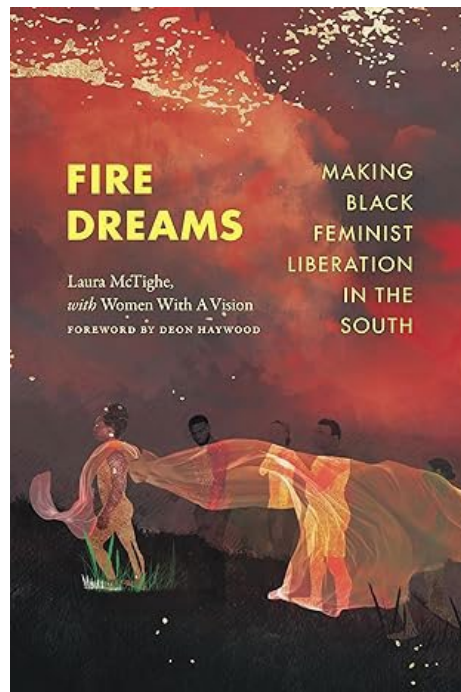
Almost two months after we won the Crime Against Nature by Solicitation case [with a legal team who filed the case in partnership with WWAV, resulting in the removal of sex workers convicted under the law from a sex offender registry³ – Ed.], we got a call about the arson attack at our office. We lost so much. Documents, WWAV's history, our first bylaws, and unique, handwritten notes from our founding mothers [Catherine Haywood and Danita Muse]. The next day after the fire, our clients showed up to donate. They knew that people around the country were giving [and they wanted to help us rebuild]. That's when we realized we were doing something special.

At the time, Laura was on the board. We decided we needed to capture this—to record the story of who we are and how we do this.

One of our community members said [that day], "We're gonna rise like a phoe-

nix." Fire is destructive, but it can also be renewing. And in that moment, we decided that was just going to be how we captured and documented the work.

Laura McTighe: Everything WWAV does is rooted in relationships, which are the theory and method of change. Deon's mom [Catherine Haywood] always says,



Cover of *Fire Dreams* (Duke University Press, 2024)

"You have to build a relationship. When you have that, you can do anything. But if you don't have that, you can't do anything."

Honestly, we weren't trying to write a book. We were trying to ensure the next iteration of WWAV's work. We've seen this with archives and libraries being destroyed as part of the genocide happening now in Gaza: When you want to destroy people's future, you try to obliterate their past. That's why WWAV's space was attacked.

But we learned quickly that so much of what WWAV has done has been carried in relationships and in stories. Continuing to do this—sitting on the front porch,

making harm reduction packets, talking to community—was the rebirth and renewal of WWAV's work after the fire.

We knew we were living through something that most people didn't survive, much less come out to be as strong, through Deon's leadership and all the people that have carried this work forward. And that was a story we had to share. We were seeing fires like that multiply across our world, and people needed tools for how to get through this—not only intact, but with your principles guiding and opening a broader horizon for liberation.

Ash-Lee Henderson: Relationships are the capital that we've got in the absence of philanthropic dollars for the kind of lifesaving work that WWAV does.

It's about survival. The work gets done because of those relationships. It shouldn't be revolutionary, but it is. What makes relationships revolutionary is how WWAV develops relationships: interdependent, not codependent, relationship between a base-building organization that also does direct service and mutual aid and political education.

Because of the way that Deon leads, how her mother did before her, and how she's training her family to lead in organizing and her staff to be in organizing. There's trust between residents of New Orleans and WWAV, because they do what they said they'd do and people respond in kind by saying, when you need something, we got you. But right now, there are not enough folks who are doing the work like Deon Haywood and WWAV.

In *Fire Dreams*, WWAV theorizes the "racial capitalism playbook" operating in our daily lives—and how Black women's existence and organizing presents a counter-playbook that refuses this playbook's logic. What lessons does the book offer to movement organizers and strategists for building the world otherwise in the face of unrelenting systemic violence and the resurgent Right?

Laura McTighe: When Andrea Ritchie did a book talk for *Practicing New Worlds*, she talked about the long view of her organizing work and how she realized that

Everybody thinks you need money to win, but every single revolutionary moment that has happened in this country took place without money.

if she wasn't in her own imagination, she was going to be in someone else's.⁴ That's why it matters to us to name how racial capitalism is working in our everyday lives, to call those steps "a playbook," because that is how the folks who are trying to destroy us work, and what WWAV does—through front porch strategy and our tools—is an entirely different process of worldbuilding.

We distilled the racial capitalism playbook's steps in the wake of the arson attack to make sense of and name what WWAV's foremothers and people before them have been living. Racial capitalism works by isolating people from necessary services, blaming them for the strategies they use to survive, criminalizing them for their survival, destabilizing their communities, erasing people from space, and taking their land.

In the book, we also theorize how WWAV works and offer several tools to build otherwise: space, accompliceship, refusal, and speech. [...These tools] aren't cookie cutter molds, but if you move all the pieces in formation, they build something different.

Deon Haywood: About the refusal part: It was modeled for me. Most leaders don't know that you have the power to refuse. In the book we talk about my mom and Danita giving money back to people.

I knew it was okay to refuse and that I was still going to win. Everybody thinks you need money to win, but every single revolutionary moment that has happened in this country took place without money.

Ash-Lee Henderson: Deon's description of [refusal] is the answer to the question. For me, this book isn't a counter to

the right-wing agenda to impact folks with HIV/AIDS or some innovative new strategy. For the last 35 years, WWAV has been a proof of concept of what Black women have been doing for centuries to dispel what the right-wing White supremacist patriarchy has been trying to prove in response to the beloved community that we've been building.

Fire Dreams is not the counter play. It's the play. The Right is doing the counter. This arson was an attempt to break the long-term win. They didn't. Why would they have risked an arson charge if Women With A Vision was losing?

Kitana Ananda is an editor, writer, and researcher working at the intersections of racial, gender, economic, and im/migrant justice. She is committed to building a world liberated from violence.

Deon Haywood and Laura McTighe sitting on a porch. (Credit: Women With A Vision Archives)



Understanding the Rise of the Multi-racial Right—And Why It Matters

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- 24** Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 42.
- 25** Chanda Prescod-Weinstein quoted in Bentley Addison, "Roundtable | White Jews: Here Is What Black Jews Need from You in 2019," *Forward*, December 28, 2018, <https://forward.com/opinion/416737/roundtable-white-jews-here-is-what-black-jews-need-from-you-in-2019/>.
- 26** Ari Kelman et al., *Counting Inconsistencies: An Analysis of American Jewish Population Studies, with a Focus on Jews of Color* (Stanford: Jews of Color Field Building Initiative, 2019). The Jews of Color Initiative defines the term "Jews of Color" as "an imperfect, but useful umbrella term... to describe Jews from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, whether biracial, adopted, Jews by choice, or part of other national or geographic populations (or a combination of these)." Jews of Color Initiative, "Navigating Nuance: Using the Term 'Jews of Color,'" June 2022, <https://jewsofcolorinitiative.org/newsletter/navigating-nuance-using-the-term-jews-of-color/>.
- 27** Gabe Stutman, "Stanford therapists allege 'hostile climate' for Jews in the workplace," *Jewish News of Northern California*, June 15, 2021, <https://jweekly.com/2021/06/15/stanford-therapists-allege-hostile-climate-for-jews-in-the-workplace/>. As the staffer explained, "My people were murdered because we were seen as contaminants to the white race.... Being told to identify with the oppressor felt like a betrayal to my family." The Stanford DEI department reportedly did not support Jewish staffers' desire to form a Jewish affinity group, likely contributing to staffers' experience of erasure. Sarina Deb, "CAPS counselors accuse University of antisemitic practices," *The Stanford Daily*, June 17, 2021, <https://stanforddaily.com/2021/06/17/caps-counselors-accuse-university-of-antisemitic-practices/>.
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- 33** They have included MAGA pundits like Ben Shapiro and Josh Hammer; right-wing magazines like *Tablet* (funded by Tikvah Fund), *Jewish News Syndicate* and the *Jewish Journal*; National Conservatism leader Yoram Hazony; representatives of the far-right Orthodox-led Coalition for Jewish Values; and "anti-woke" liberal" pundits like Batya Ungar-Sargon and Bari Weiss, among many others. See Jonathan S. Tobin, "Why aren't Jewish groups fighting DEI-based antisemitism?," *Jewish News Syndicate*, December 22, 2023, <https://www.jns.org/why-arent-jewish-groups-fighting-dei-based-antisemitism/>; Yoram Hazony, "Should Universities Protect Campus Anti-Semites?," *Public Discourse*, February 11, 2024, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2024/02/92656/>.
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- 37** See Shane Burley, "Interrogating the 'New Antisemitism,'" *Jewish Currents*, September 15, 2022, [The Forward, January 6, 2022, <https://forward.com/opinion/480444/what-the-heritage-foundation-gets-wrong-about-dei-and-antisemitism/>.](https://jewishcurrents.org/interrogating-the-new-antisemitism; Stifling Dissent: How Israel's Defenders Use False Charges of Anti-Semitism to Limit the Debate Over Israel on Campus</i> (Oakland: Jewish Voice for Peace, 2015).</p>
<p>38 Steven Lubet,)
- 39** Jay Greene and James Paul, "Inclusion Delusion."
- 40** Jay Greene interviewed by Michelle Cordero, "New Study: Diversity Officers at U.S. Colleges are Anti-Israel," *The Heritage Foundation*, December 19, 2021, <https://www.heritage.org/education/heritage-explains/new-study-diversity-officers-us-colleges-are-anti-israel>.
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DEI Programs Can't Address Campus Antisemitism," *Sapir*, Volume 10, Spring 2023, <https://sapirjournal.org/antisemitism/2023/08/why-dei-programs-cant-address-campus-antisemitism/>.

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Hindu Supremacy and the Multiracial U.S. Far Right

1 NatCon had as many as seven members from India and its diaspora attending, far more than any group of people of color: Saurabh Sharma, Vivek Ramaswamy, Ed Husain, Ram Madhav, Suella Braverman, Swapan Dasgupta, and Sumanta Maitra. See National Conservatism Conference, "About," accessed April 25, 2024, <https://nationalconservatism.org/natcon-4-2024/about/>.

2 Bridge Initiative Team, "Fact-sheet: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)," *Bridge*, May 18, 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/fact-sheet-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss/>.

3 This ambition is often articulated in the phrase *vishwaguru* or "world teacher."

4 Ram Madhav, "India should steer the global conservative movement," *Indian Express*, April 28, 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ram-madhav-writes-india-should-steer-the-global-conservative-movement-9292796/>. "Bharat" is another historical name for India derived from Sanskrit texts.

5 Soutik Biswas, "Narendra Modi: Will Coalition Turn Him Into a Humbler Leader?," *BBC*, June 8, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cno0xl6n8ldo>.

6 The terms "Hindutva," "Hindu Nationalism" and "Hindu supremacy" are often used interchangeably but imprecisely. Hindutva is a specific flavor of Hindu supremacy espoused by the Sangh and it

differs from other forms of Hindu nationalism in its exclusivist and civilizational thinking, and its belief in a Hindu degeneracy (accelerated by purportedly foreign threats) that necessitates an assertive and violent Hindu resurgence.

7 The BJP has monopolized access to big business, raising more funds than the next six parties put together and offering oligarchs unprecedented access to nearly every sector of India's economy. The Sangh has hegemonic control over the bureaucracy, judiciary, police, and military, and has also spawned thousands of civil society organizations—from charities to hostels to think-tanks to blood banks—while working to crush, harass, or defund independent entities.

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10 Usha Kumar, "Vivek Ramaswamy Represents the Convergence of White Supremacy and Hindu Supremacy — And He May Well Be Trump's Running Mate," *Religion Dispatches*, December 12, 2023, <https://religiondispatches.org/vivek-ramaswamy-represents-the-convergence-of-white-supremacy-and-hindu-supremacy-and-he-may-well-be-trumps-running-mate/>.

11 Douglas Wilson (@douglaswils), "Pieter, I would support measures that would exclude Hindus from holding public office in the United States. You in?," *Twitter (now X)*, June 3, 2024, <https://x.com/douglaswils/status/1797670545259151785>, archived at <https://archive.is/RHufv>.

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13 The Sangh or the "American Sangh" are more precise terms than an ideological category such as Hindutva to describe the concrete, material institutions through which the Hindu supremacist movement organizes. The Sangh is used by scholars to describe institutions where an RSS executive may exert authority, a) through existing institutionalized communication channels, and b) without coercion. See Felix Pal, "The Shape of the Sangh: Rethinking Hindu Nationalist Organisational Ties," *Contemporary South Asia* 31, no. 1 (October 9, 2022): 133–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2022.2132219>.

14 Savera: United Against Supremacy, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence," January 2024, <https://www.wearesavera.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Global-VHPs-Trail-of-Violence-v2.pdf>.

15 Savera: United Against Supremacy, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence."

16 Savera: United Against Supremacy, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence."

17 At a broader level, scholars have ar-

gued that race remains malleable within the U.S. Far Right, which offers a degree of inclusion to non-White actors who enthusiastically buy into its moral panics. See Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

18 For the full definition, see Savera: United Against Supremacy, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence."

19 This has been stated explicitly by various Hindutva ideologues and remains a critical part of Hindutva thinking today. For example, even the VHP-A of America has written in an editorial that "distinguishing Hindutva from Hinduism becomes imperative." See Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (Penguin: New Delhi, 2003) for a deeper analysis of the evolution of Hindutva ideology, and World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), *Hindu Vishwa*, Volume LV, No. 4 (October-December 2023), https://hinduvishwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Hindu_Vishwa_web_oct-dec-2023.pdf for the VHP-A editorial in question.

20 Dharendra Jha, "Guruji's Lie: The RSS and MS Golwalkar's undeniable links to Nazism," *Caravan Magazine*, July 31, 2021, <https://caravanmagazine.in/history/rss-golwalkar-links-nazism>.

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24 Shankar Gopalakrishnan, *A Mass Movement Against Democracy: The Threat of the Sangh Parivar* (Aakar Books, 2009).

25 Organicism, the idea of society as a living whole, is core to hierarchical right-wing thinking that views sets of people as being "natural" and "unnatural" to a society. See Jean-Yves Camus, Nicolas Lebourg, and Jane Marie Todd, *Far-Right Politics in Europe* (Harvard University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2307/ctv24w63mn>; Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (University of Chicago Press, 2016) See also Anustup Basu, *Hindutva as Political Monotheism* (Duke University Press, 2020) and John Zavos, "The Shapes of Hindu Nationalism" in *Coalition Politics and Hindu Nationalism*, eds. Katherin Adeney and Lawrence Sáez (Routledge, 2005), on the Sangh's organicism.

26 Rameshchai Mehta, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: Vishwa ka additya sanghatan* (Lotus Publications, 2017). In

fact, conceptualizing the Sangh as a banyan tree is by now something of a cliché within the Sangh.

27 This expansion had largely been focused on older waves of Indian migration, such as to Southeast Asia and East Africa (where the first overseas RSS branch was founded in 1947). See Jagdish Chandra Sharda Shastri, *Memoirs of a Global Hindu* (Vishwa Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai & Vishwa Niketan, New Delhi, 2008), <https://www.vakmumbai.org/memoires-of-a-global-hindu.pdf>.

28 Savera, "Cut From the Same Cloth: The VHP-A's Ties to Its Indian Counterpart," 2024, https://www.wearesavera.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Cut-from-the-Same-Cloth_Savera-Report-2.pdf.

29 Golwalkar felt so strongly about the importance of establishing this overseas front that when Mehta wanted to return to India, he insisted Mehta remain in the U.S. See Vanya Mehta, "The BJP's US Branch Outstrips Its Congress Counterpart," *The Caravan*, April 1, 2014, <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/foreign-returns>.

30 The HSS was within the VHP-A before becoming a separate, official entity in 1989.

31 As Gaurang Vaishnav, a VHP-A Governing Council member and close colleague of Mehta's, writes, "Guruji [an honorific in the Sangh for Golwalkar] advised Maheshbhai to build VHP in USA... He actively sought out NRIs, all young at that time, who had either RSS background or were infused with a desire to serve the Hindu society and their motherland." See Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, *Hindu Vishwa* 47, no. 2 (April-June 2017), <https://hinduvishwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Hindu-Vishwa-Apr-June-2017-Inside-Pages.pdf>.

32 Mahesh Mehta, *Hindu Philosophy in Action: In Search of Universal Well-Being* (Team Spirit India, 2003), for an example of how U.S. politics is absent from the VHP-A founder's account of the American Sangh's first three decades.

33 Mehta and other American Sangh leaders helped found organizations like Indians for Democracy (IFD) and Friends of India Society International (FISI).

34 A campaign to demolish a 500-year-old mosque in Ayodhya, the Babri Masjid, and replace it with a Hindu temple.

35 See Savera, "Cut from the Same Cloth," 19, and Savera, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence," 15–16.

36 See Savera, "Cut from the Same Cloth," 19.

37 The OFBJP was founded in April 1991 in New York City by members of FISI and other Sangh leaders. Mahesh Mehta is also credited as a founding member of the OFBJP as well and served as its national coordinator. See World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), *Hindu Vishwa*, Volume XXXVII, No. 2 (April-June 2017), <https://www.vhp-america.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Hindu-Vishwa-Apr-June-2017-Inside-Pages.pdf> and Vaniya Mehta, "Foreign Returns: The BJP's US branch outstrips its Congress counterpart," *Caravan Magazine*, April 1, 2014, <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/foreign-returns>.

38 Both Mehta and the VHP-A explicitly claim EVF USA as their project. EVF

USA was founded after RSS pracharak Shyam Gupt traveled across 30 cities of the USA to pitch the project to VHPA members. "VHPA has spared four very dynamic leaders, Dr. Basant Tariyal, Dr. Veena Gandhi, Dr. Yash Pal Lakhra, Shri Ramesh Shah to make this institution successful," Mehta writes in his memoirs. See Mehta, *Hindu Philosophy in Action*, 16, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, "VHPA History and Milestones," accessed June 20, 2024, <https://www.vhp-america.org/about-vhpa/vhpa-history-and-milestones/>.

39 Savera, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence," 17-18.

40 Gabriel J. Chin and Rose Cuison Villazor, eds, *The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965: Legislating a New America* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

41 Urban, upper-caste elites have long been the BJP's core base; its recent success has been attributed to its ability to expand beyond this base into rural and lower/middle caste groups. See Rohan Venkataramakrishnan, "Are India's Elite anti-BJP? Actually, the Party Drew Its Greatest Support From Upper Castes, Rich," *Scroll.In*, June 5, 2019, <https://scroll.in/article/925925/are-indias-elite-anti-bjp-actually-saffron-party-got-greatest-support-from-upper-castes-rich>.

42 Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Vinay Lal, *The Other Indians: A Political and Cultural History of South Asians in America* (University of California, Asian American Studies Center Press, 2008).

43 See, for example, Jennifer Snow, "The Civilization of White Men," in *Oxford University Press eBooks*, 2004, 259-80, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195149181.003.0011>. These efforts were largely unsuccessful.

44 This is a notable repeat of how upper-caste norms were also privileged by the British colonial state, who chose upper-castes as their interpreters and representatives of India and of Hinduism.

45 See VHP Governing Council, "List-mail Archive," *HinduNet*, archived on Wayback Machine, accessed June 20, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091110042014/http://hindunet.org/archive/listmail-vhpgc-l>.

46 This argument was comprehensively made in two earlier reports on HAF. See Coalition Against Genocide, "Affiliations of Faith: Hindu American Foundation and the Global Sangh," Spotlight Series Report, December 15, 2013, <https://www.coalitionagainstgenocide.org/reports/2013/cag.15dec2013.haf.rss.pdf>. Coalition Against Genocide, "Affiliations of Faith: Joined at the Hip," Spotlight Series Report, December 22, 2013, <https://www.coalitionagainstgenocide.org/reports/2013/cag.22dec2013.haf.rss.2.pdf>.

47 See, for example, in Mat McDermott, "Letter to the Editor of India Abroad from Mihir Meghani, April 2006," blog post, *Hindu American Foundation*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.hinduamerican.org/blog/letter-to-editor-india-abroad-mihir-meghani-april-2006> and Suhag Shukla, "Hindu American Political Advocacy," *Swadharna* volume 3, 27, archived on Wayback Machine, accessed June 15, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110830083203/http://swadharna.org/public/SwadharmaV3.pd>

f?page=27. In these writings, HAF emphasized that it needed to steer clear of "activism," and that other groups were too closely "associated with Indian politics."

48 Meghani emailed a report of the event to the VHP-A Governing Council detailing his interactions with other Sangh-affiliated groups, where he writes: "In December 1995, I attended the Vishwa Sangh Shibir 1995 in Baroda, Gujarat, Bharat (India), organized by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). En route, RSS arranged a meeting with a delegation of 30 Khasi Hindus from Meghalaya that were touring the state of Maharashtra as part of RSS's Bharat Mera Ghar (India is My Home) project." See Coalition Against Genocide, "Affiliations of Faith: Hindu American Foundation and the Global Sangh," and Coalition Against Genocide, "Affiliations of Faith: Joined at the Hip."

49 McDermott, "Letter to the Editor of India Abroad."

50 See Raqib Hameed Naik, "Sangh Parivar's U.S. Funds Trail," *Frontline*, July 5, 2021, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/sangh-parivars-us-funds-trail/article35117629.ece>; The Bridge Initiative, "Factsheet: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) - Bridge Initiative," *Bridge Initiative*, August 2, 2023, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss/>; and Pieter Friedrich, "The American Sangh's Affair With Tulsi Gabbard," *The Caravan*, August 1, 2019, <https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/american-sangh-affair-tulsi-gabbard>.

51 See Friends of South Asia, "Details of Proposed Textbook Edits: Controversial Changes to California History Textbooks," n.d., <https://web.archive.org/web/20230505151541/http://www.friendsofsouthasia.org/textbook/TextbookEdits.html> and Kamala Visweswaran et al., "The Hindutva View of History: Rewriting Textbooks in India and the United States," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2009): 101-12.

52 For example, when the US Commission on International Religious Freedom issued a report pointing to the rise of vigilante violence against Muslims and Dalits in India, HAF accused it of peddling "alternative facts" and claimed that its description of the existence of caste-based discrimination was "Hinduphobic." See Samir Kalra, "USCIRF and the Continued Funding of Institutional Failure," *Medium*, May 6, 2018, https://medium.com/@samir_46682/uscirf-and-the-continued-funding-of-institutional-failure-d245a5d97337.

53 Sumitra Badrinathan, Devesh Kapur and Milan Vaishnav, "Social Realities of Indian Americans: Results From the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/06/social-realities-of-indian-americans-results-from-the-2020-indian-american-attitudes-survey?lang=en>; Soutik Biswas, "Pew Survey: What Migration Reveals About Religion in India," *BBC*, August 20, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cm23n23dwx30>.

54 See Ram Vishwanathan, "Uncle, Please Sit: Anti-Hindutva Politics Finds Shelter in a Generational Shift Overseas," *The Wire*, August 26, 2020, <https://thewire.in/rights/us-america-anti-hindutva-politics-generational-shift-diaspora>;

in/rights/us-america-anti-hindutva-politics-generational-shift-diaspora; and Shreeya Singh, "South Asian Students Are Protesting Narendra Modi's Treatment of Muslims in India," *Teen Vogue*, February 29, 2020, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/students-against-hindutva-protests-modi-muslims>.

55 See Sunaina Maira, *Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire after 9/11* (Duke University Press, 2009).

56 See "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence," 25-26, 29-31.

57 In fact, the pursuit of Whiteness is increasingly contested and "earned" through the act of "punching down," signaling Hindus as more compliant minorities than their siblings, and therefore as distinct from—and presumably superior to—their Muslim, Christian, Sikh, atheist, or Dalit brethren.

58 See, for example, Friends of South Asia, "Speak Out Against the Hindutva Assault on California's History Textbooks," n.d., <https://web.archive.org/web/20230503230449/http://www.friendsofsouthasia.org/textbook/index.html>; S Karthikeyan, "The Hindu American Foundation's Warped Position on the Cisco Caste-discrimination Case," *The Caravan*, February 28, 2021, <https://caravanmagazine.in/caste/cisco-haf-hindu-american-dalit-diaspora>; and Aria Thaker, "The Latest Skirmish in California's Textbooks War Reveals the Mounting Influence of Hindutva in the United States," *The Caravan*, February 7, 2018, <https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/california-textbooks-war-reveals-mounting-influence-hindutva-united-states>.

59 See Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective, "Hindu fragility and the politics of mimicry in North America," *The Immanent Frame*, November 2, 2022, <https://tif.ssrc.org/2022/11/02/hindu-fragility-and-the-politics-of-mimicry-in-north-america/>.

60 Benjamin Wallace-Wells, "How a Conservative Activist Invented the Conflict over Critical Race Theory," *The New Yorker*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-inquiry/how-a-conservative-activist-invented-the-conflict-over-critical-race-theory>.

61 Hindu American Foundation (@HinduAmerican), Video saying "We @ HinduAmerican encounter challenges on multiple fronts: (1) Progressive movement's anti-India, anti-Hindu faction. (2) Activists spotlighting minority religious communities in India. (3) Mainstream media endorsing biases, sometimes at the expense of facts. (Part 1/4)," X, November 28, 2023, <https://x.com/HinduAmerican/status/1729713204677222909>; McDermott, "Hobson's Choice."

62 An HAF-filed lawsuit made a somewhat convoluted form of this argument in response to the Cisco caste-discrimination case, alleging that the case violated the religious freedom of Hindus and attempting to define Hindu religious doctrine. See S Karthikeyan, "The Hindu American Foundation's Warped Position on the Cisco Caste-discrimination Case," *The Caravan*, February 28, 2021, <https://caravanmagazine.in/caste/cisco-haf-hindu-american-dalit-diaspora>.

63 Kumar, "Vivek Ramaswamy Represents."

64 Rashmee Kumar, "Hindus for Trump:

Behind the Uneasy Alliance With Right-wing US Politics," *The Guardian*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/17/donald-trump-hindu-nationalism-india>.

65 This was likely also a strategic division of labor, which is common among the Sangh.

66 Savera, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence," 32.

67 Laura Loomer was a prominent example of one such collaboration. Savera, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence," 32.

68 Savera, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence," 32.

69 Savera, "The Global VHP's Trail of Violence," 32.

70 This was in fact cited by HAF on their own blog. See Hindu American Foundation, "Why the Democratic Party Is Bleeding Indian American Support," *Medium*, September 24, 2020, <https://hinduamerican.medium.com/why-the-democratic-party-is-bleeding-indian-american-support-93667dcb785f>.

71 Sumitra Badrinathan, Devesh Kapur and Milan Vaishnav, "Social Realities of Indian Americans: Results From the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/06/social-realities-of-indian-americans-results-from-the-2020-indian-american-attitudes-survey?lang=en>.

72 Back in 2020 (perhaps a moment when the Modi regime was at its peak), 31 percent of Hindu respondents were not supportive of the BJP. Only 17 percent of the Indian American population was fully aligned with the Modi government's policies. Sumitra Badrinathan, Devesh Kapur and Milan Vaishnav, "How Do Indian Americans View India: Results From the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/02/how-do-indian-americans-view-india-results-from-the-2020-indian-american-attitudes-survey?lang=en>.

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Fire Dreams: Making Black Feminist Liberation in the South

1 Women With a Vision, *Born in Flames Living Archive*, <https://www.bornin-flames.com/>, for more about the "living archive" from which the book emerged.

2 Women With a Vision, *Your Survival Guide to a Post-Roe Louisiana*, November 2022, <https://wwav-no.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Post-Roe-PDF.pdf>.

3 Center for Constitutional Rights, "Crimes Against Nature by Solicitation (CANS) Litigation," accessed September 30, 2024, <https://ccrjustice.org/home/what-we-do/our-cases/crimes-against-nature-solicitation-cans-litigation>.

4 Andrea Ritchie presents *Practicing New Worlds*, Red Emma's, Baltimore, MD, October 28, 2023, event attended by speaker.

The Art of Activism: An Interview with Cover Artist Gabi Hawkins



Copyright: Gabi Hawkins

Can you explain the concept of this artwork to us?

The concept of this artwork comes from a metaphor used by Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson in describing the book *Fire Dreams*. She likened the book to a “blueprint” for creating a better world.

In the foreground, a group of “architects” gather around a table, putting forth a collective effort toward boarding up a house due to an impending storm. This storm forms behind a group of protesters, the Multiracial Far Right.

What role do you see art playing in movements?

Art, for me, has been a tool to interpret the world around me. Not only what I see but what I wish was real. In that same vein, it has a way of mirroring the struggles shared by many.

What first drew you to art as a medium of resistance?

I’ve always thought it was easier to explain something to someone by getting it out on paper. Words can be hard and misinterpreted. I don’t think art contains incorrect interpretations because the way one receives it is so personal.

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