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In the wake of Robert Mueller's testimony, and as the 2020 election campaign heats up, all eyes are on Russia's potential influence on the U.S. But as Hannah Gais writes in our cover story this issue, **"In Search of the Russian Soul" (pg. 3)**, there is as much to be learned about what the U.S. Far Right projects upon that country. For many decades, Russia has served as an object of obsessive intrigue for the Right: once a boogeyman, more often today a romanticized ideal—no matter how inaccurate—of a traditionalist bastion that, as David Duke once pronounced, could be the "key to white survival." Irrespective of reality, for today's Far Right, Russia has again become America's "imaginary twin," its "dark double," its mirror.

While much of the Alt Right dreams of an imagined ethnostate, other sectors of the movement have embraced a seemingly contradictory strategy: attempting to create, within their deeply racist movement, an appeal to people of color, a multiracial Far Right. As Cloee Cooper and Daryle Lamont Jenkins write in **"Culture and Belonging in the USA" (pg. 10)**, some Far Right groups like Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys have become "part of a trend of Far Right organizing that departs from their explicitly White nationalist contemporaries, and often fuses antiracist language into otherwise nationalist, misogynistic, libertarian and xenophobic platforms." The strategy, which relies on a sort of secularized Christian Right traditionalism, is not without historical precedent. But the disingenuous cover for racism it represents also exposes fault lines within the Far Right.

A similar balancing act is on display in how the Right responds to the acts of violence carried out by people inspired by right-wing rhetoric. In our commentary this issue, **"Ben Shapiro and the Conservative Chorus" (pg. 16)**, Emily Gorcenski examines how a young couple sentenced for the vandalism and arson of an Indiana synagogue were radicalized by right-wing media figures, including *Daily Wire* editor Ben Shapiro. While Shapiro rejects the idea that he influenced the arsonists, he joins a growing list of right-wing leaders cited by those who carry out bias attacks—most recently including Donald Trump.

Finally, in our third feature, **"The New War on ICWA" (pg. 18)**, Mary Annette Pember uncovers how, over the last six years, an unlikely alliance of right-wing political, legal, economic, and religious groups has taken aim at a landmark law that protects Native American children. The Indian Child Welfare Act was created to address the mass separation of Native American families: a slow-moving atrocity that continued for more than 100 years. Today's attacks on it—frequently covered by mainstream media as feel-good adoption tales—are rarely grounded in legitimate concerns about child welfare, but rather represent a back-door attack on the sovereignty of Indian Country, and Native governments' ability to protect their people and lands.

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Kathryn Joyce

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BY HANNAH GAIS

In Search of the Russian Soul

How Russia Became the U.S. Far Right's Mirror



Credit: Jørgen Håland on Unsplash

Long before White nationalists descended on Charlottesville, Virginia, chanting “Russia is our friend!,” the post-war fascist writer Francis Parker Yockey took to the pages of a U.S. neonazi, White nationalist organization’s newsletter to praise an unlikely ally. In an article published anonymously in the December 1952 issue of the *National Renaissance Bulletin*, Yockey celebrated one of the late-Stalinist era’s most prominent show trials for demonstrating the commitment among so-called real Russians to stand up to the West’s true enemy: Jews. For far too long, he explained, “the coalition of Jewish interests in Washington and Moscow” had kept the West under its thumb, drunk off of their victory in the Second World War. But Stalin’s 1952 “Prague Trials,” which accused a number of Czechoslovak Com-

munist Party leaders of an alleged Jewish conspiracy against the USSR, gave hope to pro-European fascists like himself.¹ For Yockey, the shift in Stalinist-era policy was profound. The trials, he declared, “have gone off with an explosive roar to waken this European Fascist elite to active resistance against the death plans being hatched for European Culture in Washington by American Jewry. The fact is: the Russian leadership is killing Jews for treason to Russia, for service to the Jewish entity.”²

Yockey, a U.S. attorney and Nazi sympathizer who worked with a wide range of U.S. and European far-right groups—including the failed German-American Bund, the British Union Movement, and the U.S. National Renaissance Party (which published the newsletter Yockey wrote for)—hadn’t always been so friend-

ly toward Russia. His 1952 article was a departure from some of his earlier work, including his neo-Spenglerian³ magnum opus, *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics*. Published in 1948 under a pen name meant to invoke a sense of fascist European solidarity, *Imperium* posited that there were “two Russias: the Bolshevik regime and the true Russia underneath.”⁴

In his later years, Yockey never fully adopted the “pro-Russian” stance that his mainstream critics accused him of.⁵ But his later call for a “new Symbiosis” of “Europe-Russia” as a means of ushering in “a European Imperium”—a pan-European fascist paradise—went further than any of his contemporaries.⁶ As Anton Shekhovtsov, author of the 2017 book *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir*, has noted, his views were

eclectic but tactical.⁷ And in retrospect, they were fateful as well.

Russia has long occupied the imagination of U.S. far-right groups, often as a boogeyman. From the decades-old conspiratorial outlet the John Birch Society to the neonazi National Alliance, “[a]nticommunism had been the one agreed-upon tenet of the entire right wing,” as Leonard Zeskind wrote in *Blood and Politics*.⁸ For the Right in general, the Soviet Union represented the evils of socialism; within the Far Right, it also doubled as a troubling reminder of a nefarious global Jewish cabal. Anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiment served the dual purpose of not only imbuing the Far Right’s opposition to the Left with portentous geopolitical consequences, but it also provided more than enough justification for violence against political opponents. The stakes were high; traitors were among the U.S. public, and it was these “Jew Communists,” as George Lincoln Rockwell of the American Nazi Party was fond of saying, who were responsible for the decline of White America.⁹ But amid this visceral anti-Communism, some Cold War White nationalists and neonazis, including Yockey, began to believe that the Russians served a purpose.

Trying to discern the importance of individual U.S. far-right activists’ or movements’ connection to U.S.-Russia relations can feel as opaque as reading the Kremlin’s tea leaves.¹⁰ A more useful assessment of the history of joint Russian and U.S. far-right activism ought to focus on person-to-person, or movement-to-movement, interactions as transnational relationships on their own terms. Untethered from the dark magic of Kremlinology, we can understand what the U.S. Far Right sees in Russia: a mirror.

HOLOCAUST DENIERS

In the midst of Cold War agitation, Yockey’s beliefs began to take some hold, thanks to Willis A. Carto, a prominent U.S. Holocaust denier and White nationalist who admired Yockey for his criticism of American empire. Carto embraced *Imperium* and came to consider himself a devotee, promising to never “desert him.”¹¹ Carto, the future head of the racist and antisemitic Liberty Lobby,



Imperium, by Francis Parker Yockey. Credit: Amazon.

kept his promise. Liberty Lobby kept *Imperium* in circulation, and Yockey’s writings were often published in the group’s weekly newsletter, *The Spotlight*, even after the author’s death in 1960. But more importantly, it was Carto who, in the chaotic aftermath of the Soviet Union, seized upon Yockey’s proclamations about who real Russians were.

By the time the great “evil empire”¹² collapsed in on itself in the late 1980s, Russian ethno-nationalists and right-wing chauvinists had come to represent a sizable bloc in the new Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), supporting a number of ultra-nationalist institutions and intellectuals. Publications, notably Igor Shafarevich’s 1982 *samizdat*¹³ text *Rusofobia* (“Russophobia”), helped inspire a new generation of antisemitic, ultra-nationalist literature, and further solidified a victim-like mentality among nationalist dissidents in the RSFSR.¹⁴ Dissident culture made the rapid proliferation of these ideas possible. Robert Horvath, a historian who has written on nationalism in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, has argued that the free-wheeling nature of *samizdat* publication and distribution were effective in terms of spreading radical right-wing ideas. Its “pluralism,” he wrote, while

often encouraging fruitful discussions, also “engendered a plethora of authoritarian, imperialist, anti-Semitic, and quasi-fascist currents,” and left ample room for reactionary ideas to evolve.¹⁵ Much like now-infamous forums such as 4Chan, or the more extreme 8Chan, there was plenty of room for proponents of extremist views to push their noxious ideas into the mainstream. As both *samizdat* and today’s digital platforms have made clear, there are some benefits to a world without gatekeepers, but also numerous drawbacks.

Among those who benefited from the growing openness of *perestroika* (rebuilding) and *glasnost* (openness) was the antisemitic organization Pamyat (“Memory”), founded in the twilight years of the Soviet Union. Pamyat’s spokesman Dmitry Vasilyev, a former Soviet journalist, played a crucial role in bringing violent antisemitism into the streets.¹⁶ In the 1990s, the group republished the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the notorious, fabricated 1903 document that purported to outline a plan for Jewish world domination. Like Yockey, Vasilyev and Pamyat saw ethnic Russians and their homeland as having been “tortured and plundered by aggressive Zionism, Talmudic atheism, and cosmopolitan usury”—all of which took place with the explicit cooperation of the Soviets.¹⁷ Although some of Pamyat’s claims bordered on comical—they blamed Jewish influence, for instance, for “food shortages, sex on television . . . [and] the nuclear accident at Chernobyl,” as well as the absurd allegation that Jews were encouraging alcoholism by putting liquor into kefir—the group effectively captured international attention while leaving questions of their actual power and influence unanswered.¹⁸

In North America and the United Kingdom, Holocaust “revisionists”—the preferred euphemistic term of most international Holocaust deniers—were facing legal struggles, often for spreading neo-Nazi propaganda. The RSFSR’s renewed antisemitism encouraged them. Just a year after the Soviet state imploded, Ernst Zündel, a German-born Holocaust denier based in Toronto and author of conspiratorial books like *UFOs: Nazi Secret Weap-*

ons?, dispatched one of his underlings to Moscow to meet with a few seemingly sympathetic Russian officials. Among them was Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, head of the ironically named Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, who had just begun advocating for a pan-European union of far-right parties.¹⁹ Zündel would later travel to Russia on his own. Others, such as Swiss author Jürgen Graf and Italian writer Carlo Mattogno, followed Zündel's lead in 1995, taking two "research trips" to dive into the recently opened Moscow archives, which contained numerous World War II related documents, but also to build up additional contacts.²⁰

While these three floated under the international media's radar, not all of their like-minded colleagues were as lucky. David Irving, a self-appointed Holocaust scholar who became a central figure in denialist circles, managed to create an international incident during his 1992 trip to Moscow. Irving, like many legitimate historians, had been drawn to the newly independent Russia by the allure of long-inaccessible Soviet archives, much of which included a wealth of previously unseen World War II material. Under the auspices of publishing a biography of Joseph Goebbels, Irving became the first Western researcher to gain access to the war diaries of the Nazi's for-

illegal in Russia—proved to be a fruitful time for Western deniers who ventured there. Denialist organizations such as the Institute for Historical Review (IHR) praised the speed at which translations of Western "revisionist" materials were sold in the country. Among them were Graf's *Myth of the Holocaust* and *Six Million "Lost" and Found*, written by British National Front author Richard Harwood, the pen name of Richard Verrall. Graf's text, which was excerpted in a special edition of *Русский Вестник* (*Russkiy Vestnik*) and published in full in a special 123-page booklet, was said to have sold over 200,000 copies in its first year on the market alone.²⁴ Zündel attributed these successes to an effort to change Russia's collective memory. "In the wake of the collapse of Communism," he told an audience at IHR's 1994 conference, "...people are enduring a drastic, soul-searching re-evaluation of their national history and collective self-identity."²⁵ While human rights groups like Memorial sought to correct the Communist Party's whitewashed version of history, Holocaust deniers used this necessary revisiting of the country's past as a cover for hate.²⁶ Zündel's wistful dreams "of future close collaboration between a revived, nationalist Russia and a revived, nationalist Germany"—a sentiment echoed by

World History," coverage of the meeting presented Russia as a haven for "dissident" views.³⁰ ("Revisionists Enjoy Free Speech Without Fear of Thought Police," pronounced one headline.³¹) Although Carto's efforts in the country appear to be minimal after this period, one conference speaker would pick up the torch and carry it forward: former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard and perennial candidate David Duke.

PUTIN: SAVIOR OF THE WHITE RACE?

In David Duke's 2013 book, *The Secret Behind Communism*, the former Klansman writes of meeting the famous—or infamous—Russian dissident writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn soon after the publication of Solzhenitsyn's book on Russian Jews, *Two Hundred Years Together*, which argues that Jews were complicit, at the very least, in Communist atrocities. "I waited for ten years in vain for the book to be published in English," writes Duke. "It remains unpublished to this day. Of course. The secret behind Communism must remain a secret to most of the public."³² Duke was referring to a talking point that had made its way through White nationalist and antisemitic circles for years: that while we are told to "never forget" the Holocaust (in Duke's terms, "the Jewish Holocaust"), we never acknowledge the even *bigger* genocide carried out by the Bolsheviks. And that, Duke argued, is because the "Jewish tribalists" in power make such discussion impossible.³³

Duke's meeting with Solzhenitsyn in 2002 was far from his first experience in the country. His escapades began in September 1995, when he traveled to Russia and met with the Liberal Democratic Party's Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, whom Duke referred to as "protective of ... the white race."³⁴ (Duke, somehow, either ignored or didn't know that Zhirinovskiy himself is of Jewish ancestry.) Four years later, he returned.³⁵ In 1998, one of Duke's associates, General Albert Makashov, a notorious antisemite, proposed "round[ing] up all the Yids and send[ing] them to the next world."³⁶ One undated photo shows Duke meeting with Aleksandr Dugin,³⁷ a neo-Eurasianist, neo-fascist thinker with deep ties to the European Far Right and

Untethered from the dark magic of Kremlinology, we can understand what the U.S. Far Right sees in Russia: a mirror.

mer minister of propaganda, spanning from 1941 to 1945.²¹ When both Irving's penchant for referring to himself as a "mild fascist"²² and his abuse of archival privileges nearly resulted in a permanent ban from all 2,000 archives within the former Soviet Union, the international right-wing media became apoplectic. Much like the contemporary White nationalist movement's obsession with protecting their right to hate under the auspices of free speech, the global Far Right was outraged by this apparent violation of the antisemite's "free speech" rights.²³ The Russians, for their part, claimed they were duped into believing Irving was a legitimate historian.

But overall, the 1990s—close to two decades before Holocaust denial became

Pamyat—became, in a way, a reality.²⁷ The "revisionist" project did manage to foster transnational relationships, but did so in part by making its stated goals more explicitly racist and White nationalist in the process.

By the time Carto—who was forced out of the IHR over an internal dispute with a colleague²⁸—brought his own revisionist conference to Russia in 2002, this process was well underway. The meeting was a joint operation of Carto's latest venture, *The Barnes Review*, which merged more explicit White nationalist and White supremacist rhetoric with IHR-style revisionist historiography, and the Moscow-based *Encyclopedia of Russia Civilization*.²⁹ Billed as the "First International Conference on Global Problems of

author of several books frequently cited by U.S. White nationalists, including *The Fourth Political Theory*. Duke's presence helped drum up interest in Russian translations of his work. In 2001, reports began to circulate regarding the sale of his first Russian-language book, *The Jewish Question Through the Eyes of an American*, which consisted of translated excerpts from his 1998 autobiography, *My Awakening*. (According to the *Los An-*

cestral Register, "the book was the catalyst of all Indo-European nations."⁴⁰ To put it another way, what *Atenei* and the Russian racologists sought was "White pride worldwide."

Contrary to various articles attributing the Alt Right's interest in Russia to Dugin's influence, it was Duke who, in large part, helped bridge the organizing gap between Holocaust deniers and "White nationalism 2.0" in Russia. One author positively compared Duke to John Reed, the

British far-right movements and who was reportedly working as DPNI's Director of International Relations,⁴⁵ spent most of his time pontificating on the importance of Russia to the broader White nationalist movement while touting the benefits of an anti-immigrant Russian identity.⁴⁶ (Although he was believed to have once sublet David Duke's Moscow apartment,⁴⁷ Wiginton also began staking out his own territory, dubbing Duke an "opportunist" who "will meet with anyone if it makes him look good."⁴⁸) Wiginton would later use his contacts and access to Texas A&M, his former alma mater, to host various pro-White nationalist events. Among his guests were Aleksandr Dugin, who spoke to the university by Skype because sanctions prevented him from attending his own event in person,⁴⁹ and Richard Spencer, the White nationalist credited with coining the term "Alt Right."⁵⁰

The Alt Right proper was not far behind, although joint organizing with Russian extremists has been haphazard. On the one hand, there is the Alt Right's interest in Dugin. Arktos, a White nationalist publishing house now based in Hungary, has published a number of Dugin's works in English, beginning with *The Fourth Political Theory* in 2012. Another book, the 2014 essay collection *Eurasian Mission*, outlined Dugin's approach to working with White nationalists.⁵¹ Around the same time, Richard Spencer and his innocuously named think tank, the National Policy Institute (NPI), began churning out translations of Dugin's work with the help of Spencer's then-wife, Nina Kouprianova. In 2014, Dugin was even billed as one of the main speakers at NPI's inaugural "European Congress" in Hungary. The conference, which was organized by Spencer and several other prominent White nationalists from *American Renaissance* and other outfits, proved to be too racist even for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who prevented Dugin and others from entering the country.⁵² But the following year, in 2015, Taylor, along with White supremacist lawyer Sam Dickson, made his way to Russia for a conference hosted by Russia's nationalist party, *Rodina* ("Motherland").⁵³ The event, dubbed

It was the U.S. 2016 election that solidified the U.S. Alt Right's appreciation of the Russian Far Right.

Los Angeles Times, copies of the book were even advertised and sold "next to the cafeteria in the Duma."³⁸) By the early 2000s, it became clear that Duke had secured his own Moscow apartment.

Meanwhile, several native Russian groups with White nationalist and White supremacist leanings made their presence known. The Russian journal *Atenei*, created by three prominent racist Russian thinkers (Pavel Tulaev, Anatoly Ivanov, and Vladimir Avdeyev), sought to advance the cause of preserving racial purity. Avdeyev's concept of "raciology," for instance, "biologizes ethnicity" in an effort to explain the distinct development of different cultures while asserting the need for ethn racial homogeneity.³⁹ Here, Russia's supposed racial purity puts it in a unique position to help hold together a White racial front—a unity of Russia, the United States, and Europe. With this goal in mind, *Atenei* held a 2006 Moscow conference titled "The White World's Future." Although the manifesto that emerged from the conference focused on European-Russian relations, *Atenei* invited numerous European and U.S. attendees to participate, including Duke, Guillaume Faye of the French New Right, and the head of the now-banned Slavic Union Dmitriy Demushkin. Though *Atenei* has since faded from international relevance, several points from the manifesto were telling. In an effort to facilitate cooperation across borders, it proposed: "[creating] an alternative international council aimed at fighting for the survival of . . . white nations"; "protecting the rights of fighters for the life and identity of their nations"; and "form[ing] a coun-

cil of all Indo-European nations."⁴⁰ To put it another way, what *Atenei* and the Russian racologists sought was "White pride worldwide."

Russian revolution's foremost English-language chronicler.⁴¹ Duke, and to a lesser extent Carto, demonstrated that Russia, specifically Putin's Russia, was a worthwhile ally for White nationalists. Above all, what Russia may offer, Duke speculated, was the "key to white survival."⁴² As Duke observed in a speech at the Mayakovsky Museum in Moscow:

What role does Russia and the former Eastern Bloc countries play in this scheme of things? Russia is a White nation! Of the many capital cities of Europe, it is accurate to say that Moscow is the Whitest of them all. . . . In my opinion, Russia and other Eastern countries have the greatest chance of having racially aware parties achieve political power. If just one nation would break through for our people, I think it would cause a domino effect that would cascade throughout the whole world.⁴³

Duke's "domino effect" didn't play out as expected, and by the mid-2010s, a number of far-right leaders—including Alexander Potkin, better known as Alexander Belov, of Russia's xenophobic Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI)—were facing anti-extremism charges.⁴⁴ Even the once-massive "Russian March"—an annual nationalist extravaganza—became a shadow of its former self.

Yet the Kremlin's concern about the possible threat posed by domestic ethnonationalist groups didn't dissuade the West's burgeoning Alt Right from turning to Russia for support and inspiration. In 2008, Preston Wiginton, a U.S. White nationalist with ties to both Russian and

the International Russian Conservative Forum, sought to bring together far-right activists from across the globe—what Jared Taylor, the long-time head of *American Renaissance*, called “an exercise in vigorous free speech that probably could not have been held anywhere else in Europe.”⁵⁴ Around the same time, *Rodina*, along with the far-right, Orthodox Christian nationalist Russian Imperial Movement (RIM), sought to form an international organization for far-right groups dubbed the World National Conservative Movement (*mezhdunarodoe natsional’no-konservativnoe dvizhenie*).⁵⁵

But it was the U.S. 2016 election that solidified the U.S. Alt Right’s appreciation of the Russian Far Right. For many in the movement, Trump’s praise of Putin and his campaign promise to improve U.S.-Russian relations was more than welcome. Matthew Heimbach, former head of the neonazi Traditionalist Worker Party, became a central organizer in the effort to forge transnational, far-right ties between the countries. Although Heimbach was unable to attend the St. Petersburg forum, he traveled to the United States in September 2017 with RIM’s Stanislav Shevchuk, who, as Heimbach told *Think Progress*, was the group’s Western Europe representative. Their joint tour came just weeks after White nationalists stormed Charlottesville, Virginia—a live reenactment, of sorts, of the Charlottesville marchers’ chant: “Russia is our friend!”⁵⁶

RUSSIA AS A HAVEN FOR ANTI-LGBTQ HATE?

While Russia may have seemed a promising ally for Holocaust deniers and White nationalists, Russian far-right actors have, thanks to various government crackdowns, found their reach to be limited, forcing them to instead rely on fleeting personal connections. As scholar Marlene Laruelle has argued in researching the issue, “It is important not to conflate influence with confluence.”⁵⁷ That is, while both groups sought to collaborate on certain issues, broader cooperation was hard to achieve. Yet they found common ground in anti-LGBTQ activism, most prominently through the World Congress of Families.

As a project of the U.S.-based International Organization for the Family, which promises to “[unite] and [equip] leaders worldwide to promote the natural family,”⁵⁸ the WCF was founded with the primary mission of defending the traditional family from the destructive forces of modern liberalism. The WCF was born out of the Illinois-based Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society—one of several organizations, including Focus on the Family, that rose to prominence thanks to a wave of institutionalized homophobia within fundamentalist Christianity in the 1970s and ’80s. But while the WCF’s origins are thoroughly American, it could not exist without Russia.

As WCF co-founder Allan Carlson told *ThinkProgress*, the organization was created several years after he was “contacted out of the blue” by Anatoly Antonov, a professor at Lomonosov Moscow State University, in the early ’90s.⁵⁹ Antonov invited Carlson, a former Reagan administration official, to Russia to discuss the importance of the “natural family.”⁶⁰ In 1995, Carlson went, meeting with a variety of scholars, politicians (including members of Russia’s Ministry for Social Protection), and activists.⁶¹ Some, such as Ivan Shevchenko, head of the Orthodox Brotherhood of Scientists and Specialists, were eager to make their religious affiliations known.⁶²

All shared serious concerns about an impending demographic winter—a term used by “pro-family” groups to refer to the quasi-apocalyptic effects of population decline that, at least in some cases, is akin to White nationalist fears of “White genocide.”⁶³ In the West, figures such as Steve Mosher of the WCF-partner organization, the Population Research Institute, have expressed concerns that “anti-family” policies and non-White immigration will lead to the decline of Western civilization.⁶⁴ In Russia, population decline was and continues to be a serious concern, even outside far-right politics,⁶⁵ as poverty, low life expectancy (especially among men), and brain drain have all contributed to a population decline. But rather than address the long-time structural inadequacies behind these statistics, conservative activists have blamed liberalism for destroying the so-called

natural family.

The WCF helped cultivate the image of Russia as a valuable partner for U.S. far-right thinkers and organizers across the spectrum. “We are convinced that Russia plays and should play a very prominent role in the matter of family advocacy and moral values on a global scale,” Larry Jacobs, WCF’s now-deceased managing director, said in a 2013 interview.⁶⁶

Cooperation between Russian and U.S. far-right activists continued and grew. In 2014, a massive leak from Russian hacker group Shaltai Boltai revealed strong connections between Alexey Komov, WCF’s Russian representative, and prominent nationalists such as Aleksandr Dugin and Orthodox oligarch Konstantin Malofeev.⁶⁷ Although Russia’s invasion of Ukraine forced the WCF to withdraw public sponsorship for what was meant to be a big blowout in Moscow, the meeting nevertheless was set to feature speeches from National Organization for Marriage President Brian Brown and leaders of other major right-wing U.S. Christian organizations—although the tumultuous political climate between the United States and Russia may have lowered the turnout.⁶⁸ Leaked data also showed that many U.S. far-right activists, including WCF communications director Donald Feder, received financial backing from sanctioned Russian oligarch Vladimir Yakunin’s Foundation of St. Andrew the First-Called.⁶⁹

In Russia, WCF proved instrumental in developing some of the country’s most radical anti-LGBTQ laws, including bans on “gay propaganda” (spearheaded by WCF associate Yelena Mizulina) and on the adoption of children by same-sex couples.⁷⁰ Indeed, a 2014 report from *Mother Jones* observed that “the rise of anti-gay laws in Russia has mirrored, almost perfectly, the rise of WCF’s work in the country, with 13 new anti-gay laws passed since Jacobs first traveled there.”⁷¹ It did so, in part, by establishing relationships with conservative Orthodox hierarchs, such as Archbishop Dmitri Smirnov of the Russian Orthodox Church’s commission on the family, and nurturing relationships with prominent oligarchs such as Yakunin and Malofeev.⁷² In addition to funding, these ties ensured fa-

avorable coverage through networks such as Malofeev's own Tsargrad TV and the Russian Orthodox Church aligned channel Spas. While Spas is far from popular, and Tsargrad TV exists only on the web, they've delivered WCF's message to the exact population it has targeted.

FROM RUSSIA, WITH APATHY

For the Nazis, Russians were never part of a "White" country, and the same U.S. immigration quotas from the 1920s that White nationalists herald today at the time categorized Russians as racially undesirable.⁷³ The country is far from being the "sole White power in the world" that Richard Spencer imagined.

Likewise, contrary to the image of Rus-

transnational relationships themselves. Lacking substantive ground on which to connect, the communities that grow out of these relationships tend to be almost endlessly adaptable—and, as a result, devoid of the stability that can encourage a movement to grow. Constant change and infighting ensure that the ties that bind are far from strong. If Putin is the "grand godfather" of "extreme nationalism" as Hillary Clinton once said, he's a rather estranged relation to its U.S. practitioners.

Rather than view Far Right mobilization as a sinister Russian plan to undermine U.S. democracy, we ought to see it as just one more instance where Russia has served as an object of obsessive intrigue—the Russophilia that currently

open bottles of Russian vodka.⁷⁸ In another video, the pair wanders around a sanctioned opposition protest, before offering inane commentary, proudly unfamiliar with prominent opposition leaders, marveling that the protesters carried Russian flags⁷⁹ (something, Southern would later tell me, "Antifa" would never do).⁸⁰

"Brittany and I are not experts on Russian politics," Southern said in an interview soon after their trip, while recounting the impulsive origins of the pair's project—a Russian fan of Pettibone's who offered to show them around.⁸¹ It was as if the pair had undertaken their pilgrimage on a whim, driven to uncover the "real" Russia—a fairy-tale land of fur hats, where "traditionalism" is king and gender norms are respected.⁸² As talking with Southern made clear, it was not Russia that mattered to them so much as the *idea* of Russia: an imagined embodiment of far-right ideals, the geographic equivalent of what Russian sociologist Yuri Levada once said of Putin—that he was a mirror "in which everyone, communist or democrat, sees what he wants to see and what he hopes for."⁸³

For the U.S. Far Right, there is no "real Russia," but merely a blank canvas upon which the movement's desires can be drawn. Not a sovereign nation, but a bastion of traditionalism and a haven for those keen on espousing hate; the last cradle of Christian civilization, albeit a Christianity that few among them understand. It is, as the Charlottesville rioters put it, a "friend," though in reality, more of a politically expedient *znakomiy*, or acquaintance. The enigmatic "Russian soul" does not exist in its own right. It is whatever they will it to be.

Hannah Gais is a freelance writer who recently completed a graduate program at Harvard Divinity School, where Gais focused on the intersection of nationalism, extremism, and Russian Orthodox identity in a post-Soviet context. Gais was also a graduate student associate at Harvard's Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies.

What is enthralling about Russia is not the nation itself, but what a Russia imaginary means in relation to the United States or the idea of "White civilization."

sia as a haven for the Far Right, Putin has imposed domestic crackdowns on Russian ultra-nationalist activists after far-right, anti-government protesters found common ground with more mainstream opposition protesters.

Yet none of this has had an effect on the Alt Right's pro-Putin rhetoric. For the Far Right, what matters more is the Kremlin's general strategy of propping up right-wing and nationalist groups abroad. "Putin is supporting nationalists around the world and building an anti-globalist alliance, while promoting traditional values and self-determination," Matthew Heimbach told *Business Insider* in 2016.⁷⁴ That David Duke's books are currently categorized in Russia as "extremist" literature matters far less than Russia's image as a traditionalist, racially pure hedge against the West.

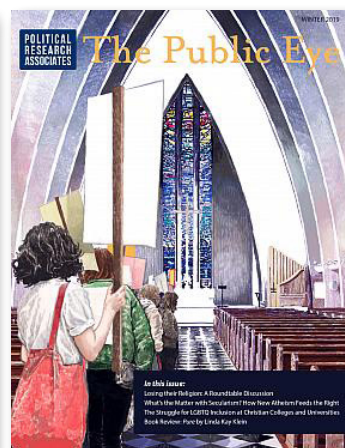
This lack of substance has made the prospect of long-term, meaningful cooperation impossible. "Mutual admiration and shared worldviews are not enough to demonstrate any kind of concrete interactions," writes Marlene Laruelle, "and still less any kind of Russian influence over U.S. far right public opinion."⁷⁵ To some extent, the flimsiness of the alliance is baked into the nature of these

tantalizes the U.S. Far Right as a close cousin of the Russophobia that animated more mainstream conservatives a generation before. Just as scholar David S. Foglesong described U.S.-Russia relations in the 19th and 20th Centuries, the country has again become the United States's "imaginary twin" and "dark double" today.⁷⁶ What is enthralling about Russia is not the nation itself, but what a Russia imaginary means in relation to the United States or the idea of "White civilization." Mainstream U.S. politics, as historian and host of the *SRB Podcast* Sean Guillory observed, "has oscillated between [seeing] Russia as an object of American narcissistic desire to a subject of American neurosis."⁷⁷ So, too, has the Far Right.

In May 2018, this trend reached a perplexing apex. Lauren Southern—a Canadian far-right YouTuber who often parrots White nationalist talking points—headed to Moscow with noted "Pizzagate expert" Brittany Pettibone for a series of odd, rambling interviews with Dugin. In a brief trailer released that June, Southern and Pettibone danced around an abandoned, graffitied building wearing traditional Russian *ushankas* with the Red Army logo on them while cracking

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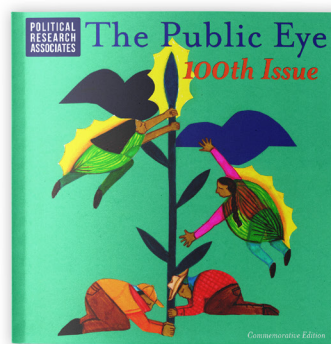


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BY CLOEE COOPER AND DARYLE LAMONT JENKINS

Culture and Belonging in the USA

Multiracial Organizing on the Contemporary Far Right



A Black Trump supporter at an Arizona rally in 2016. Credit: Johnny Silvercloud/Flickr.

August 4, 2018, the day of the “Gibson for Senate Freedom March,” was a balmy day in Portland, Oregon. Patriot Prayer, a group loosely associated with the Alt Right, had organized the march, calling on like-minded people to “make history today” and fight for free speech in the face of Portland’s “intolerant hateful culture.”¹ Joey Gibson, the founding leader of Patriot Prayer, was running for U.S. Senate in Washington state in the Republican primary—a platform he used to promote and coalesce local far-right forces in the Pacific Northwest. It was one of dozens of rallies the group had organized in the region since April 2017;

after the deadly “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, Patriot Prayer’s presence in the streets had only grown. (While Patriot Prayer members were not openly present in Charlottesville, reputed members of the Proud Boys, a group with overlapping membership, were.) A year later, the Southern Poverty Law Center warned that the Patriot Prayer rally could be Charlottesville 2.0, drawing Alt Right groups from all along the West Coast to flex their muscles.²

Chants of “USA! USA!” filled the air along the Naito Parkway as an estimated 500 members of Patriot Prayer, the Proud Boys, the militia group Three Per-

centers, and their various supporters, converged on the city.³ The Arkansas-based neo-Confederate group the Hiwaymen—themselves veterans of the Unite the Right rally—waved Confederate flags against a backdrop of men in MAGA hats and a smattering of Blue Lives Matter flags (pro-police symbols in opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement).

And yet, when counter protesters challenged Gibson’s coalition with antiracist chants, they encountered a strange rebuttal.⁴ As one rally-goer told a counter protester, “If you support the Left, you are 100 percent racist. It’s the Left that wanted to keep Black people in Slavery. It’s the Left that wanted to keep Black

people from voting. If you support them, that's exactly what you are supporting."⁵

Gibson, a Washington-based Japanese-American activist⁶ who says he was politicized during the 2016 Trump campaign,⁷

connections to Three Percenter militia circles,¹² was founded in 2016 by Joey Gibson under the pretense of promoting libertarian ideas and free speech—although for Patriot Prayer, that has often

tifa protesters who demonstrated against an appearance by McInnes at the Republican Club in Manhattan.¹⁷

Our concern is that multiculturalism within the Far Right may represent an

Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys are part of a trend of Far Right organizing that departs from their explicitly White nationalist contemporaries, and often fuses antiracist language into otherwise nationalist, misogynistic, libertarian, and xenophobic platforms.

echoed those thoughts. When asked by a journalist to respond to antifascists' charge that Patriot Prayer is racist, Gibson said, "Why is it that we have way more [people] of color than they have? ... I am darker than 90 percent of those people that are calling me a racist."⁸

Coming onto the scene in 2016, Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys are part of a trend of far-right organizing that departs from their explicitly White nationalist contemporaries, and often fuses antiracist language into otherwise nationalist, misogynistic, libertarian, and xenophobic platforms. With people of color in positions of leadership and representing 10 percent⁹ of their August rally, the groups represent something substantively different from old-style White supremacism in terms of both ideology and organizing: what scholars and journalists refer to as the Multiracial Far Right.

The emergence of this new bloc raises several questions. First, why are people of multiracial backgrounds gravitating to Far Right groups? Further, is this a new phenomenon or is there historical precedent for this sort of unlikely partnership? Finally, if racial exclusion isn't the ultimate glue that binds this sector of Far Right groups together, how are these groups "transcending" race, and what issues continue to be fault lines within their movement?

THE MULTIRACIAL FAR RIGHT

Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys are two of the most prominent Far Right¹⁰ organizations that include significant membership of people of color. But street crews like Battalion 49 and the 211 Bootboys¹¹ are also part of the contemporary Multiracial Far Right.

Patriot Prayer, an organization with

connections to Three Percenter militia circles,¹² was founded in 2016 by Joey Gibson under the pretense of promoting libertarian ideas and free speech—although for Patriot Prayer, that has often meant physically attacking those they consider to be enemies of free speech. Its two most prominent members, Gibson and Tusitala "Tiny" Toese, are both men of color. (Toese, who is of Samoan descent and in his early 20s, claims to have been anti-Trump before meeting Gibson.¹³)

Founded in 2016 by *Vice Magazine* co-founder Gavin McInnes, the Proud Boys describes itself as a men's fraternity dedicated to the idea that the "West is the Best." Its rhetoric is marked by inflammatory misogynistic positions that defend "natural" gender differences and advocates for violence and protest against Muslims, undocumented immigrants, reproductive justice, the Left, and transgender rights. McInnes denies being a White supremacist and the group welcomes men of various ethnic and religious backgrounds, including Jewish men, as long as they agree to the Proud Boys' principles.¹⁴ Their website features a video of a young Black man, identified only as "Yosef," who describes the Proud Boys as a "multi-ethnic organization that like [sic] pounding beer, defending the Constitution, and making Western babies."¹⁵

The 211 Bootboys are far-right nationalists with roots in New York City. Founded in 1999 by Dennis "F.U." Davila, the lead singer of a hardcore punk band called Fed Up, the 211 Bootboys come out of the New York City hardcore punk scene, and in particular traditional¹⁶ and anti-racist skinhead circles. In recent years, 211 Bootboys shifted to embracing Far Right and xenophobic politics, despite its predominantly Latinx membership. Members of its multiracial crew were implicated, along with the Proud Boys, in an October 2018 attack on An-

effort to copy the Left's embrace of multiculturalism in the service of a new version of right-wing rebellion.

AN UNEASY ALLIANCE

While Joey Gibson denies any accusations of racism, he regularly organizes and attends rallies with well-known White supremacists and neonazis. And some of them have turned to violence. In April 2017, a White supremacist named Jeremy Christian attended a Patriot Prayer "free speech" rally in Portland; less than a month later, Christian killed two Portland residents and injured a third, in one of the most shocking displays of White supremacist violence in Oregon's history.¹⁸

When Gibson attended a later rally in Rhode Island with Brien James, a Proud Boys member who also co-founded the neonazi organizations Vinlanders Social Club and American Guard, he told a journalist that James' history was irrelevant since he said nothing bad at the rally."¹⁹

At the Unite the Right rally in August 2017, the infusion of people of color into the Far Right was evident. In fact, Alex Michael Ramos, a Latinx person associated with the Three Percenters militia movement and the Proud Boys, is now in prison for his role in attacking a Black man named DeAndre Harris in a parking lot that day.²⁰ Ramos later claimed that he attended the rally not because he was racist, but because he was a conservative who cared about free speech, claiming he can't be racist because he is Puerto Rican.²¹

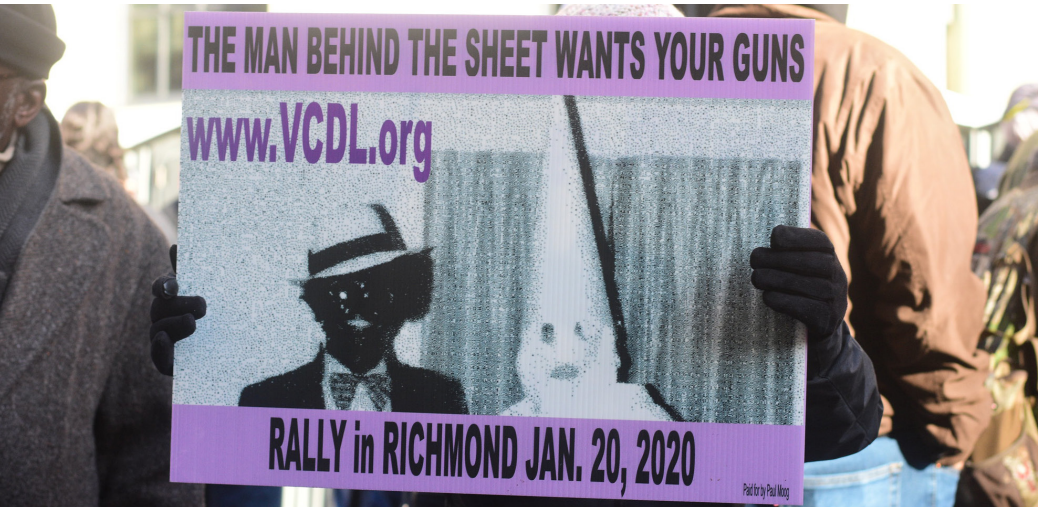
HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

Since the election of Donald Trump, many have rightfully pointed out that White nationalism, a movement that

seeks to create an all-White nation-state, is on the rise in the United States.²² White nationalist movements spiked in the U.S. in the wake of the Civil Rights move-

nations and governments within the U.S. They also shared the antisemitic position that Jewish people had taken control of the government.²⁵

Some militia groups explicitly embraced and “promoted blatant racism” and others “directly confronted or harassed White nationalist organizations such as the KKK.”



Virginia Second Amendment Rally, January 2020. Credit: Anthony Crider/Flickr

ment.²³ But in the past as well as today, there is political tension within the Far Right regarding race: some groups with roots in paleoconservatism advocate for an all-White nation and predicate membership based on what they refer to as being part of the “Aryan race”; other groups align with White nationalist politics on some principles but embrace a broader notion of America-first nationalism, which doesn’t discriminate based on race, as long as other far-right principles are shared.

Within the former group, there is a history of White nationalist organizations building tactical alliances with nationalist movements within U.S.-based communities of color, to advance their goal of separatism. The most famous example is when Tom Metzger, founder of the neonazi group White Aryan Resistance, led his supporters to join Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and his supporters in a 200-person meeting in Michigan in 1985.²⁴ The meeting was allegedly held based on shared notions that Black and White people should have separate

Multiracial far-right organizing that *doesn’t* advocate separation of races is less common in the Far Right, however. The 1990s militia movement, which is the precursor to the modern Patriot movement (and with which Patriot Prayer is closely associated), may offer the best example.

Matthew Lyons, author of the recent book *Insurgent Supremacists: The U.S. Far Right’s Challenge to State and Empire*, describes tensions surrounding race within the 1990s militia movement. The movement drew inspiration from White supremacist and antisemitic organizations like the Posse Comitatus, which rejected

In many ways, what seems to bind this new sector of the Far Right together is a secularized Christian Right traditionalism.

the federal government’s legitimacy and advocated against “the New World Order.”²⁶ Considered a right-wing anti-government phenomena, the militias shared membership with the revived gun

rights movement, Mormon ultra-conservatives, Christian Reconstructionists, and elements of the anti-environmentalist Wise Use movement. But the militias’ anti-government, pro Second Amendment emphasis also attracted some sympathizers from groups more commonly associated with the Left, including some communities of color that have immigrant populations, who saw government encroachment on individual rights as a threat. According to Lyons, some militia groups explicitly embraced and “promoted blatant racism” and others “directly confronted or harassed White nationalist organizations such as the KKK.”²⁷

In 1994, James J. Johnson, a Black utility worker from Columbus, Ohio, cofounded a Patriot Movement group called E Pluribus Unum and became a leader and spokesperson for the Ohio Unorganized Militia.²⁸ Johnson actively attempted to recruit other people from Black communities, calling the militia movement “the Civil Rights Movement of the ‘90s.”²⁹

Despite blatant White supremacist and antisemitic trends within the militia movement, Johnson embraced its aspirational American patriotism and saw a place for Black Americans within the burgeoning anti-government movement.

“The KKK and the Aryan Nation[s] neither invite or desire the presence of non-whites at their meetings,” Johnson wrote.³⁰ “The militia does... The militia does not hyphenate its membership. We are all Americans first.”³¹

While Johnson saw government agencies as the primary enforcer of racism, he embraced a movement that not only had its roots in White supremacist and antisemitic ideology but also held anti-globalization and anti-Communist be-

liefs, which led militia chapters to plot violence against the Latinx community.

According to an April 2009 report on right-wing extremism prepared for the Department of Homeland Security, the

1990s militia and other Far Right groups were concerned with immigration's effect on people competing for jobs.³² Believing that illegal immigrants were taking away American jobs through their willingness to work at significantly lower wages, one Wyoming militia member was arrested in February 2007 for plotting to kill immigrants crossing into the United States at the Mexican border. Later that year, six militia members were arrested for various weapons and explosives violations, with the specific purpose of violently

anti-immigrant and anti-Communist advocacy, and multiracial membership are all mirrored in their current counterparts: today's Patriot Prayer and Proud Boys groups. This was particularly evident at a June 30, 2018, rally in Portland when a Proud Boys organizer said, "[For] all the illegals trying to jump over our border, we should be smashing their heads into the concrete—handling business, separating them from their kids."³⁵

(At the August 4 rally, Proud Boys member "Tiny" Toese, as well as other members of the group,

wore shirts reading, "Pinochet did nothing wrong." When asked by reporter Christopher Mathais about Pinochet killing, torturing and detaining an estimated 40,000 of his countrymen, Toese responded, "Aren't they all communists?"³⁶ The reference was to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, notorious for murdering thousands of Leftists after rising to power in a U.S.-backed military coup, including some executed by being thrown out of helicopters—a historical atrocity that has since become a right-wing meme.³⁷)

become a topic of inquiry across academic, journalist and activist spaces. Some of the inquiry follows the question: If race is not the glue that binds these far-right groups together, what is?

According to Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph Lowndes, authors of *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity*,³⁸ the ascent of select elites of color and multiculturalism within the Right reflects a shift.

"Racially subordinated groups have been made even more vulnerable in this period of economic crisis, evident in disparities of wealth, income, debt, incarceration rates, health outcomes, etc.," Lowndes explained in an email to PRA.³⁹ "Multiculturalism on the right becomes represented as the ethical embodiment of an exceptional American national identity...These figures are meant to testify to the enduring qualities and virtues of the nation, the exemplars of individualistic striving and persistence in the face of hostility and institutional failure."⁴⁰

Lowndes highlighted the irony of Gibson calling himself a Civil Rights activist, and featuring Civil Rights imagery on his website, while aligning in the streets with White supremacists and violently defending a nationalist, racist, xenophobic and misogynist U.S. president.

According to journalist Arun Gupta, people of color are often drawn into the movement for its patriarchal elements, and to find companionship and affinity. He also suggests that the Left tends to over-homogenize the views of people of color, assuming they all share progressive values.

"There is a complex reality of communities of color [joining far-right organizations]," Gupta told PRA.⁴¹ "The Left wants to reduce [all communities of color] to progressivism, which is just not true... These are more suburban middle-class and upper-middle-class [guys]," Gupta said. "Some are in the tech industry. They work with computers for a living. It gives them a feeling that they are engaged in a heroic struggle. That sweeps in men of color along with it."⁴²

When Gupta spent time with members of Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys in Vancouver, Washington, prior to their August 2018 demonstration, he asked



"I HATE THE LEFT N RACISM" – Seen at a far-right rally in Portland, Oregon, in August 2018. Credit: Old White Truck/Flickr.

attacking Latinx immigrants.³³

Fighting Communism against Central America and the Philippines became a galvanizing force for 1990s militia and Second Amendment advocacy. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, they saw gun control laws as signs of an impending tyrannical and Communist government.³⁴

These groups' embrace of violence,

But while the 1990s militia provides some context for what we are seeing today, the specific attributes of the contemporary Multiracial Far Right are unique and require further probing and exploration.

"TRANSCENDING" RACE

Why people of color in the U.S. are joining Far Right organizations has

their Caribbean and Latinx members what attracted them to the movement. Enrique Tarrío, the Proud Boys' Afro-Cuban chairman, argued that institutional racism no longer exists in the U.S. Elysa Sanchez, who is Black and Puerto Rican, and attends rallies with the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer, told Gupta, "If black people are committing more murders, more robberies, more thefts, more violent crime, that's why you would see more black men having encounters with the police."⁴³

Gupta added, "If you are anti-Communist and you do have reactionary attitudes about gender, then the combination tends to make you more in sync with Alt Right views."⁴⁴ For example, some U.S. communities that were part of Cold War refugee resettlements hold lingering anti-Communist views⁴⁵ that make some right-wing perspectives more attractive.

Far-right positions on gender roles also provide common ground for groups like Patriot Prayer, Proud Boys, and 211 Bootboys. Alex DiBranco, a Yale doctoral candidate on social movements and the U.S. Right, makes the case that the contemporary Far Right is as much about misogyny as it is about race.⁴⁶ Being a man (as well as a "Western Chauvinist") is a prerequisite to joining the Proud Boys, for example.⁴⁷ And as Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes elaborated in a 2018 video, "We are going to continue being proud of ourselves. We are going to continue getting married, living in the suburbs, having kids and loving America."⁴⁸

One of the Proud Boys' organizational tenets is to "venerat[e] the housewife."⁴⁹ When asked what that means, McInnes says that women are capable of many things, but there are just some things women can't do, like write. Consequently, there is a Proud Boys' Girls organization, for women who are supportive of Proud Boys politics.⁵⁰

Last fall, Patriot Prayer members attended a #HimToo rally in Portland that displayed the misogyny common within the Multiracial Far Right. In the wake of the Kavanaugh hearings, the rally addressed what organizers claimed was a rash of "false rape allegations."⁵¹ Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer also recently turned up in support of the annual pro-

Life rally in Portland.⁵²

In many ways, what seems to bind this new sector of the Far Right together is a secularized Christian Right traditionalism. With Patriot Prayer and Proud Boys combining support for restrictive gender roles with a fantasy of a new male supremacy and embrace of Western culture, they invoke a new version of the traditional Judeo-Christian values that defined the Christian Right over the past four decades.⁵³

To some on the Far Right, building a broader coalition that includes people of color is self-evidently part of their project to redefine nationalism.

FAULT LINES

The factors outlined above are only a few hypotheses regarding the rise of a Multiracial Far Right. But within the ranks of the contemporary movement, multiracial membership has sparked intense debate and controversy. Some explicitly White nationalist Far Right leaders have condemned the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer over their inclusion of people of color. Others support a multiracial coalition in pursuit of creating a broader Far Right alliance.

In an article on the explicitly antisemitic and White nationalist website the Daily Stormer, Adrian Sol writes, "Jews and shittlibs have gotten so insufferable these days that even brown people are joining the 'Neo-Nazi White supremacist' movement in droves."⁵⁴ (The article was a direct response to Gupta's *Daily Beast* article, "Why Young Men of Color Are Joining White-Supremacist Groups."⁵⁵)

Others, such as American Guard founder Brien James, advocate in favor of building coalitions across far-right organizing—the same goal that inspired the Unite the Right rally. James criticizes White nationalist groups, which he sees as dividing the "civic nationalist" movement by excluding people of color from their ranks.

"It's just as foolish for the civic nationalists to try to appease or convince the Left as it is for White nationalists to turn away good patriotic citizens who are willing to bleed in the streets beside

them due to the color of their skin or any other reason," he said in a YouTube video.⁵⁶ "The biggest problem for the White nationalists is trying to bring a racially exclusive message to events organized by people who have other goals in mind."⁵⁷

To some on the Far Right, building a broader coalition that includes people of color is self-evidently part of their project to redefine nationalism. However, tensions around race, and who should be included in their vision of a new society,

continue to be fault lines within their movements. But above all, what the Multiracial Far Right demonstrates is how much their movement can and will continue to change form, at times coalescing within communities more often associated with the Left, and along other axes than race.

Cloe Cooper holds a master's degree in journalism from the Medill School of Journalism, specializing in social justice and investigative reporting. Cloe tracked, monitored and organized against anti-immigrant organizations with ties to white nationalism with the Center for New Community from 2009-2012. Her work can be seen at Chicago's local PBS affiliate – WTTW, Alternet, Social Justice News Nexus, Imagine2050 and Hard Crackers. She currently serves on the Editorial Board of Hard Crackers, a journal documenting the everyday life of those striving to overturn the mess we are in.

Daryle Lamont Jenkins is the founder and executive director of One People's Project (OPP), a Philadelphia-based anti-hate organization that researches, monitors, and reports on right-wing groups and individuals that seek to polarize communities. Jenkins has appeared on A Current Affair, The Montel Williams Show, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC's Rachel Maddow Show, AMJoy with Joy Reid, ABC's 20/20 and in countless newspaper and magazine articles as well as documentaries focusing on Antifa's fight against the Alt Right.

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BY EMILY GORCENSKI

Ben Shapiro and the Conservative Chorus



Ben Shapiro speaking at the 2019 Student Action Summit hosted by Turning Point USA at the Palm Beach County Convention Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. Credit: Gage Skidmore/Flickr.

In May 2019, a young man in Indiana was sentenced to three years in federal prison for a hate crime. Nolan Brewer, along with his then-17-year-old wife, Kiyomi Brewer, spray-painted a Nazi flag on a garbage shed at a Carmel, Indiana, synagogue and set fire to its lawn.¹ While Nolan had never before defaced a house of worship, after the Brewers' arrest, investigators linked Kiyomi to at least two other incidents regarding houses of worship in the surrounding area, starting with break-ins and theft and escalating to vandalism and arson.² Despite being a minor at the time of the crimes, Kiyomi was tried as an adult for state charges of arson and was sentenced to two years' probation.

The Brewers' crimes come at a time of increasing antisemitism throughout the United States.³ The government argued for an "upward departure" in Nolan's sentencing—that is, more jail time than federal sentencing guidelines recommend given Nolan's plea, criminal history, and severity of the act—pointing out that a strict penalty for Nolan would deter other acts of antisemitic violence such

as the Tree of Life synagogue massacre in 2018.⁴

Evidence against Nolan showed an affinity for Nazism. His phone's wallpaper displayed a swastika; he wore a pendant with a swastika-like design; he shared Nazi and racist memes with co-workers; one had even referred to him in a text message as "lil Hitler."⁵ And yet, in arguing for leniency, Nolan's defense team claimed it wasn't Nolan who inspired the attack, but rather Kiyomi, who, Nolan claimed, had herself been set on the path to neonazism by a series of increasingly reactionary media sources. Among them was conservative commentator Ben Shapiro.⁶

Shapiro, 36, is a former *Breitbart* staffer who has since become editor-in-chief of *The Daily Wire*, a conservative opinion website. Best known for his liberal-tweaking quips, such as "facts don't care about your feelings," or his declaration that "'Right side of history' may be the most morally idiotic phrase of modern times"⁷—a tweet later undermined when he published his 2019 book, *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral*

Purpose Made the West Great—Shapiro has frequently advocated for right-wing positions on social issues. He opposed *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which legalized same-sex marriage nationwide; he supports a total ban on abortion; and he's argued that more than half of Muslims worldwide are "radicalized." After the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in favor of transgender protections under Title VII this June, with Trump-appointee Neil Gorsuch penning the majority opinion, Shapiro lambasted the conservative Justice, calling his decision "a bad, outcome-driven legal decision."

It wasn't the first time Shapiro has been cited as inspiring reactionary violence. Evidence against Alexandre Bissonette, who killed six Muslim men at a Quebec City mosque in 2017, shows that he frequently visited Ben Shapiro's Twitter profile in the months before his rampage.⁸ In 2019, U.S. federal authorities charged Matthew Havigand, then 30, with cyberstalking and threatening to murder a university professor partly because of the professor's liberal views on abortion and gender; in now-deleted YouTube videos,

Haviland had encouraged his YouTube followers to check out Shapiro's videos.⁹

Shapiro rejects the idea that he's influenced these far-right violent actors¹⁰ and categorically denies any association with the Alt Right.¹¹ As a Jewish man, he says he's been targeted himself by the hate of the Alt Right, which blames Jews for so-called societal ills.¹² Private chat records from numerous neonazi groups (leaked by independent media collective Unicorn Riot) demonstrate reactions to Shapiro's work that range from tepid acceptance¹³ to outright hostility.¹⁴ And to be clear, there is no evidence to suggest that Shapiro has explicitly called for violence or that he approves of it.

Nevertheless, Shapiro has joined an ensemble of right-wing leaders cited by perpetrators of bias attacks. The man accused of killing 51 Muslims in the 2019 Christchurch massacre in New Zealand referenced Black conservative media personality Candace Owens in his manifesto (although perhaps mockingly).¹⁵ The trial of a married couple who were fans of former *Breitbart* writer and Alt Lite star Milo Yiannopoulos for allegedly shooting a counter-protester and pepper-spraying others outside one of Yiannopoulos' campus events in Seattle, ended in mistrial.¹⁶ Both the mass package bombing¹⁷ and Kroger shooting¹⁸ in late 2018 were committed by fervent supporters of President Donald Trump. An ABC News investigation found over 50 criminal cases involving violence, threats, or assaults invoking Trump's name.¹⁹

More recently, a man allegedly shot a protester during a rally to remove a statue of Juan de Oñate in Albuquerque, New Mexico.²⁰ The alleged shooter's Twitter account shows he replied multiple times to Shapiro's tweets, in one case posting a tweet in defense of the assassination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani.²¹

So frequently are violent right-wing acts linked to well-known conservative personalities that right-wing media outlets have developed rapid responses to distance themselves. From straw man arguments to outlandish conspiracy theories, these tactics are designed to deflect and distract from the underlying story, often employing "DARVO" tactics—that is, to deny, attack, and reverse

the victim and offender. When *Buzzfeed* reported on the Brewers,²² for example, a tweet promoting their story mistakenly stated that Nolan, rather than Kiyomi, was most swayed by Shapiro's rhetoric.²³ Although the article itself was accurate, and the tweet was quickly corrected, this minor gaffe gave right-wing media all the ammunition needed to attack the report. These counter-narratives also pointed to Shapiro's Jewish heritage and his status as a victim of Alt Right rancor as evidence that he could not possibly inspire hate crimes. Soon, articles attacking *Buzzfeed's* credibility sprung up in the *Daily Caller*,²⁴ *RT*,²⁵ the *Washington Examiner*,²⁶ *The Blaze*,²⁷ and others. A chorus of conservative voices ridiculed Nolan's claim that Shapiro's work had helped radicalize his wife.

But Shapiro's invectives against trans people,²⁸ Arabs,²⁹ Muslims,³⁰ and even "Bad Jews"³¹—by which he means Jewish people who vote against his political interests³²—is otherwise indistinguishable from standard Alt Right rhetoric. This unified defense by right-wing media seems designed less to absolve Shapiro of accusations of bigotry than to provide him rhetorical cover to continue promoting it.

This is no mistake. Shapiro and many of his peers are not Alt Right personalities themselves. And there's little doubt that Shapiro sincerely abhors attacks on synagogues. But he nonetheless traffics in inflammatory rhetoric against marginalized individuals with language that frequently overlaps that of Hard Right movements. He regularly criticizes the transgender rights movement, claiming in at least one case that gender confirmation surgeries "don't work."³³ He often engages in Islamophobic rhetoric, including his claim that there's "not any evidence" that only a minority of Muslims are radical.³⁴

Shapiro's comments are typically short on actual policy or factual analysis,³⁵ and instead seem designed to provoke anxiety in his supporters: kernels of populist right-wing identity politics that help drive a rightward shift in the Overton window—the spectrum of what political viewpoints are considered acceptably mainstream. Time³⁶ and again,³⁷

these talking points have been found in the motives and manifestos of violent far-right actors, as almost unavoidably, some fans, like the Brewers, use this rhetoric as a stepping-stone to more reactionary positions.

Shortly after their attack on the synagogue, Kiyomi and Nolan Brewer met with recruiters from the White nationalist group Identity Evropa³⁸—one of the organizations responsible for planning the fatal 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia—and mailed in membership dues to join. After details of Nolan's sentencing were made public, Patrick Casey, the group's leader, released a statement claiming that the membership dues paid by the Brewers applied only to Kiyomi, that the organization was unaware of the Brewers' crimes or that Kiyomi was a minor, and that Kiyomi's membership was promptly terminated.³⁹ Facing a bevy of legal and public relations challenges stemming from Unite the Right, Identity Evropa recently rebranded as the American Identity Movement and has tried to rehabilitate its image as a non-violent, pro-White identitarian movement.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, despite this *ex post facto* attempt to distance themselves from the incident, their extended legacy as a violent hate movement is a permanent blemish on their veneer.

Violent White supremacist groups have long sought legitimacy by sanitizing their image without toning down their hateful views. While these groups may despise Shapiro for both his Jewish faith and his proximity to mainstream conservatism, nevertheless, as the Brewers' case demonstrates, he and his peers provide a gateway to more radical corners of the Right, where violence is part and parcel of the territory.

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BY MARY ANNETTE PEMBER

The New War on ICWA



The Carlisle Indian Industrial School (c.1900), a government-sponsored boarding school to assimilate Native children. Credit:Wikicommons.

The story on NPR's website first introduces the Buckley-Becker family with a beautiful portrait of the young, middle-class, White couple and their children. In the photo, the father, Paul Buckley, holds their toddler son Mason, whom he and his wife, Cheryl Becker, were inspired to foster after seeing the example of their fellow church members.¹

But then the story takes a sharp turn: the family's dream to adopt Mason has been threatened by a federal law, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). The couple's adoption process was nearly complete when they were blindsided by the news that Mason is a citizen of the Choctaw Nation and the tribe was considering intervening in the proceedings. Under ICWA, tribes have primary jurisdiction

over the non-parental custody of its children. But according to Buckley, Mason's birth mother, whom they'd met, never mentioned her or Mason's heritage. Plus, he continued, "Mason didn't even look Indian in the least regards."²

The occasion for NPR's article—one in a long list of misleading stories in the mainstream media about Indian adoption issues—was an important ICWA ruling in federal court last fall. On October 4, 2018, federal Judge Reed O'Connor of the Northern District of Texas ruled that ICWA is unconstitutionally race-based.

The ruling wasn't based on Buckley and Becker's experience, but rather on that of Chad and Jennifer Brackeen, who similarly wanted to adopt an Indian child: an enrolled citizen of the Navajo and Cherokee Nations whom they had fos-

tered for a year-and-a-half. In 2017, the Brackeens filed a lawsuit in Texas seeking to adopt the two-year-old boy, identified in the lawsuit as A.L.M. Although a Navajo family was available to take the boy, in January 2018 the Brackeens won their case in a Texas district court and successfully finalized their adoption.³ But their lawsuit, *Brackeen v. Zinke*, proceeded anyway, joined by several other plaintiffs, including the states of Texas, Louisiana, and Indiana,⁴ and eventually landed before Judge O'Connor.

Most coverage of O'Connor's ruling, like NPR's, tended to gloss over ICWA's political and legal context and the far-reaching implications of its reversal. Many failed to mention that conflicts concerning ICWA can often be traced back to the failure of state and county authorities

to notify a tribe when an enrolled child enters child protective services (as was the case with the Buckley-Becker family's foster son, Mason). And most neglected to explain that tribal identity is based not on racial identifiers, or whether a child "looks Indian," but on their political connection to a sovereign nation. And that gets at issues that go far beyond the ability of non-Natives to adopt Native American children.

The designation that the children of enrolled tribal citizens are automatically enrolled citizens as well "is foundational to federal Indian law," noted a statement released by the Native American Journalists Association.⁵ In March 2019, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans heard oral arguments in the *Brackeen* case. Although the court hasn't yet issued a decision, the case is likely headed for the Supreme Court.⁶ If the court finds that ICWA is based on race rather than tribal membership, the law could be determined to be in violation of the Equal Protection Clause, which guar-

racism, greed, and the othering of poor people.

Since 2013, challenges to ICWA have gained new urgency and support from wealthy right-wing interest groups. *Brackeen v. Zinke* was itself bankrolled by an unlikely alliance of right-wing political, legal, economic, and religious groups that outwardly appear to have little connection to Indian Country or its children. They include right-wing think tanks, representatives of the private adoption industry, the evangelical adoption movement, anti-treaty rights organizations, and conservative fossil fuel industrialists.¹⁰

Although the final goals of these seemingly disparate groups may differ, their shared strategy of commodifying Native American children reveals a colonial mindset that not only depicts Native American people as incapable of managing their own affairs but also frames their children and resources as free for the taking.

According to J. Eric Reed, former tribal

Attacks on ICWA are a right-wing foot in the door to rewrite the Constitution.

antees equal protection of laws regardless of race.⁷ This finding, in turn, would call tribal sovereignty into question. And without sovereignty, treaties between the U.S. government and tribes could be subject to debate.

Reversing ICWA would mean that "The hundreds and thousands of federal statutes benefiting Indians would be open for reconsideration," said Michigan State University law professor Matthew Fletcher, a member of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians and editor of *Turtle Talk*,⁸ the leading blog on American Indian law and policy. "Federal services for Indians and statutes such as the Indian Self Determination Act, Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and others could be challenged."⁹

And that might be the point. Tribal leaders, legal scholars and ICWA advocates speculate that attacks on the law are seldom rooted in genuine concern for American Indian children, but are merely the latest strategy for right-wing groups to advance agendas rooted in

prosecutor and a member of the Choctaw Nation, the current ICWA fight is part of a strategy that feeds into ending the federal government's trust relationship with tribes as well as challenging federal authority over states' rights. If the decision in Texas is upheld, he said, its legal precedent could reach even beyond Indian Country, where it would strike at the heart of tribal sovereignty, to effectively declare all federal Indian law unconstitutional.

"*Brackeen v. Zinke*," said Reed, "is a right-wing foot in the door to rewrite the Constitution."¹¹

THE ROOTS OF ICWA

Most people in the U.S. have never heard of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), enacted in 1978 to stop the near wholesale removal of Native American children from their birth families to non-Native foster and adoption placements.¹² Today, under ICWA, tribes typically try to place children who come into tribal or state care with a family member, a mem-

ber of their tribe or, failing that, a family from another tribe.

"Typically, the mainstream press picks up a story regarding ICWA only when a non-Indian family has somehow been injured," said Terry Cross, founding director and current advisor for the National Indian Child Welfare Association.¹³

But the law stems from generations of abusive policies that tore Native American families apart. Beginning in the late 19th Century, the federal government forced or coerced the separation of thousands of Native children from their families, sending them to federal or religious boarding schools often many hours away from their homelands.

Created as part of President Ulysses S. Grant's Peace Policy of 1869, the boarding school era was framed as a bloodless, more humane answer to the country's "Indian Problem": that is, the fact that Indian land claims stood in the way of greater Western expansion by the United States. The schools' explicit mission was to destroy Native cultures, languages, and spirituality, and prepare the children for assimilation into American society. Modeled on education tactics used on Native prisoners at Fort Mason in the 1870s by Captain Richard H. Pratt, the boarding schools followed a punitive philosophy of rigid order and Pratt's motto: "Kill the Indian, and save the man." The schools would continue well into the 20th Century.¹⁴ Today, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), within the Department of the Interior (DOI), oversees 183 schools and dormitories serving Native students, including 51 boarding schools.¹⁵ (One-hundred and twenty-five of the 183 schools are tribally operated under BIE grants or contracts.¹⁶)

By the late 1970s, the means of separating children from their families had changed, as 25 to 35 percent of all American Indian and Alaska Native children were removed from their homes by state welfare and private adoption agencies. Of those removed, 85 percent were placed outside of their families and communities.¹⁷ Native Americans continue to face entrenched racial bias by courts and child welfare authorities; today, American Indians and Alaska Natives are overrepresented in foster care at a rate

2.7 times greater than their proportion in the general population.¹⁸

It's these dynamics that ICWA was created to address: helping ensure that tribes, as sovereign nations, have jurisdiction over their own children.¹⁹ Since ICWA's establishment, several prominent child advocacy organizations have declared it the gold standard for child welfare policies and practices for American Indian children.²⁰

But beginning in 2013, with an infa-

far from the reservation. Notably, in both the Brackeen and Buckley-Becker cases, tribes ruled in favor of the non-Native families' adoptions. These scenarios, however, seldom receive media coverage.

There is little data regarding states' compliance with ICWA, but a 2015 study by Casey Family Programs suggests that many government child protection agencies fail to follow the law. The lack of federal oversight for enforcing ICWA adds to

privatize American Indian lands, destroy tribal cultures, and reverse the tribes' and government's "trust relationship," which protects tribal treaty rights, lands, assets, and resources.²⁸ The assault on this trust responsibility and Indian rights became known as the Termination Era.

During those two decades, over 100 tribes had their federal trust relationship terminated,²⁹ meaning their lands and governments were lost; tribal governments dismantled; reservation lands di-

Getting rid of ICWA isn't only about adoption. If ICWA is found to be unconstitutional, the ruling could undermine the authority of tribal courts, abolish tribal casinos, and privatize tribal lands, opening them up to developers with interests in fossil fuels and other extractive industries.

amous lawsuit known as "Baby Veronica" that reached the Supreme Court, challenges to ICWA have increased. In the Baby Veronica case—formally called *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl*—powerful interests in the adoption industry and evangelical churches joined with high-profile attorneys to challenge ICWA's authority regarding the adoption of an infant citizen of the Cherokee Nation named Veronica. Eventually the non-Native couple seeking to adopt Veronica, Matt and Melanie Capobianco, prevailed.²¹ Not long after the Supreme Court ruled in the Capobiancos' favor, Veronica's non-Native biological mother, Christina Maldonado, signed onto a lawsuit against the U.S. government claiming that ICWA was unconstitutional. (She later dismissed the suit voluntarily.²²)

When a similar case arose in 2018, Native American Rights Fund attorney Erin C. Dougherty Lynch described the attacks on ICWA as part of an ongoing and "well-funded multiyear effort by antitribal interests, who use Indian children as weapons in their assault on ICWA and on tribes more broadly. It is a shameful, nakedly political effort ... to undo decades, even centuries, of settled law."²³

Ironically, despite ICWA, tribes often decide not to transfer eligible children to tribal jurisdiction for a number of reasons: that the child may have close tribal and family connections in a non-Indian placement, or the tribe may lack resources to intervene in cases located

gaps in compliance.²⁴

"For years, under ICWA, tribes have been making determinations in child welfare cases based on the best interest of the child," noted law professor Matthew Fletcher. "Suggesting that tribes don't routinely make child welfare decisions based on the best interest of the child is just ignorant."²⁵

The legal battle over the Texas ICWA decision will likely continue for several years, and Fletcher and others believe that future challenges to ICWA are inevitable. In *Indian Country Today*, writer and Native rights advocate Rebecca Nagle writes that even if O'Connor's decision is overruled, other attacks on ICWA will continue.²⁶

And that, said former tribal prosecutor J. Eric Reed, is because getting rid of ICWA isn't only about adoption. If ICWA is found to be unconstitutional, the ruling could undermine the authority of tribal courts, abolish tribal casinos, and privatize tribal lands, opening them up to developers with interests in fossil fuels and other extractive industries. "Eliminating ICWA," said Reed, "is part of an ultra-conservative agenda to return Indian Country to the Termination era, abrogate tribal treaties, and make tribes and tribal citizens fully subject to state law."²⁷

TERMINATION OF TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

From the mid-1940s through 1970, the federal government employed a series of assimilationist policies designed to

vided and sold to individual developers, then subjected to local property taxes; and federal Indian programs dissolved. Thousands of American Indians were also moved off reservations to cities as a means of forced assimilation. But that mostly meant exchanging rural poverty for urban poverty.

President Trump's contemporary policies and opinions regarding Indian sovereignty harken back to the Termination Era. Trump has longstanding animus toward tribal sovereignty and its potential threat to his casino interests.³⁰ In 1993 Trump claimed that the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act grants tribes unfair advantage over non-Indian gaming enterprises, such as his own. He's also repeatedly insisted that, since some Native people don't meet his impressions of what Native Americans should look like, their tribal affiliations are invalid.³¹ In 1993, for example, when Trump testified before Congress to protest Indian gaming laws, he argued, "If you look at some of the reservations that you have approved—you, sir, in your great wisdom, have approved—I will tell you right now, they don't look like Indians to me, and they don't look like Indians."³²

Both tribes and legal precedent maintain that tribal citizenship is not based on race but rather on a political relationship between tribal governments and the federal government, according to a January 12, 2017 decision in the Arizona Court of Appeals in *S.S. v. Colorado River Indian*



Native American Community Mural in the Cesar Chavez Student Center Building, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA. Credit:Wikicommons.

Tribes.³³ In a 2017 challenge to ICWA, the Supreme Court upheld this interpretation.³⁴

But in 2018, in *Brackeen v. Zinke*, Judge O'Connor seemed to endorse Trump's view, declaring ICWA a race-based statute that violates the Constitution's Equal Protection Clause—an important basis for anti-ICWA arguments, since it undermines tribal rights to determine their own membership criteria. (This comes less than a decade after the U.S. signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which enumerates this right, in 2010.³⁵)

Describing *Brackeen* as a “kitchen-sink complaint,”³⁶ several tribes successfully moved to stay O'Connor's decision pending appeal, and were joined by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Department of the Interior (DOI), Department of Justice (DOJ), and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).³⁷ In a written statement, the Partnership for Native Children further decried Judge O'Connor's decision as a legal anomaly by an outlier judge,³⁸ since O'Connor, nominated by President George W. Bush,³⁹ has a history of conservative rulings, including on cases involving same-sex marriage, transgender people's rights, and the Affordable Care Act.⁴⁰

“If you're a right-wing interest group

and can figure out a way to get the case heard in Judge O'Connor's court, you can expect a sympathetic ear,” Fletcher said.

But before the stay had been granted, shortly after Judge O'Connor's decision, the office of the Attorney General of Texas had already issued an instructional letter to the state's Department of Family and Protective Services, declaring that

Overtuning ICWA would lead the way to terminating the entire canon of Indian law, including the existence of federal Indian trust lands.

ICWA is “no longer good law and should not be applied to any pending or future child custody proceedings in Texas.”⁴¹

THE WEIRD TRIAD

The leading figures in the newest anti-ICWA drama include the right-wing think tank Goldwater Institute; the National Council for Adoption, representing the private adoption industry; and an evangelical Christian adoption movement that sees adoption as a means to live out their faith.⁴² Ancillary supporters include the Koch brothers; the DeVos family; the Mercer Family (who are among Trump's largest donors); the Cato Institute; the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC);⁴³ the anti-treaty

group Citizens Equal Rights Foundation (CERA), which advocates for the termination of U.S. and tribal treaty agreements; the Southern Baptist Convention; and others.⁴⁴

For longtime ICWA supporters, the alliance of seemingly disparate groups opposing the law was surprising.

“It's like this weird triad of strange and

powerful bedfellows,” said Nicole Adams of the Colville Confederated Tribes and advisor at the Partnership for Native Children.⁴⁵ Some of the players may have unwittingly signed on to this war and don't necessarily share the duplicitousness of others. But their combined opposition to ICWA represents titanic influence, power, and money—all in service of an agenda of privatization.

The alliances are, in fact, not unlikely at all. The united opposition to ICWA of conservative and neoliberal groups is part of a strategic plan to privatize everything from land use to child welfare. Under the guise of promoting free market principals of federalism, limited government, and individual liberty, or-

ganizations and individuals such as the Goldwater Institute, the National Council for Adoption, ALEC, the Koch brothers, and others want to reduce governmental social and environmental protections in order to benefit wealthy corporations. “It is a worrisome marriage of corporations and politicians,” explains Lisa Graves, former executive director of the Center for Media and Democracy, “which seems to normalize a kind of corruption of the legislative process—of the democratic process—in a nation of free people where the government is supposed to be of, by, and for the people, not the corporations.”⁴⁶

The Goldwater Institute

One of the richest anti-ICWA funders is the Goldwater Institute. Since 2015, the libertarian non-profit has underwritten several legal challenges to ICWA.⁴⁷ Attorneys at the Goldwater Institute filed an amicus brief in *Brackeen v. Zinke*, reiterating its past claims that ICWA is race-based and unconstitutional.⁴⁸ And Timothy Sandefur, the Institute’s vice president for litigation, compared ICWA to discrimination suffered under Jim Crow laws, telling *The Nation* in 2017 that ICWA subjects Native children to an unfair set of rules based on race.⁴⁹

The Institute describes Indian communities as environments “where poverty, crime, abuse and suicide are rampant,” and cites data showing that American Indian children have the highest rate of foster care of any ethnic group as an argument against ICWA.⁵⁰ In essence, this blames American Indians for the outcomes of generations of federal assimilationist policies and recommends more of the same as a solution.

And yet, as Fletcher noted, “The Goldwater Institute has no history of expressing interest in either Indian or family law.” Although the Goldwater Institute has created an organization called Equal Protection for Native Children⁵¹ and frequently works with other ICWA opponents such as the Cato Institute, it has no history of working to improve the economic, educational, or health circumstances of Native children.⁵² Indeed, according to the organization’s income tax filing from 2016,⁵³ its primary areas of

research include constitutional law, education reform, and healthcare policy.

Among the Goldwater Institute’s major donors are the Koch brothers, well-known opponents to federal power and spending.⁵⁴ Through their various advocacy organizations, the Koch brothers fund and support groups such as ALEC, which, like the Goldwater Institute, has called for a constitutional convention that would focus on elevating states’ rights and reducing federal oversight and regulation.⁵⁵

Koch Industries, which operates many businesses involved in the petroleum, chemical, mineral, and logging industries, is one of the country’s largest polluters, incurring substantial fines from both state and federal authorities⁵⁶ for pipeline spills, chemical leaks, soil and groundwater contamination, illegally extracting oil and gas from federal and Indian lands, and more. It would certainly benefit from less federal regulation and

For this right-wing coalition, getting ICWA declared unconstitutional is a vital first step in undermining tribal sovereignty. But for Native American communities, it’s just the most recent chapter of a very old story.

oversight.⁵⁷

If ICWA is declared unconstitutional, less regulation protecting Indian land would be one likely result. Overturning ICWA would lead the way to terminating the entire canon of Indian law, including the existence of federal Indian trust lands. That would in turn open up an enormous opportunity to exploit the vast natural resources on Indian trust lands, currently protected under federal law. At present, tribes as sovereign entities are allowed to act as states under the Clean Water Act, which enables them to establish water and air quality standards on their lands.⁵⁸ If sovereignty is overturned, however, these tribal standards—frequently more rigorous than their state and federal laws—would become meaningless.

Although reservations make up just 2 percent of land in the U.S., they hold up to 20 percent of the country’s known oil

and gas reserves as well as 30 percent of the nation’s coal reserves, making them a tempting acquisition for extractive industries.⁵⁹ The Koch brothers have already been investigated by the federal government for stealing oil from reservation lands.⁶⁰ If the trust relationship between tribes and the federal government were dissolved, reservation land would likely be privatized and no longer subject to federal regulations governing leases and permitting of American Indian lands.⁶¹

The Adoption Industry and the Religious Right

The other components of the “weird triad”—the National Council for Adoption, and the adoption movement they represent—bring their own interests to the table, often with support from, or in partnership with, groups like the Goldwater Institute. Matthew McGill, the lead plaintiffs’ attorney in *Brackeen v. Zinke*,

is part of a husband-and-wife legal team with a long history of challenging ICWA. McGill also represented the National Council for Adoption, a non-profit adoption advocacy organization, and a private adoption agency⁶² in the 2015 case *National Council for Adoption v. Jewell*, which also challenged ICWA as unconstitutional and race-based.⁶³ The case was dismissed in federal district court.⁶⁴ He also joined Goldwater Institute VP Timothy Sandefur at the Cato Institute in 2018 for a presentation on their work challenging ICWA.⁶⁵

McGill’s wife, Lori Alvino McGill, also a lawyer, represented the adoptive parents and the non-Indian biological mother in the Baby Veronica case,⁶⁶ accompanying them on a media tour, including an appearance on the Today Show,⁶⁷ that helped make their challenge to ICWA a national story.

The couple represent a larger con-

stituency in the private adoption industry, which has become a powerful lobby against ICWA.⁶⁸ Private adoptions are a lucrative business, with attorney fees routinely running between \$10,000 and \$40,000. But as obstacles to international adoptions have grown, there is a greater interest in domestic adoptions in the U.S.—including adoptions from Indian Country.⁶⁹

Many clients of private adoption attorneys like the McGills are members of a Christian adoption movement that encourages evangelicals to see adoption as a means to live out their faith,⁷⁰ help the needy, and evangelize children.⁷¹ The statement of faith for Nightlight Christian Adoptions—the agency affiliated with the Baby Veronica case—holds that adoption fulfills the Bible's Great Commission mandate to make disciples of all nations.⁷²

Practicing Christians are more than twice more likely to adopt than the general population, according to a 2013 study by the Barna Group.⁷³ The study also found that most adoptive parents are White, while the children they adopt are overwhelmingly non-White.

For many Native Americans, these demographics bear a troubling resemblance to historical interactions between White Christians and Native peoples—whether the Catholic Church's 15th Century documents granting European Christian explorers permission to use any means necessary to subdue and convert indigenous peoples,⁷⁴ or the more recent abuses of the boarding school era.

"There is nothing original about some of the evangelical Christian adoption movements to focus on Native children and take it upon themselves to decide what's best for Native families," said the Partnership for Native Children's Nicole Adams.

GENERATIONS OF HARM

No matter what goal they're after, for this coalition of right-wing think tanks, adoption industry professionals and advocates, and industrialists eager to plunder tribal lands, getting ICWA declared unconstitutional is a vital first step in undermining tribal sovereignty.

But for Native American communi-

ties, it's just the most recent chapter of a very old story. Beginning with the 1819 Indian Civilization Fund Act,⁷⁵ enacted to force assimilation and wipe out Native cultures, generations of Native American communities and families have borne the impact of non-Native political and economic battles over their existence and way of life.

Assimilationist policies such as the boarding school era traumatized generations of Native Americans in ways that we are now only beginning to understand,⁷⁶ as health researchers are finding that the trauma of loss of identity, family, culture, and spirituality is passed from one generation to the next and contributes to high rates of addiction, suicide, violence, and other entrenched maladaptive behavior in some Native American communities.

Sandy White Hawk, program manager with the Indian Child Welfare Act Law Center in Minneapolis, and a team of researchers found that adult American Indians who were adopted to non-Indian parents experienced high rates of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse in their adoptive families. Adoptees also experience traits common to trauma survivors such as anxiety, intrusive imagery or nightmares, depression, withdrawal/isolation, guilt, and unresolved grief.⁷⁷ The National Indian Child Welfare Association also cites studies indicating that Indian children placed in non-Indian adoptive homes suffer a far greater risk than the general American Indian population of psychological damage and have a higher tendency to abuse drugs and alcohol.⁷⁸

"I believe some of the motivation for evangelical Christians to adopt American Indian children comes from a savior complex," said White Hawk. "Minority populations are often portrayed as unable to care adequately for their children; some of the adoptive parents may believe they are offering homes for unwanted, neglected children."⁷⁹

But too often, then as now, this impulse may spring from a failure to understand American Indian culture or extended family structure, wherein aunts or uncles might raise a child instead of a biological parent. As child welfare work-

ers labeled that tradition as neglect, generations of Indian children were removed from their homes.

"Instead of saving Native families, these policies robbed them of the nurturing traditional values where the whole community embraced the child," said Nicole Adams. "Who are these people to think they can take away ICWA, one of the few good things Native people have to protect our families?"

And from the perspective of adoptees, even the best non-Native family placement, in a loving family, can't always fill the hunger to know one's history and culture. Rachel Banks Kupcho, of the Leech Lake Ojibwe tribe of Minnesota, was adopted by White parents in 1977 shortly before ICWA became law. Although her adoptive family is loving and supportive, she said, "I always had a void in my life no matter what I did or where I went."

Kupcho's adoption experience motivated her to pursue work as an ICWA investigator for Hennepin County in Minnesota as well as non-profit ICWA advocacy organizations. She began searching for her birthmother in 2008. Several years later, she found her, and, to her surprise, learned that her mother, too, had been adopted. Back in the 1950s and '60s, Kupcho's biological grandmother was coerced by social workers into relinquishing her children for adoption in order to give them better lives. For generations, Kupcho's family had faced family separation based on the idea that growing up outside of Indian Country was best.

As Kupcho develops her relationship with her biological mother, she said she's realized that "Love is not always enough. Going to the occasional pow wow is not enough. ... Even knowing you're Indian is not enough."

"I needed to know where I came from and make that tribal connection," she continued. "When visiting the reservation, I am suddenly among family, and I feel good."⁸⁰

Mary Annette Pember is an independent journalist based in Cincinnati, Ohio.

In Search of the Russian Soul

1. "What's Behind the Hanging of the Eleven Jews in Prague?," *National Renaissance Bulletin* (Beacon, NY: National Renaissance Party, December 1952). The full text is available online as part of a package of documents released by the FBI as a result of a FOIA request: https://archive.org/details/foia_NRP-HQ-1/page/n87.
2. "What's Behind the Hanging of the Eleven Jews in Prague?," *National Renaissance Bulletin* (Beacon, NY: National Renaissance Party, December 1952). The full text is available online as part of a package of documents released by the FBI as a result of a FOIA request: https://archive.org/details/foia_NRP-HQ-1/page/n87.
3. The term refers to the work and thought of the German historian Oswald Spengler, author of such revered right-wing tomes as *The Decline of the West*. Yockey not only saw himself as the heir to Spengler's legacy, but in the introduction to *Imperium*, for instance, he is described as starting "where Spengler left off"—e.g., he, too, envisioned cultures as operating in a cyclical fashion, thereby repudiating the liberal notion of "progress." Kerry Bolton, "Forward," in Francis Parker Yockey, *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics* (Abergele, UK: Wermond & Wermond Publishing Group, 2013), xxviii.
4. Francis Parker Yockey, *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics* (Abergele, UK: Wermond & Wermond Publishing Group, 2013), 727.
5. The author of the introduction to one version of *Imperium* is quick to note that there is a fair bit of complexity to Yockey's views here. In response to accusations that Yockey was "anti-American and pro-Russian," the author noted: "Although this label was of course vomited for the benefit of gullible newspaper readers, it shows that some of his later writings could have been misinterpreted as being pro-Russian, just as *Imperium* indicates an anti-Russian attitude. Of course, Yockey was neither pro nor anti-Russian; he was concerned with the health and continuity of the West, and his view of the rest of the world was at all times subjective to what he considered in the best interests of the West at that time." Ulick Varange (Francis Parker Yockey), *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics* (1948), xxii. Available online at: <https://www.solargeneral.org/wp-content/uploads/library/imperium-ulick-varange-francis-parker-yockey.pdf>.
6. Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 22.
7. Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3.
8. Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 245.
9. George Lincoln Rockwell, "Rockwell Was Right," <https://www.counter-currents.com/2011/03/rockwell-was-right/>.
10. There is a great deal of work examining transnational relationships from both a historical and political science perspective, and a growing body of literature exploring how these relationships relate to non-state actors in particular. As one of the earlier articles in this genre notes, an honest exploration of transnational relationships ought to make clear that while many are "initiated and sustained by entirely, or almost entirely, by governments of nation-states," many also fall under the purview of non-nation-state actors. See: Joseph S. Nye Jr. and Robert O. Keohane, "Transnational Relations and World Politics: An Introduction," *International Organization* 25, no. 3 (Summer 1971), 329–349, esp. 332.
11. Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 10.
12. Andrew Glass, "Reagan brands Soviet Union 'evil empire,'" *Politico*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/03/08/this-day-in-politics-march-8-1983-440258>.
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15. Robert Horvath, *The Legacy of Soviet Dissent: Dissidents, Democratization and Radical Nationalism in Russia* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 130.
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