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As this issue of *The Public Eye* goes to press, the midterm results are in, with the uneven verdict that Democrats have regained some power in Washington, but there's still much work to be done. Not least to address the rising tide of Far Right violence that marked the lead-up to Election Day: violence aimed at the Jewish community and people of color; journalists and progressive leaders; and women targeted by mobilized male supremacism. These troubling developments make it fitting that this issue largely concerns the various ways racist ideology is showing up in our country today.

In our commentary, **"A Classicist's Guide to Misappropriated History" (pg. 3)**, Donna Zuckerberg explores how the Alt Right and Alt Lite have co-opted classical studies to serve as the idealization of "an imagined golden age of White supremacist patriarchy they can aspire to recreate." This misinformed and bigoted appropriation has prompted academics to develop their own curricula to challenge the Alt Right.

In **"The New Southern Strategy" (pg. 5)**, Cole Parke makes the case that the conservative cause of "religious freedom," dominated by claims of "Christian persecution," has become the new code by which Republicans can appeal to White voters' racial anxieties. The original "Southern Strategy" used an evolving sequence of coded language to speak to anti-Black bias: talking first of busing and "states' rights," then "law and order" and more abstract discussions of cutting taxes. Today, Parke writes, instead of protecting religious minorities, "religious freedom" has become a cudgel used against them, as well as against LGBTQ people and women.

"The Road to Flint" (pg. 11), by Anna Clark, illustrates another contemporary result of that same coded racism. Flint's devastating and prolonged water crisis began with Michigan's appointment of emergency managers—a modern-day manifestation of decades-old anti-urban bias and the Nixonian idea that poor cities are plagued not by racism and economic divestment, but rather lacking personal responsibility. What happened to Flint, Clark writes, arose from the same right-wing belief "that ailing cities just need a better and more authoritarian leader to get things working again—a presumption that has proved its limits again and again."

Even as much of the contemporary Right has doubled down on racist policies and rhetoric, some right-wing advocates still attempt to market the GOP to non-White voters. In **"Kochs in Pro-Immigrant Clothing" (pg. 13)**, Gabriel Arana investigates how the LIBRE Initiative and LIBRE Institute are continuing their efforts to draw Latinxs into the Republican Party, despite its feverish hostility to immigrants and refugees. Through its regular presence at Latinx community events, LIBRE hopes to both "convince Latinxs that laissez-faire capitalism will empower them and to draw the 'sleeping giant' of American electoral politics to the Right."

Lastly, in **"Bringing Bad Sex Ed Back" (pg. 19)**, Melissa Mayer reports on how the Trump administration is reviving the failed, faith-based abstinence-only policies of the Bush era, now rebranded with the language of scientific legitimacy, as "Sexual Risk Avoidance." Under Trump, abstinence-only organizations that have peddled demonstrably false information about teenage pregnancy and sexual health have become the new arbiters of policy, using hugely expanded federal funding to condemn all non-marital sexual activity.

In addition to the stories in this issue, please make sure to read Alex DiBranco's online commentary on the Tallahassee shooting that's been tied to right-wing misogynist mobilization, an often-unrecognized part of the increasingly mobilized Far Right.

In between issues of *The Public Eye*, PRA publishes blog posts, features, reports, and more every week, so be sure to visit us at politicalresearch.org.

Kathryn Joyce

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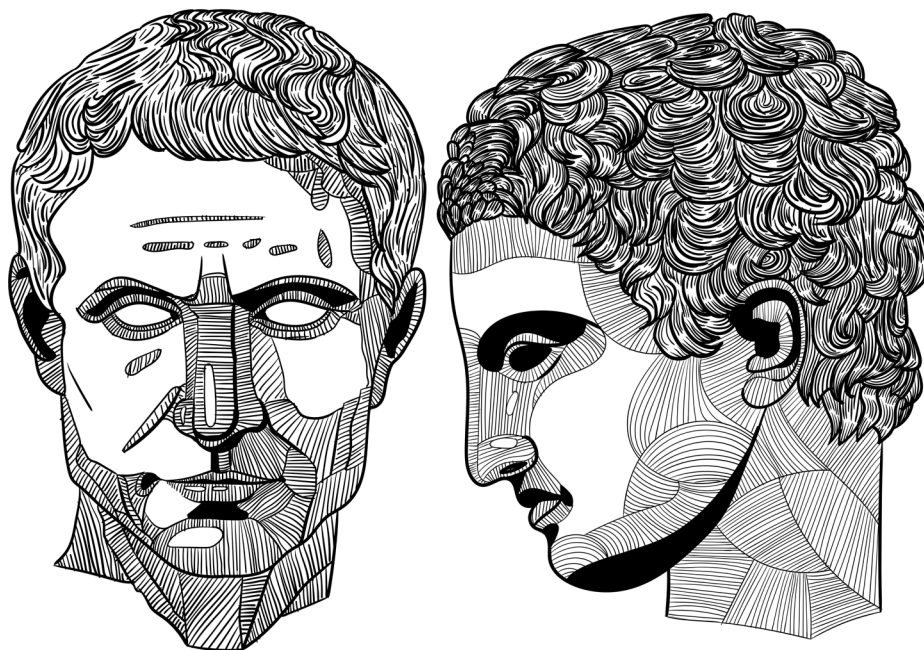
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BY DONNA ZUCKERBERG

A Classicist's Guide to Misappropriated History



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In the face of a crushing debt crisis, it seems unavoidable that students will stop reading great works of literature and instead spend their costly college education studying topics that are more likely to directly lead to financial rewards. Frank Bruni's May op-ed in *The New York Times*¹ is only one of many premature obituaries for the humanities published in recent years. But the value of studying the humanities has found an unlikely (and unwanted) group of defenders in the White nationalist "Alt Right"—or, more specifically, what is sometimes called the "Alt Lite," a closely allied subgrouping that eschews outright neonazism in favor of coding White supremacist views as a celebration of "Western culture and civilization."

These groups have become some of the most vocal proponents of reading classic works of (European) literature. In an August 2016 manifesto titled "A Normie's

Guide to the Alt-Right," published on the neonazi site *The Daily Stormer*, Andrew Anglin wrote that one of the movement's mandates was "Endorsement of White History." Anglin, the site's founder, wrote, "Rejecting revisionist arguments by modern social scientists which portray Whites as having wrought evil on the planet, we view Whites as the creators and maintainers of Western civilization." Next to Anglin's text was a photograph of the Colosseum in Rome.

Ancient Greece and Rome are an origin point of sorts for the Alt Right: an imagined golden age of White supremacist patriarchy they can idealize and aspire to recreate. Many classical scholars first became aware of this phenomenon in the weeks following the presidential election of Donald Trump, when the White nationalist group Identity Evropa papered college campuses with posters depicting vague White supremacist slogans along-

side both classical sculptures and more recent sculptures in a self-consciously classicizing style.² These images use classical art as a kind of visual shorthand for aesthetic ideals that were also leveraged by the Nazis, as classicist Sarah Bond has argued.³ (Famous ancient sculptures are also often used in the bizarre digital art that accompanies so-called "fashwave" music, a subgenre of electronic music that Anglin once deemed "the Whitest music ever."⁴)

But even before the Alt Right entered the public consciousness in the summer of 2016, Far Right online communities were looking to ancient Greece and Rome for confirmation of their views. It doesn't take much searching in their virtual fora to find articles glorifying ancient history and historical figures. These fascinations are widespread within different subgroups of "The Red Pill" community, as many men's rights activists refer to their



Chudakov / Adobe Stock.

Ancient Greece and Rome are an origin point of sorts for the Alt Right: an imagined golden age of White supremacist patriarchy they can idealize and aspire to recreate.

loose coalition. The Alt Right is particularly fond of Classical Sparta, a society that they believe exemplified both male virtue and ethnic purity. The first century CE Roman poet Ovid has been embraced as the original seduction guru⁵ by the pickup artist community—a splinter of the men’s rights world that, as writer David Futrelle has explained, is closely enmeshed with the Alt Right.⁶ Texts from Stoic philosophy, such as Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations* and Epictetus’ *Enchiridion*, appear on recommended reading lists on websites promoting masculine self-improvement.⁷ These ancient exemplars lend the Red Pill and Alt Right communities a sheen of intellectual credibility and lineage, convincing them that Western Civilization was founded on the very same values that they glorify.

In its idealization of ancient Greece and Rome as a golden age of “White culture,” the Alt Right overlooks the historical fact that ancient Greeks and Romans themselves were not actually “White” in any meaningful sense. Although ancient

Mediterranean societies had a concept of race, it was very different from our own—different enough that many scholars prefer to use the less charged term “ethnicity.” Curricula have been developed for professors of the classics and other scholars seeking to incorporate these discussions into their cultural studies programs. Interested readers can find many useful resources in the bibliography prepared by Classics at the Intersections.⁸

The Alt Right, however, has brushed aside the complexity of scholarly discussion about race in the ancient world as little more than politically correct nonsense. Worse, they erupt with fury at scholars who attempt to infuse these discussions with some nuance, subjecting them to a virtual tidal wave of online abuse ranging from harassment on social media to emailed death threats to hacking and doxxing. The prominent British classicist Mary Beard incurred their ire last summer when she wrote in support of a BBC cartoon about Roman Britain⁹

that contained some dark-skinned characters. More recently, Alt Right websites and YouTubers have shifted their focus to the casting of David Gyasi, a Black actor, to play Achilles in the BBC miniseries *Troy: Fall of a City* (the backlash to which was documented thoroughly in the classicist blog Pharos.)¹⁰

It hardly needs saying that the Alt Right’s impassioned defense of the humanities isn’t one that most scholars of the discipline welcome. In addition to using the ancient Mediterranean to promote an ideology that is proudly racist and sexist, members of the Alt Right frequently refer to “facts” about classical antiquity that are misleading or flat-out wrong, like the canard that immigration caused the fall of the Roman Empire.¹¹ This talking point, popular among conservative politicians going back as far as Enoch Powell’s infamous 1968 “rivers of blood” speech, is taken as a statement of fact by the Alt Right, although the reality was considerably more complex.¹²

In spite of these inaccuracies, the Alt Right’s enthusiasm for ancient Greece and Rome is one that we need to take seriously. And in its own way, it makes an excellent case for saving the humanities. Not because we need to preserve and celebrate something called “Western civilization,” which, as Kwame Anthony Appiah has argued,¹³ is a deeply flawed and problematic construct, but because only by asserting the value of careful, nuanced scholarship on these issues can we counteract their pernicious misrepresentations of history. ☪

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BY COLE PARKE

The New Southern Strategy

How Christian Persecution Became White Supremacy's Newest Disguise

At the 2016 Republican National Convention, Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council and an at-large member of the Louisiana GOP delegation,¹ announced from the stage that he would be casting his vote for Donald Trump and encouraged his fellow evangelical Americans to do the same. “Perkins’s endorsement could be a tipping point for the religious right moving behind the party’s newly-minted nominee,” suggested *The Hill*.²

The prediction proved prophetic: on Election Day, White evangelicals turned out in force for Trump, with over 80 percent voting for the Republican ticket. Their game-changing status became undeniably clear, but so did an unsavory truth about their “values voter” identity. For all their talk of morals and virtues, Trump’s misogyny, racism, xenophobia, and bigotry were never really obstacles for the “faith, family, and life” crowd, but part of the appeal.

Coded racism’s ever-evolving lexicon has served to mask the long courtship, but on November 8, 2016, with Perkins serving as the proud officiant, the Christian Right finally consummated its marriage to White Nationalism.

WHO IS TONY PERKINS?

Perkins first emerged on the national stage in 2003 when he became president of the Family Research Council (FRC), a right-wing policy shop and the Christian Right’s leading voice in Washington, D.C. It was an impressive consolation prize after his failed 2002 run for the U.S. Senate, in which he sought to oust incumbent Democratic Senator Mary Landrieu.

Having served for seven years as a member of the Louisiana House of Representatives, Perkins was an established



Tony Perkins speaking at the Values Voter Summit in Washington, D.C., on October 7, 2011. Credit: Gage Skidmore / Wikimedia Commons.

and well-known candidate, but he finished last in the four-candidate primary after local media resurfaced details of an old racially charged scandal: while working as the campaign manager for Woody Jenkins’ own senatorial bid in 1996, Perkins paid \$82,500 for the phone bank list of former gubernatorial candidate and ex-Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke and then concealed the purchase.³ The revelation was a huge blow, ultimately resulting in Perkins’ fourth-place finish, and (seemingly) the end of his political career.⁴

But now we live in different times.

In the 2016 presidential campaign, an affiliation with David Duke proved to be far less taboo than it was in 2002, as then-

candidate Donald Trump demonstrated reluctance to disavow Duke’s endorsement without significant consequence.⁵ The conventional wisdom about how closely connected an elected official can be to an unabashed White supremacist has shifted dramatically. The historic relationship between the Christian Right and White Nationalists has also become more and more conspicuous, and Perkins’ reputation isn’t suffering at all.

Alongside its legislative affiliate, FRC Action, Perkins’ FRC focuses on advancing “faith, family, and freedom in public policy and the culture from a Christian worldview.”⁶ At both national and local levels, the organization coordinates lobbying efforts, media work, leader-

ship training programs, and high-profile conferences. Perkins runs the show and also hosts a radio program, *Washington Watch*, which offers “daily insight from leading political figures and culture warriors”⁷ to more than 250 stations, likely reaching tens of thousands of listeners nationwide.

conducted by the American Culture & Faith Institute (ACFI), a Christian Right research organization dedicated to mobilizing conservative voters, revealed that among “SAGE Cons”—their category for “Spiritually Active, Governance Engaged Conservative Christians”—Perkins was considered one of the top five most influ-

THE PERKINS/TRUMP LOVE AFFAIR

Though Perkins was first a supporter of Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) in the 2016 Republican primaries, he quickly became one of Trump’s most important links to the White evangelical vote. Once it was clear that Trump would secure the Republican Party’s nomination, conservatives began scrambling to either reaffirm or realign their loyalties. In June 2016, Perkins helped organize a gathering of nearly 1,000 leading conservative Christian ministers and activists from across the country for a closed-door meeting with Trump in New York City. The goal was to help the group better “understand” the presumed nominee before the November election.¹³

The coalition laid out a set of core requirements for Trump to gain their support: a commitment to “pro-life” judges; a conservative running mate;

and a promise to uphold the party platform,¹⁴ which FRC played such a key role in shaping that Jeremy Peters of *The New York Times* described it as the “Tony Perkins Platform.”¹⁵

Trump managed to satisfy these demands, and on Election Day, the coalition’s faithful flocks followed through on their leaders’ pledge of support.

Despite a seemingly endless barrage of positions, policies, revelations, remarks, and tweets that are antithetical to the purported Christian value of “loving one’s neighbor as oneself,” Perkins continues to function as a critical bridge between the current administration and White evangelicals, serving both as Trump’s advisor and as his cheerleader and interpreter. When adult film star Stormy Daniels publicly disclosed her affair with Trump, for example, Perkins quickly at-



President Donald Trump shakes hands with Family Research Council president Tony Perkins at the 2017 Value Voters Summit, Friday, Oct. 13, 2017, in Washington. Credit: AP Photo/Evan Vucci.

Over the last 15 years, Perkins has expanded FRC’s size and influence, nearly doubling its annual revenue, expanding the organization’s pastor network from less than 2,000 to nearly 25,000,⁸ and establishing the annual Values Voter Summit as the Christian Right’s premier political event of the year. The effect has been tangible: FRC played a prominent role in the fight over California’s Proposition 8 ballot initiative in 2008, rallying voters across the state to reject state-wide marriage equality.⁹ The organization also claims credit for the growing momentum to eliminate federal funding for Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers.¹⁰

At the same time, Perkins has raised his own profile, amassing tremendous personal political power both nationally and internationally. A 2016 survey

essential political analysts in the U.S. The report concluded that although Perkins isn’t a full-time media professional, “His daily radio program, *Washington Watch*, along with the numerous articles he published over the course of the [2016 presidential] campaign, clearly hit home with the conservative Christian community.”¹¹

ACFI’s research also showed that 94 percent of SAGE Cons voted for Donald Trump in 2016.¹² As both a public-facing figurehead of the Christian Right and a behind-the-scenes bellwether for the conservative movement, Perkins played a major role in delivering this decisive constituency to a candidate who didn’t initially inspire much evangelical enthusiasm.

tempted to put out the fire by doling out a “mulligan” for the president’s “personal failings.”¹⁶

And Perkins’ loyalty has paid off: he boasts of regular visits to the White House,¹⁷ and is a prominent member of the President’s ad hoc evangelical advisory board, along with many of the Religious Right’s other leading figures, including former Congresswoman Michele Bachmann (R-MN) and Focus on the Family founder James Dobson. Richard Land, former head of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and another member of the advisory board, bragged in an interview on *Washington Watch* that under Donald Trump, the Religious Right has gained “unprecedented access” to the White House and its policies.¹⁸

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE ANTI-CHRISTIAN “DISEASE”

In May 2018, the Christian Right gained even greater authority with the appointment of three far-right evangelicals, including Perkins and former FRC president Gary Bauer, to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan commission “dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.” Its nine volunteer members are tasked with reviewing “the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations” and suggesting policy solutions to the president, the State Department, and Congress.¹⁹

In the past, progressive critics have accused USCIRF of being ineffective, anti-Muslim, and disproportionately focused on the persecution of Christians.²⁰ Under the Trump administration, the latter of those charges is no longer a liability, and the first is now being mitigated by the addition of a new “Religious Liberty Task Force,” announced in July 2018 by Attorney General Jeff Sessions as a way to combat “dangerous” secularism.²¹

As PRA Senior Research Analyst Frederick Clarkson has carefully docu-

mented, religious freedom was initially conceived of as an important strategy for protecting religious minorities from the dominant culture’s religious imposition, and preserving the separation of church and state.²² Given the Christian Right’s role in redefining this progressive value to justify discrimination against LGBTQ people, women, and others who don’t

Initially intended to protect religious minorities, religious freedom has been redefined by the Christian Right to justify discrimination against LGBTQ people, women, and others who don’t align with the Right’s ideological views.

align with the Right’s ideological views, their increasingly dominant presence in the USCIRF—and throughout the Trump administration—is cause for much concern.

Following the announcement of his appointment to the Commission, Gary Bauer was blatantly clear about his priorities, tweeting that his primary focus would be the “growing persecution of Christians.”²³

Perkins, too, depicts Christians as an oppressed and persecuted class that is under constant siege by “secularists” for their anti-LGBTQ, anti-abortion convictions. Though he’s quick to acknowledge that American Christians aren’t as threatened as others—“we can face name-calling and ‘hate’ lists whereas Christians in the Middle East have been put to death for their beliefs,” he said—Perkins is just as quick to link the two, arguing, “the opposition to Christians here and abroad is rooted in the same opposition—it’s just different in degree.”²⁴

Perkins and FRC also have a long track record of spreading anti-Muslim rhetoric, charging, among other things, that Islam is “incompatible with the Constitution” and therefore not entitled to the same rights and protections that the Christian Right claims as unrestricted First Amendment guarantees.²⁵ In a 2015 editorial entitled “How Do You Solve a Problem like Sharia?” Perkins warned of the national security threat posed by “radicalized Muslims,” and advocated for “better, safer vetting protocol” for immigrants—a foreshadowing of Trump’s in-

famous “Muslim Ban.”²⁶

Perkins said that Muslims in Syria, Iraq, and Nigeria—whom he refers to as anti-Christian “tyrants”—were emboldened by the Obama administration’s “indifference toward religious persecution.” Writing at FRC, he argued:

Little by little, they let their deep hatred for certain faiths turn violent. As

time passed, and they grew more confident that the United States government wouldn’t intervene, their attacks became bolder, more ferocious. Innocent men, women, and children were gunned down, beheaded, raped, tortured, or chased from their homes simply because of who they were and what they believed. It was like a disease that America’s silence left to fester.²⁷

Now Perkins has the weight of the government behind him as he goes to battle against this anti-Christian “disease,” the cure for which is assuredly bad for LGBTQ people, women, and Muslims.

WHITE SUPREMACY’S NEWEST DISGUISE

But is there really an epidemic of Christian persecution in the U.S., or is it just a useful stand-in for a different kind of fear?

The continued allegiance of White evangelicals to Trump despite his marital infidelity, blatant misogyny, theological ignorance, and profanity-laced volatility is confounding to many. Trump’s adherence to the Christian Right’s anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ agenda is often assumed to be the key attraction in this perplexing courtship, but what’s rarely highlighted or discussed is the other part of this voting bloc’s two-part identity: that is, that they’re White.

The Christian Right’s entrance into politics is generally thought of as a logical conservative backlash to the sexual revolution and the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. Resistance to ho-

homosexuality and abortion has dominated the conservative agenda for so long that the racial resentment that first spurred evangelicals into action is often forgotten. But before *Roe* was ever a household name, it was the encroaching threat of desegregation that ultimately wedded (White) preachers and (White supremacist) politics.

In 1971, the Supreme Court ruled in *Coit v. Green* that racially discriminatory private schools were not eligible for tax-exempt status. The case was part of a broader effort by the federal government to enforce the provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and in 1975, the IRS sought to revoke the tax-exempt status of Bob Jones University (BJU), a private evangelical school in Greenville, South Carolina, because the school's regulations forbade interracial dating. (Prior to 1971, the school had denied admission to Black students altogether.)

Under the “Southern Strategy,” unabashed racists like David Duke continued to express anti-Black attitudes, but most Republican politicians talked instead about “law and order” and “states’ rights.”

BJU challenged the IRS, but in 1983 in an eight-to-one decision, the Supreme Court upheld the government's right to deny tax-exempt status to the school on account of its racially discriminatory policies. Upon learning of the Court's decision, the Rev. Bob Jones III proclaimed, “We're in a bad fix in America when eight evil old men and one vain and foolish woman can speak a verdict on American liberties... You no longer live in a nation that is religiously free.”²⁸ In other words, Jones's definition of religious freedom included the right to racially discriminate.

Paul Weyrich, one of the most important architects of the modern Christian Right (and a friend and role model to Perkins²⁹), was paying attention. Weyrich, a devout Catholic, had for years attempted to galvanize evangelical allegiance to his political agenda. In his book, *Thy Kingdom Come: An Evangelical's Lament*, author Randall Balmer recalls Weyrich explaining the eventual evolution of

Christian Right political engagement:

“I had discussions with all the leading lights of the movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s, post-*Roe v. Wade*,” [Weyrich] said, “and they were all arguing that that decision was one more reason why Christians had to isolate themselves from the rest of the world.”

“What caused the movement to surface,” Weyrich continued, “was the federal government's moves against Christian schools.” The IRS's objection to segregated schools, he said, “enraged the Christian community.”³⁰

With right-wing evangelical leaders finally paying attention, Weyrich moved quickly, directing their rage and energy into the formation of institutions that would become the bedrock of the New Right: the Moral Majority, the Heritage Foundation, the American Legislative Exchange Council, the Free Congress

Foundation, and the Council for National Policy, all of which he co-founded.

The Council for National Policy (CNP), often considered a who's who of the Right, is a secretive organization that networks right-wing donors and their operative allies to collaborate on long-term movement strategy.³¹ Though the organization intentionally works under the radar and keeps its membership confidential, the Southern Poverty Law Center obtained and published one roster from 2014, which listed Perkins as CNP's vice president.³² Subsequent reports on CNP events indicate that Perkins has since been promoted to head of the secretive organization.

UNITED BY FAITH, AND RACE

Given the Religious Right's deeply entrenched racist history, it's not surprising that until relatively recently, the language of racial reconciliation was entirely foreign in evangelical spaces.

In *Personal Faith, Public Policy*, a 2008 call-to-arms for the Christian Right co-authored by Perkins and Rev. Harry R. Jackson, Jr., a popular Black evangelical megachurch pastor, the authors lay out “a comprehensive strategy that can bring evangelicals together across racial and denominational lines.” Adding to the traditional bread-and-butter issues of the Christian Right—“the sanctity of human life, the preservation of marriage, and the defense of our Christian faith”—the authors argue that other contemporary issues should be addressed, including immigration, poverty, the environment, and racial reconciliation.³³

In the book, Perkins recounts how he publicly repented for the “racism of white evangelicals that had divided the body of Christ” at an event in 1992.³⁴ But that posturing didn't stop him from purchasing David Duke's phone list four years later, or prevent him from addressing the

Louisiana Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC), a White nationalist organization, while he was a Louisiana state legislator in 2001. Perkins insists that he didn't

know about either Duke's connection to the list or the CCC's racist history, and that he “opposes racial discrimination.” But his efforts to resist it have consistently proven hollow.³⁵ Despite Perkins' claimed advocacy for a more expansive vision of the Christian Right agenda, the issues highlighted on FRC's website are still limited to Life, Marriage and Family, and Religious Liberty. And after FRC hosted Trump at its 2017 Values Voter Summit, the Rev. William Barber, one of the most prominent faces of the contemporary Religious Left, blasted Perkins' organization as “no more represent[ing] Jesus than did the church authorities who backed slavery.”³⁶

Meanwhile, Greenwell Springs Baptist Church, Perkins' home church in Louisiana, didn't welcome its first Black members until 2006,³⁷ and the church's staff is still entirely White.³⁸ The church is an affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which, with over 15.2 million

members, represents one of the Christian Right's most dominant voices.³⁹ (It's also one of its whitest, with a membership that's 85 percent White, even though SBC churches are most prevalent in regions where African Americans compose a higher proportion of the general population than the national average.⁴⁰)

Founded in 1845, the SBC's formation was the result of a split between White Southern Baptists who disagreed with the abolitionist sentiments and activities of their Northern church brethren. In other words, the SBC was established for the express purpose of defending slavery. During the Civil Rights Movement, members of the convention almost unilaterally supported segregation. And though the SBC formally reversed course in 1968 with the passage of an official statement endorsing desegregation and confessing a share of responsibility for the failure to create "conditions in which justice, order, and righteousness can prevail,"⁴¹ the denomination effectively fed into the tide of White racial resentment throughout the 1950s and '60s.

During those years, the conservative movement expressly established unity through intentional exploitation of racial polarization. As the Civil Rights Movement and the dismantling of Jim Crow laws provoked a deepening of pre-existing racial tensions throughout the South, Republican strategists sought to win over White, conservative voters in the region who had traditionally supported the Democratic Party.

It was known as the "Southern Strategy," and it worked. Between 1948 and 1984, the Southern states—previously a stronghold for the Democratic Party—became key swing states. Unabashed racists like David Duke continued to overtly express and nurture anti-Black attitudes, but most Republican politicians sought to present a more "respectable" image in order to win over White Southerners. They did so by talking about "law and order" (a critique of the strategies and tactics of the Civil Rights Movement) and deploying rhetoric about protecting "states' rights": a coded way to express their opposition to federal enforcement

of civil rights for Black people and to federal intervention on their behalf. (More recently, the Right similarly insisted that decisions regarding marriage equality should be determined at the state level rather than by the federal government—a thinly veiled attempt to disguise their homophobia.)

In 1981, Lee Atwater, a top Republican strategist, explained the covert intent of this terminology in a 1981 interview with political scientist Alexander Lamis: You start out in 1954 by saying, "N*****, n*****, n*****". By 1968 you can't say "n*****"—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking

Ultimately, the goal was to talk about race without actually talking about race.

about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] Blacks get hurt worse than Whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me—because obviously sitting around saying, "We want to cut taxes, we want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "N*****, n*****, n*****".⁴²

Ultimately, the goal was to talk about race without actually talking about race.

THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT'S ANTI-DEMOCRATIC DOMINANCE

The Southern Strategy was effective, but it also pigeon-holed the Republican Party as the party of White racial resentment. Kevin Phillips, a conservative electoral analyst and one of the biggest promoters of the Southern Strategy, proclaimed in 1970, "From now on, the Republicans are never going to get more than 10 to 20 percent of the Negro vote and they don't need any more than

that."⁴³

But Phillips didn't take into account the reality that White people would eventually become a minority in the United States, and without the demographic edge of a White racial majority, winning a national, democratic election becomes significantly more difficult with a platform that actively oppresses and alienates people of color.

The solution, of course, to maintaining a White Christian-dominated society (that wants to at least *appear* democratic) is to simply place restrictions on who can or can't vote. Paul Weyrich understood this better than almost anyone.

Speaking at a Religious Right gathering in Dallas, Texas, in 1980, Weyrich revealed part of the anti-democratic methodology by which he intended for his movement to gain domination: "I don't want everybody to vote. Elections are not won by a majority of people—they never have been from the beginning of our country and they are not now. As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections, quite candidly, goes up as the voting populace goes down."⁴⁴

In other words, as writer Noah Berlatsky observes, "A party built on demonizing and attacking marginalized people is a party that will have to disenfranchise those same people if it is to survive."⁴⁵

Voter disenfranchisement has become a racialized, anti-democratic epidemic in the decades since. After Trump's 2016 victory, Kristen Clarke, executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, observed,

The most intense voter suppression efforts can be traced to a 2013 ruling issued by the U.S. Supreme Court that gut [sic] a core provision of the Voting Rights Act. Since the day the ruling was issued in *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder*, states have unleashed a seemingly-coordinated campaign to make voting more difficult. Those efforts bore fruit during the 2016 presidential election cycle.⁴⁶

A NEW SOUTHERN STRATEGY

As Lee Atwater explained in 1981, when overt racism becomes socially un-

acceptable you have to be more abstract in your language and in your strategy—you talk about “states’ rights” and the economy when unabashed resistance to civil rights, justice, and equality becomes uncouth. Today, the codes are shifting again.

Bob Jones’ complaint that “You no longer live in a nation that is religiously free” when you’re prevented from discriminating against people on the basis of their race signaled a change in the Southern Strategy’s trademark code language. The rhetoric of “states’ rights” wasn’t suffi-

The rhetoric of “states’ rights” wasn’t sufficiently masking the goal of maintaining White racial dominance anymore, but Jones had successfully identified a new alternative: religious freedom.

ciently masking the goal of maintaining White racial dominance anymore, but Jones had successfully identified a new alternative: religious freedom.

The Christian Right is currently using their version of religious freedom to justify discrimination against LGBTQ people, restrict access to comprehensive reproductive health care, and obstruct Muslims and other non-Christians from their constitutional rights. But in the initial corruption of the principle, the Christian Right had cast religious freedom as a tool of White supremacy and racism, and that remains their prevailing interpretation.

Being associated with White supremacists like David Duke might not carry the same sort of campaign-ending consequences that it once did, when earlier generations of candidates were compelled to disavow Duke or return White nationalist campaign contributions, but in today’s America, White people are generally still reluctant to think of themselves as racist. However, fear among White Americans sparked by demographic shifts and their imminent fall from racial majority status, coupled with the rising resistance of Black and Brown-led justice movements (and eight years of a Black president), has ushered in new tidal waves of White racial resentment and fear.

Conveniently, within the self-image of the Christian Right, Whiteness and Christianity are often synonymous, and it’s far easier to sound the alarm about “Christian persecution” than to admit the truth of one’s racism. Additionally, claiming victimhood is far preferable than owning one’s complicity in the perpetuation of another’s oppression.

Trump caught on early. In a January 2016 interview with the right-wing Christian Broadcasting Network, then-candidate Trump responded to a question from David Brody about protecting

Christians by saying that Christians are “under siege”:

You look at Syria where they’re chopping heads off, specifically of Christians, and others... we have to do something, we have to band together, we have to become stronger as Christians because it is very bad what’s happening with respect to Christianity. We’re just not banded together properly, and we have to stick together whether it’s very, very serious things like is happening over in the Middle East or things such as “Merry Christmas” where you don’t see it anymore in department stores.⁴⁷

The rhetoric of Christian persecution strategically sparks fear in evangelicals, many of whom are on the lookout for indicators of the “end times” and the impending apocalypse that is believed to be a necessary precursor to Jesus Christ’s return.⁴⁸ This fear is then amplified by the racist, xenophobic fears underlying anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, and anti-Black sentiments, serving to galvanize and unify White racial resentment.

Last year, Trump declared to the triumphant attendees at FRC’s Values Voter Summit (VVS), “In America, we don’t worship government—we worship God.”⁴⁹ He went on to highlight all the ways in which he has advanced the Christian Right’s religious freedom formula, contorting it into a tool of oppression

that privileges conservative Christians and justifies discrimination against LGBTQ people and women, all the while portraying it as a necessary shield against rising persecution.

Perkins was thrilled. “In an era when public prayer and displays of faith are so readily attacked,” he wrote, “social conservatives were heartened to hear this reaffirmation of the role religion has played—and is still playing—for the public good of our country.”⁵⁰

Significantly, the 2017 VVS also featured Steve Bannon, a former strategist in Trump’s administration and co-founder of *Breitbart News*, which he described in 2016 as “the platform for the alt-right.” *Breitbart* has also been referred to as an “online haven for White Nationalists.”⁵¹ But Bannon’s appearance at VVS served to soften his and the Alt Right’s image among White evangelicals, helping strengthen the increasingly public bond between the Christian Right and White nationalists.

What Bannon and Perkins both know is that the relationship between Christian supremacy and White supremacy is the real “traditional marriage.” Because ultimately, the Christian Right isn’t just concerned with asserting and maintaining theocratic dominance in the U.S.—they’re fundamentally invested in White dominance. Left unchecked, their growing power represents one of the greatest threats to multi-racial democracy this country has ever known. ☹

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BY ANNA CLARK

The Road to Flint

The Right's 50-Year Anti-City Agenda

There was a time when I thought that emergency management—Michigan's system of state oversight of struggling cities and schools—might be the best of a number of bad options. When an emergency manager was sent to my own city of Detroit in 2013, seizing authority that would normally be wielded by an elected mayor and city council, I was sad and wary, but also reflective.¹ It was an emergency here.

Decades of disinvestment, billions in debt, and the loss of more than half our peak population created a downward spiral that seemed perpetual. Vacant lots, houses, storefronts, schools, and skyscrapers scarred the city. Miles of broken streetlights left tens of thousands of people in the dark. Cash-strapped fire and police services, crumbling infrastructure, and a backlog of more than 11,000 untested rape kits² put lives at risk. If emergency management could staunch the bleeding—an extreme measure to meet extreme need, undertaken by an outsider who was unconstrained by electoral concerns—then wouldn't it be worth it? And besides, it was long past time for the state to take some responsibility for the results of its long-simmering neglect of core cities.

It's not by chance that the U.S. is full of hollowed-out urban centers. Residents are disproportionately poor and people of color, surrounded by wealthier and whiter suburbs. It traces back to the Great Migration, which brought great numbers of African Americans to segregated cities and pushed the "separate but equal" doctrine to its limit.³ Follow-



Flint City Limit, Michigan. Photo: Linda Parton/Adobe.

ing years of discrimination, hundreds of cities erupted in the 1960s. One of them was Detroit, where, in the midst of the most lethal uprising of all,⁴ President Johnson convened the bipartisan Kerner Commission to diagnosis the nation's urban crisis. In its 1968 report, the Commission urged a reckoning with systemic racism.⁵ It noted the "massive transition" already unfolding: White people and institutions had abandoned urban centers for the suburbs, creating a destructive "racial ghetto."⁶ It issued a strong call for integration as "the only course which explicitly seeks to achieve a single nation rather than accepting the present movement toward a dual society."⁷

But soon, Richard Nixon was elected president, championing "law and order" and demanding that rioters and criminals be held accountable for the destruction of their own communities.⁸ It was a perspective grounded in right-wing ideology—that a lack of personal responsibility, rather than racism and concentrated poverty, was the problem with struggling

cities, and implicitly, that Black people couldn't be counted on to govern themselves. Today, the modern-day manifestation of that argument is seen in emergency management, which holds that ailing cities just need a better and more authoritarian leader to get things working again—a presumption that has proved its limits again and again.

And so it followed that Michigan's emergency management helped steer Detroit through the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history.⁹ But in Flint, decisions made under a series of emergency managers set in

motion a catastrophic drinking water crisis.¹⁰ Meanwhile, without the systemic intervention urged by the Kerner Commission, infrastructure inequality is perpetuating itself, exacerbating the divides that the commission saw coming 50 years ago.

There are 22 states that have some oversight mechanism for distressed cities and public schools.¹¹ Michigan's law was used sparingly until after the 2010 election of Republican Governor Rick Snyder, when Republicans assumed control of all branches of state government, and soon expanded the law, setting a lower threshold to declare an "emergency."¹² Emergency management suspended the authority of locally elected leaders and gave it to an administrator chosen by the state—and then some, as emergency managers were empowered to make or break contracts and to sell city assets without the consent of local lawmakers or voters.¹³ (The only thing they couldn't do was miss bond payments to creditors.¹⁴)

In 2011—on Election Day, no less—the state announced that Flint would be the first community to be put under the expanded system.¹⁵ A year later, Michigan voters overturned the expanded emergency management law in a statewide referendum, yet the lame duck legislature resurrected it. A few weeks after the referendum, it passed a near-identical version of the law, which Snyder signed.¹⁶ This time, it included appropriations, making it immune from going before voters again.¹⁷ The state's rush probably had to do with its plans for Detroit, which would receive its emergency

The biggest crisis in disinvested cities isn't leadership; it's a structural and historic crisis, with origins well beyond the city borders—and it includes belief systems about whose lives are valuable.

manager a few months later.¹⁸ (Flint's disempowered mayor later told me that he felt that his city was used as a test case for Detroit. "The terrible tragedy of what happened with the water crisis is, it became clear that there were a large number of people who were not acting in the interests of the Flint community," added then-mayor Dayne Walling. "There was a pretending. There was a pretending to act in the interest."¹⁹)

While under emergency management, changes to Flint's drinking water system caused contamination with lead, *E.coli*, and a carcinogenic byproduct of the disinfection process.²⁰ It was also almost certainly connected to a two-year outbreak of deadly Legionnaires' disease.²¹ While the switch was celebrated as a path to more affordable water, Flint's infamously expensive water bills rose even higher.²² A different source of water did not solve the mathematical problem of having fewer and poorer ratepayers to maintain a system that was still sized for the 1960s, when the city had more than twice the population and a flourishing industrial sector to help carry the cost. When Flint's city council voted to return to Lake Huron water from Detroit, its final emergency manager ignored them, as he was legally allowed to do, given the council's disempowerment.²³ Before he

left office, he signed an order prohibiting Flint from modifying any of his decisions until it had been out of receivership for at least a year.²⁴

It took 18 months of community organizing for the state to intervene in Flint's water crisis,²⁵ and three months more before a full-scale recovery response began.²⁶ The ensuing criminal investigation indicted 15 people to date, most of them from the state environmental and health departments.²⁷ (Four received plea deals.) Two emergency managers were also charged. But the pattern is plain: under emergency management,

there is no meaningful accountability or transparency for bad decisions. As legal cases wind through the courts, the state is going so far as to argue that emergency managers are not state officials at all, but local ones.²⁸

Emergency management also disproportionately restricts the voting rights of Black-majority cities and schools. As of 2017, more than half of Michigan's Black residents and 16 percent of Latinx residents lived in cities with emergency managers.²⁹ Only two percent of White people could say the same.³⁰ Black Michigan residents were five times as likely as White residents to live under an emergency manager between 2009 and 2016.³¹ The Voting Rights Act forbids disenfranchisement tactics like replacing elected leaders with appointed ones,³² but Michigan's law seems to slide by on a technicality—it creates an appointed post that supersedes all the elected ones. But the effect is the same: the voting power of communities of color is undercut. And it can go on indefinitely. While emergency managers are given an 18-month term, they tend to resign just short of the deadline. When a new emergency manager is appointed in their place, the clock starts over.

Detroit's emergency manager was a star bankruptcy lawyer from Washing-

ton, D.C. That was unusual. It's more common to see the same emergency managers cycle through the same Michigan communities again and again. That's because the biggest crisis in disinvested cities isn't leadership; it's a structural and historic crisis, with origins well beyond the city borders—and it includes belief systems about whose lives are valuable, and whether an us-versus-them society is preferable to one that's integrated and organized for the common good. Emergency managers with modest credentials—they're only required to have five years of experience in business or a related field³³—can tinker with a budget, but austerity is of little use in places that are already cut to the marrow.

In the state and federal Flint water crisis investigations, Michigan's emergency manager law was routinely cited as a contributing factor.³⁴ While many think the law is irredeemably undemocratic and should be repealed, there have also been a number of proposals to change it for the better. Perhaps there shouldn't be a single emergency manager, but a three-person panel, including two local officials. Perhaps it should only be instituted if local leaders request it. Perhaps emergency managers should be assigned not to a single city, but to a county, where they would be in a better position to deal with the regional context for urban core disinvestment. The county model would also help remedy the racial disparity of the law.

But to date, no action has been taken. The state has boasted that, by June 2018, no communities were under state oversight for the first time in 18 years.³⁵ And yet, Michigan's potent emergency management law is the same as it was during Flint's water crisis—an egregious omission that makes communities more vulnerable, not less. ☹

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BY GABRIEL ARANA

Kochs in Pro-Immigrant Clothing

LIBRE's Quest to Deliver the Latinx Powerhouse to the Right



Daniel Garza speaking at a LIBRE Initiative forum in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2015. Photo: Gage Skidmore/Flickr.

On a balmy July evening in Tempe, Arizona, around two-dozen people gathered for a buffet reception and forum on immigration at the Arizona Heritage Center.

Sponsored by the LIBRE Initiative—a libertarian nonprofit founded by former George W. Bush White House staffer Daniel Garza to inform “the U.S. Hispanic community about the benefits of a constitutionally limited government, property rights, rule of law, sound money supply and free enterprise”—and broadcast live on Telemundo, the bilingual panel included a local immigration attorney; an undocumented youth from Aliento, an activist group comprising undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, known as “Dreamers”; and Carlos Alfaro, the Arizona coalitions director for the LIBRE Initiative.

“When you have a desirable economy

with opportunity and freedom, people are going to want to come, and when people come, it only makes our country better,” said Alfaro, an organizer and public-relations specialist who set up LIBRE’s Arizona branch in 2013.

Flanked by placards touting the benefits of immigrants to Arizona’s economy—\$2.5 billion added to the state’s GDP, \$5.4 billion paid in taxes—Alfaro advocated raising caps on visas and urged Congress to offer Dreamers a path to citizenship in exchange for increased border security, a Republican sticking point. On several occasions, he lamented political gridlock on immigration. “We can point fingers at Democrats or Republicans...but at the end of the day, we need to point the finger at ourselves and say, ‘Am I being one of those people that is being polarized?’”¹

Three attendees wearing Trump

hats heckled the speakers during the question-and-answer session. The apparent ringleader, a White woman with long, curly hair, held up a smartphone as she interrupted the panelists’ discussion, broadcasting her stunt on social media. “Why do people come illegally when they can come to the U.S. legally?” she demanded. The trio snickered while the immigration lawyer explained that current immigration caps, set in the 1990s, fell far short of meeting the labor demands of the American economy over the next two decades. The woman tried to interject again, prompting the moderator to ask the speakers for closing statements.

A musician played an electric guitar as attendees at the Arizona forum shuffled past tables of LIBRE swag—wristbands, pens, chapstick, sunglasses, and signs emblazoned with the group’s logo and slogan: “Limited Government · Unlim-

ited Opportunity.” The three Trump supporters, phones aloft, harangued a formerly undocumented woman in the entryway, pelting her with questions whose answers they weren’t interested in hearing. On the patio outside, the trio accosted other audience members with argumentative questions, with the ring-leader shouting at a woman who’d told them her husband had been deported for smoking marijuana. “Fucking stupid!” she screamed before slinking away.

A KOCH IN PROGRESSIVE CLOTHING

To the casual observer—indeed, even to the hecklers who’d come to disrupt the pro-immigration forum—LIBRE may appear indistinguishable from progressive groups advocating for immigration reform. The group’s president, Daniel Garza, has criticized Trump in the press for his rhetoric about Mexican immigrants, the president’s failure to support DACA, and most recently, the administration’s “zero-tolerance” enforcement policy that separated approximately 2,600 parents from their children at the border.² Garza and leaders from LIBRE’s state branches publicly urge Congress to extend citizenship to Dreamers. The group ran an ad campaign titled “We Are Patriots,” assuring viewers that Dreamers are Americans who “work hard, put food on the table, care for our families, and...pledge allegiance to [the] flag.”³

LIBRE’s overarching goal is twofold: to convince Latinxs that laissez-faire capitalism will empower them and to draw the “sleeping giant” of American electoral politics to the Right.

The Arizona forum was among half a dozen events LIBRE hosted in late July, including one on Capitol Hill, advocating for immigration reform after Republicans in the House of Representatives failed to pass an overhaul that included cuts to legal immigration, increased funding for border security, and a path to citizenship for Dreamers.⁴ An Obama-era initiative, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program currently shields 690,000 of the country’s estimated 3.6 million Dreamers from deportation.⁵ Shortly after taking office in 2017,

President Donald Trump announced he was ending the program,⁶ but DACA remains active under several court orders, with the Supreme Court ultimately expected to decide its fate.⁷

“If Congress does not enact a balanced, bipartisan solution that protects Dreamers and enhances border security, tremendous uncertainty is just around the corner,” said Garza in a statement after the Capitol Hill event. “Congress is empowered to make and reform our immigration laws. This is the time to do so.”⁸

But the idea behind LIBRE is bigger. At events like the one in Tempe, LIBRE’s Carlos Alfaro may express sympathy for undocumented youth and urge reform. But ultimately, the organization he represents is less aligned politically with the Dreamer he shared the stage with than the racists in the third row.

Backed by the billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch—who have contributed more than \$15.8 million to the organization through umbrella group Freedom Partners Action Fund⁹—LIBRE’s overarching goal is twofold: to convince Latinxs that laissez-faire capitalism will empower them and to draw the “sleeping giant” of American electoral politics—Latinx voters, who compose an increasing share of the electorate—to the Right. The infrastructure of their group comprises an advocacy arm, the LIBRE Initiative—a 501(c)(4) nonprofit, which under

Citizens United can engage in political activity and raise unlimited amounts of money without disclosing individual donors—and an educational arm, the LIBRE Institute, which conducts community outreach. According to tax filings, in 2016 the groups had a combined income of \$13.5 million.

“More [Latinos] self-identify as conservatives than liberal or moderate,” Garza told me. “What happened in the past is that those on the free-market government side...failed in the past to make the kind of investments that

needed to be made in order to educate Latinos on the free-market, limited-government agenda.”¹⁰

With a permanent staff of around 60 in 11 states—including swing states with large Latinx populations like Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Nevada, and New Mexico—and an annual budget of around \$10 million, LIBRE is a regular presence at Latinx community and cultural events across the country, erecting booths at Cinco de Mayo festivals and for César Chavez Day.¹¹ The group gives away turkeys at Thanksgiving and school supplies in August. It provides free English-language instruction as well as citizenship, GED, and driver’s license courses. It offers seminars for aspiring business owners and conducted tax workshops after the Republican tax cut earlier this year.

LIBRE also seeks to bring its message to communities of faith. The organization’s director of faith initiatives, John Mendez, was previously vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals.¹² In talks before religious congregations and right-wing religious groups like the Family Research Council, Mendez preaches that conservative economics have a biblical basis, echoing the “Gospel of Prosperity” rhetoric that has become popular among some conservative evangelicals.

“The Hispanic pastor will teach his congregants on the prosperity of God, but won’t necessarily teach them on how to manage, maintain, uphold that prosperity,” Mendez said in an interview with the Pacific Justice Institute, a right-wing religious organization. “We come in and inform them and teach them on those principles of economic freedom and free enterprise from not only a constitutional perspective, but also a biblical perspective.”¹³

But LIBRE has faced withering criticism from Democratic politicians and Latinx advocacy groups for supporting politicians and policies that progressives say hurt the Latinx community. The group opposed the Affordable Care Act, which decreased the percentage of uninsured working-age Latinxs by 18 percent;¹⁴ supports school vouchers that

fuel White flight from public schools, leaving poorer Latinxs behind; and opposes raising the minimum wage. LIBRE has campaigned for “right to work” laws that defund unions and voter-ID laws that disenfranchise poor minorities.

Garza readily acknowledges that LIBRE’s advocacy on immigration falls second to its free-market fundamentalism. Noting that many Latinxs “are certainly not one-issue voters” even on immigration, Garza says the group will advocate against other Latinxs who “would expand the growth and size of government, who would restrict educational choice, who would increase the burden of taxes and regulation...and just take over the role of the market, the church, and so on.”

“While we may disagree with a candidate on immigration,” Garza says, “we’ll vote for the candidate based on that person’s position on taxes, regulations, healthcare, and education.”¹⁵

Democratic Senator Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada, a supporter of immigration reform and now the first Latina in the Senate, is one of the politicians whose candidacy LIBRE opposed. In 2016, the group ran ads attacking her for opposing a school voucher program in the state. Garza echoed that criticism in a Spanish-language op-ed for Univision, in which he also lambasted her opposition to education savings accounts and accused her of conspiring with regulators to keep Uber out of the state. “The fact that she is ‘Latina’ doesn’t excuse her for the harm she will do to her fellow Latinos,” Garza wrote.¹⁶ The Koch-funded Freedom Partners also spent nearly \$8.4 million targeting Cortez Masto during the 2016 election cycle, making it the third-most expensive race in the cycle.

“In a career spent as a prosecutor, I’ve learned one thing: Always follow the money,” Cortez Masto said on the Senate floor in April 2018 (following earlier criticism of the group from former Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid). “What the Koch Brothers and their web of dark money organizations like LIBRE are really doing is deceiving Latinos and supporting the very same politicians who are working against Latino families.”

SELLING LIBERTARIANISM TO LATINXS

Daniel Garza openly acknowledges LIBRE’s connection to the Koch brothers, though the organization’s representatives often note that the Kochs are among “hundreds” of donors to the organization.

“I am proud to associate with Charles and David [Koch],” Garza told me. While David Koch has largely stopped his conservative advocacy due to health problems, Garza praised Charles’ “amazing” contributions to “the freedom movement.”¹⁷

Latinx advocates and academics refer to Garza as a “true believer”: an earnest libertarian who believes that, absent government intervention, “the market” regulates itself as a perfect meritocracy. In this utopia, LIBRE imagines a poor immigrant family can take a \$5,000 school voucher and pay tuition at a \$25,000-a-year private high school; that the for-profit health-care industry will work in the interest of the public good; and that corporations will use their increased earnings to give the average American worker a raise. Implicit in libertarianism is the idea that billionaires like the Kochs are beneficent and don’t rig the game.

“Libertarianism is designed to ignore social reality,” says Stephen Nuño, chair of the Department of Politics and International Affairs at Northern Arizona University. “If we can ignore these realities, it’s a very romantic ideology. The notion that without government, [for] you the hard worker, the smart person, the creative entrepreneur, the sky’s the limit, plays into a lot of these American values. It does play into the immigrant dream.”

It follows that, while LIBRE purports to try to reach Latinxs across the board, its outreach efforts primarily target new immigrants, whom Garza says are most inclined to respond to their message.

“There does in fact exist a predisposition for these folks who come to sacrifice, to work hard, to come to America because they’ve seen the promise that their hard work can develop into,” Garza says.¹⁸

For LIBRE’s critics, the outreach to new arrivals to the country unfamiliar with U.S. politics is by design—anyone remotely familiar with the system knows

that the Republicans who typically espouse libertarian positions are also the ones who decry “anchor babies.”

“A lot of low-education voters, especially low-information, never heard of LIBRE. In a new place, this organization comes along to give them training on how to open a business,” says Jorge Silva of the Latino Victory Project, who says he had a “front-row view” of the group’s tactics in Nevada when he worked for Sen. Harry Reid. (Silva was also Hillary Clinton’s national director for Hispanic media in 2016.¹⁹) “The main point of the LIBRE organization is an effort to deceive Latinos into supporting the politicians that are working against Latino families.”²⁰

LIBRE is targeting not only misinformed voters, but also youth who are “hungry to be involved in whatever way they can,” says Reynaldo Benitez, special advisor for the office of Senator Cortez Masto.²¹

LIBRE supports immigration reform to the extent that doing so coheres with the libertarian belief that borders should be open and labor should flow freely across them. The group initially opposed DACA when President Barack Obama proposed it, objecting to it as an instance of executive overreach.²² The organization is now outspoken in its advocacy for Dreamers, but toes the Republican line when it comes to their parents. At the 2013 Conservative Political Action Conference, Garza said he opposed granting undocumented immigrants citizenship, instead endorsing a notion of “legality.”²³ This would allow undocumented immigrants to remain and work in the country but deny them the full benefits of citizenship, including the right to vote and social services support—a proposal that would confer *de jure* second-class status on millions of people. The organization opposed Obama’s executive actions regarding Dreamers’ parents—known as DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents)—warning that granting protected status to the parents of Dreamers “may encourage more immigrants to enter or remain in the U.S. in violation of our laws.”²⁴

A spokesperson for LIBRE said that the organization now supports an “earned”

pathway to citizenship, which has meant various things under different legislative proposals but commonly entails undocumented immigrants admitting to the crime of breaking immigration law, paying a fine and back taxes before being considered for citizenship.²⁵

Despite the fact that net migration from Mexico fell to zero in 2012²⁶ and the federal government spent \$22 billion on immigration enforcement in 2018—more than the sum total of all other federal law-enforcement agencies combined²⁷—LIBRE insists, in line with Republican orthodoxy, that the country direly needs more funding for border security.

A PARTISAN POWERHOUSE

LIBRE describes itself as “nonpartisan.” A spokesperson noted that in addition to its advocacy on immigration, which aligns more with the Left than the Right, LIBRE recently criticized the Trump administration for imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum²⁸ and sent out mailers praising Democrats for their work on immigration reform.²⁹

“We hold both Republicans and Demo-

crats accountable,” says a LIBRE spokesperson. “We’re willing to stand with those who stand right and call out those who stand wrong. It’s not dependent on party.”³⁰

But most of LIBRE’s political advocacy has benefitted Republicans. In 2014, the group spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on ads attacking four House Democrats for supporting the Affordable Care Act,³¹ which LIBRE believes “constrain[s] job creation and add[s] another layer of bureaucracy to an already bogged down system.”³² “The fact is that premiums spiked, deductibles spiked, doctor choices were reduced and quality suffered” under the ACA, Garza says.³³

Three of the Democrats LIBRE targeted—Rep. Ron Barber in Arizona, Rep. Pete Gallego in Texas, and Rep. Joe Garcia in Florida³⁴—lost their re-election bids. Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick won hers against Arizona State Representative Andy Tobin, a strong supporter of Arizona’s infamous “Papers, Please” anti-immigrant law, SB 1070,³⁵ which (among other provisions) would have mandated that immigrants carry documentation at all

times and required police to racially profile Latinxs. (The Supreme Court ruled key portions of the law unconstitutional in 2012.³⁶) That same year, the group also helped defeat Mark Udall in Colorado, a Democrat and strong supporter of immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship for the undocumented.³⁷

During the 2016 election cycle, LIBRE spent \$700,000 on ads to support the re-election campaign of Florida Senator Marco Rubio,³⁸ a fickle supporter of immigration reform. As a member of the Senate’s “Gang of Eight,” which drafted and passed a comprehensive immigration bill in the Senate in 2013, Rubio opposed his own bill once the political winds shifted.³⁹ For the 2018 election, LIBRE has launched a six-figure media campaign in Arizona to support Proposition 305,⁴⁰ a voter referendum that would expand school vouchers in the state.

LIBRE “may believe that those policy positions empower Latinos, but I would say based on our policy analysis and given Latinos’ need to access healthcare, we tend to not agree with them on most positions,” says Clarissa Martínez-de-Castro, deputy vice president in the office of Research, Advocacy and Legislation at UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza).⁴¹

LIBRE’s angel donors, the Kochs, have funded the campaigns of some of the most anti-immigrant politicians in the U.S., including Russell Pearce and Kris Kobach,⁴² the architects of Arizona’s SB 1070. They have backed Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa),⁴³ who—with a few close contenders—has been perhaps the most openly racist member of the House of Representatives. King told CNN he’d “like to see an America that is just so homogenous that we look a lot the same.”⁴⁴ On Dreamers, King said that “for every one who’s a valedictorian, there’s another 100 out there who weigh 130 pounds—and they’ve got calves the size of cantaloupes because they’ve been hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert.”⁴⁵ The Kochs are also one of the chief backers of Louie Gohmert (R-TX),⁴⁶ one of DACA’s chief antagonists in the House, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, another hardliner on immigration.⁴⁷ Trump recently tasked Pompeo with investigating

LIBRE’s angel donors, the Kochs, have funded the campaigns of some of the most anti-immigrant politicians in the U.S.



Charles Koch, speaking at an event in Aspen, Colorado, in 2016. Photo: Kevin Moloney/Flickr.

the “large scale killing” of White farmers in South Africa—a myth commonly espoused by White supremacists as the country seeks to redistribute land post-apartheid.⁴⁸

“How could you make [Latinos] believe that these people who support these anti-immigrant politicians are doing something great for our community?” Latino Victory Project’s Jorge Silva asks. “[Daniel Garza] has a tough job—he tries to make people forget that his money comes from the Kochs, from the same money that supported Arizona’s SB 1070.”⁴⁹

“I see LIBRE’s involvement in helping immigrants and advocating for pro-immigrant policies as mostly tactical, a means to an end,” says Frank Sharry, founder and executive director of pro-immigrant group America’s Voice.⁵⁰

What LIBRE sees as smart strategies for reaching Latinxs with the free-market message, others see as stealthy indoctrination. The group recruits high-profile members of the Latinx community—from television anchors to high-school football stars—and opens offices near centers of civic activity like schools. With its substantial budget, LIBRE buys large swaths of airtime on Spanish-language radio and television, which have helped make it a household name among Latinxs. At its seminars on business development and driver’s license courses, the group invites government officials to offer information alongside LIBRE representatives espousing free-market ideology, giving the group’s views a patina of credibility (and potentially fusing the idea of the U.S. with conservative ideology in the minds of new immigrants).⁵¹

“When they do these workshops or trainings, they always have a member of LIBRE Initiative talking about how we need less government,” says Silva. “They call them ‘small business seminars,’ where they do provide information but also always have a member of LIBRE talking about need for reducing regulations... LIBRE takes advantage of people who are there for something they need, then go ahead and indoctrinate them.”⁵²

This year, LIBRE launched a \$100,000 campaign aimed at approximately 50,000 Puerto Ricans fleeing destruction from Hurricane Maria in Florida.

The campaign, “Welcome to Florida,” provides English-language instruction, resume-building and mock interviews to migrants from the island in Orlando, Miami, and Tampa.⁵³ While LIBRE Executive Director David Velazquez told *The Weekly Standard* that the primary goal was not to “activate” Puerto Ricans politically, the group nonetheless hopes its speakers inspire them to embrace free-market principles.⁵⁴

In blaming both Republicans and Democrats equally for the failure of immigration reform, LIBRE’s critics say the group is misinforming and disenfranchising Latinx voters. Republicans have in fact been responsible for the failure of immigration reform during

“At the end of the day, LIBRE’s end goal is to spread their ideology and make people disengage from the political process.”

the administrations of former President George W. Bush and former President Barack Obama. In both instances, Republicans stonewalled immigration legislation that provided citizenship to the undocumented. When the Democrat-controlled Senate passed an omnibus immigration bill in 2013 that included a path to citizenship, the Republican House failed to put it up for a vote because it was expected to pass the full conference.⁵⁵

“At the end of the day, LIBRE’s end goal is to spread their ideology and make people disengage from the political process,” the Latino Victory Project’s Silva says. “They want to make Latinos think the political system doesn’t work, both parties are the same, and what Latinos need to do is focus on local politics.”⁵⁶

For Stephen Nuño, chair of the Department of Politics and International Affairs at Northern Arizona University, LIBRE serves yet another purpose in the overarching political landscape.

“If you’re a moderate Republican you can look at LIBRE and say, ‘See we’re going after Latinos; we’re not racist,’” he says. “Republican outreach to Latinos has less to do with Latinos than with giving White voters cover for the racist poli-

cies of the Republican Party.”⁵⁷

AN OBSOLETE STRATEGY?

In some ways, LIBRE feels like a throwback to an earlier political era. In principle, there is no inherent contradiction in supporting immigration reform and conservative economics. This was George W. Bush’s “compassionate conservatism,” which drew 40 percent of the Latinx vote in 2004.⁵⁸

“LIBRE is a relic of a different era of the Republican Party,” Stephen Nuño says. “Anyone who thinks that Republicans care about free markets today is mistaken. Since 9/11 and 2008, it’s become an overwhelmingly White nationalist enterprise.”⁵⁹

The GOP has become progressively more radical on immigration since the Bush years, meaning LIBRE occupies an ever-shrinking space on the political map. Only 31 percent of Latinxs voted for John McCain in 2008,⁶⁰ a number that fell to 27 percent in 2012 for Mitt Romney,⁶¹ who advocated “self-deportation”—the policy of making the lives of undocumented immigrants so unbearable that they choose to leave the country voluntarily—as a solution to the country’s immigration problem.⁶² After the 2012 election, the Republican National Committee released an autopsy urging its politicians to embrace same-sex marriage, court women voters, and change their hardline opposition to “comprehensive immigration reform” (that is, immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship for the undocumented).

“Among the steps Republicans take in the Hispanic community and beyond, we must embrace and champion comprehensive immigration reform,” read the report from the Republican National Committee’s Growth and Opportunity Project.⁶³ “If we do not, our Party’s appeal will continue to shrink to its core constituencies only.”

Over the next six years, the GOP did

precisely the opposite. Now, with President Donald Trump, an immigration hardliner, leading the GOP, most of the politicians who share LIBRE's views on economics oppose immigration reform. Garza is right that more Latinxs describe themselves as conservative than liberal (32 percent versus 28 percent), but the largest share (36 percent) describes themselves as "moderate." Around 65 percent of registered Latinx voters now identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party, and the percentage of Latinxs who say Democrats have more concern for them than Republicans has jumped 11 percent since 2004.⁶⁴

Garza noted that Trump outperformed Romney in the 2016 presidential election, garnering 29 percent of Latinxs' votes.⁶⁵ "Democratic outreach efforts focused on insulting candidate Trump's supporters—they really failed to drive a persuasive message and didn't focus on opportunity and jobs," he says. "[Trump] was the one making promises to increase jobs, wages and economic growth. The number one priority for Latinos, in poll after poll, is jobs and the economy."⁶⁶

Garza is right here, too: Polls show that Latinxs list jobs and the economy atop immigration as political concerns.⁶⁷ But immigration is nonetheless dispositive for Latinxs. Most Latinxs in the U.S. are citizens who were born here, but many have extended family members, or community connections, who are undocumented. Politicians' views on immigration serve as a touchstone for how they view Latinxs more generally. One might expect Latinxs to have punished Trump more severely for his rhetoric about Hispanics, but outperforming Romney by two points doesn't suggest a fundamental shift in how Latinxs view the Republican Party.

More to the point, Latinxs on the whole support government intervention in society at higher rates than the general population. According to the nonpartisan Pew Research Center, 75 percent of Latinxs say they would "rather have a bigger government which provides more services than a smaller government which provides fewer," compared with 41 percent of the public at large. Support for larger government is strongest among first-

generation Latinx immigrants, 81 percent of whom share this view.⁶⁸

"There have been attempts to categorize Latinos in simplistic fashion on both sides," Martínez-de-Castro says. "It's not a monolith, but through polling you see that on one hand Latinos believe you need to work hard and believe in self-reliance. But they also believe that we should invest more in public education or in quality education, access to health-care, are willing more to pay in taxes to see those things happen."⁶⁹

LIBRE's message will inevitably resonate with the third of Latinxs who naturally skew conservative, as well as Cubans, who have historically aligned with Republicans.⁷⁰ But it is difficult to imagine the group can grow the number of free-market Latinx libertarians in the country with Trump in the White House and other immigration hardliners at the fore of the GOP.

"Their market share is going to be limited by the fact that they are ultimately dependent on one funding source and restricted by an ideology that doesn't have a lot of purchase on a community that needs a strong government to get ahead," says Sharry of America's Voice. "LIBRE is not an organic community push for libertarian ideas. It's a top-down, well-funded, sophisticated political operation."⁷¹

That raises the question of what purpose LIBRE ultimately serves in the political ecosystem. It is difficult to fault the organization for the social services it provides. LIBRE could be more transparent in disclosing its connection to the Koch brothers, but like many other nonprofits in the post *Citizens United* era, there is little incentive to disclose more than the law requires. What's more, after seven years of operation, the group's Koch ties have been dissected in story after story in the media—a simple Google search shows the group's extensive connection to the conservative mega-donors.

LIBRE's most nefarious influence on the political system may be in its ability to pour Koch money into close elections in districts with large Latinx populations. On television and on the radio, LIBRE does not disclose its Koch connections—voters hear the group's message without knowing the source. And with

their attack ads in Texas, Arizona, and Florida, the group was successful in helping to oust three Democrats over the Affordable Care Act.

But the organization's ability to significantly shift Latinxs' political alignment is imperiled every time President Donald Trump leads attendees at a rally to chant, "Build the wall." Or, as Silva put it, "I wonder how Puerto Ricans are going to feel when they say it's good the government doesn't spend more money given how little it spent in the recovery efforts for Hurricane Maria."⁷²

The GOP may someday return to "compassionate conservatism," but the trend line over the last 15 years has been moving the party toward ever more draconian immigration policies. And even if Republicans heed their advice, and soften their stance on immigration, the damage done to the party's brand among this demographic will continue to make recruiting efforts difficult. But until that happens, LIBRE will remain a cause without a party.

If anything, LIBRE's outreach efforts highlight how little Democrats have invested in courting Latinxs, who vote at significantly lower rates than other groups.⁷³ Come election time, news stories tease readers with headlines declaring that the "sleeping giant" of American politics may finally wake up, but as long as both parties make little concerted effort to woo Latinxs, they will remain somnolent.

"If you look at Latino voters, they report that they receive very little outreach from [both] parties and candidates," Martínez-de-Castro says. "If LIBRE being on the ground gets Democrats to start working a little harder—to not take these voters for granted—that's a good thing."⁷⁴ ©

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Bringing Bad Sex Ed Back

Trump's Rebranding of Abstinence-Only

A shocking thing happened at a closed-door United Nations meeting in March, during the annual meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). In a private session intended to set language for gender equality policies and to brief non-governmental organizations on U.S. priorities for women's issues, a senior advisor from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Bethany Kozma, who gained notoriety for her transphobic stance on bathroom policies, declared the United States a "pro-life" nation.

The pronouncement jolted the room like a "record scratch," one UN official later said.¹ At subsequent sessions over the two-week gathering, other Trump officials, including the senior policy advisor for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Valerie Huber, reiterated the point. Huber, who once headed a national abstinence-only advocacy organization,² used the term "pro-life" while demanding the removal of key terms such as "modern contraception," "emergency contraception," and "unsafe abortion" from outcome documents focused on gender equality.³

But the declaration encompassed more than just abortion. In both cases, the U.S. representatives pushed a far-right agenda not just on abortion but on sex education and contraception, seeking to scrub from the meeting's outcome documents any mention of sexuality. It was a stunning revelation that the Trump administration's "pro-life" agenda isn't just targeting abortion access but sex education as well.

One meeting attendee, Shannon Kowalski, director of advocacy and policy at the International Women's Health Coalition, called the move simultaneously ag-

gressive and regressive. It caused other stakeholders, such as Sanam Amin, a program officer with the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, to question their continued participation in the CSW, which focuses on addressing barriers for the world's most vulnerable women.⁴ It wasn't just talk of regressive policy changes; the U.S. delegation also extended official invitations to two right-wing organizations, the Heritage Foundation and the Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam),⁵ meaning both could attend restricted CSW sessions off-limits to most other nongovernmental organizations. One delegate, Rashima Kwatra, communications officer for OutRight Action International, expressed concern that this signaled an effort to enshrine discrimination as entities pushing for "religious freedom" co-opted CSW's message.⁶

A GRIM HISTORY

Between 1982 and 2010, the government poured approximately \$1.6 billion into abstinence-only initiatives. Each benchmark (notably the Title V Abstinence Only Until Marriage component of the 1996 welfare reform law, and Congress's funding of Community-Based Abstinence Education in 2001) represented an increase in expenditure and an uptick in governmental control, as lawmakers and proponents sought to define and enshrine traditional family values through increasingly strict requirements for grant recipients. During that time, the government's position morphed from a general call in the 1981 Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) to encourage "chastity and self-discipline" to a full-blown doctrine enshrining monogamous heterosexual marriage as the sexual norm.

By 2004, the George W. Bush administration shifted abstinence-only fund-

ing from the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Bureau to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Bush would also more than double overall spending on abstinence-only education from \$60 million in 2000 to an all-time high of \$177 million in 2008. Under this more conservative management, ACF hardened funding guidelines. Where MCH grant recipients had merely been prohibited from contradicting Title V's eight-point definition of abstinence-only programming, ACF grantees had to address each of the eight points with equal weight. ACF also expanded its target population to include all Americans younger than 30. By 2006, organizations receiving ACF grants were specifically prohibited from providing clients with information about safer sex (even with separate funding), and the concept of abstinence had grown to include any sexual contact between unmarried people.

Despite this massive investment, the reality that abstinence-only programs don't work was becoming obvious. They consistently failed to delay sexual behavior, prevent teen pregnancy, or protect against sexually transmitted infections. They also offered patently false or misleading information about reproductive health; relied on fear- and shame-based methodologies and biased curriculum materials that promoted gender stereotypes and excluded sexual minorities; contained thinly veiled efforts to enshrine religious values as universal standards; and lacked any federal oversight to ensure basic scientific accuracy.

By 2008, 16 separate reviews detailed these concerns, including assessments authored by the minority leader of the House Committee on Government Reform, the Government Accountability Office, an investigative firm hired by HHS,

as well as 13 state inquiries. Congress convened a hearing on abstinence-only initiatives the same year and declared the programs ineffective and objectively harmful. By this point, almost half of all states were refusing federal funds tied to abstinence-only, and the initiatives seemed destined for the dustbin of history.⁷

To settle any lingering public debate, researchers combed through decades of data, comparing abstinence-only outcomes with those of an evidence-based comprehensive sex education program endorsed by the National Institutes of Health. They found that the lowest teenage pregnancy and birth rates occurred in states offering comprehensive sex education while the highest were in states that emphasized abstinence-only. The research team also reported clear socioeconomic and racial disparities associated with abstinence-only, as richer, Whiter states emphasized abstinence less and, unsurprisingly, experienced fewer teen pregnancies and births.⁸

When it comes to sex education, all the major players—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institutes of Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the Society for Adolescent Health Medicine, the American Public Health Association, and the American Psychological Association—have taken positions against abstinence-only,⁹ recognizing that it's bad science and a violation of adolescents' human rights.¹⁰

Still, abstinence proponents—overwhelmingly conservative Christians—pushed forward, insisting that their approach “follows God's plan for sexuality and reflects a biblical vision of marriage and family.”¹¹

REBRANDING ABSTINENCE-ONLY

The Obama administration decisively shifted away from abstinence-only to comprehensive sex education, cutting funding from \$177 million to \$50 million and eliminating two major funding streams (AFLA and CBAE). Immediately upon Trump's taking office, his administration reversed course again, increasing annual federal abstinence-only expendi-

tures to \$85 million dollars in 2016 and \$90 million dollars in 2017, and installing abstinence-only advocates, mostly conservative evangelicals, into key positions in government, such as HHS's Valerie Huber, one of the delegates who insisted that the U.S. is now “pro-life” at the UN.

Huber is also the co-founder of her own abstinence-only organization, Ascend, which she started after she was found guilty of an ethics violation and suspended from directing Ohio's abstinence education program.¹² Through Ascend, she's argued that comprehensive sexual education constitutes a greater pressure on adolescents to have sex¹³ than they face from their own dating partners.¹⁴ (To back this up, Huber cites a study compiled for Ascend by an evangelical Christian polling firm that self-describes as providing insight to “spiritual influencers.”¹⁵) Ascend has also taken aim at the methodology of research supporting comprehensive sex education,¹⁶ arguing, for example, that researchers measuring overall condom usage “did not measure consistent, correct use”—a long-time critique by abstinence-only advocates that conflicts with their insistence that instructing students in correct condom usage is “explicit content” that provokes students to become sexually active.¹⁷

But after years of studies demonstrating the failures of abstinence-only, both organizations like Ascend and the Trump administration itself have rebranded their work, as Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA).¹⁸

SexualRiskAvoidance proponents have sought to recast abstinence-only's image by poaching scientific language, using terms like “risk avoidance,” “evidence-based,” and “medically accurate”—language that lends the program a veneer of public health legitimacy in ways that “abstinence” could not. Much of this language appears modeled on public health initiatives aimed at decreasing objectively dangerous behaviors. Ascend, for example, directly compares its approach to risk reduction strategies aimed at preventing underage drinking, illegal drug use, smoking, and violence, insisting that the goal is to return sexually active youth to a “healthy

lifestyle free from all sexual risk.”¹⁹ SRA proponents even push for “cessation intervention support” for sexually active adolescents.²⁰

Therein lies the most insidious rebranding of abstinence-only. Epidemiologists use the term “risk reduction” when exploring outcomes. As a risk reduction program, comprehensive sex education is geared toward minimizing absolute health risks associated with teen sex: teen pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections. However, SRA proponents insist that comprehensive sex education does not really reduce harm and should not even be considered a risk reduction program—even if outcomes show an all-time low for teen pregnancy rates²¹—because, for abstinence-only advocates, the goal is not to reduce the risks associated with teen sex but to recast all premarital sex as inherently unhealthy and destructive to society. According to SRA, any outcome other than complete abstinence is a failure, and all studies demonstrating the efficacy of comprehensive sex education are inherently flawed, since the only acceptable standard for success is total cessation of all premarital sex.

That much is demonstrated by an infographic published by Ascend, taking specific aim at the evidence-based comprehensive sex education program Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP, the curriculum endorsed by the National Institutes of Health), claiming the program increases oral sex among teens.²² Ascend's infographic also makes the demonstrably false claim that TPP increases teen pregnancy, but its focus on oral sex is revealing: an admission that their aim is not to reduce teen pregnancy but to mandate one specific sexual morality.

Now, under Trump, that perspective is policy. Huber's HHS has adopted SRA, as well as its stated goal: to normalize “the optimal health behavior of avoiding non-marital sexual activity” altogether.²³

Despite the façade that SRA is a new public health program, the vast majority of the studies cited by Ascend's treatise on SRA—23 of 25—are pulled from the previous era of abstinence-only. Additionally, a third of the studies—eight of 25—were authored by a single social

psychologist, Stan Weed, whose Institute for Research and Evaluation exclusively focuses on abstinence-only and character education materials. Weed's reemergence as an SRA expert is particularly notable; his testimony before Congress during the 2008 hearings that ultimately found abstinence-only ineffective and harmful represented a public low point for abstinence-only. In videos of the hearings, Weed argues vociferously with a Republican congressman about the benefits of withholding sexual health information from young people—while seated near a young adult who had just finished testifying that he contracted HIV as an outcome of withheld information.²⁴ Weed's support staff at the hearing? None other than Valerie Huber.

The alternative is to view sex education through the same lens used by developed countries with substantially lower rates for teen pregnancy. That is, "based on the WHO definition of sexuality as a lifelong process, aiming to create self-determined and responsible attitudes and behavior with regard to sexuality, contraception, relationships and life strategies and planning."²⁵ But for SRA proponents, this amounts to being "pro teen sex."²⁶

FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS

Back at the UN in March, the U.S. delegation's "pro-life" declaration and subsequent push to eliminate any mention of phrases such as "modern contraceptives" from outcome documents set the U.S. at odds with the UN Commission on the Status of Women working group, including representatives from nations traditionally far to the right of U.S. policy on gender equality, such as China, Egypt, Iran, and Russia.²⁷ It also sparked concerns about the broader implications of the United States' new political orientation.

One delegate told BuzzFeed the members came together and "stared down" the U.S., optimistically claiming they succeeded in thwarting the extreme agenda. Yet the final draft of the document was reduced to weak references to "sexual and reproductive health," stripped of any mention of sex education, contraception, or abortion. A U.S. statement released after the negotiations clarified

that even the phrase "sexual and reproductive health" was open to interpretation, leaving participants speculating about the implications for U.S. funding for international family planning, traditionally managed through USAID.²⁸

There is certainly domestic precedent for defunding alternatives to abstinence-only education. Shortly after Valerie Huber's appointment to HHS, that agency slashed federal funding for the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program that Ascend had long denounced, and ended grants awarded to Planned Parenthood and 81 other organizations two years early. In a March 2017 op-ed for *The Hill*, Huber declared TPP ineffective, despite the *Journal of Adolescent Health* and the CDC both reporting an all-time low for teen pregnancy in 2016, which medical experts such as the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists attribute to TPP.²⁹ The piece appears to be backed by research, but many of the hyperlinked sources lead nowhere or don't reflect the text they are meant to support.³⁰ In one instance, Huber insists that youth who receive training to avoid sex are more likely to use condoms than students who receive comprehensive sex education, yet the study she cites concludes with a recommendation for comprehensive sex education.³¹ A federal judge blocked HHS's effort to defund Planned Parenthood's TPP program in April, stating the potential for substantial harm from cutting the grants.³²

After losing five such federal lawsuits brought by defunded grantees,³³ HHS resumed TPP funding but seems to have adjusted its course to sidestep judicial oversight. Now, instead of eliminating TPP, current HHS funding guidelines for the program include options to allocate TPP money for SRA programs.³⁴ In the first funding tier, prospective grantees can apply for a total of \$61 million earmarked for TPP but they are permitted to use an SRA assessment tool developed by an abstinence-only organization, the Center for Relationship Education, for curriculum selection, essentially providing a means to funnel TPP funds to SRA programs. The second tier enables public and private entities to access \$22 million of TPP funds to develop and test "new

and innovative strategies to prevent teen pregnancy...by focusing on protective factors," including those set forth by the SRA tool.³⁵

There's additional cause for concern regarding the role abstinence-only education may play in what international reproductive health programs Trump does fund. Legal Momentum and the Harvard School of Public Health describes how the earliest iteration of Bush's HIV/AIDS program, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), had, as a global abstinence-only mandate, "deprive[d] women and girls of prevention strategies that are, literally, lifesaving."³⁶ During the Obama administration, PEPFAR's abstinence-only requirements were relaxed, and the program has grown to be considered a public health success.³⁷ However, after the Trump administration unsuccessfully proposed eliminating PEPFAR funding for 2018, it proposed extending the Global Gag Rule to cover PEPFAR for the first time.³⁸

In a political climate marked by near-constant human rights violations, the resurrection of abstinence-only programs under the guise of "risk avoidance" occurs amid growing outrage fatigue. This is a dangerous perfect storm, given the domestic implications, especially for vulnerable students, and the potential global reach of the policy. ☹

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