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# The Public Eye



## ENDGAME

How "Bipartisan Criminal Justice Reform" Institutionalizes a Right-Wing, Neoliberal Agenda

As we move into the second 100 days of the Trump era, it's hard to keep track of everything that has changed since November 8. The Far Right threats we have long covered in these pages increasingly shape both the conservative movement and our national government. Violent rhetoric, physical attacks, and policies laden with White supremacy, xenophobia, misogyny, and anti-LGBTQ invective are on the rise. From immigration to health care to climate change, promising efforts for progressive reform are being rolled back, even as mass resistance to the new administration helped scuttle Trump's Muslim ban and has fortified the congressional opposition. The administration, mired in multiple ongoing corruption scandals, has had difficulty aligning the disparate factions of the Republican Party behind its policy initiatives and continues to govern by executive order and fear-mongering. *The Public Eye* will continue to bring you fresh analysis, reporting, and research on the most critical issues of our times.

Particularly at a time when the U.S. is as starkly divided as it is now, joint efforts that bring together progressive criminal justice reformers with the likes of Newt Gingrich and Grover Norquist might seem like exactly the balm a fractured nation needs. But in our cover story, "**Endgame**" (pg. 4), a deep-dive exploration of the state of bipartisan criminal justice reform efforts, Kay Whitlock reminds us that conservative support for progressive causes can come with a steep cost. Making the case against mass incarceration and the criminalization of communities of color on budgetary, rather than social justice grounds, may bring more parties to the table, but does little to address the systemic problems underlying the country's incarceration crisis: "Reforms that leave so much injustice and violence intact and unchallenged will ultimately continue to lead U.S. society to that prison and all of its shadow manifestations." Whitlock calls for an alternative, "an unapologetically progressive, anti-neoliberal agenda in the era of Trump."

In our second feature, Christopher Stroop also looks at strange bedfellows—in this case, the factions of the U.S. Right drawn to Putinist Russia at a time when that country is seeking to exert substantial influence across Europe and in the U.S. "**Between Trump and Putin**" (pg. 11) looks at both the democratic crises arising in countries where Russian actors have sought to influence elections as well as the less-examined ideological ties binding together this new "Right-Wing International." The result, Stroop writes, is an ideology that "rejects modern liberalism as a 'rootless,' culture-destroying globalism, and offers in its place a 'multipolar' world order with strengthened national sovereignty, weakened 'supranational institutions,' and a rejection of universal human rights."

How these and other recent developments have come to be is the focus of Matthew Lyons' review of John Judis's recent book, *The Populist Explosion* (pg. 18). With populist upsurges evident both in the U.S. as well as across Europe, Lyons notes that while populist movements may arise "because people don't feel represented by the conventional political options," the left- and right-wing versions of populism are grounded in very different worldviews and expressions, as right-wing populism goes beyond championing the people against the elite to also target demonized "out groups"—something all too apparent in the age of Trump.

In that vein, "**Trumpism and the Unstable Ground of Whiteness**" (pg. 3), explores the forces that propelled Trump to office. Author Naomi Braine considers a "split-screen" view of White America that, on one side, recalls a mythical past of economic glory, and on the other, the current reality of economic displacement and loss that's easily blamed on scapegoated "others." Trump's successful appeals to xenophobia and racism follow a well-worn historical path, from Reconstruction to Prohibition, wherein the Far Right grows in response to demographic and cultural change. But the history of these reactive moments also includes warnings for progressives: "to be wary of alternative social contracts that have genuinely progressive elements while maintaining authoritarian structures and White supremacy."

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Kathryn Joyce

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BY NAOMI BRAINE

## Trumpism and the Unstable Ground of Whiteness

Trumpism is built on a split-screen image of life for the White middle and working classes: a contemporary view of economic suffering and “loss” to encroaching “others,” while in the background hovers a shimmering past of cultural and economic glory. In reality, of course, the lost economic prosperity has largely flowed upwards to the wealthiest segment of the U.S. population, and the situation of White Trump voters continues to be significantly better than that of African Americans and Latinxs of similar educational levels.

A dangerous aspect of this dual image is that Trumpism describes a real element of White American experience while linking it to racist and xenophobic “alternative facts.” The parts of the country that can variously be described as Trump country, “Red States,” or the older phrase “the heartland,” may be concentrated in the Rust Belt, the South, and the Plains, but can also be found scattered through “Blue” states like New York and California. I find “heartland” useful because it captures the self-understanding of the small cities, towns, rural, sub- and ex-urban areas that have long been the core of a White, largely Protestant, multi-generation U.S. experience and identity that was central to the Trump constituency. These heartland communities are currently experiencing a decline in economic opportunities, a marked increase in opiate addiction, and reduced life expectancy,<sup>1</sup> as well as a rise in racist xenophobia most visible as Trumpism. The convergence of economic and demographic change is not unique to our current era, and has previously led to a surge in the power and respectability of the Far Right among Whites living outside of major cities.



A member of Identity Evropa (a White supremacist college organization) sports a “Make America Great Again” hat at an event last year. (Photo courtesy of thetab.com.)

Times of demographic and cultural threat to a core White American identity and experience have historically empowered the Far Right. Post-Civil War reconstruction was obviously one such time, and led to the birth of the Ku Klux Klan in the South. The Civil Rights movement was another such time, and also saw a resurgence of the KKK in the South. In addition, the surge in neo-Nazi and other Far Right organizing in the 1980s could be seen as another such period, following the movements of the 1960s and ‘70s that challenged traditional White male power structures. These three examples, however, were periods in which the Far Right was mobilized in particular areas, not times when its ideology was normalized or widely dispersed throughout the wider U.S. The 1920s and early ‘30s, however, after

the last major wave of immigration and economic transformation, were a time of significant right-wing mobilization that spread throughout the U.S. and was largely normalized in White, non-urban areas.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, the major threat to White identity in the ‘20s and ‘30s came from Southern and Eastern European immigrants, who were considered neither White nor Black according to the racial classifications of the time. Over time, these European immigrant groups came to be understood as White,<sup>3</sup> illustrating both the possibility of shifts in racial categories and the power they hold at any given moment in time.

Demographers have been anticipating for many years the moment the U.S. population ceases to be a majority of European descent, or “White” in the current U.S. understanding of race. The

**Commentary, continued on page 20**

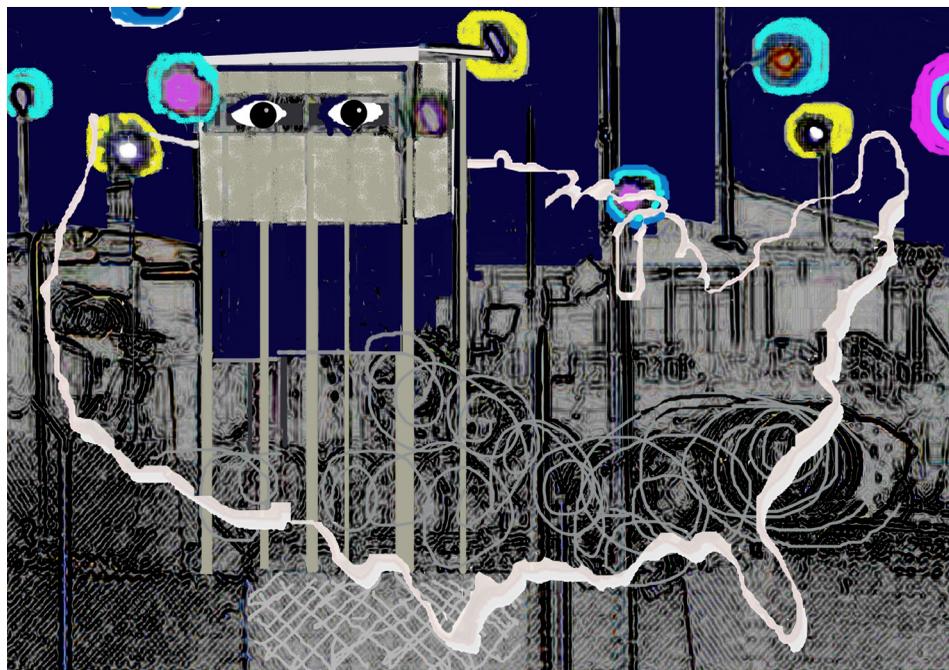
BY KAY WHITLOCK

# ENDGAME

How “Bipartisan Criminal Justice Reform” Institutionalizes a Right-Wing, Neoliberal Agenda

Could it be possible...  
that white supremacy as  
an ideological formation  
has been nourished, rather  
than attenuated, by notions  
of progress and political  
development?

—Daniel Martinez HoSang,  
*Racial Propositions*



“Prison Industrial Complex” by Natasha Mayers. (Image via Flickr, CC BY-SA 2.0.)

October 2016 marked the release of Ava DuVernay’s documentary, *13th*: the most prominent film to date to tackle the history of mass incarceration in the U.S. DuVernay tells her story through the lens of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude “except as a punishment for crime whereof the part shall have been duly convicted.”

Tracing the criminalization of Black people as a class to this loophole, *13th* movingly grieves lives lost to “law and order” politics<sup>1</sup> in recent years and invites us to join the movement to dismantle mass incarceration. The case for change is made by an unusual array of commentators, who span the political spectrum. Newt Gingrich and Grover Norquist appear on equal footing with such scholar-activists as Angela Davis,

Marie Gottschalk, and Khalil Muhammad, whose work profoundly helps to shape our understanding of racialized law enforcement, police and prison violence, mass incarceration, and the growth of the public-private prison industrial complex.

Many activists are surprised to see the first two names joined with the latter. With decades of staunch right-wing activism, Gingrich, most recently an ardent supporter of racial profiling to counter “terrorism,”<sup>2</sup> and Norquist, who heads Americans for Tax Reform and dreams of shredding the social safety net,<sup>3</sup> have been made over as conservative poster children for criminal justice reform. They’re only two among scores of hardline Republicans and right-wing or libertarian think tanks and advocacy organizations promoting bipartisan collaboration.

What should one make of this? Is this the softening of the Right? Are Davis and Gingrich really in sync? Of course not. Davis is a scholar and prison abolitionist whose life’s work reflects an unequivocal, untiring commitment to expansive notions of liberation, freedom, and justice. By contrast, the Right’s—and Gingrich’s—embrace of “bipartisan reform” builds on a long history of support for structural White supremacy and a larger neoliberal austerity framework that promotes an ever-expanding emphasis on security.<sup>4</sup>

Those differences matter—profoundly, and sometimes in unexpected ways. How and why that came to be amounts to a cautionary tale for progressive movements about the “bipartisan reform consensus.” Recognizing its assumptions, limitations, and contradictions also helps identify opportunities to advance

an unapologetically progressive, anti-neoliberal agenda in the era of Trump.

### BIRTH OF THE “BIPARTISAN REFORM CONSENSUS”

More than an actual means of improving policy, “bipartisan criminal justice reform” has become a mantra signifying hope: that people of good will can come together across ideological divides and partisan gridlock to end our country’s overreliance on expensive and unjust systems of incarceration. But what, exactly, are bipartisan advocates seeking to reform?

By early 2017, according to Prison Policy Initiative (PPI), the U.S. criminal justice system held more than 2.3 million people in disparate public systems, including 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 901 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 76 Indian Country jails, as well as military prisons, immigrant detention facilities, civil commitment centers, and prisons in U.S. territories. About 197,000 people are in federal prisons. An additional 41,000 immigrants are in civil detention at any given time by U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—often in private facilities or contracted jail space—for reasons unrelated to criminal proceedings.<sup>5</sup> Most people held in local jails have not been convicted of anything but are awaiting trial. The overwhelming majority are held in publicly-owned jails and prisons.<sup>6</sup> The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that an additional 3.8 million people are on probation in the United States and 870,500 are on parole. Astonishingly, this means that at the end of 2015, one in every 53 adults in the United States was under community supervision.<sup>7</sup>

About 60 percent of those incarcerated are people of color, mostly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous. The rate of growth for the incarceration of women, particularly Black women, has outpaced that of men. At the intersections of race and class, LGBTQ and gender nonconforming people, and people with disabilities and mental illness are heavily policed and incarcerated.<sup>8</sup>

Over the last decade, bipartisan solu-

tions to reforming the criminal justice system in the U.S. began to gain popular traction, as high-profile incidents of police violence drew public attention to systemic problems with law enforcement violence. In 2009, Oscar Grant III, a Black 22-year-old, was shot point blank in the back by a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) officer when he was already being restrained face-down. He later died, and when videos of the murder, captured by bystanders on cellphones, went viral, Grant’s death became a catalyst for protest. In 2010, Michelle Alexander’s bestselling book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, was published. A steady toll of subsequent deaths, from Trayvon Martin to Rekia Boyd to Michael Brown to Freddie Gray followed, and the Black Lives Matter movement arose, galvanizing popular resistance to state violence against Black and other communities of color.

Around the same time, a powerful public relations machine, amplified by mass media, began promoting a national bipartisan reform agenda. The agenda

### Reform alone cannot dismantle mass incarceration or reduce the scope of surveillance and supervision.

encompasses particular reforms that generally fall into a few areas: amending sentencing laws and addressing “overcriminalization,” reforming pretrial practices, prison release/re-entry, community corrections, and civil assets forfeiture. (Immigrant detention has never been included.)

But for progressives and anti-racist activists, this reform agenda leaves much to be desired. While bipartisan reform advocates promise justice on the cheap by reserving prisons for “dangerous,” “hardened,” and violent criminals, and lowering the number of non-dangerous offenders who are incarcerated, they have addressed neither the racialized violence of policing nor the structural racism, poverty, and economic violence that produce mass incarceration. Nor do they address the ways in which “reform” creates a massive shadow prison system.

For more than 10 years, “bipartisan reform” has been reshaping portions of the justice landscape. The bipartisan label lends a certain cachet that generally exempts it from close examination. But even well-intentioned reformers seeking to reduce racial disparities have sometimes ended up supporting policies that preserved or intensified them. In the late 1970s, seeking to eliminate widespread racialized disparities in indeterminate sentencing that kept many people in prison for unjustifiable lengths of time, liberal reformers united with conservatives on a remedy of fixed sentencing guidelines, codified in the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984. This included but was not limited to mandatory minimums for some federal crimes. But as legal scholar David Jaros observes, “Unfortunately for liberals, the guideline regime established...ultimately advanced hardline conservative criminal justice goals that were antithetical to the objectives of many of the Act’s liberal supporters.”<sup>9</sup> The result: in most federal court districts, Black people were more likely than White people to be convicted under

mandatory minimum provisions and received longer sentences than Whites convicted of the same crimes.<sup>10</sup>

And while the 1984 federal sentencing reforms did not directly produce the subsequent explosion of state “get tough on crime” laws, they helped to fuel it. This supports Angela Davis’ assertion that all major criminal justice reforms fail to challenge the system in any meaningful way, but rather try to improve upon it, with the result that “more people are brought under the surveillance of the correctional and law enforcement networks.”<sup>11</sup> Given this history—and what is at stake—it is essential to apply a critical eye to the present generation of reform initiatives.

The bipartisan approach didn’t spring up overnight.

One of its antecedents can be found in 1990s “welfare reform,” which similarly

sought to bring together Left and Right in shared effort to overhaul a complex system. In 1996, U.S. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Texas governor George W. Bush, both Republicans, and Democratic President Bill Clinton, pursued new restrictions and limitations on and work requirements for people receiving public assistance and decentralization of federal welfare funding through the creation of state block grants. These measures further shredded an already-tattered social safety net and laid new groundwork for accelerated assaults on remaining New Deal and War on Poverty programs. The number of people in deep poverty increased, and reform produced yet another wave of anti-Black criminalizing discourse.<sup>12</sup>

In 1996, the Texas government released *Faith in Action: A New Vision for Church-State Cooperation*, a report attacking the social welfare system as a response to a host of social problems, including crime.<sup>13</sup> A Texas Faith-Based Initiative was created. Many government-operated welfare programs were replaced with moral rehabilitation programs delivered by non-state conservative Christian institutions. The initiative included a criminal justice component. In 1997, the first contract was with the InnerChange Freedom Initiative, an evangelical residential pre-release program offered by Prison Fellowship—the global prison ministry started by former Nixon aide Chuck Colson (after his Watergate-related imprisonment) that has now become one of the largest programs of its kind in the world. Religious studies scholar Tanya Erzen has documented the subsequent rise and increasing institutionalization of faith-based (Protestant) ministries in U.S. jails and prisons.<sup>14</sup>

Five years into Texas' new faith-based initiative, a watchdog organization monitoring the Far Right, Texas Freedom Network, noted that while the InnerChange program originally funded its own operations, in 2001, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice began allocating money for its work, including the provision of Bible-based counseling and "Christianity-centered materials." Along with providing new funding streams for faith-based programs in multiple arenas, the initiative justified deregulation on the basis of religious

freedom.<sup>15</sup>

Texas continues to serve as an incubator and proving ground for right-wing reforms. The Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF), a think tank established in 1989, is a major player. TPPF has deep ties to Charles and David Koch, Exxon, and other wealthy individuals and industries,<sup>16</sup> and supports an ambitious free market agenda emphasizing deregulation, devolution (transfer of power, accountability, and responsibility to lower levels of government and its public or private designees), and privatization. In 2010, TPPF launched Right on Crime, which plays a singular conservative role in promoting rhetorical and policy reform frameworks.<sup>17</sup>

#### **COALITIONS, PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS, AND UNEXPECTED ALLIANCES**

It's not clear exactly when the Right and more liberal actors began to seek common reform ground, but some seeds of coalescence were evident by the early 2000s. In 2003, the Open Society Institute (now Open Society Foundations) released a paper on Justice Reinvestment as a framework for reform, arguing that it made sound business sense to cut corrections costs by reducing incarcerated populations and redirect that money to other social needs. Some portion of the billions spent on prisons would be directed "to rebuilding the human resources and physical infrastructure—the schools, health care facilities, parks, and public spaces—of neighborhoods devastated by high levels of incarceration."<sup>18</sup> Over the next few years, in concert with the Council of State Governments and JFA Institute, the concept of justice reinvestment was institutionalized as a mainstay of bipartisan reform, though not in the way the Open Society paper advocates.<sup>19</sup>

Other liberal groups followed suit. In 2011, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) held a press conference to release its new report, *Misplaced Priorities: Under Educate, Over Incarcerate*, that announced a new "Smart and Safe" campaign to reinvest money saved by reducing mass incarceration on education.<sup>20</sup> Joined by representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

and other groups, NAACP President and CEO Ben Jealous called for specific reforms to keep "dangerous criminals" in prison while lowering costs by reducing sentences for low-level offenses. Neither the report nor speakers offered concrete suggestions for redirecting those savings to increased spending for education beyond the creation of vaguely defined "reinvestment commissions."

Months earlier, Newt Gingrich and Pat Nolan, then of Justice Fellowship, the onetime political arm of Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship International, had penned a *Washington Post* op-ed announcing that Right on Crime's new campaign "opens the way for a common-sense left-right agreement on an issue that has kept the parties apart for decades."<sup>21</sup> Nolan spoke at the press conference, as did Grover Norquist. Gingrich could not attend but sent a letter of support.

That evening, PBS *Newshour's* Judy Woodruff spoke with Jealous and Norquist, asking Norquist if he agreed that at least some of the money spent on prisons ought to be directed to public education. Norquist hedged, saying, "Well, that's the NAACP's study and analysis...I'm in favor of allowing taxpayers to keep the money that's presently being misspent. But that's a separate discussion...we can have that conversation another time."<sup>22</sup>

That exchange foreshadowed how the bipartisan consensus would unfold. From the beginning, the center-liberal sector aligned with the Right in making a "dollars and sense" argument for reducing mass incarceration, appealing for support on the basis of cost, taxes, and public safety rather than issuing a full-throated call for structural, redistributive justice. That early compromise would have long-lasting effects on the ability of liberals and progressives to push for transformative change. Tax- and cost-based arguments advance austerity politics, which in turn intensify violence and abandonment suffered by the communities that are already most criminalized.

Today's "bipartisan consensus" on criminal justice reform is a brokered set of "strange bedfellows" relationships that emerged over the last decade or so among various think tanks, selected

national advocacy organizations, foundations, and other funders. Its work is promoted as a middle way forward that is neither “tough” nor “soft,” but rather “smart” on crime.

Strategic bipartisanship to bridge significant political divides has been a trend within philanthropy and centrist think tanks for at least a decade. It has produced a number of efforts, largely not successful, to bring groups and constituencies together across chasms of ideological difference to find responses to longstanding tensions in such arenas as immigration reform, abortion, and climate change.<sup>23</sup> But almost always, something crucial is lost for progressives. When centrist Democrats sought to find common ground with conservative opponents of abortion rights, the results were more restrictions on those rights and less access to services.<sup>24</sup>

By the time the new wave of bipartisan reform emerged, the country had long since been shifting to the Right. Speaking on condition of anonymity, one highly placed foundation official told me that as it all came together, center-liberal partners couldn’t compete with the libertarian-Right’s already well-developed analyses, rhetoric, talking points, policy templates, and political dominance.

“Liberalism had no power to cut the deal that had to be cut,” the official said.<sup>25</sup>

The result is creation of a series of federal, state, and local coalitions and ever-expanding private-public partnerships that organize, promote, and implement reform agendas.

Major partners and federal-state partnerships helping to shape and implement the “bipartisan consensus” include funders across a broad political spectrum, such as Koch Industries<sup>26</sup> and the Laura and John Arnold Foundation on the Right, and the more liberal Ford Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and Open Society Foundations. A host of other foundations and donors also support aspects of this work.

With funding from the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI), a public-private partnership, provides technical assistance to participating states along

with a structured process intended to “to improve public safety and control taxpayer costs.”<sup>27</sup> In addition to The Pew Charitable Trusts (which funds its own work), technical assistance is provided by the Council of State Governments Justice Center, the Crime and Justice Institute at Community Resources for Justice, The Center for Effective Public Policy, the Urban Institute, and the Vera Institute of Justice.

Open Society Foundations funded the ACLU to create a somewhat different approach to reducing incarceration and re-allocating savings, although both models emphasize sentencing reforms.<sup>28</sup> In 2014, with major funding support from the ACLU, Californians for Safe Neighborhoods and Schools successfully placed Proposition 47 (the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act) on the ballot. With support from the Tides Center, the

lic relations efforts.<sup>30</sup> There has been at least one major internal disagreement within the coalition (see online sidebar).

#### **KEY REFORM ELEMENTS: CAUTIONARY NOTES**

A quick look at a few key elements of the agenda suggest a more complicated story than that contained in campaign talking points. Beyond specific agenda issues and proposals are questions of how they are framed, how they will be implemented, and possible gains or losses.

#### **Sentencing Reforms**

Reduced sentences for some categories of low-level, nonviolent offenses, particularly for drug-related and minor property offenses, are a reform centerpiece. In various states, thousands of people have been released from jails and prisons; many thousands more have had

**“Liberalism had no power to cut the deal that had to be cut.”**

coalition institutionalized into Californians for Safety and Justice (CSJ), which works to facilitate and expand the Proposition 47 agenda. A sister organization, The Alliance for Safety and Justice, also supported by the Tides Center, was created to advance various reforms in other states.

In 2015, the national Coalition for Public Safety was created with funding from Koch, Arnold, MacArthur, and Ford to serve as a public face for and promote the bipartisan consensus.<sup>29</sup> Center-liberal partners include the ACLU, the Center for American Progress, NAACP, and the Leadership Conference Education Fund. In addition to Right on Crime, the libertarian-Right partners include Norquist’s Americans for Tax Reform (which opposes any new taxes and most existing ones), Ralph Reed’s Faith & Freedom Coalition (which mobilizes against LGBTQ rights and recognition and reproductive justice, and for school privatization and removal of church/state barriers), and FreedomWorks (which mobilizes against unions and for so-called “right to work” laws, deregulation, and school privatization). Since its inception, the Coalition for Public Safety (CPS) appears to have focused primarily on genial pub-

their conviction records changed; still others will benefit from shorter sentences. This is a remarkable and necessary “decarceration” accomplishment that must be amplified. Thousands of others, pre-trial or pre-charge, are diverted to some form of community corrections and supervision, mandatory treatment for substance abuse, or “alternatives to incarceration.”

Some reform initiatives also increase certain sentences. Mississippi’s reforms did both.<sup>31</sup> So did the federal Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015, which failed to pass that year and did not gain sufficient traction in Congress the following year.<sup>32</sup> Should the liberal-Left sector accept some sentencing increases, however grudgingly, on the basis of pragmatism?

#### **Expanding Community Corrections & Supervision**

Bernadette Rabuy and Peter Wagner of the Prison Policy Institute emphasize that justice reform “should aim to reduce the number of people under correctional control rather than simply transfer people to other pieces of the correctional pie.”<sup>33</sup> But over the past decade, there has been a quiet but steady expansion in the often onerous requirements and

conditions placed on people under some form of correctional control, including community corrections or alternatives to imprisonment.<sup>34</sup>

This system includes parole and probation supervision, treatment/rehab programs, electronic monitoring, contractual truancy monitoring, re-entry programs, and specialized drug, veteran, mental health, and other “problem-solving” courts.<sup>35</sup> Framed as humane alternatives that make it possible to divert people from prisons, too often they come with profound costs to the

charged, with even worse consequences accompanying possible conviction. Violation of these conditions, including failing to pay associated fees, is met with “swift and certain” responses, including incarceration.

Much of the funding for this expansion comes through “justice reinvestment” or offloading costs onto individuals who are increasingly required to pay some or all of the costs of community corrections. People who can least afford it may have to pay for drug tests and shoulder the cost of other treatment, supervision fees, and startup and ongoing (daily or monthly) fees for electronic monitoring. But many of these people shouldn’t be in the system at all.

A mix of public-private for-profit and nonprofit institutions, ranging from municipal drug courts to privately-run probation systems to corporate corrections behemoths like The Geo Group to local prisoner aid organizations, community corrections, as a category, provides uneven quality of services and technologies. Every possible arena becomes a potential corrections and surveillance site. In practice, this matrix is often plagued with profiteering, scandal, and corruption.<sup>38</sup> What strate-

gies can effectively challenge this in the short term and transform it in the long run?

#### **Money Bail Reform**

A bail bond is the amount of money a defendant is required to pay as a guarantee they will show up in court. A person who is unable to pay may be—and often is—incarcerated from the time of arrest until the case is resolved.

Urgently needed, money bail reform is moving forward in a growing number of municipalities and states, but it can be a double-edged sword. In 2016, New Mexico voters approved a constitutional amendment permitting judges to deny bail to certain defendants considered “exceptionally dangerous” and also grant pretrial release without bail to those who are not considered danger-

ous. The ACLU and some other initial advocates withdrew support because the final wording contained changes demanded by the politically influential for-profit bail bond industry. These changes required poor people to provide evidence of poverty and added ambiguous wording that potentially could be misused against particular communities, including immigrants.<sup>39</sup>

In 2017, the Movement for Black Lives (MLB), in collaboration with other partners, released *Transformative Bail Reform*, a popular education curriculum, an invaluable and unique resource for grassroots organizers and social justice to help them understand the issues in a larger historical, social, and economic context.<sup>40</sup> There must be a concerted effort to help get this information in the hands of local social justice organizers to inform their work.

#### **“Reinvestment” Sleight of Hand**

According to a 2016 Urban Institute report on Justice Reinvestment Initiative programs in many states, more than \$1 billion has been saved (or calculated as averted costs) over time by reducing the number of people incarcerated in participating states. Yet JRI savings are not reallocated to improve the health and well-being of communities most impacted by race-based policing and mass incarceration, except indirectly, through recycling into some form of prison-based or community corrections work.<sup>41</sup>

Prop 47’s initial “community investment” savings—about \$68 million once substantive governmental disputes over the correct amount were settled—were to be distributed by three different bodies through competitive grants for drug treatment, mental health services, and supportive housing for people in the criminal justice system (65 percent); programs for at-risk students (dropout and truancy) in K-12 schools (25 percent); and victim services (10 percent). Yet as of December 2016, almost two years after the passage of Prop 47, none of the “savings” had been spent for these designated purposes. (The money should be reallocated in Spring 2017.)<sup>42</sup>

The Movement for Black Lives and others in progressive justice movements promote far more liberatory “invest/divest/reinvest” frameworks for organizing.<sup>43</sup> But in many jurisdictions, pro-



Powerful resistance movements such as Black Lives Matter have surged in recent years. Photo: Fibonacci Blue via Flickr.

individuals remanded to them and the communities already reeling from the impacts of mass incarceration.<sup>36</sup> While reform often produces some degree of decarceration, it does not, by itself, dismantle mass incarceration.<sup>37</sup> Nor does it permanently reduce the scope of law enforcement surveillance and supervision. To the contrary, pre-charge and pre-trial diversion into some form of community corrections ends up also sweeping in people who have not been convicted of crimes, and in some cases, have not yet been arrested, but who must comply with state-imposed conditions for set periods of time before their records are cleared. This means that they bear the consequences of punishment, although they have not been found guilty of any offense. The alternative is to be formally

gressives will have to organize to overcome or transform the closed, restrictive processes that are already institutionalized.

### **Rhetoric of Danger**

When we fail to challenge and transform the terms of engagement, reform agendas relying on representations of danger and violent criminals always win out over social, economic, and environmental justice. In the U.S., anyone labeled violent, dangerous, or criminal is considered disposable. Bipartisan reform campaigns center the themes of danger and public safety, and the framing implies that “public safety” is primarily a function of policing, surveillance, and control, with the prison always in the background as the essential repository for “danger” and the disposable people who are marked as its embodiment.

That doesn’t ever bode well for justice movements but particularly now when they must contend with a new and unstable president who rose to power on a wave of right-wing populism, stoking a toxic mix of White nationalism and racialized resentment and rage. Particularly concerning is the appointment of Jeff Sessions, who has a long, racist “law and order” history, as attorney general. As a champion of voter suppression, draconian anti-immigrant policies, harsh sentencing policies, expanded incarceration, racial profiling, and unbridled police power to quell imagined or actual dissent, he is obsessed with doing battle against racialized, violent notions of criminals.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, justice movements know Sessions isn’t the only problem. Today’s growing torrent of state and local efforts to harshly criminalize dissent comes in the wake of anti-state violence uprisings and the Standing Rock water protectors’ assertion of Indigenous sovereignty as much as 2017 protests surrounding Trump’s inauguration.<sup>45</sup> The challenges we face are the result of decades of right-wing activism, not simply the ascendance of Jeff Sessions.

In 1883, the abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass spoke about the power of racial criminalization, noting “the general disposition in this country to impute crime to color.”<sup>46</sup> He was describing a massive system of racialized

social control that includes prisons. In this light, consider again the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984. Ultimately calamitous (and still racially biased) policies came into being in part because “criminal justice” was narrowly framed as a standalone issue whose problems could be corrected by tinkering with the mechanics of sentencing.

It’s happening again. The U.S. carceral system is not winding itself down as a humanitarian response to the racialized and economic brutalities of mass

state violence against Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Muslim peoples, against immigrants and refugees, has surged. Black Lives Matter, #SayHerName, Dream Defenders, the Movement for Black Lives, and the Standing Rock water protectors have inspired progressives. Increasingly, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people have been organizing to make their voices heard and advance more progressive agendas. Justice advocates should support and help strengthen this work without per-

**The Right utilizes every possible issue to advance an ideological agenda and endgame. The Left, by contrast, has no similar endgame in mind.**

incarceration. Rather, it’s reinventing and renewing itself under the bipartisan mask of reform. And today, as in 1984, conservative-Right reformers are better organized to win on contested terrain.

The Right utilizes every possible issue—criminal justice reform, health care, school privatization, environmental protection, industry regulation, religious liberty—to advance an ideological agenda and coherent, holistic endgame. The progressive-Left sector, by contrast, has no similar endgame in mind.

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

*My argument is the policies that have driven us apart, the policies that have trapped African-Americans in all too large numbers in poverty and in hopelessness [are] the ideological policies that say, “Black lives matter.” -Newt Gingrich, 2016, on Fox and Friends<sup>47</sup>*  
*Lately funders have been very excited by the possibility of groups aligning with unlikely allies. But to create a powerful front, a front with the capacity to change the landscape, it seems that connecting with likely allies would be a better use of time and trouble. -Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “In the Shadow of the Shadow State”<sup>48</sup>*

The same threats posed by reform that fails to engage structural violence and inequality also identify possible openings for social justice movement base-building and grassroots organizing.

Popular and powerful resistance to the criminalization and deployment of

mitting White people, non-Indigenous people, and people who have never been incarcerated to take it over.

Some campaigns that attract support across the political spectrum, such as money bail reform, are vitally important. But it is also important to question and sometimes challenge “brokered” rhetoric about danger. Conservatives may well want to advance their arguments in fiscal terms, but that doesn’t mean social justice movements should accept without challenge austerity arguments and privatization strategies. Justice should never be for sale. And it is always important to redefine in liberatory ways what constitutes community well-being and safety outside the framework of policing and the criminal justice system.

Where “bipartisan consensus” reforms and framing are problematic and might intensify harm to heavily incarcerated communities, or simply reconfigure it, there is already significant organizing work underway that suggests better approaches to transformation are possible. Harm reduction efforts are critical to support and advocate for people who are incarcerated and under community supervision. One useful strategy to dismantle the prison industrial complex and develop youth leadership, writes anti-violence writer and educator Mariame Kaba, “is participatory defense campaigns. These are grassroots efforts to pressure authorities, attend

to prisoner needs, and raise awareness and funds.”<sup>49</sup> Kaba emphasizes the importance of placing this work in an abolitionist context that doesn’t concede the inevitability of prisons. There is no “one-size-fits-all” answer to whether or how we might engage reform efforts, but Kaba proposes this essential guideline: “[A]ll of the ‘reforms’ that focus on strengthening the police or ‘morphing’ policing into something more invisible but still as deadly should be opposed.”<sup>50</sup>

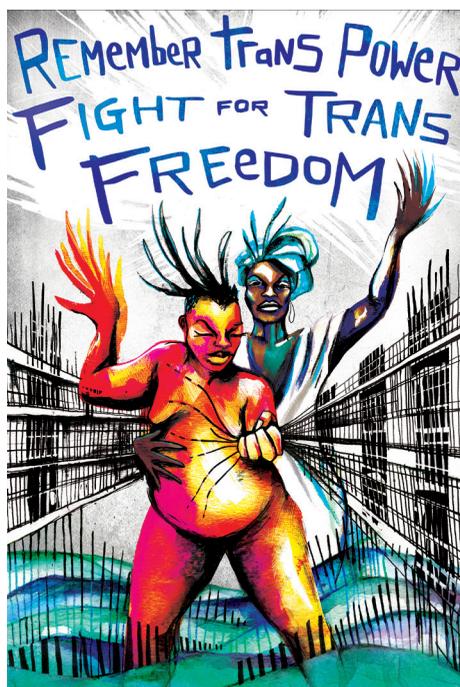
States and counties remain the primary arenas for bipartisan reform campaigns and initiatives. It will be up to grassroots social justice organizations in those locales to decide if or how to engage them. The work of Women With a Vision (WWAV) in New Orleans provides one example of principled engagement that simultaneously serves immediate needs while advancing long-range justice goals. With a long history of community organizing led by Black women, the organization took on issues of racial bias and lack of transparency in the district attorney’s diversion program. The result was the co-creation of Crossroads, a radically better diversion program for women facing drug and prostitution charges.<sup>51</sup>

Lastly, we must lift issues of law enforcement violence and mass incarceration out of the stranglehold of a single-issue framework in order to see them in a larger, even global, context. It is essential to develop structural analyses that make clear the complex and inter-related drivers of race-, class-, gender-, and disability-based policing and mass incarceration. The analysis must be centered in the experiences and insights of the communities most affected, not produced by elites. Rather than settling for the trade-off, this work invites justice advocates to begin articulating an endgame that consciously connects work on protection, solidarity, sanctuary, mutual aid, and environmental protection with long-term, cross-movement strategies for liberation.

Examples of how to engage this task abound. In 1962, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), whose members did some of the riskiest organizing and outreach work of the Civil Rights movement in the Deep South, created a Research Department.

Designed to help strengthen field organizing, its resources included an expansive documentary archive and power analysis that illuminated the specific civic and economic structures supporting segregation.<sup>52</sup>

Present day examples include the Movement for Black Lives platform and the *Southern Movement Blueprint: A Plan of Action in a Time of Crisis*, a synthesis of analysis from communities throughout the region to help build a powerful, progressive Southern infrastructure for change connected, across movements, by common principles, values, and work.<sup>53</sup>



Poster created with the Audre Lorde Project, which promotes models of safety outside of the prison industrial complex. (Courtesy of the artist, Micah Bazant.)

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, an anti-prison activist and author of *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, argues that this step is critical in order to break through narrow thinking, connect local realities to international movements for justice, and organize more effectively. “The problem with a good deal of analysis about what is happening everywhere,” she told me, “is that it is constricted by the obscuring thickness of neoliberalism and globalization. That is, the ideology and rhetoric of neoliberalism has blanketed the earth at the same time that globalization is blanketing the world with

war and super-exploitation to keep capitalism going.” Even justice movements can unwittingly come to accept an austerity mindset. She encourages activists to think about austerity politics and the push for privatization beyond the frame of greed and corruption in order to more effectively understand, resist, and offer alternatives to its profoundly desocializing impacts.<sup>54</sup>

We can start by changing the way we think about, discuss, and depict the devastation of the prison industrial complex. Although it wasn’t as widely covered as *13th*, 2016 also saw the release of another documentary: Brett Story’s *The Prison in 12 Landscapes*. Story’s film transports us into a variety of rural and urban geographies—New York City and rural Kentucky, Detroit and Ferguson, Marin County, California and beyond—in order to glimpse the long, racialized, and economically violent impact of the U.S. prison system. The film offers a quiet but deeply unsettling look at the framework of the civil society we have created, seen through the refracted light of the prison and the expansive systems of carceral control it generates, and all without seeing a single prison until the last, lingering shot.

And, in a way, that’s the point. Reforms that leave so much injustice and violence intact and unchallenged will ultimately continue to lead U.S. society to that prison and all of its shadow manifestations. Long-term, collective strategies of social and economic transformation, by contrast, can take us through changing landscapes, step by determined step, and lead us toward the day that there will be no prison at journey’s end. ☪

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# Between Trump and Putin

## The Right-Wing International, a Crisis of Democracy, and the Future of the European Union

“So. Washington is ours. Chişinău is ours. Sofia is ours. It remains but to drain the swamp in Russia itself.” Right-wing Russian ideologue Alexander Dugin posted this pronouncement as his Facebook status on November 13, 2016.<sup>1</sup> Each of the cities he named is the capital of a country—the U.S., Moldova, and Bulgaria, respectively—that had recently elected a leader espousing at least some views that are favorable to Moscow. And each had elections that took place amid concerns about Russian influence.

Knowing who Dugin is makes his post-U.S. electoral victory cheer more chilling. Dugin, who might be seen as a Russian counterpart to U.S. Alt Right leader Richard Spencer, made an early endorsement of then-candidate Trump in February, 2016 through Katehon, an illiberal “think tank” headed by Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, a man known for conceiving and financing conservative Christian initiatives.<sup>2</sup> Dugin is also on the U.S. individual sanctions list for his role in the Ukraine crisis—specifically for his leadership in the Eurasian Youth Union, which, as the Department of the Treasury reported, “actively recruited individuals with military and combat experience to fight on behalf of the self-proclaimed [Donetsk People’s Republic] and has stated that it has a covert presence in Ukraine.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most notably, Dugin is also a chief proponent of neo-Eurasianism: an ideology encapsulating Russian “traditionalism” (including the rejection of feminism, “globalism,” and LGBTQ rights) and the belief that Russia has a Manifest Destiny of its own—a mystical calling not only to take dominion of Eurasian spaces from the Baltic to the Pacific, but also to revive the West’s Christian roots.

One of the more striking features of

the 2016 U.S. election was the convergence of the rhetoric and talking points of President Donald Trump and his supporters with those of the Kremlin. And in the tangled and ongoing investigation of Russian involvement with U.S. and European elections, these ideological connections and motivations have gone far less noticed.

While in Soviet times the Kremlin’s Marxist ideology attracted its share of Western sympathizers, post-Soviet Moscow has, if you will, dialectically emerged at the center of a “traditionalist international” around which many right-wing fellow travelers are rallying. There is an older history of American conservative attraction to Russian Christians and anti-Communists. Paleoconservative leader Pat Buchanan, a contemporary apologist for Russian President Vladimir Putin, noted as much in a post-Crimea paean to Putin, when he wrote that “The ex-Communist Whittaker Chambers who exposed Alger Hiss as a Soviet spy, was, at the time of his death in 1964, writing a book on ‘The Third Rome’—the conviction that, after the original Roman Empire, and ‘the Second Rome’ of Constantinople, Moscow inherited the mantle of Christian empire.”<sup>4</sup>

This fascination with Russian conservatives and Russia’s conservative potential was also shared by some of the direct ideological ancestors of today’s U.S. White nationalists, such as Francis Parker Yockey, a mid-century U.S. Far Right leader and avowed antisemite, who called for Western-Soviet cooperation in fighting Zionism. Since that time, post-Soviet Russia has become a right-wing state that has cultivated, through the efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church as well as right-wing intellectuals like Dugin, a loose right-wing international, as

I wrote in *The Public Eye* in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

Given this context, it’s unsurprising that the most toxic elements of the U.S. Right are drawn to Putinist Russia. In 2004, for example, White supremacist David Duke declared, “Russia has a greater sense of racial understanding among its population than does any other predominantly White nation.”<sup>6</sup> Duke has since cultivated ties with Russia, among other things maintaining an apartment in Moscow that he has subleased to fellow White supremacist activist Preston Wiginton.<sup>7</sup>

Interest in Russia among the global Right has grown steadily in recent years, accelerating since the beginning of Putin’s third term in 2012. Since then, the Russian state has not only coordinated more closely with the Russian Orthodox Church, but has also come increasingly to portray itself, with a high degree of success, as the global standard bearer for “traditional values” conservatism.<sup>8</sup> While Russia cultivates ties to Westerners on both the Far Left and the Far Right, Russia’s leading ideologues and soft power institutions—such as think-tanks, government-backed non-governmental organizations, and university centers—promote right-wing, neo-Eurasianist traditionalism. This ideology rejects modern liberalism as a “rootless,” culture-destroying globalism, and offers in its place a “multipolar” world order with strengthened national sovereignty, weakened supranational institutions (such as the European Union), and a rejection of universal human rights, with women’s rights, the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBTQ rights particularly threatened.

Russia’s embrace of this anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ, anti-“globalist” “traditionalism” has coincided with a period in which the Russian state, concerned

about “color revolutions” and NATO expansion, has increasingly sought to weaken Western institutions. Putin’s agenda in this regard is not only to strengthen Russian power at the expense of the West, but also to undermine belief in the viability of liberal democracy itself. The means by which Russia pursues this agenda include cultivating ties with Western anti-democratic forces, inundating the West with propaganda, and employing other active measures, including hacking, in influence campaigns. What does Russia’s central role in rising global right-wing populism mean for the prospects of the EU, particularly in light of Brexit and Trump’s ascendancy to the U.S. presidency? The stakes are high this year. While the results of the Dutch and French elections have been encouraging for the future of the EU and NATO, an important German election is yet to come, and the threat of disinformation originating in both Russia under Putin and the United States under Trump remains serious.

#### **EVALUATING DUGIN’S CLAIM: THE INTERNATIONAL APPEAL OF RUSSIAN ILLIBERALISM**

Russian interference and influence in Europe, including the promotion of far-right “traditionalism,” should be of concern to defenders of human rights in light of the West’s current crisis of democracy.<sup>9</sup> The future of the EU, after Brexit, is very uncertain. Should the EU be abandoned by another major player, the kind of illiberal, authoritarian, right-wing populism represented by Russia would continue to spread, to the detriment of democracy and human rights.<sup>10</sup> That’s already happening in places such as Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, of the right-wing populist Fidesz Party, openly admires Putin and has recently moved to shut down Central European University. Indeed, European elites themselves have begun to express a need to protect their countries and values not only from Russia, but potentially also from the United States, in which a Russian influence campaign helped elect an illiberal president about whom Alexander Dugin and other Russian elites have often been enthusiastic.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, it is

salient that the U.S. right-wing *Breitbart News Network* is seeking to expand into European markets, bringing the same narratives of xenophobia and religious traditionalism that helped mobilize Trump’s supporters. While *Breitbart* has not yet opened new offices in Germany or France, these plans seem not to have been tabled.<sup>12</sup>

To be sure, the enthusiasm of the Russian political establishment for the Trump administration has faded as 2017 proceeds. In addition to disagreeing with Russia over Syria, the Trump administration has ham-handedly tried to distance itself from Russia after National Security Advisor Michael Flynn was forced to resign in February for failing to disclose that he discussed a possible lifting of Russian sanctions with Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Sergey Kislyak during the transition period. Russian politicians also became more cautious, even as they and Russian media rallied to the defense of Flynn. (In 2015 Flynn spoke at the 10th anniversary gala of the Russian propaganda network RT in Moscow, where he sat at Putin’s table. At a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism on May 8, fired former Acting Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates confirmed that the Department of Justice believed Flynn to be compromised.)

But the shared illiberal agenda of Trump and Putin remains a threat to Europe. This April at a G7 meeting, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson—who in 2013 received the Russian Order of Friendship from Putin—unnerved many in Europe when he asked, “Why should U.S. taxpayers care about Ukraine?” Such a statement aids Putin’s goal of undermining democracy, even if Tillerson has also proven willing to give at least lip service to criticizing Russian aggression.<sup>13</sup>

And even apart from an immediate normalization of U.S.-Russian relations on Russian terms—something it seems the Trump team at least initially desired, and which would be geopolitically destabilizing as it would weaken NATO—the Trump administration is far more amenable to Dugin’s ideological goals than a Clinton administration

would have been. With this in mind, Dugin’s declarations—that Washington, Chişinău, and Sofia are Russia’s—seem like more than mere braggadocio, even if they are inflated. Will Dugin be declaring “Berlin is ours” this fall?

Dugin is not a latter-day Rasputin, the peasant healer who was widely believed to hold undue influence over the last Romanov royal family. But, despite some assertions to the contrary from those seeking to downplay Dugin’s significance, he is also far from a fringe figure. Nina Kouprianova—the estranged wife of Alt Right leader Richard Spencer who writes pro-Putin and anti-Ukrainian commentary under the name Nina Byzantina—has translated some of Dugin’s far-right political theory into English, bolstering Dugin’s influence among American White supremacists. While Kouprianova has downplayed the relationship between Dugin and Putin,<sup>14</sup> the latter’s foreign policy is clearly informed by Dugin’s worldview in ways that are relevant to Russian influence in European and U.S. politics, as Eurasia expert Casey Michel explains:

If Dugin’s name is at all familiar, it’s likely due to his neo-fascist screeds, posited as geopolitical analysis, that have begun swirling international trends. As Spencer is to the alt-right, so, too, is Dugin to the modern incarnation of “Eurasianism,” a geopolitical theory positing Russia as the inheritor of “Eternal Rome” and one of the primary ideological bulwarks pushing the Kremlin to carve eastern Ukraine into the fanciful entity of “Novorossiya.” While much of Dugin’s influence on the Kremlin has been over-hyped, Dugin’s *Foundations of Geopolitics* remains assigned to every member of Russia’s General Staff Academy [the premier Russian institution for continuing training of high-ranking military officers]. And despite Kouprianova’s claims that “there is no evidence of communication between” Dugin and Putin, Charles Clover, in his masterful history of Eurasianism, noted that Putin and Dugin met a few months after the former ascended to the presidency. “Soon,” wrote Clover, “there were sponsors, contacts, and open doors” for Dugin.<sup>15</sup>

Dugin was also reportedly a part of the entourage that accompanied Putin on his visit to the Orthodox Christian holy site Mt. Athos in Greece in May 2016.<sup>16</sup> But however personally close to Putin Dugin may be, what should concern us most here is the spread of a “traditionalist” ideology that, following in the footsteps of early 20th Century fascism, rejects liberal democracy and individual moral autonomy. Contemporary Eurasianism, like interwar Eurasianism and other Russian schools of thought related to the 19th Century ideologies of Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism, posits a special destiny for Russia in uniting the peoples of the large Eurasian landmass that runs roughly from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean, in addition to a messianic role in the revival of Western civilization’s Christian roots.<sup>17</sup>

In Putin’s third term in particular, Russia has positioned itself at the center of the right-wing international that propounds a “traditionalist” ideological tendency, and Dugin has emerged as one of the broader movement’s leading ideologues. As recent reports from NATO and Political Capital (a Hungarian think tank whose website describes it as “committed to the basic values of parliamentary democracy, human rights and a market economy”) have documented, Eurasianist ideology not only informs Russian foreign policy (such as Russia’s use of hybrid warfare, a military strategy that entails cyber and covert operations, including Russia’s use of troops without insignia in its invasion of Crimea and its officially-denied direct support for and presence in the rebel campaigns against the Ukrainian state), but also holds some attraction for Europeans disillusioned with austerity, immigration, and secularism.<sup>18</sup>

In light of the above, what are we to make of Dugin’s claim that Russia has won Washington, Chişinău, and Sofia? It is certainly overstated with respect to the latter. Bulgarian President Rumen Radev has called for the easing of EU sanctions against Russia, but also recently stated that he supports retaining Bulgaria’s membership in the EU and NATO, both of which Russia seeks to weaken.<sup>19</sup> Sabra Ayres, a fellow with the International Women’s Media Foun-

dation who researches Russian soft power tactics in Bulgaria and other parts of Europe, said that her research has not turned up any evidence of a significant Russian effort to see Radev elected.<sup>20</sup>

Pro-Russian Moldovan President Igor Dodon goes much further than Radev, however. Dodon openly declares that he aspires to be “a dictatorial leader, the same as Putin,” and claims to have received the blessing of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia. Dodon achieved a narrow electoral victory (initially contested with claims of voting irregularities) over Western leaning rival Maia Sandu. He’d campaigned on a platform of moving to scrap Moldova’s EU association agreement—over which Moscow actually sanctioned Moldova in July 2014, banning the import of Moldovan wine, fruit, and vegetables—and integrating Moldova into the Moscow-centered Eurasian Economic Union. Dodon’s campaign was rife with anti-immigrant and homophobic rhetoric and marked by widespread disinformation, much like Donald Trump’s.<sup>21</sup>

With respect to President Trump, the U.S. intelligence community released a report in January expressing high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign targeting the 2016 U.S. election that was intended to undermine U.S. confidence in the democratic process and to damage Hillary Clinton’s prospects. The CIA and FBI also have high confidence that in its effort, which involved hacking both Republican and Democratic targets but releasing damaging information only about Democrats, Russia “aspired to help President-elect Trump’s election chances.” Statements made at recent Senate hearings have confirmed these findings, and on May 8, before the Senate Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper actually stated that the Russians behind the influence campaign targeting the 2016 U.S. election “must be congratulating themselves for having exceeded their wildest expectations.”<sup>22</sup> In addition, the U.S. intelligence community reported in January that the same techniques that were used in this campaign—a blend of “covert intelli-

gence operations—such as cyber activity—with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or ‘trolls’—are likely to be applied “to future influence efforts worldwide, including against US allies and their election processes.”<sup>23</sup>

In light of what is now known about the Russian role in the U.S. election, it is very plausible that Russia’s influence campaign played a key role in Trump’s Electoral College victory. The same type of Russian campaign appears to have swung Georgia’s 2012 presidential election, and there is no reason the same strategy cannot continue to effectively undermine other countries’ democratic processes unless vigilance is exercised and countermeasures are taken.<sup>24</sup>

Russian leaders perceive such actions as defensive. They push conspiracist ideas about opposition to corruption and undemocratic policies in former Soviet republics such as Ukraine and Georgia being funded by liberal U.S. philanthropist George Soros, who has of late become a bugbear of Trump supporters and the U.S. Right as well. The Russian regime also rejects homegrown East European and post-Soviet efforts to protect universal human rights and work toward functional democracy as Western imports. While Russia’s reactions to perceived Western aggression have been disproportionate and unjustifiable, the West might have helped to stave off the current state of affairs if its leaders had taken Russia’s concerns about NATO expansion into consideration earlier.

## **RUSSIAN SOFT POWER AND INFORMATION WARFARE IN WESTERN EUROPE**

Hacking is one of the most powerful tactics the Kremlin uses to influence other countries’ electoral processes, as the U.S. has been too slow to recognize. Germany and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have been recent targets of Russian hacking according to Germany’s intelligence services, and Germany has likewise expressed concerns about disinformation and possible hacking ahead of its parliamentary election slated for fall 2017.<sup>25</sup>

Hacking, however, is by no means the only tactic Russia uses to gain influence

and sow disinformation in the West. In order to assess the outcomes of recent European elections and the prospects for upcoming European elections, we need to be aware of other methods of influence Russia employs. These include:

- infiltration by spies;
- hiring Western PR firms (in the past including Kissinger Associates and Ketchum) to help manipulate Western media and improve the Kremlin's reputation among Westerners;<sup>26</sup>
- supporting Eurasianist and pro-Kremlin think tanks, such as the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute in Berlin (which is funded through a foundation headed by the Russian oligarchs Natalia Yakunina, the chairperson, and Vladimir Yakunin, the vice-chairman);<sup>27</sup>
- establishing cultural centers at universities through the Russkiy Mir foundation, which promotes not only benign cultural exchange but also Eurasianist ideology and the Kremlin line on Ukraine;
- financing Far Right Western politicians and parties, such as Marine Le Pen's National Front in France;<sup>28</sup>
- promoting social conservatism and pro-Moscow views through representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church; and
- taking advantage of the West's relative openness to flood the media with disinformation through "troll armies" and propaganda outlets such as RT, which had a \$380 million budget in 2011.<sup>29</sup>

Russia has also played a role in facilitating relationships between right-wing European parties, for example with respect to the European Alliance for Freedom, a coalition that seeks to undermine the EU and liberal norms in the European Parliament.<sup>30</sup>

Through all of these methods, Russia looks to capitalize on pre-existing weaknesses. Russia did not create discontent with the neoliberal European establishment, explains Italian legal expert Pasquale Annicchino, a research fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and senior research associate at the Cambridge Institute on Religion & International Studies; Euro-

skepticism is homegrown. One might add that the situation is exacerbated by a refugee crisis due overwhelmingly to failed U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Nevertheless, Annicchino stresses, Russia has proven capable of capitalizing effectively on the rising right-wing populist mood and exercises influence among politically extreme European groups.<sup>31</sup>

Annicchino has also done some of the most interesting research on how the Russian Orthodox Church has helped promote hardline conservatism in Europe by making common cause with traditionalists of other Christian confessions. Marcel Van Herpen, director of the Cicero Foundation and author of *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*, has shown that the Russian Foreign Ministry and Orthodox Church often coordinate with the goal of promoting a "traditional values" agenda and attacking universal human rights at the UN and in other international settings.<sup>32</sup>

One case Annicchino has studied, the *Lautsi* controversy at the European Court of Human Rights, particularly illuminated this dynamic, when in 2011 the supranational court overturned a prior ruling that the compulsory display of crucifixes in Italian schools was a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. The legal expertise that secured the 2011 ruling—greeted by conservatives as a triumph over secularism—was largely derived from American evangelicals and delivered through *amicus curiae* briefs filed by the European Center on Law and Justice—an organization co-founded by U.S. Christian Right advocate Jay Alan Sekulow to serve as a sister organization to his American Center on Law and Justice.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, Annicchino writes, "the Russian Orthodox Church was at the forefront of the diplomatic battle," with major representatives, including Patriarch Kirill, writing to the Vatican and to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in support of the original Italian law requiring the display of crucifixes in public schools. In this manner, the Moscow Patriarchate courted favor with conservative European Christians.

To Annicchino, the entire case is em-

blematic of what is sometimes referred to as the "new ecumenism": the cooperation of distinct churches in pursuit of common goals.<sup>34</sup> Another example may be found in the close ties between the Russian Orthodox Church with traditionalist European Catholics cultivated in particular by the ROC's Chair of the Department of External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), who regularly meets with Catholic cardinals in Europe and has a particularly intimate relationship with the Institute for Ecumenical Studies at Switzerland's University of Fribourg, where he oversees exchange programs.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, Italy's Far Right Northern League has made no secret of looking to Russia not only as an economic partner, but also as a model for "the protection of the family."<sup>36</sup> It has created a cultural exchange program, the Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association, which receives funding from the Voice of Russia (since 2014 integrated into the publishing empire Sputnik, an increasingly important Russian propaganda outlet). The honorary president of the association is Alexey Komov, a right-wing advocate with substantial ties to both U.S. and Russian conservative coalitions, as the World Congress of Families' regional representative for Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States; the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society's representative to the United Nations; and a member of the Russian Orthodox Church's Patriarchal Commission on the Family and the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood.<sup>37</sup>

The new ecumenism Annicchino describes also exemplifies what is sometimes called "bad ecumenism": that is, interfaith activity designed to achieve domination and undermine pluralism rather than promote the common good. Such bad ecumenism has played no small part in ushering in the rise of right-wing fellow travelers around Moscow.<sup>38</sup> The alliance of the Russian Orthodox Church with European and American Christian conservatives is just one example of the means by which Russia cultivates the Western Far Right, but it is an important one.<sup>39</sup>

## RUSSIA, RIGHT-WING POPULISM, AND THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN 2017

In engaging in the kinds of activities described above, the Russian Orthodox Church pursues not only its own ends, but helps to advance Russian influence in the West. With this context in mind, we can step back to consider what Russian influence may mean in the current European political landscape.

During the lead-up to the Dutch election on March 15, the prospects for Geert Wilders' Far Right Party for Freedom (PVV) concerned many. While Prime Minister Mark Rutte's Center Right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) won with 21.3 percent of the vote, the Labor Party (PvdA) suffered considerable losses, and the PVV came in second with 13.1 percent. While the Far Right populist bullet was dodged in the Netherlands, negotiations toward a governing coalition are ongoing, and the surge for Wilders' PVV is concerning.

But what of a Russian role? According to Van Herpen, with respect to the Dutch general election, there was no real need for Moscow to do more than continue to produce propaganda and disinformation.<sup>40</sup> Wilders cannot be openly pro-Russian due to anti-Russian sentiment in the Netherlands related to the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 by Russia-backed separatists in Donbas using the Russian Buk missile system, and the Kremlin also knows that it must not appear to be too cozy with Wilders if it wants to see his party succeed.<sup>41</sup> As a Euroskeptic party, however, PVV's relative success is a threat to the EU. The Dutch vote against approval of the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement in April 2016 is also relevant context.

Meanwhile, the French election represented a high stakes test for the viability of the European Union and the post-war order. When I interviewed Van Herpen in January, the race was expected to come down to a contest between Marine Le Pen and François Fillon of the center-right Republicans. Moscow's affinity for Le Pen, leader of the far Right National Front, has been evident for some time, but Van Herpen noted that Russia could "wait and see" with respect to the French

general election, since both Le Pen and Fillon have pro-Russian views.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, the contours of the French election changed in ways that confounded early forecasts. While Fillon's prospects receded, center-right En Marche! party candidate Emmanuel Macron surged in the polls, overcame an initial Russian propaganda campaign, and faced Le Pen in the May 7 runoff, coming away with a resounding victory (just over 66 percent of the vote), although unusually low turnout for France (74 percent) indicated widespread dissatisfaction with both candidates.

Well before the first round of the election on April 23, French officials began preparing for a Russian influence blitz on behalf of Le Pen.<sup>43</sup> Their foresight proved wise, as France was subjected to a fake news onslaught in which Russian propaganda outlets played a key role. After Macron's initial surge, Sputnik published a claim that Macron is a closeted gay man with "a very rich gay lobby" behind him, and his campaign has also been targeted by hackers suspected of being part of a Russian influence campaign.<sup>44</sup> Yet this failed to keep Macron out of the runoff, and an eleventh-hour assault of leaked documents and disinformation also failed to prevent Macron from winning in a landslide as projected by the polls.

A notable lesson from the election is that France seems comparatively well inoculated against the toxic effects of fake news, both institutionally and culturally. For example, France enforces a blackout on election coverage in the 44-hour period leading up to a presidential election, which in this case limited the impact of the last-minute document dump meant to harm Macron's candidacy. The French-language edition of *Sputnik* covered the leaks, but the French public collectively shrugged. Culturally, as Johan Hufnagel, managing editor of the left-wing newspaper *Libération*, recently stated, "We don't have a Fox News in France," adding that French voters "were mentally prepared after Trump and Brexit and the Russians."<sup>45</sup>

Of course, Le Pen's nearly 34 percent of the French vote, an unprecedented result for the National Front, is nothing to sneeze at, and defenders of human rights must take it as a reminder

that the forces of nationalism and right-wing populism are still powerful. At the same time, in an attempt to make herself more appealing during the campaign for the runoff, Le Pen announced that she would temporarily step aside as leader of the National Front in order, ostensibly, to bring together the entire French people. She has since announced that she will "recreate her National Front into a broader 'patriotic' party that would seek power in parliamentary elections next month."<sup>46</sup> Perhaps this is why, despite Le Pen's espoused desire to withdraw France from the EU and her post-election claim to represent "patriots" over "globalisation supporters," U.S. White nationalist Richard Spencer took to Twitter to whine that whatever emerges from the National Front will be most likely "become a cucky, GOP-like party."<sup>47</sup> Spencer also tweeted that "we've seen the limits of the typical Euro-Right nationalist parties," suggesting "a global political party for White people" as one alternative going forward.<sup>48</sup>

As encouraging as the French results are, there is still cause for concern. Just as defenders of Western institutions and norms may learn from what happened in France, so may purveyors of disinformation, including the Russian government. Russia will surely pull out all the stops to influence the German federal election scheduled for September 24, 2017. As Van Herpen argues, "Because Merkel is the last powerful defender of the EU and of sanctions against Russia, the Kremlin will do its utmost best to remove her by influencing the election process by disinformation and, eventually, hacking."<sup>49</sup> Van Herpen's book also notes the considerable affinity for Russia across the German political spectrum, including in Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) as well as among right-wing nationalist forces, such as Alternative for Germany (AfD).<sup>50</sup> Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has a warm personal relationship with Putin, and Russian soft power has a significant presence in Germany, including through the Kremlin-backed think tank Dialogue of Civilizations in Berlin, one of the founders of which was Russian oligarch Vladimir Yakunin. Should the German political landscape shift enough to remove Chancellor Angela Merkel's

Christian Democratic Union (CDU) from the next governing coalition, this will likely result in a Germany more willing to support Russian interests at the expense of robust support for democratic norms and supranational institutions. In a very real sense, then, Angela Merkel may be said to be the current leader of the free world—the United States under Trump has certainly abdicated the right to make any such claim for the American president—and Merkel's removal from office would, at best, lead to increased destabilization and uncertainty for the EU's future.

### THE TRUMP FACTOR: WHY THE 2016 U.S. ELECTION BODES ILL FOR EUROPE

At this point we may be disposed to ask the best known of the Russian “accursed questions”: what is to be done?<sup>51</sup> Coming on the heels of the UK's Brexit vote, Trump's dubious, undemocratic, and quasi-covertly Russia-backed election to the U.S. presidency has certainly changed the picture relative to the European political landscape.<sup>52</sup> America's European allies have reason to be uncertain about the new administration's willingness to honor Article 5 of NATO's charter, which provides for collective defense, with an attack against one ally considered an attack against all. In the aftermath of the U.S. election, Britain was reportedly so concerned about the possibility that Moscow holds compromising material on Trump that it “sought reassurance from the CIA that the identity of British agents in Russia will be protected when intelligence is shared.”<sup>53</sup> Israel's intelligence services reportedly expressed similar concerns that information shared with the United States might be passed to Moscow.<sup>54</sup> The departure of Flynn from the Trump administration and the open disagreement between the United States and Russia over Syria may have gone some way to assuage these concerns, but it is clear that serious questions remain about Russian influence on Trump himself.

Not too long ago, human rights advocates held out hope that the United States might be able to aid our European allies in pushing back against disinformation and influence campaigns from the Kremlin. On December 23, 2016, Congress passed the National Defense

Authorization Act, which provided for the creation of a Global Engagement Center “to lead, synchronize, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining United States national security interests.”<sup>55</sup> Under Trump, we cannot expect much good to come from any efforts that might begin under the aegis of this Center; even if in light of recent developments Trump has become more cautious about his repeatedly stated goal of improving relations with Russia, he is unlikely to go out of his way to counter Russian propaganda. In addition, on May 9, 2017, Trump sent shockwaves through the U.S. by firing FBI Director James Comey in what appears to be an attempt to shut down the FBI's investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia and possible criminal activities (although the nominal reason provided by the Trump administration has to do with Comey's handling of the Hillary Clinton email case).

Melissa Hooper, Director of Human Rights and Civil Society at the Washington- and New York-based nonprofit Human Rights First, had been among those hoping for a robust U.S. response to Russian influence after the 2016 election. Hooper previously worked with NGOs through the ABA Rule of Law Initiative as director for Russia and Azerbaijan. While based in Russia, Hooper became increasingly dismayed at the negative impact of the illiberal legislative efforts of Putin's third term, including the 2012 “foreign agents” law that requires independent groups that engage in any “political activity” to register as “foreign agents” if they receive any funding from sources outside Russia.<sup>56</sup> Having noticed Russia's influence on the spread of illiberalism in Europe—for example, in Hungary under Orbán—Hooper came to Human Rights First with concerns about the possibility of counteracting this trend.<sup>57</sup>

With funding from the Jackson Foundation, she organized a series of informal policy discussions throughout 2016—at Columbia University, Stanford University, and Human Rights First's Washington, D.C., location—with experts from fields including advocacy, journalism,

scholarly research, and technology, to consider approaches to countering Russian disinformation, influence, and support for far-right extremism in Europe. I participated in the last of these discussions, in December 2016, and the mood in the wake of Trump's dubious win was far from cheery. Although proposed solutions involve both private and public actors and institutions, we participants were all clearly aware that the results of the U.S. election would make the task much more difficult. Nevertheless, there are steps that can be taken. As Hooper later explained to me:

We hope to act as a convener of civil society, so that with a unified voice we can help technology companies identify where they are contributing to threats rather than reducing them—in the areas of disinformation and publication of false stories, personal safety of rights workers, and the proliferation of hate speech targeting minority groups. And we hope we can then partner with companies to make sure their responses and proposed solutions are comprehensive, accessible, and effective.<sup>58</sup>

For his part, Van Herpen supports debunking Russian disinformation and creating counter-narratives that can prove attractive. He points to the website StopFake.org, which was founded at Kyiv's Mohyla University and which is devoted to debunking Russian disinformation relative to the hybrid war in Ukraine. Van Herpen also believes that Western governments should impose stricter standards on Russian media produced for Western consumption and that Western states should invest in Russian-language media. With *Breitbart* planning to expand to Germany and France, Europe may soon be facing an onslaught of disinformation not only from Russia, but also from the United States.<sup>59</sup>

### “DRAINING THE SWAMP” OF WESTERN LIBERALISM: A RUSSIAN-AMERICAN ENTERPRISE?

In light of Trump's election and the potential expansion of *Breitbart* into European markets, Europe now faces a dual Russian-American onslaught of right-wing populist disinformation and fake news, sure to be backed up in cyberspace

by Russian and American trolls and bots. The U.S. election results confirm that the power of media manipulation and post-truth politics to erode liberal democratic norms must not be underestimated. And it is significant that far-right Russian and American ideologues have already been collaborating in media manipulation for some time.

The neo-Eurasianist ideologue quoted at the beginning of this article, Alexander Dugin, has become a beloved comrade of America's neonazis, White nationalists, and Christian nationalists. Dugin has, for example, given a lecture at Texas A&M University at the invitation of Preston Wiginton (delivered via Skype because sanctions prevented him from traveling to the U.S.).<sup>60</sup> Less well known, however, is that as a regular presence on the Russian outlet Tsargrad TV, Dugin has interviewed American conspiracist purveyor of fake news Alex Jones, of Infowars infamy. Tsargrad TV was founded by "God's oligarch" Konstantin Malofeev, and it employs former FOX News producer Jack Hanick, who, along with his family, recently converted to Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>61</sup>

In a segment from the program "Our Point of View" (*Nasha tochka zreniia*) uploaded to YouTube by the official Tsargrad TV account on December 20, 2016, Dugin tells Jones "there is a political elite that is organizing a color revolution against us." Referring to this elite as "the global dictatorship," Dugin adds "Clinton, Soros, the Obama Administration—that which is called the Deep State, will also organize a color revolution against Trump, not wanting to recognize the democratic victory of the American people." He added, "We need to think about how all of us together—Americans, Russians, Europeans—what we can do to oppose this elite."<sup>62</sup> Jones agreed with Dugin's call to oppose "globalism," asserting it is a matter of "survival."<sup>63</sup>

With this context in mind, we can return to Dugin's words quoted at the beginning of this article: "It remains but to drain the swamp in Russia itself." There's no need to guess Dugin's meaning, since he's told us himself—and in English, no less—on the site of Katehon, a Eurasianist "think tank" whose

supervisory board's president is none other than Konstantin Malofeev.<sup>64</sup> For Dugin, "draining the swamp" has much more to do with a desire to wage extremist culture wars than it does with rooting out political corruption (something that U.S. columnist Amanda Marcotte argues was also the implicit promise to Trump supporters all along).<sup>65</sup>

On November 14, 2016, Katehon published Dugin's essay, "Donald Trump: The Swamp and the Fire," along with an illustration featuring European political leaders, including Angela Merkel and François Hollande, caricatured as swamp creatures. Dugin's essay opens with this pronouncement:

"The Swamp" is to become the new name for the globalist sect, the open society adepts, LGBT maniacs, Soros' army, the post-humanists, and so on. Draining the Swamp is not only categorically imperative for America. It is a global challenge for all of us. Today, every people is under the rule of its own Swamp. We, all together, should start the fight against the Russian Swamp, the French Swamp, the German Swamp, and so on. We need to purge our societies of the Swamp's influence.

Dugin goes on to claim that "anti-Americanism is over" thanks to the election of Trump, and to call for "a Nuremberg trial for liberalism, the last totalitarian political ideology of Modernity." Once representing the "apocalyptic monsters" of capitalism and Communism, Russia and America, in Dugin's view, now represent "two eschatological promises"—that is, in Dugin's understanding of "traditionalism," an illiberal Russia and America working to destroy liberalism would bring the world into better alignment with God's ostensible plans for humanity.<sup>66</sup>

Like Dugin, Trump's chief strategist, Steve Bannon, is given to violent rhetoric. In a 2014 speech he gave via Skype for a conference held at the Vatican, Bannon bizarrely and inaccurately described World War II as a war of "the Judeo-Christian West versus atheists," which led to the relatively benign Pax Americana. Bannon added that, since the end of the Cold War, both sides face "a crisis both [sic] of our church, a crisis

of our faith, a crisis of the West, a crisis of capitalism." He predicted that "we're at the very beginning stages of a very brutal and bloody conflict" in which the "church militant" will have to play a role, lest modern "barbarity" "eradicate everything that we've been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years."<sup>67</sup>

Dugin and Bannon would undoubtedly disagree on certain matters regarding capitalism and Islam. Because Russia is home to large Muslim populations of different ethnic backgrounds, and the Russian state mobilizes Muslim leadership to pursue its traditional values agenda domestically—just as it does leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church and other faiths—Russia cannot overtly support wholesale Islamophobia, despite frequent ethnic Russian opposition to the construction of new mosques. Nevertheless, both Dugin and Bannon call for a violent international fight against secularism and liberalism. It also is not clear precisely how and in what manner President Trump may change U.S.-Russian relations, as he has received some pushback on his foreign policy agenda, and has upset the Russian political establishment with his actions in Syria. It is clear, however, that many Russian and American conservative leaders and ideologues continue to see potential for Russian-American global collaboration in the right-wing international in pursuit of Far Right ends. Let us hope that European governments and international institutions—and, more broadly, democratic norms and universal human rights—will ultimately prevail against the onslaught. ☹

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## Populism's Moment

Review of John B. Judis's, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016)

Populist upsurges can be hard to predict. At the beginning of 2016, not many people expected Donald Trump to win the Republican nomination, let alone the presidency, nor Bernie Sanders to give Hillary Clinton such strong competition in the Democratic primaries. Europe has seen comparable surprises in recent years: the sudden rise of Left-populist parties Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, a near victory of the right-wing populist Freedom Party candidate in Austria's 2016 presidential election, and the upset win for Brexit in Britain's June 2016 referendum, in which the Right-populist UK Independence Party played a key role.

*The Populist Explosion* by John B. Judis is a tightly framed analysis of populism's recent advances on both sides of the Atlantic. Judis relates this international upsurge to the Great Recession that began in 2008 but also to the neoliberal economic policies that have prevailed in both western Europe and the United States since the 1970s or '80s: cutting social spending, weakening labor unions, deregulating business, reducing corporate taxes as well as barriers to the movement of capital and workers across international boundaries. At the same time, Judis traces populist politics back historically: in Europe to right-wing anti-tax parties of the '70s, and in the United States to the left-leaning People's Party of the 1890s. His U.S. historical narrative takes in Huey Long's Share Our Wealth Society in the 1930s; the presidential campaigns of George Wallace in the '60s and '70s, and of Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan in the '90s; and the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements of the recent Great Recession era.

Between these various expressions of

populism, Judis draws an elegant conceptual distinction:

Leftwing populists champion the people against an elite or an establishment...Rightwing populists champion the people against an elite that they accuse of coddling a third group, which can consist, for instance, of immigrants, Islamists, or African American militants. Leftwing populism is dyadic. Rightwing populism is triadic. It looks upward, but also down upon an out group.

That dynamic played out in the 2016 presidential campaign, as both Sanders and Trump criticized the political and economic establishment for pursuing policies that replaced well-paid manufacturing jobs with low-wage jobs overseas. But "unlike Trump and his supporters," Judis writes, "[Sanders] didn't blame unauthorized immigrants for the plight of American workers or seek to end terrorism by banning Muslims from coming into the country. He was entirely focused...on combating the 'billionaire class.'"

Populist movements of either flavor may gain momentum because people don't feel represented by the conventional options. But the two sides have different electoral bases.

Judis recalls sociologist Donald I. Warren's "middle American radicals" ("MARs")—often blue-collar men who supported New Deal programs but were conservative on issues related to poverty and race, and who regarded the middle class as under attack from above and below—as the key voting bloc that has supported U.S. right-wing populists from Wallace to Buchanan to Trump. Conversely, Judis notes that Sanders's strongest support was among young people, "the descendants of the McGovern generation," just as Greece's Syriza

and Spain's Podemos have enjoyed disproportionate youth support.

In a compact book of 182 pages, Judis engagingly sketches out the historical roots of today's seemingly sudden and unpredictable populist initiatives. Judis makes clear that Trump's recent positions both can be traced back to populist antecedents in Buchanan and Wallace and also reflect ideas he's voiced consistently for decades (belying the criticism that he doesn't believe in anything but his own importance).

Populist politics evolve, too. In Europe, Judis notes, several right-wing populist parties (including UKIP and France's National Front) started as laissez-faire advocates for small businesspeople and farmers, but later adopted more social democratic economic policies. This shift, coupled with anti-immigrant scapegoating, enabled the parties to attract many working-class voters who had previously supported the Left. The National Front, which Judis calls "Europe's most important rightwing populist party," has taken this further. Party founder Jean-Marie Le Pen was an antisemite and Vichy government sympathizer, but his daughter Marine Le Pen, who replaced him as party leader in 2011, has repudiated these positions, banned skinheads from National Front rallies, welcomed LGBTQ people as top advisors, and toned down the party's anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Judis also effectively describes some of the dynamics by which U.S. populist movements have influenced conventional political actors. For example, fear of Huey Long's Share Our Wealth movement helped inspire President Franklin Roosevelt's move to address economic inequality in the New Deal. George Wallace's skillful use of coded racism—framed as opposition to federal inter-

ference— inspired Republicans to copy elements of his approach and thereby attract many of his “middle American radical” supporters.

That today’s populist upsurge is largely a reaction to neoliberalism is hardly a new idea, but Judis presents it succinctly and clearly. I especially appreciate his repeated reminders that neoliberal policies have been laid down and implemented not just by Republicans but also Democrats, not just European conservatives but also social democratic parties. Business tax cuts and deregulation started under Carter, not Reagan. Obama’s refusal to challenge Wall Street in the face of the worst financial crisis since the 1930s “left a political vacuum that was filled by the angry right.” Seeing Socialist François Hollande abandon promises and impose “austerity” measures helped persuade many French workers to back the National Front instead.

But Judis’s succinct approach leaves out many examples of populism that don’t fit neatly into his chosen framework. Since the 1970s the Christian Right has mobilized popular support and built an extensive organizational network largely around fears of an elitist “secular humanist conspiracy.” The movement’s majority quickly positioned itself as a more or less stable faction within the Republican Party, confounding Judis’s assertion that populist movements tend to dissipate or slide into conventional politics once they achieve power. Meanwhile, contra his claim that U.S. and western European populists have embraced “democracy” and electoral politics, a hardline but influential minority of Christian Rightists wants to replace the U.S. political system with a full-blown theocracy. Similarly, the Patriot movement has warned since the 1990s that globalist elites are plotting to impose a dictatorship on the U.S. It has never embraced the electoral process but instead has arrogated to itself governmental powers such as judicial authority and the right to form military units. The Patriot movement shared a number of themes with Pat Buchanan’s 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns, but Judis doesn’t mention it, which makes it harder for readers to understand the insurgent undertones of Buchanan’s

candidacies. Speaking more broadly, the dynamic tension between those populist currents that accept the existing political system and those that reject it has often had a significant impact, but has no place in Judis’s discussion. (The Alt Right’s symbiotic relationship with Trump’s presidential campaign offers a recent example.)

With regard to Western Europe, Judis makes passing mention of Beppe Grillo’s eclectic anti-establishment Five Star Movement in Italy but ignores several other important Italian parties with at least important populist tendencies, notably Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, the regionalist Lega Nord, and the “post-fascist” Alleanza Nazionale, whose 1994 coalition put a party directly descended from Mussolini’s Black Shirts in power for the first time since 1945. Discussion of Forza Italia could be especially fruitful since, as Judis himself notes, Berlusconi is in many ways Donald Trump’s closest European counterpart. It’s perfectly reasonable for Judis to limit the scope of his discussion, but a clearer explanation of how and why he did so would have been helpful.

Judis’s contextual framework for explaining populism’s rise is also too narrow. Neoliberal economic policies are important, but they exist in relation to a number of other developments of the past half-century, particularly the limited but important gains won by popular movements against racial oppression, patriarchy, and heterosexism. Neoliberalism isn’t just a set of policies but also a strategy for social control, and in many expressions has embraced a tepid multiculturalism—largely to coopt and defuse anti-oppression struggles. This feeds right-wing populist claims that grassroots challenges to social hierarchy are abetted or orchestrated by elites. Judis notes Trump’s bigotry toward Mexicans, Muslims, and women but doesn’t explore its larger significance: that, like Wallace, Buchanan or the Tea Party, Trump speaks to millions who see their relative social privilege under attack from below, in ways that go far beyond economic policy.

The one place where I take strong exception to Judis’s book is when he asserts that right-wing populist complaints, even racist or nativist ones,

“point to genuine problems.” Judis tells us that desegregation busing really was “self-defeating” because it caused White flight to the suburbs, that unskilled immigrants have indeed “tended to pull down wages and burden the public sector,” and that France’s immigrant underclass really is “a seedbed for political extremism and terrorism.” Judis offers these concessions without evidence, as if they’re simple statements of fact, when at best they’re questionable claims scholars are actively debating. Judis also fails to mention the many Muslim refugees to Europe who are themselves fleeing terrorism and war, or the many immigrants who have injected new militancy into the U.S. labor movement. It’s odd that Judis plays into victim-blaming in this way, since his argument would work just as well if he framed these “problems” as widely perceived rather than declaring them genuine.

Judis can hardly be faulted for failing to predict Trump’s victory in November, and for suggesting that the candidate’s “casual bigotry” and “impromptu assaults” on Clinton would likely bring about his own defeat. But since Trump did win, Judis’s model of populism implies a prediction: whether President Trump achieves any of his campaign objectives or not, he will probably not be able to maintain his role as a populist politician, as someone who puts forth demands the establishment is unlikely to concede. His administration will instead morph into a conventional one based on bargaining among political interest groups. This is in fact where things seem to be heading given the number of generals and billionaires Trump has picked for his team and his recent moves toward a conventional foreign policy, but if he can keep his popular base mobilized Trump may still find ways to keep the establishment off balance and on the defensive. Either outcome is cold comfort to the “out groups” who will bear the brunt of his policies. ☹

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**Commentary, continued from page 3**

dramatic expansion of inequality in the U.S. taking place at the same time as the economic decline of the “heartland” means that this shift in numerical majority status is occurring in the context of status loss across multiple dimensions for Whites most accustomed to living in homogenous, White-majority contexts. The Obama administration added a symbolic threat of increasing Black power and visibility while continuing the neoliberal policies that have eroded the employment, education, and housing advantages given to Whites, especially men—sometimes called the “wages of Whiteness”—for non-elite Whites relative to both those above and those below.

The historical expansion of the category of “White” to include the descendants of devalued European groups updated and maintained the White-Black bifurcation at the core of U.S. racial hierarchies. There is some evidence that a similar process may be underway today with some Asian and Latinx groups, although in ways that currently point to an “off-White” status in which some Latinx and Asian populations look increasingly similar to Whites in income and education.<sup>7</sup> An analysis of the expansion of Whiteness addresses the societal level, not the experiences, negotiations, and conflicts that occur as the process unfolds. It also does not consider how the process may affect non-elite Whites who

lar relevance, this iteration of the Klan explicitly targeted Catholics and Jews as threatening racial “others,”<sup>9</sup> drawing clear and uncompromising boundaries around who counted as a White American. It included a wide range of members who would not have endorsed the violence perpetrated by some within the national network, but who nonetheless embraced a platform of nativism, White Protestant supremacy, and both moral and economic conservatism.<sup>10</sup> The KKK functioned in many ways as an ordinary fraternal order, with special social events and women’s and children’s auxiliaries. This effectively normalized the expression of White supremacy combined with conservative moralism as no different than any other social organization.<sup>11</sup> There are strong analogies here to the ways conservative movements today, including the Tea Party and conservative Christianity, have normalized and spread a potent combination of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia with *Breitbart News Network* and other media outlets serving as bridges to the Alt Right and the Trump campaign.

Unlike the KKK, Prohibition is not usually considered in connection with racial boundary enforcement or Far Right movements. Popular history and imagery largely associate Prohibition with flappers, jazz, gangsters, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the desire to “clean up” urban life in the early 20th Century. While those were all elements, the historical reality of Prohibition embodied the era’s deep conflicts over national identity, power, and social dominance.<sup>12</sup> The movement for Prohibition was an assertion of traditional White, Protestant dominance over the “degenerate” ways—and growing prominence—of Catholic and Jewish immigrants, and to a lesser extent African Americans. Enforcement of the law reflected this not only in the differential targeting of working class immigrants and African Americans, but in the active role played by organized community vigilante groups, including the KKK. The repeal of Prohibition under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was part of the realignment of national political processes associated with the New Deal,<sup>13</sup> bringing the largely immigrant, urban, industrial working class

**The right-wing resurgence did not begin with the populist nationalism that elected Trump, and is unlikely to end in four years regardless of who wins the 2018 and 2020 elections.**

By contrast, Whites in the large urban areas that consistently voted for Clinton in November have largely become accustomed to contexts that combine White supremacy with numerical minority status. For example, Whites are only 48.7 percent of the population in the Chicago metropolitan area but have a median household income of \$71,927, which is more than double the median Black household income.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the Philadelphia metro area, Whites account for 41.7 percent of the population, and their median household income is 78 percent higher than the median Black household.<sup>5</sup> In these and other large cities, Whites experience racial and cultural diversity without significant loss of economic and political power, reducing or eliminating the identity and status threat of racial diversity. The lived experience of diversity without relative status loss may provide a form of perverse protection against Trumpist xenophobia and racism, particularly in contrast to the experience of economic anxiety without comparative context; the “deaths of despair”<sup>6</sup> among White working and middle classes in heartland communities result from existential loss, not direct and objective comparison.

consider themselves the White American norm even as their social ground is shifting culturally and economically. The wave of reformist and right-wing movements of 1920s and ‘30s, particularly Prohibition and the second wave of the KKK, were a White, middle class, Protestant backlash against the growing power and assimilation of Southern and Eastern European immigrants, raising questions about what might be learned from this period in relation to today’s dynamics.

The second wave of the KKK differed from the first, Reconstruction-era Klan, as well as the later Civil Rights-era Klan, in significant ways that are relevant to thinking about the contemporary Far Right. The Klan of the 1920s was a mainstream, national fraternal organization which openly espoused White supremacy and engaged in racist terrorism but whose primary activities involved a range of community projects of interest to its middle class membership, from social events (e.g. pageants and baseball teams) to support for Prohibition.<sup>8</sup> They combined racism and xenophobia with a generalized conservative Protestant moralism concerned with opposition to birth control, the teaching of evolution, and drinking alcohol. Of particu-

into a political coalition that implemented progressive social welfare policies in part through the deliberate exclusion of African Americans.<sup>14</sup> It took the uprisings of the Civil Rights movement before African Americans were incorporated into the New Deal.

The contemporary concentration of opiate use among native-born, non-urban Whites has discouraged punitive substance control policy, but in other ways the current moment has some sociopolitical analogies to 100 years ago. This is also a time of extreme inequality, a second Gilded Age, and a period of consolidation of changes in the structure of capitalism. The early 20th Century solidified an industrial economy while the current period has seen a shift to financialization; each of these transitions came with significant technological development and change. The early 20th Century was also the last time the U.S. had a high proportion of immigrants concentrated in major cities, with associated demographic and cultural shifts. Importantly, these economic and social changes led to both subjective and objective loss of status among middle class and small-landholder Whites outside of large cities,<sup>15</sup> although there does not appear to have been the same depth of social and economic threat experienced in those communities today.

In both eras, the response among native born “heartland” Whites has been a mainstreaming and normalization of explicitly racist, xenophobic, and violent right-wing perspectives. The Far Right has gained more power today than in the past, with Trump’s ascendancy to the White House and the installation of Hard Right movement figures such as Steve Bannon and Mike Pence in the executive branch. The conflation of Muslims and “terrorism” fuses religion, ethnicity and politics at an even deeper level than earlier accusations of Jewish communism, with similar connotations of international “infiltration” and threat. The right-wing resurgence did not begin with the populist nationalism that elected Trump, and is unlikely to end in four years regardless of who wins the 2018 and 2020 elections. The second wave of the KKK went from 1915 until the late ‘20s, and Prohibition lasted from 1920 to ‘33.

One of the important lessons to be learned from the 1920s and ‘30s is to be wary of alternative social contracts that have genuinely progressive elements while maintaining authoritarian structures and White supremacy. The enforcement of Prohibition led to a significant expansion of policing and penal systems in the U.S., creating the core structures of the current federal law enforcement and prison systems.<sup>16</sup> The first federal drug-control laws were passed in 1909 (the Opium Exclusion Act) and 1914 (the Harrison Act), but national enforcement accelerated significantly after the repeal of Prohibition when the fundamentally racist institutional enforcement infrastructure reoriented towards drug control.<sup>17</sup> The New Deal instituted a set of economically progressive policies but did so through the consolidation of an alliance that brought together the European immigrant, industrial working class with non-urban, native-born Whites, including the southern power structure, while explicitly excluding African Americans.<sup>18</sup> The coalitions that in 1933 simultaneously ended Prohibition and brought in the New Deal enacted some progressive change, but only at the expense of African Americans and other non-Whites, who remained marginal-

servative Democrat positioned as “anyone but Trump” in 2020. For example, Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York, is a conservative Democrat with a strong neoliberal track record and marked hostility towards both unions and low-income communities in New York City who shows signs of national ambitions. His highly touted new Excelsior scholarship program offers free tuition at NY public colleges for middle class families, but the actual design of the program does not cover the majority of students’ expenses yet requires a schedule that will make work and family responsibilities difficult to maintain.

If history is a guide, the hallmarks of a re-inscription of Whiteness would benefit the middle class in a significant way while leaving out the urban poor, particularly the non-White poor. Possibilities include a Medicare buy-in or other form of health insurance support that helps the middle class while being too expensive for the working poor; the expansion of a DACA-like program but with elements that enhance criminalization of the undocumented as a whole; or perhaps restrictions on immigration overall that don’t focus on terrorism but enhance the polarization between “valuable” and “criminal” immigrants.

### The expansion of Whiteness intrinsically involves the re-inscription of Blackness.

ized while Catholics and even Jews were increasingly incorporated into Whiteness.

These historical examples suggest the potential for a political response, perhaps by the Democratic Party or a populist movement less racist than Trumpism, which offers some economic relief but re-inscribes White supremacy by bringing together U.S. born Whites and selected immigrant groups. The 2016 exit polls<sup>19</sup> show the seeds of this in a right-wing direction, with 29 percent of both Latinxs and Asians voting for Trump. These data fit with the economic and social stratification among immigrants that would enable a re-inscription of the boundaries of both Whiteness and Blackness,<sup>20</sup> and could be harnessed even more effectively perhaps by a con-

It is vital to remember that the expansion of Whiteness intrinsically involves the simultaneous re-inscription, and perhaps expansion, of Blackness. It will be necessary to break the historical racist alliance between elite and non-elite Whites that lies at the core of the current situation, and to do it before new groups are inducted into the edges of the privileged circle. ☪

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29. The most comprehensive treatment of all the methods listed in this paragraph is Van Herpen, *Putin's Propaganda Machine*. For the RT budget figure, see p. 71.
30. "The Russian Connection," 6.
31. Pasquale Annicchino, personal interview with author, December 24, 2016. Full disclosure: Annicchino and I are both senior research associates with the Post-Secular Conflicts research initiative at the University of Innsbruck.
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## Art of Activism

This issue's cover artist, Erik Ruin, is a Philadelphia-based printmaker, shadow puppeteer, and paper-cut artist whose work has been called "spell-binding" by *The New York Times*. He describes his art as oscillating "between the poles of apocalyptic anxieties and utopian yearnings, with an emphasis on empathy, transcendence, and obsessive detail."

He stumbled upon printmaking and paper-cut art because they were the more affordable, available mediums being deployed by his punk rock peers. The democratic nature of the mediums he works in creates opportunities to challenge and reinvent the "rather hierarchical and elitist infrastructure that often surrounds/presents the art world." For Ruin, printmaking in particular allows for a highly personal creative process that's more accessible than a single painting.

Raised in Michigan, Ruin was a member of the UpsideDown Culture Collective in Detroit and other groups of radical-minded artists that eventually coalesced in 2007 to form the international Justseeds Artists Cooperative of printmakers (which began as a solo project of Josh MacPhee in 1998). His work is frequently made in collaboration with other artists and activist campaigns delving into social issues as well as more abstract underlying concepts. For example, "Prisoner's Song," his recent audio-visual piece with composer Gelsey Bell,

was formulated to explore "what imprisonment and isolation reveals about the nature of humanity."

Ruin says the connection between his art and activism isn't always scripted though. Pointing out that activism often focuses on quantifiable goals and campaigns, Ruin is drawn to art-making partly because of its "resistance to utilitarianism," noting that "the way an image or performance has the potential to impact people is highly subjective, variable and often mysterious even to its maker."



Erik Ruin, *Wanderers (Trees)*, 2014, screen print, 25" x 19".  
See more of Erik's work at [erikruin.com](http://erikruin.com).

While artists often use their skills to enrich and amplify the message of social movements, Ruin also observes that "art has the power to speak in different, sometimes stranger and subtler, ways—to say things that are only on the verge of being articulable otherwise." Although his art often explores more abstract and subjective elements, the labor-

intensive physicality of his process—he is currently creating a paper-cut piece more than 100 feet long—intersects with his convictions. "[L]abor and the struggle to be present with what I am depicting is of inherent value to me," he says. "I feel like the effort to shape and bring forth the figures and landscapes in my work is an extension/reflection/origin of the empathy I hope viewers will experience when viewing it."

-Gabriel Joffe

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