

SEVEN

A RACE APART: ANTISEMITISM AND THE WHITE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

When the alt-right burst onto the national scene ahead of the 2015 presidential campaign of Donald Trump, many were shocked that such an openly supremacist and bigoted movement could still find legs in the United States. While it was a surprise to many, some antifascists and careful observers of the far-right were noticing something happening. For decades, they had seen the white nationalist movement grow increasingly energized and bold.

“After the 2016 presidential election, I decided to get organizing,” Mimi Arbeit, a Jewish scholar and activist, told us. She joined the Charlottesville, Virginia, chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), a national group that organizes white communities against racism.

In May 2017, after the Charlottesville city council vote to remove the city’s Confederate monuments was blocked by lawsuits, alt-right leader Richard Spencer organized flash mobs at the statues.^[1] In July, the Ku Klux Klan had a rally in the city, and alt-right organizer Jason Kessler had also filed for an August 12 permit for a protest he called Unite the Right. Arbeit joined the intense counter-organizing across those months, building a media strategy and coordinating with community networks to oppose the feared alt-right onslaught.

“The answer is we need twenty thousand people there to tell these people to fuck off,” Ben Doernberg, an IfNotNow activist who grew up in Charlottesville, described the prevailing mood among activists. “People just don’t understand how big this is going to be.” Dedicated antifascists knew Unite the Right would be a crescendo for the white nationalist movement, weaving its many strands into one cohesive, and potentially violent, show of force. Doernberg was hoping to mobilize a large Jewish contingent to take the streets, as part of the counterdemonstration that local activists were organizing. Instead, he got the message that many Jewish community leaders, taking advice from the ADL, would be staying home.

“A local activist messaged me a screenshot of the permit and was like, ‘you should know this is happening...next door to your synagogue,’” Rabbi Rachel Schmelkin, who served at Congregation Beth Israel, the only synagogue in Charlottesville, told us. She and her congregants faced difficult questions. What kind of security should Congregation Beth Israel

have? Should Congregation Beth Israel join the counterprotest—or would squaring off with the alt-right merely provide the white supremacists the attention they desperately craved?

Rabbi Schmelkin started organizing with the Charlottesville Clergy Collective, which is an interfaith network formed after the 2015 white supremacist shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in nearby Charleston, South Carolina. When the KKK showed up in July of 2017, she joined the counterdemonstration alongside many congregants and joined another faith-based activist group that was formed in that event’s wake called Congregate C’ville.

“People were scared,” Schmelkin told us, “and the truth is that not everybody was aligned on what exactly to do...We had elderly congregants and people who had parents who were Holocaust survivors. Being out on the front lines was not the answer for everybody. So, we were trying to walk this line, saying that ignoring that this is happening was not the right option...[and] the community members chose to take various approaches to the presence of the alt-right and the KKK.”

As the day of the alt-right rally approached, a large coalition of antiracist activists prepared to take the streets. This included some activists from IfNotNow, as well as a group of folks that would later form the Jewish Solidarity Caucus of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), and members of the Muslim-Jewish Anti-Fascist Front (MuJew Antifa), which had organized against Trump’s Muslim ban and found a natural alliance, fighting Islamophobia and antisemitism across the MAGA movement.^[2] “It felt extremely personal,” Moishe Ben Marx, an organizer with MuJew Antifa who had come down from New York City and connected with Charlottesville’s Jewish community, told us. “It felt like I was in the middle of a potential pogrom in the making, and I just felt the presence of my ancestors in a real way—[those] who had survived pogroms, or [those who] had not survived the Shoah.”

The night before the rally, the now-infamous alt-right torch-lit march paraded through the University of Virginia campus, and chants of “Jews will not replace us” echoed across the campus. Counterdemonstrators were attacked as they desperately tried to hold their ground, and were supported by antifascists from out of town who came to support the community. “I was scared for my life. My chest started tightening up, and there was a ringing in my ears,” remembers Diane D’Costa, a UVA student living on the quad the alt-right marched through. “I took off my Hamsa necklace...and my Shema ring...I just tried to hide any part of my Jewish identity.” As she walked out of her room to leave, a man walked by with a swastika on his arm.^[3]

“I’ve heard those chants, I’ve seen those marching, but they were always in these black-and-white movies,” Tom Gutherz, senior rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel, told us. Gutherz’s shock was eclipsed by anger, as congregants then asked if it was safe to bring their kids to

preschool the next day, when the rally was scheduled to occur. “We had to explain to our kids why these people hate us... What do you say to an eight-year-old?”

Rabbi Gutherz is the son of a Holocaust survivor, and grew up, he told us, with the casual antisemitism of slurs and “pennies thrown.” But this time, violent antisemitism was banked up not just against him, but his entire congregation and community. The alt-right rally would occur during Shabbat, and Congregation Beth Israel, Gutherz told us, knew they would not back down—they would continue their services *davka*, Hebrew for “specifically because,” of this threat. They refused to let the Nazis undermine Jewish living.

On the day of the rally hundreds of white nationalists stormed the city, decked out in fascist insignia, waving Confederate flags, and carrying battle shields. Many Congregation Beth Israel congregants showed up to *daven* (pray) that morning and went to join the counterdemonstrations after services. Gutherz and others in the Clergy Collective had planned to hold hourly prayer services, but that plan went out the window in the ensuing chaos. With “roving bands of Nazis walking down the streets,” the situation was dangerous, and some activists had set up care, medical, and food stations in neighboring parks, while Gutherz and others maintained a safe space in a nearby church where community members, often injured, could escape the expected violence.

Arbeit helped handle national media requests, while Doernberg ran the protest’s live streams and antifascists hit the streets. Alan Zimmerman, president of Charlottesville Congregation Beth Israel, helped stand guard in front of the synagogue as the fascists marched by. “[I’m] appreciative of the fact that these [antifascists] are willing to get out into the street and fight these neo-Nazis,” he told us, “and I think that history has shown that meeting forces like this in the streets is a part of the response that needs to be made.”

Violent skirmishes took place in front of onlooking news cameras, and long after the fascists had seemingly pulled into retreat, one of them slammed his Dodge Charger into what had become a victory demonstration, killing antifascist protester Heather Heyer and injuring thirty-five others. Everyone was in shock, and it was unclear if more attacks were to follow. Word circulated that some alt-righters were planning on heading to Congregation Beth Israel to torch the synagogue, so the rabbis had to ensure it was clear, canceling later services.

Three days later, as news of Heyer’s murder shocked the nation, then-president Trump gave a major boost to the white nationalist movement with his now-infamous remark, at a press conference at Trump Tower, that there were “very fine people on both sides” of the battle of Charlottesville.^[4]

What happened there changed the entire community, everyone involved, and echoed throughout the country as people tried to understand where the violence had come from and why so many people felt unprepared for it. Like other marginalized groups, Jews felt fear—and it pushed them into action. “There was a sense that things are continuing to escalate,

[that] the Jewish community is under attack and is not prepared to counter the attack,” Moishe Ben Marx told us, “and we felt like we needed an organizational home for the Jewish antifascist Left in New York City.” This led to the creation of Outlive Them, an NYC-based Jewish antifascist group, just weeks before the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting in October 2018.

After Unite the Right, “Congregation Beth Israel and the Jewish community there, and really Charlottesville in a larger way, started to take antiracism really seriously in a way that they never had before,” Rabbi Schmelkin told us. The lesson had been clear—an organized response is necessary to push back on the advance of white supremacy.

“There were physical threats to my safety,” Arbeit told us, noting how frightening the climate had gotten in advance of the rally. “But I felt that I had people in my corner. I didn’t feel alone. I had people who were organized together to keep each other safe and to keep the community safe.”

The battle raging that day in Charlottesville was a microcosm of the war waged every day on Capitol Hill, in classrooms, at school board meetings, and on the streets across the country: between those who think the United States ought to remain a country dominated by white Christian men, and those who fight for a truly pluralist, multiracial democracy. And in this contest over the contours of “we, the people,” the American Jewish community finds itself in the crosshairs, alongside other groups. By understanding the white nationalist movement, and the antisemitism at its core, we can fight back.

WHITE NATIONALISM: AN AMERICAN MOVEMENT

White nationalism is a patently American phenomenon. The United States was founded as a settler-colonial society, built on the enslavement of Black people and the genocide of the Indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island. Driven by the profit motive of racial capitalism, the inequalities of white supremacy have structured the institutions and social relations of American life. Some of the core “virtues” championed by today’s white nationalist movement—like white racial purity and demographic dominance, racist segregation, patriarchal norms, and social traditionalism—were not uncommon among many white Americans until the mid-twentieth century. In the following decades, movements for racial, immigrant, feminist, and LGBTQ justice rattled these unjust foundations, and attempted to build a more equal society. Today’s white nationalist movement is a desperate reaction to the very real successes of these movements for change.

White nationalists see themselves as beleaguered underdogs, brave, persecuted race rebels, raging heroically against a mammoth, overpowering anti-white system. They give this

system a Jewish face, and imagine that, by overthrowing Jewish power, they can build a radically new social order of unbridled white dominance.^[5]

White nationalism isn't only expressed through tiki-torch marches and neo-Nazi rallies. It also wears a suit and tie, sitting at the highest echelons of power. Donald Trump tapped nativist fearmongering, white resentment, and conspiracy theories to win the presidency. The Trump administration was stacked with advisers and organizations with close ties to white nationalists and far-right populists, from Steve Bannon and Stephen Miller to nativist groups like the Federation for American Immigration Reform and Center for Immigration Studies.

White nationalism has also crept deeper into the heart of mainstream conservatism. Leading GOP politicians, and prime-time pundits like former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, routinely warn against the "great replacement" of white Americans by non-white immigrants, at the hands of scheming liberal elites like George Soros and "globalists." Recently, white nationalists have been exposed as staffers at conservative Beltway institutions, media outlets, and electoral campaigns. Notable Republican politicians and celebrities have spoken at white nationalist conferences, and in November 2022, former President Trump even dined with Nick Fuentes, one of the country's leading white nationalists.

If systemic white supremacy is at the root of so many problems plaguing our society, the white nationalist movement is one bitter fruit, warping American politics to reflect its dystopian vision. We can't assume these organizations and actors will simply "go away" or treat them merely as a sideshow. They have been a core part of the American story long before the alt-right, and they will grow unless they are countered.

A WHITE ETHNOSTATE

We use the term "white nationalism" to describe a movement emerging after World War II, as white supremacists worldwide found a new language to articulate their key demand: a society for whites only.

White nationalists believe that race is not a social construct, but a biological and/or spiritual fact. While you often find beliefs in racial superiority, they tend to couch these ideas in the language of difference or other coded distractions.

As census data predicts that by 2045, non-Hispanic whites will fall below 50 percent of the US population,^[6] an important political concern for white nationalists is what they call the "great replacement," the extinction of the white race in the United States and Europe through non-white immigration and miscegenation. And they're convinced "the Jews" are behind the "great replacement," and all other threats to white dominance.

Racists had to rethink fascism's presentation after the catastrophic defeat of Axis powers and the total delegitimization of Nazism as the realities of the Holocaust shocked the

conscience of the West. To reclaim fascist politics from the burned-out cities and war tribunals of Europe, a new message was needed.

Francis Parker Yockey was a significant figure in this process, an American organizer who cocreated a neofascist network called the European Liberation Front. Yockey's ideas were preserved in his magnum opus *Imperium*, a rambling screed demanding a pan-European civilizational unity that would reestablish the greatness of the white West against the dominating subversion and degeneracy advanced by Jews. "In this period of history," wrote Yockey in 1948, "America and Jewry form a Symbiosis. The head of the organism is the Jewish entity, the body is America."^[7] For Yockey and others, America was under Jewish control, and its postwar ascension as a geopolitical superpower was yet another front for Jewish world domination.

Willis Carto would inherit Yockey's crusade. Born in 1926 in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Carto visited Yockey shortly before his suicide in a San Francisco prison in 1960, and would carry on his teacher's legacy for the ensuing decades.

Carto pursued what researcher Leonard Zeskind called a "white supremacist realpolitik," dressing his radical views in suit and tie in an attempt to influence mainstream politics.^[8] In 1958 he founded the Liberty Lobby, establishing it as a Capitol Hill advocacy outfit across the 1960s. He organized groups like the Youth for Wallace organization, which went on to become the National Youth Alliance, a prelude organization to the neo-Nazi National Alliance.

Through sponsorship of the Institute for Historical Review and, later, *The Barnes Review*, Carto almost single-handedly built the infrastructure of late-twentieth-century Holocaust denial in the United States. By blending explicit antisemitism within a broader slate of nativist, anti-government and anti-communist ideas, Carto found a wider audience for his fascist radicalism. At Carto's peak in the 1980s, Liberty Lobby commanded a mailing list of four hundred thousand, while circulation of his newspaper *The Spotlight* was said to surpass three hundred thousand.

In the 1950s, Black-led freedom movements gained new momentum in their struggles against Jim Crow segregation, terrifying white supremacists. Like their Nazi forebears, these white supremacists used antisemitism to explain how the world went so wrong, and what to do about it. Since they believed that Black people are less capable than white people, they needed an outside deus ex machina to explain why the Black freedom struggle was succeeding. They concluded that the Jews built Black movements as a battering ram against white interests. While the Western world welcomed Jews into the covenant of whiteness, white nationalists held on to "the Jew" as a primary enemy combatant.^[9]

In their view, Jews remained not simply a subhuman race, but almost a type of "anti-race," as critical theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno described—one whose

biosocial foundations led them to undermine, and ultimately destroy, other races and peoples so as to ensure their own survival. They were clever, in a way, but not industrious, creative, or honest, and so they manipulated the racial taxonomy to appear white, in order to dismantle the white race from within. As we discuss, groups like the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens' Councils claimed Jews were behind the growth of the civil rights movement in the Jim Crow South, and firebombed multiple synagogues as part of their campaign of violence and terror.

In the 1950s another figure carried the mantle of Nazism into postwar America. With his American Nazi Party, George Lincoln Rockwell used the shock of the swastika to garner attention while exploiting white opposition to civil rights to garner support. In 1961, as the Freedom Rides registered disenfranchised Black voters, Rockwell and his storm troopers traversed the South in his "hate bus," intimidating Black activists—one of many racist stunts.

The Jews engineered the Black freedom struggle, Rockwell told Alex Haley in a 1966 *Playboy* interview, by turning Black Americans "into a psychological bomb...They're just natural-born agitators. They just can't help coming in and getting everybody all stirred up."^[10] Though Rockwell's American Nazi Party scarcely had over one thousand members and ran a shoestring budget, his white power slogans, neo-Nazism, and Holocaust denial carried an outsized impact for future generations of white nationalists.

Rockwell and others built international forums like the World Union of National Socialists for like-minded fascists to collaborate and share ideas.^[11] Issues like the defense of apartheid in South Africa gained new significance, framed through a shared language of global white survival.^[12] Highly publicized agitation like the infamous National Socialist Party of America march on the Chicago suburb of Skokie in 1978, home to thousands of Holocaust survivors—called off after a thousands-strong antifascist coalition put pressure on the Nazis—underlined the centrality of antisemitism for this new generation of neofascists.

In 1974 William Pierce, a close associate of both Rockwell and Carto, founded the National Alliance as a fascist vanguard with revolutionary aspirations (and its own pantheist spirituality). Pierce's 1978 novel *The Turner Diaries* depicted a cataclysmic race war in an apocalyptic future, during which a band of white guerrillas overthrows the Jewish-controlled US government, kills billions of non-white people worldwide with nuclear weapons, and institutes an Aryan republic on American soil. The novel inspired generations of white nationalist violence, including Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building in 1995, and remains influential today.

In the 1970s and '80s, radicalization deepened as disgruntled, traumatized Vietnam veterans entered the movement, the victories of the civil rights struggle continued to bear fruit, and white nationalists, convinced that political reform was a lost cause, focused on paramilitary training and violence. Clandestine organizations like The Order carried out

bombings against federal targets, armed robberies, and the assassination of Jewish talk radio host Alan Berg.

The Klan also entered its own post-civil rights era when a new leader, David Duke, reinvigorated it, making antisemitism a centerpiece of the worldview. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Duke ran electoral campaigns for various Louisiana and national offices that garnered national attention (including his successful 1989 legislative run for Louisiana's District 81), employing diatribes against Black welfare recipients, school bussing, and non-white immigration that channeled racist grievance, fears of dispossession, and the growing sense of victimization among white voters.

While rural white nationalists traded apocalyptic fantasies and prepared for a race war, the urban movement saw white power skinheads escalating the violence. The skinhead movement arose in late 1960s Britain as a multiracial coalition of youth united by their working-class identity and love of Jamaican ska and rocksteady. In the 1970s, the fascist National Front began recruiting them, eventually splitting the scene into competing racist and antiracist factions (the split became more pronounced in the 1980s). This influenced racist groups in America, which became famous for gang-style attacks on interracial couples, Jews, and queer folks. Cities like Portland, Oregon, became beset by violent teenage Nazis supported by a neo-Nazi organization, White Aryan Resistance (WAR).

WAR saw skinheads as the rank-and-file storm troopers of the white revolution. They often carried out attacks against minorities, and when WAR was sued for its association with the 1988 murder of Ethiopian immigrant Mulugeta Seraw, the group's leader, Tom Metzger, pushed toward the "lone wolf" model of racist violence pioneered by white supremacists like Louis Beam and James Mason so that they could better avoid government infiltration.^[13] While militant antifascist groups like Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice (SHARP), the Baldies, Anti-Racist Action (ARA), and Red and Anarchist Skinheads (RASH) existed prior to Seraw's murder, this tragedy became a rallying point that pushed the growth of antifascist organizing that would, decades later, lead to the modern antifa movement.

MAINSTREAMING RACIST HATE

Amidst this world of chaotic ultraviolence, "suit-and-tie" white nationalism was seeing a revival, and started moving into the mainstream. At the edges of mainstream conservatism, a new "paleoconservative" movement supported traditionalist values and defense of "Western civilization," was suspicious of "globalist" foreign intervention and free-market neoliberalism, and often showed sympathy to the segregationist South. When running for president in 1992, paleoconservative leader Pat Buchanan closely followed David Duke's Louisiana electoral strategy.^[14] "The way to deal with Mr. Duke," Buchanan noted after

Duke won a surprising 55 percent of Louisiana’s white vote in the 1991 gubernatorial runoff election, “is the way the GOP dealt with the far more formidable challenge of George Wallace. Take a hard look at Duke’s portfolio of winning issues and expropriate those not in conflict with GOP principles.”^[15]

Adopting a framing that is common across the radical Right, Buchanan critiqued US support for Israel using America First conspiracy theories, claiming malicious “Zionist” infiltrators covertly controlled US foreign policy.^[16] Other paleoconservative leaders Joseph Sobran and Sam Francis spoke at Holocaust denial and white nationalist conferences^[17] and became a leading white nationalist, respectively.^[18] Many of those in the MAGA orbit or among the burgeoning National Conservatives can count the paleocons as their ideological forebears.

Some white nationalists jumped headfirst into pseudoacademia. Publications like *American Renaissance*, launched in 1990 by Jared Taylor, insist intelligence is racially determined, white people are more evolutionarily advanced than other races, and racially homogeneous societies are the only pathway to human flourishing. Eager to lend an academic sheen to bigotry, Taylor and others coined pseudoscientific terms like “race realism” and “human biodiversity” (HBD), inspiring an entire blogosphere that explains the world through long-discredited race science and advocates for eugenics.

DENYING REALITY

“Those numbers you always see are overblown, probably invented entirely.”

It was the year 2000. Shane, sixteen at the time, was browsing a string of Cheetah Chat message boards, a vestige of the heyday of early Internet chat rooms, when he stumbled into a political debate forum.

“The Zionist lobby manufactures these horror stories about Auschwitz because they think no one will notice if they change the numbers. There weren’t even that many Jews in Europe at the time.”

The conversation revolved around some heady mix of Federal Reserve policy and the first Iraq War, nothing he could make heads or tails of—what did any of this have to do with Jews, Israel, and the Holocaust, as commenters kept insisting? He grabbed a couple quick search terms and plugged them into Yahoo. Did other people think key facts about the Holocaust were falsified, and the Jews were to blame? And why?

Holocaust denial had been a feature of the global far-right since before the true magnitude of the Nazi genocide was even in full view, and in the years after the war figures like Austin J. App, Arthur Butz, and Robert Faurisson sought to challenge the facts. At its core, the assertion that Jews have falsified the Holocaust, or deliberately exaggerated its core

details, is a massive conspiracy theory, impossible to accept without the underlying premises of global Jewish power and control over media, government, and society. Further, it is used by the radical Right as a core recruiting tool. If the Holocaust was inflated, they say, then maybe Nazi ideology got a bad rap, and perhaps the moral barriers now in place against extreme nationalism and antisemitism can be lifted.

As Shane headed to college and started to engage in organizing and politics, he heard of something called the Pacifica Forum. Created by University of Oregon professor emeritus Orval Etter, the Forum brought controversial speakers to campus, including some Leftists. At least in the early years.

“There is a man inside that building who is absolutely possessed by his hatred of Jews,” shouted a visibly upset woman as Shane walked out of the journalism school after another late afternoon of classes. The man was Mark Weber, a former member of the National Alliance and major figure in the Institute for Historical Review, which projected an academic veneer onto Holocaust denial. The Pacifica Forum was now hosting these sorts of speakers regularly.

Holocaust denial had popped up on campus life in many places, as fascists sought to exploit the university’s role as a space for young minds to question their most basic assumptions. The Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust was launched in 1987 by Bradley Smith as an affiliate of the Institute for Historical Review. The committee tried to take out ads in student newspapers questioning the facts. The project was a win-win for them: either the ad ran and they reached potential recruits, or the ad did not run and they claimed censorship.^[19]

David Irving, a formerly respected historian of the Third Reich, was one of the few credentialed figures in their scene. He became the face of the effort to reform Hitler’s image, both by trivializing and denying key aspects of the Holocaust, and by subtly shifting historical responsibility for it onto the Jews themselves.^[20]

Around the same time as Shane and his friends were organizing against a new movement called the “alternative Right” led by the “suit-and-tie” fascist Richard Spencer, Irving was touring the United States once again, giving talks in private venues. Just like with the Committee, an Irving appearance was a test: either he would be allowed to speak, thus indicating communal sympathy, or he wouldn’t, and he could claim censorship. He was visiting a hotel in the nearby city of Syracuse, and an antifascist bloc was organizing to stop it. Community members got together and organized a call-in, with participants on both coasts phoning the manager and demanding the event be canceled. But despite the fact that one of the most notorious Holocaust defenders in the world was inviting neo-Nazis and antisemitic militants to convene in their hotel, management refused to cancel the talk and threatened the antifascist demonstrators with the police.

Denialism—whether of the Holocaust or any genocide or historical atrocity—has long served as a pathway to expressing deeper bigotries that dare not be named. But it is also used to ignore the consequences of dystopian political and social ideas, to mask the brutality of ethnic nationalism. It is, in effect, yet another grasping after easy answers, to point at scapegoats and distract from real answers for society's ills.

THE RISE OF THE ALT-RIGHT

For many decades, the white nationalist movement's mainstream reach remained relatively limited. This would change in the twenty-first century, when the rise of illiberal right-wing nationalism around the world granted the movement an opening that previous generations could only dream of.

Beginning in 2008, white nationalist Richard Spencer and paleocon author Paul Gottfried popularized the term “alternative Right.” Their big-tent reactionary movement rejected mainstream conservatism for its supposed capitulation to liberalism, and asserted that a more authentic Right must reject the notion of human equality in any form.

Spencer was influenced by the growing “identitarian” movement championed by the European New Right (ENR). Started by French philosopher Alain de Benoist in the late 1960s, the ENR attempted to reframe fascist politics away from obvious racism and toward a cultural renaissance that pushed their noxious political vision through the social back door.

The ENR helped to spawn the “identitarian” movement, which believes that growing rates of immigration from the Global South (including from refugee resettlement and especially from Muslim countries) represented an existential threat, deemed the “great replacement” by French writer Renaud Camus,^[21] carried out against white Europeans by a sinister and malicious (and for many, a Jewish) elite. Many of these far-right activists demanded some kind of ethnically and/or culturally homogenous region, something that they believed manifests the alleged historic continuity of their national identity. In the mid-2010s, the alt-right Americanized the ENR, roping together racist pagans, men's rights activists, neoreactionaries, “radical traditionalists,” paleocons, and others into a tacit coalition whose defining features were racial thinking.

Antisemitic conspiracy theories were core to the alt-right worldview, providing a scaffolding for the movement's male supremacy, anti-Blackness, xenophobia, and other bigotries. “I don't think that you can have a full understanding of the world without addressing the question of Jewish identity and Jewish power,” Richard Spencer told us in 2016.

Kevin MacDonald, an evolutionary psychology professor who taught for many years at California State University, Long Beach, built the intellectual architecture for alt-right

antisemitism. In a series of books beginning in the 1990s, MacDonald cast centuries of Jewish theology, and practices such as kashrut (kosher foods) and endogamy, as part of a pernicious “group evolutionary strategy” to preserve Jewish genetic material from contamination through intermarriage with non-Jews. “From an evolutionary perspective,” he writes,

this Jewish sense of moral and religious idealism, which results in genetic segregation, is in fact a mask for a self-interested evolutionary strategy aimed at promoting the interests of a kinship group that maintains its genetic integrity during a diaspora.^[22]

Once the formal structures separating Jews and Gentiles were dissolved during the European Enlightenment, MacDonald argues, these liberal and emancipated Jews created ethnically driven networks among political, media, and literary elites, thus controlling modernity's core, and progressive activism itself became the “group evolutionary strategy” for these assimilated Jews. Modern Jews, he insists, have used psychoanalysis, critical theory, and racial justice movements to pathologize and undermine the healthy hierarchies of white Western society. In the end, MacDonald's views won and have become largely ubiquitous, in one form or another, across the white nationalist movement.

MacDonald justifies antisemitism as merely another “group evolutionary strategy” conducted by Gentiles to “push back” against an alien enemy seeking to undermine their ethnoracial integrity. His writing retrofits centuries of antisemitism into a coherent, unified twenty-first-century theory with a pseudoscientific veneer. There is no *Protocols*-style cabal necessary to explain its functioning, except perhaps metaphorically. Instead, “Jewish power” is engendered by evolution itself, the predictable consequence of Jewish genes.

Once he was forced into academic retirement due to widespread protest in 2014, MacDonald doubled down on his white nationalist activism. Today, even while many followers lack the patience to comb through his tomes, his underlying theory about Jews has become a near-consensus belief for white nationalism and conspiracists looking for a totalizing theory to explain “Jewish power.”

BECOMING MAINSTREAM

The growth of social media allowed alt-rightists to enlarge their digital footprint and adopt online troll culture while participating (often anonymously) in a user-generated content mill and community.

But it took the 2015 presidential campaign of Donald Trump to energize the movement, and bring it beyond the world of conferences, journals, podcasts, and 4chan, and into the

streets. “Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!” thundered Spencer in a now-infamous speech to a crowded room of white nationalists, many of whom responded with Hitler salutes, in a Washington, D.C., conference center days after Trump’s election victory. Groups like Identity Evropa, Vanguard America, and Patriot Front began recruiting whites across communities and campuses, and within conservative institutions.

These groups brought antisemitism with them. “We do not see Jewish people as European because they themselves consider themselves Semitic, which is Middle Eastern, mixed-race population,” Identity Evropa founder Nathan Damigo told us in 2016, channeling long-discredited “Semitic” categories of nineteenth-century European race science. “And they have hundreds of organizations, many of which are hostile to European interests and have been for a very long time.”

The deadly violence at the Unite the Right rally—and President Trump’s assertion afterward that there had been “very fine people” on both sides—was further indication that the fight was escalating, and the fascists had friends in power. “Many of us that have been dealing with [fascists] for generations were kind of used to it,” Daryle Lamont Jenkins, founder of the antifascist One People’s Project, told us, “but when they really started to become a little more intensified because they felt they had a safety net provided them by the White House, we realized that we needed to reconfigure how we approached things.”

The alt-right’s crescendo was in Charlottesville, and afterward, pressure from antifascists resulted in heavy deplatforming and the inability of alt-right groups to keep a stable “IRL” presence. By the time a second Unite the Right was planned one year later, the alt-right was a shadow of its former self—but white nationalism wasn’t going anywhere.

In the fallout, groups like Atomwaffen and the Base introduced recruits to “accelerationism,” the belief that acts of violence are necessary to trigger the collapse of the system. A series of mass shootings, celebrated on 4chan and targeting Jewish, Muslim, Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ communities, underscored the movement’s eliminationist intent.

Others remained convinced white nationalism could find widespread appeal among millions of Trump voters and disaffected white Americans by working alongside them on campus or by speaking their language: American patriotism, conservative Christianity, and traditionalism. The Gen-Z America First/groyper movement, led by virulent antisemite Nick Fuentes, sought to lead Republican student organizations, embed themselves within GOP electoral campaigns, network at conservative conferences, and otherwise influence the establishment Right. By using Christian nationalist rhetoric, the groypers hope to appeal to a wider base of MAGA supporters.

“This is about the satanic globalist elite,” Fuentes yelled into the megaphone to a crowd of hundreds at the December 2020 Million MAGA March in Washington, D.C., naming

ubiquitous Jewish targets of right-wing anger, such as George Soros, “versus us, the people of Christ.”^[23]

Today, while its on-the-ground organizing has decreased relative to the heyday of Unite the Right, the white nationalist movement has succeeded in reshaping mainstream conservatism in its image. During the Trump presidency, GOP politicians like Steve King faced severe consequences for promoting white nationalist ideas. But now the Overton window has shifted so sharply that those consequences are no longer ensured. Leading MAGA politicians like Paul Gosar and Marjorie Taylor Greene have spoken at groyper conferences, and in late 2022, Fuentes even sat down for dinner with former president Trump himself.

As America becomes more racially diverse, and growing racial justice movements mount powerful challenges to systemic white supremacy, millions of white Americans are terrified of losing their dominant status. Right-wing leaders are using white nationalist ideas to channel their reactionary grievance. In an era when Fox News anchors and GOP politicians warn incessantly against the “great replacement” and a supposed endemic of anti-white hatred, movements like the groypers have arrived right on time.

White nationalist views on immigration, demographics, race, and even Jews have diffused across the base of the MAGA movement. An April 2021 study at the University of Chicago found that supporters of the Capitol insurrection were highly likely to subscribe to core tenets of the “great replacement” theory, and that arrested insurrectionists were six times more likely to live in a county where the percentage of non-Hispanic white people has decreased in recent years.^[24]

A June 2022 YouGov poll found 61 percent of Trump voters think that “in the U.S., a group of people is trying to replace white Americans with immigrants and people of color who share the group’s views” (the number increased to 73 percent when “Democrats” were named as the group in question), and 12 percent agreed that the Jews were behind this plot.^[25] Another 2022 study by researchers at Harvard and Tufts University found the “epicenter of antisemitic attitudes is [found with] young adults on the far right,” with this population two to three times more likely than young far-leftists to hold overt antisemitic attitudes.^[26]

White nationalism is an ever-present force in American politics, but it does not function alone. Its politics of exclusion are closely tied in with Christian narratives of triumphalism and dominance, used by the West to justify centuries of colonization and repression. An increasingly volatile Christian nationalist movement is trying to repeal the foundations of liberalism and multiculturalism, and institute a fundamentalist dystopia that would disenfranchise not only Jews, but most marginalized communities who challenge its theocratic vision.

A CHRISTIAN NATION: ANTISEMITISM AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

“If we are going to have one nation under God, which we must, we have to have one religion! One nation under God, and one religion under God!”

It was November 13, 2021, and retired US Army general Mike Flynn, a prominent Christian nationalist, QAnon promoter, and Trump acolyte—and briefly, Trump’s national security adviser—thundered this proclamation from the pulpit. Flynn spoke at a rally at Cornerstone Church, a congregation led by influential Christian Zionist pastor John Hagee, in San Antonio, Texas.^[1] That afternoon’s rally was part of ReAwaken America, a nationwide tour featuring a who’s who of pastors, politicians, media celebrities, and far-right influencers trumpeting a toxic mix of Christian nationalism, QAnon, COVID-19 conspiracy theories, and election denial. Nobody in the jubilant audience had any doubts which “one religion” Flynn was referring to.

At four stops across the country, leading election deniers like Roger Stone and MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell took the stage alongside far-right 2022 midterm candidates like Doug Mastriano and “apostles” and “prophets” from the New Apostolic Reformation, the country’s leading Christian nationalist movement. In San Antonio, conspiracy theory-monger Alex Jones warned the crowd that the “New World Order” was “meeting right now, plotting the next bioweapon released, plotting the next big cyber crash...[and to] collapse the Third World into the United States!” Audience members blew shofars, spoke in tongues, and cheered for the Rapture, convinced they were on the front lines, squaring off against elite Democrat pedophile cabals in the final battle between good and evil—the battle, they were told, to turn America into a Christian nation. Less than a year into the Biden administration, the MAGA base was readier than ever for holy war.

While it is easy to mock Christian nationalist crowds like these for their wacky tales of vaccine microchips and their kitschy religious triumphalism, the threat they pose to the safety and thriving of trans and queer folks, to the reproductive choice of millions, to the religious freedom of Jews, Muslims, and other religious minorities—and to the very foundation of multiracial democracy—is deadly serious.

Since the 1970s, the Christian Right has mobilized thousands of churches, nonprofits, think tanks, legal foundations, and advocacy organizations into a powerful movement, bent on reshaping the United States to reflect its fundamentalist interpretation of Western Christianity.

Today’s Christian Right remains what writer Sean Quinn called in 2008 “the organizing engine of the Republican Party,” a battering ram mobilizing millions with an endless barrage of anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ culture war campaigns.^[2] One of their crowning achievements remains the election of Donald Trump, who won with the support of 80 percent of white evangelicals, his most devoted constituency.^[3] Another is, of course, the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, the culmination of forty years of conservative legal strategy. And if Christian nationalists succeed in building their longed-for “Christian nation,” it will turn Jews—and anyone else who fails to conform—into second-class citizens at best.

THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT’S ANTISEMITISM

White grievance has long animated the Christian Right. While many assume the movement first sprang into action after the passage of *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in 1973, in fact, defense of segregation provided the initial impetus, as Professor Randall Balmer has documented. By the late 1970s, Southern Christian leaders were incensed by mounting court orders to desegregate, and turned to conservative operatives like Paul Weyrich for help. Weyrich, determined to deny Democratic president Jimmy Carter a second term, was looking for the hot-button issue that could mobilize millions of white evangelicals. But since publicly opposing integration was a political dead end, they turned to abortion instead.^[4] “When political power is achieved,” Weyrich wrote in the mid-1970s, the “Moral Majority” he sought to build “will have the opportunity to re-create this great nation.”

As discussed, the United States is a Christian-hegemonic country, animated by strong currents of Christian supremacy that have long been oppressive to Jews and many other marginalized groups, here and around the world. It’s little surprise then that from its beginnings, the Christian Right, despite fervently declaring love for “Judeo-Christian values” and the State of Israel, carried more than a whiff of antisemitism. Movement leaders, bankrolled by big business and channeling Cold War anti-communism, have long appropriated thinly veiled conspiracy theories against “secular humanist” liberal elites who, they claim, dominate media and academia in order to erode traditional morality.

While Christian Right leaders like Jerry Falwell, Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, and Tim LaHaye rarely brought explicit antisemitism center stage, they couldn’t always hide it either.^[5] Over the decades, their lurid associations of Jews with money, media, pornography, and even the Antichrist made headlines.

At a rally for the Christian Right's Moral Majority in August 1980, Reverend Bailey Smith, then president of the thirteen-million-member Southern Baptist Convention, drew gasps for remarking that "God Almighty does not hear the prayers of a Jew."^[6] Reverend Jerry Falwell, head of the Moral Majority, met with Jewish leaders shortly after to reaffirm his commitment to religious freedom and the separation between church and state. "America is a pluralistic republic," Falwell reassured them. "It cannot survive if we allow it to become anything else."

The year before, he struck a different tone—*The Washington Post* quoted Falwell expressing his desire to "turn [the United States] into a Christian nation."^[7] The Christian Right is now poised to dispense with even the pretense of Falwell's 1980 assurances. Christian nationalists want to drastically reconfigure US civic and political life according to the dictates of an ultra-patriarchal, traditionalist, and intolerant version of Christianity.

The United States "is steadily becoming less Christian and less religiously observant," as a 2019 Pew report put it, and Christian nationalists know their agenda is supported by an ever-shrinking minority.^[8] Much like white nationalists, they are terrified of losing their traditional dominance, and committed to an antidemocratic strategy of securing permanent minority rule, in order to preserve that dominance at any cost. "Christian nationalism," writes researcher Frederick Clarkson, is "not so much about moral purity as it is about power—the kind of power to defend and to deliver the Christian nation that never was."^[9]

Millions of charismatic, Pentecostal, and evangelical Christians are part of a decentralized movement called the New Apostolic Reformation, which charges followers to capture the "Seven Mountains" of societal influence—education; religion; family; business; the government and military; arts and entertainment; and the media. Christian nationalists aim to steadily change societal attitudes while simultaneously re-shaping law and public policy toward their exclusionary vision.^[10] This is happening not only in the United States, but also in Latin American countries like Brazil, Eastern European countries like Poland and Hungary, and elsewhere around the world, making the Christian Right a backbone of rising authoritarianism globally.

The movement has increasingly lobbied for, and won, discriminatory religious exemptions allowing Christian institutions receiving state funding to deny adoption and foster services to LGBTQ couples, and reproductive health and other health care to women and LGBTQ people. We can now see how this agenda might target Jews as well. In January 2022, a Jewish couple filed a lawsuit against Tennessee's Department of Children's Services, after a Christian adoption agency receiving taxpayer funding refused to help them foster a child because they are Jewish. The agency advertises itself as "committed to Christian biblical principles," and it was able to discriminate because of a 2020 law likely inspired by Project Blitz, a Christian nationalist initiative shaping state-level legislation across the

country. "I felt like I'd been punched in the gut," said Liz Rutan-Ram, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. "It was the first time I felt discriminated against because I am Jewish."^[11]

A 2019 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute found that 19 percent of Americans—including 24 percent of Republicans, and 24 percent of white evangelicals—agreed that small business owners should be allowed to refuse services to Jewish patrons, if doing so violates their religious beliefs. The survey found even higher levels of support for such discrimination against LGBTQ people, atheists, and Muslims.^[12]

The Christian nationalist movement's decades-long attack on abortion rights, which finally succeeded in overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 and triggering state-by-state abortion bans and restrictions across the country, is a major threat to Jewish religious freedom. The classical rabbinic tradition locates the beginning of life not at conception, nor during the gestation of a fetus, but during the birthing process—and even during childbirth, if the pregnant person's life is in danger, saving their life takes precedence. This all stands in stark contrast to Christian Right theology, and where that theology becomes state policy, it can leave Jews literally unable to follow religious law.

"The fundamentalist Christian position is the exact opposite of the halachic approach to abortions," stated Ephraim Sherman, an Orthodox nurse practitioner, in a May 2022 op-ed. "The success of this Republican-Christian strategy should strike terror in the hearts of frum [traditional Orthodox] communities across America. It should also motivate us to action."^[13]

For Dania Rajendra, a Jewish organizer and educator, this became strikingly clear when she received emergency, lifesaving surgery to end an ectopic pregnancy. "My deepest, most intimate experience of antisemitism," she told a Minnesota audience in a 2019 speech,

isn't someone calling me horrible names, or threatening me or my family—though that happens, sometimes. Antisemitism, to me, is the idea that at my absolutely most vulnerable, I might be denied the means to save my life, because someone else's religion says my fetus is as important as I am, even though my tradition says otherwise...[We] need to start recognizing antisemitism even when people are not calling us names, and when they are "just" limiting our secular freedoms—to have an abortion, to join a union, to go to public, secular school. Those rights protect us as Jews.^[14]

Christian nationalism has been normalized across the MAGA movement and American society. A 2023 survey found that over half of Republicans, and 29 percent of Americans overall, are adherents to or sympathizers of Christian nationalism, and while the bulk are white evangelical Protestants, Hispanic and other Protestants and Catholics of color are well represented as well. This group shows significant support for statements like "[because]

things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country” and “I would prefer the U.S. to be a nation primarily made up of people who follow the Christian faith.”

Where these views predominate, antisemitism is more commonly found as well. The survey found 23 percent of Christian nationalist adherents, and 19 percent of sympathizers, agreed with the statement that “Jewish people hold too many positions of power.”^[15] A 2021 analysis of survey data found voters who endorsed statements like “the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation” were much more likely to support statements like “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to this country” and “Jews killed Jesus.” Christian nationalists who held QAnon beliefs, in turn, subscribed to twice as many antisemitic tropes as those who did not. “These are not independent forces operating in American politics,” explain the authors, “Christian nationalism and QAnon support work together to drive up anti-Semitism.”^[16]

Inside the conservative movement, the standard had been to slightly veil this Christian nationalist agenda, but the veneer has peeled away as the ideology moves mainstream. Far-right Georgia representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, one of the most popular and influential GOP politicians, declared, “We should be Christian Nationalists,” at the July 2022 Turning Point USA Student Action Summit, and later insisted “I am being attacked by the godless left because I said I’m a proud Christian Nationalist.”^[17]

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Today, tens of millions of conservative Christians are staunch and active supporters of the far-right Israeli government—so much so that Israeli leaders count them as a more reliable base of support, even, than the often-critical American Jewish community. Yet counterintuitively, Christian Zionism is one of the largest and most powerful, if slow-burning, antisemitic movements in the United States.

The core theological belief of Christian Zionism is that the “ingathering” of Jews and the creation of a Jewish state in the Holy Land is part of a divine plan that will trigger the long-awaited End Times. In this apocalyptic scenario, Jesus will return to the Earth, humans will become embroiled in a cataclysmic war, the Christian faithful will be raptured to heaven, and finally, all Jews and other non-Christians will either convert or burn in eternal hellfire.^[18]

This supremacist eschatology has been maintained by generations of Christian Zionist leaders in one form or another, and is deeply troubling, to say the least. While movement leaders appear to offer warm and heartfelt support to Jewish political ambitions, this is undergirded by longing for the eventual negation of Jewish peoplehood.

The United States’ most active Christian Zionist group, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), claims 10 million members—3 million more than the entire American Jewish population. Major Christian Zionist leaders have amassed unprecedented political power in pursuit of their goals. Trump administration officials like Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo were Christian Zionists, and the movement took credit for some of the administration’s most hard-right Middle East policy moves, including moving the US embassy to Jerusalem and the cancellation of the Iran nuclear deal.

The Christian Zionist agenda is a major obstacle to prospects for a just peace in Israel/Palestine, and stability in the Middle East region. Based on a selective interpretation of biblical verses, most Christian Zionists support the Israeli Right’s agenda of permanent occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, believing these lands were given to the Jewish people by God (international law, however, does not recognize such a divine arrangement).

Christian Zionists aggressively lobby against common sense measures for peace like the Iran nuclear deal because, in their fantasy, escalating war, unrest, and instability in the Middle East are prophetic signs of the coming End Times. Thus, they eagerly goad the conservative movement and Israeli Right to pursue more aggressive, expansionist policies that make the prospects for meaningful peace ever more remote.

In the wake of Hamas’s October 7 attack and Israel’s bombardment of Gaza, Christian Zionists clamored for total war. “America should roll up its sleeve and knock the living daylights out of Tehran for what they have done to Israel,” Pastor John Hagee, leader of CUFI, announced to roaring applause at CUFI’s annual “Night to Honor Israel,” held days after Hamas’s October 7 attack. “Hit them so hard that our enemies will once again fear us and our friends will again trust us.” Sharing the stage that evening with Israeli ambassador Gilad Erdan as well as numerous GOP representatives, Hagee insisted a two-state solution is “not a reality...there is [only] a one-state solution—Israel today, Israel tomorrow, Israel forever.” Channeling End Times fervor, he declared “when Messiah comes...he’s going straight to the city of Jerusalem, [to] put his foot on the Mount of Olives, and establish the eternal kingdom of peace.”^[19] Later, Hagee spoke before an audience of tens of thousands at the March for Israel in Washington, D.C., along with hard-line Christian nationalist and House Speaker Mike Johnson, who declared that “this is a fight between good and evil, between light and darkness, between civilization and barbarism. The calls for a ceasefire are outrageous.”^[20] Clearly, an end to bloodshed for Palestinians and Israelis was not on the Christian Zionist agenda.

“Christian Zionism and, more broadly, Christian nationalism affect us all,” Jonathan Brenneman, a Christian Palestinian American activist, said in 2022. “And if people who are working for justice, and particularly working for Palestinian rights, don’t understand the

amount of power and influence that Christian Zionists have, they're going to be missing a key dynamic in what is perpetuating the oppression of Palestinians."^[21]

Christian Zionism is older even than the Jewish political movement of the same name. Since at least the time of the Crusades, a significant portion of European Christendom has turned toward Jerusalem as the supposed site of apocalyptic End Times scenarios, and beginning in the late sixteenth century, many British Protestant theologians accorded Jews a central role in this process. Decades before Theodor Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress in 1897, many English church leaders and statesmen were clamoring to deport European Jews to Palestine, where the building of a Jewish commonwealth would trigger the End Times. This would have the added benefit of bolstering their colonial ambitions while emptying the metropole of Jews.

One 2017 poll found that 80 percent of evangelicals think the “the modern rebirth of the State of Israel in 1948 and the regathering of millions of Jewish people to Israel” were “fulfillments of Bible prophecy that show we are getting closer to the return of Jesus Christ.”^[22] Not every Christian Zionist leader or follower holds the fiery End Times scenario closest to heart. Many adhere more to the “prosperity gospel,” according to which God promises wealth and success to Christians who support Israel, based on the loose translation of Genesis 12:3, “he who blesses Israel shall be blessed, while he who curses Israel shall be cursed.”

But even at its least eschatological, Christian Zionism is suffused with the supremacist paternalism of traditional anti-Judaism.

“The Jews are returning to their land of unbelief,” Jerry Falwell exclaimed in his 1980 book *Listen, America!* “[Jews] are spiritually blind and desperately in need of their Messiah and Savior. Yet they are God’s people, and in the world today Bible-believing Christians are the best friends the nation Israel has.”^[23]

The movement instrumentalizes Jews and Israel as characters in a Christian drama, what scholar S. Jonathon O’Donnell calls “overdetermined...fetish objects invested with supernatural power.”^[24] It is impossible to show respect and allyship to Jews as Jews if that support merely reinscribes us as pawns in a Christian narrative of sin and salvation.

Most movement leaders effusively condemn antisemitism—which they mistakenly claim, of course, to be equivalent to criticism of Israel. At the same time, they view antisemitism as divine punishment for Jewish sinfulness, and a cosmic stimulus to goad Jews to leave the diaspora and return to the Holy Land.

“It was the disobedience and rebellion of the Jews,” Pastor John Hagee, leader of CUFI, said in his 2006 book, *Jerusalem Countdown*, “that gave rise to the opposition and persecution that they experienced beginning in Canaan and continuing to this very day.” The reason for the Holocaust, Hagee said in a 2005 sermon, was “because God said, ‘my top priority for the Jewish people is to get them to come back to the land of Israel.’”^[25]

Jews deserve better allies in the fight against antisemitism.

NAMING THE JEW

After the Holocaust, most Christian denominations worked hard to purge open antisemitism, yet their success in doing so has remained uneven. The rise of the global far-right has bolstered reactionary currents within Christian denominations worldwide, and antisemitism is part of this toxic upsurge.

Within the Catholic world, a growing movement of traditionalist Catholics, or “trad Caths,” rejects the liberal, modernizing reforms of the Second Vatican Council. They focus on maintaining the traditional Latin liturgies, including prayers regarding “Jewish perfidy,” and enforce strict gender roles and sexual prohibitions. While not every adherent is an antisemite, “the historical association,” wrote the then editor of *National Catholic Reporter* in 2009, “between some strains of traditionalist Catholicism and anti-Semitism runs deep”—a legacy stretching back from conservative opposition to the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century to the Dreyfus affair in the late nineteenth and the rise of hard-right preacher Father Coughlin in 1930s America.^[26]

In the late 1980s, English bishop Richard Williamson of the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX), one of the largest and most prominent traditionalist Catholic branches, was revealed to be a Holocaust denier. SSPX remained ambivalent regarding Williamson throughout his years of open antisemitism, and has continued to promote antisemitism and support other far-right theologians.^[27] In 2013, a commemoration of the Nazi pogrom of Kristallnacht at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Buenos Aires was disrupted by young members of SSPX who demanded that “followers of false gods” be removed and that “the Jews killed Jesus.”^[28]

“Trad-Cath” aesthetics, and similarly reactionary forms of Eastern Orthodoxy, Mormonism, and other Christian movements are increasingly popular with the online far-right. For example, the Gen-Z America First/groyper movement, led by Unite the Right attendee Nick Fuentes, combines militant “Christian futurism” with antisemitism and white nationalism, and has built coalitions with far-right Christian groups such as Church Militant.

At the groypers’ 2022 conference, which featured GOP representatives Marjorie Taylor Greene and Paul Gosar, Gab CEO Andrew Torba railed against the “synagogue of Satan,” a phrase from the Book of Revelations that features prominently in the antisemitism of movements like Christian Identity, and was met with loud applause from the mostly Gen-Z audience.^[29]

As discussed earlier, US white supremacist organizations and leaders have long interwoven antisemitism with Christian doctrines, from the second-era Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s to demagogic preachers like Gerald L. K. Smith in the 1940s. In the 1980s, groups like

Aryan Nations and leaders like Richard Butler adhered to an ideology called Christian Identity, which took Christian supersessionism to a radical, racist conclusion. White Aryan Christians, they claimed, were the “true” genetic and spiritual descendants of the ancient Israelites, while present-day “Jews” were diabolical, scheming imposters: a mongrel tribe hell-bent on defiling the “real Jews” with race mixing, and perverting the true Israelite religion by mixing it with demonic practices. People of color were not fully human, perhaps lacking a soul, and were the “beasts of the field” named by Adam in Genesis. The End Times would take the form of a race war and the longed-for extermination of the “fake Jews.”^[30]

Christian Identity initiated some of the most militant and bloody episodes in contemporary US white nationalism. Identity compounds like Elohim City in Oklahoma, or the Aryan Nations near Hayden Lake, Idaho, became centers of revolutionary militia activity, aimed against the “Zionist Occupation Government,” and Identity theology was influential amongst populist proto-militias like Posse Comitatus in the rural heartland. Identity adherents committed murders and orchestrated bomb plots across the 1980s and 1990s, including the 1999 shooting of five at the Los Angeles Jewish Community Center by an Aryan Nations associate.^[31]

As scholars like Alex DiBranco have noted, beginning in the 1980s, as Christian Right leaders ramped up anti-abortion rhetoric on the national stage, Christian Identity groups like Aryan Nations and Phineas Priesthood, as well as neo-Nazi skinheads, linked up with militant movements like Operation Rescue to target abortion providers with assassinations, bombings, and other acts of terror.^[32]

These white nationalists weren’t the only antisemites in the anti-abortion coalition. The Catholic anti-abortion organization Human Life International charged that “American Jews have been leaders in establishing and defending the efficient destruction of more than 30 million pre-born children in this country,” and its leader, Father Paul Marx, once said it was a “strange thing how many leaders in the abortion movement are Jewish.”^[33] The murder of Dr. Barnett Slepian by Catholic militant James Charles Kopp in 1998 helped to highlight that Jewish abortion doctors could be particularly vulnerable to attack, with one report noting that four of five abortion doctors shot during this period were Jewish.

Other white nationalists take the antisemitism forged in centuries of Christian anti-Judaism and focus on it so completely that they eclipse Christianity itself. For neo-Nazi pagan or heathen movements like Wotanism or the Vinlanders Social Club, the Jewish conspiracy is so totalizing that Christianity itself becomes a millennia-old Jewish plot to take down European whites.^[34] Christianity is reframed as worship of a foreign, Semitic ethnic God, which colonizes European white people with a deceptive message of weakness rather than strength. Its “turn the other cheek” message, they claim, runs counter to the nationalist

warrior ethos, and the universalism of Christian claims to salvation undermines sacred boundaries between races.

Christianity is then, as the fascist neo-pagan Odinist movement frequently calls it, “Cultural Marxism,” a universalizing force that paved the way for materialism, the Enlightenment, and modernity, a virus destroying Germanics, subsuming them in degeneracy and mass immigration. Instead of reading the Jewish scriptures as a metaphor and precursor, pointing the way toward “New Testament” salvation (as Christians do), they reject “Old” and “New” Testaments alike as twin symptoms of Jewish malfeasance. Instead, groups like the Asatru Folk Assembly claim to revive pagan folk traditions, and appropriative interpretations of Eastern mysticism, cast in racist glaze.

“Post-Christian” white nationalism, in various forms, has influenced the European New Right and “identitarians” like France’s Generation Identity, as well as US alt-right leaders like Richard Spencer and Greg Johnson, offering a supposedly more authentic spiritual foundation for their seething racist rage. It carries a long history in modern European romantic and far-right movements, championed by fascist intellectuals like Julius Evola and Savitri Devi and movements like Nazism.

“JUDEO-CHRISTIAN” VALUES

The Christian nationalist movement feels for Jews like storm clouds on the horizon. We can almost see distant cracks of lightning and hear peals of thunder. It is disorienting, however, that even as these dark clouds gather, Jewish-Christian relations can appear friendlier than ever. Christian politicians and pundits speak forcefully against antisemitism (as they understand it) and in support of Israel, and wax rhapsodic about the supposed “Judeo-Christian values” at the heart of the American idea.

A dizzying inversion has occurred—Jews have now been refashioned as a stalwart part of, even core guardians of, the (white) Christian West, which used to be the chief source of antisemitic persecution. “Europe’s post-war rehabilitation,” wrote scholar Gil Hochberg, “the desire of Jews to assimilate, and various US political parties’ interests all came together to generate a powerful myth: an always already existing Judeo-Christian civilization, synonymous with ‘Western Culture.’”^[35]

In popular discourse, “Judeo-Christian” functions as a floating signifier, defining not so much who we *are*, as who we *are not*. In the decades of the Cold War, the freedom and openness of the “Judeo-Christian West” was counterposed to the closed authoritarianism of the U.S.S.R. and the broader communist menace. More recently, during the “War on Terror,” the enemy of the “Judeo-Christian West” has become radical Islam, which threatens “our”

way of life with its wholly barbaric Otherness. “In the post-9/11 world of the Bush presidency,” wrote scholar Shalom Goldman in 2011,

American Islamophobia flourished and “Judeo-Christian” has become a term of exclusion, rather than inclusion. The implication in the current context is that the U.S. can accept Jews into the social contract (or at least those Jews who embrace “traditional values”), while Muslims, who “killed us on 9/11” in Bill O’Reilly’s phrase, are permanently excluded.^[36]

In the political center “Judeo-Christian values” are evoked to prop up a status quo of American exceptionalism, free-market neoliberalism, and pervasive Islamophobia. On the Right, although the term signals “a message of cooperation and ecumenicism,” in Goldman’s words, it has come to signify cultural conservatism and chauvinistic nationalism, and is “really a cover for an attack on the values of the Enlightenment; the very values that enabled Jews to enter Western societies.”

Meanwhile, around 22 percent of US Jews stake their political loyalties within the Republican coalition.^[37] Prominent Orthodox figures like Ben Shapiro and organizations like the Coalition for Jewish Values stand alongside Christian Rightists, and insist upon a shared biblical framework of traditionalism. A 2023 survey found that 7 percent of US Jews are adherents to or sympathizers of the core tenets of Christian nationalism.^[38] When General Flynn’s “one nation, one religion” comment went viral in late 2021, Jewish hard-right Ohio Senate hopeful Josh Mandel tweeted “We stand with General Flynn” and “America was not founded as a secular nation.”^[39]

Many Jewish Rightists misleadingly insist that Jewish religious teaching is aligned with the Christian Right agenda on issues like abortion. This kosher stamp of approval helps the Christian nationalist movement lend its supremacist project a veneer of pluralism.

The Jewish Right’s visible alliance with the Christian Right also provides ample cover for antisemitism. There is, of course, a long history, in modern antisemitism, of demonizing liberal, secular Jews as existential threats to faith, flag, and family—and persecuting them on that basis.

Today’s rhetoric provides a twist—the Right demonizes these Jews not as embodiments of “the Jew,” but rather of “the anti-Jew.” They are seen as “not really Jewish” at all, in contrast to more “authentic” Orthodox and right-wing Jews. “It is precisely [the Christian Right’s] staunch support for certain kinds of Jews and certain forms of Judaism that makes possible their attacks against, or at the very least disregard for, defending the rights of other types of Jews,” wrote scholar Eliyahu Stern. “If progressive Jews are not really Jews and if

left-wing Jewish values are not really authentically Jewish, then it follows that opposing these types and values does not indicate any particular anti-Jewish animus.”^[40]

Channeling this dismissiveness, the Catholic Trump überally Rudy Giuliani rambled in a 2019 interview that “Soros is hardly a Jew. I’m more of a Jew than [George] Soros is. I probably know more about—he doesn’t go to church, he doesn’t go to religion—synagogue.” Giuliani also called Soros an “enemy of Israel.”^[41] Giuliani’s word mush offers a telling window into this mindset, misinterpreting Soros’s Jewishness under the weight of Christian categories (church, religion) before denying it outright, while Othering him as secular and insufficiently pro-Israel.

Jewish scholar and activist April Rosenblum calls this “crude, coercive and conditional ‘love’ for Jews” a product of “a world where centuries of Christian rulers have been invested in what the symbolism of Jews means for them—and [are] much less interested in the fate or needs of real, flesh-and-blood Jews.”^[42]

The Jewish Right is also eager to back the Christian Right for its fervent support for the hard-right policies of the contemporary Israeli government. And here, too, they are providing cover for increasingly open antisemitism against liberal diaspora Jewry.

In October 2022, former president Trump took to social media to warmly praise US evangelicals and Israeli Jews who supported his far-right policies on Israel, and sharply castigate liberal American Jews who did not. “U.S. Jews have to get their act together and appreciate what they have in Israel—before it is too late!” Trump concluded with a barbed threat.^[43]

One week later, with midterm elections fast approaching, Christian nationalist Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate Doug Mastriano was asked by a Jewish reporter to explain his widely reported connections to antisemites like white nationalist Gab CEO Andrew Torba. In response, his wife, Rebbie Mastriano (also a fervent Christian nationalist), retorted with thinly rebranded Christian supersessionism. “I’m gonna say as a family we so much love Israel,” she sneered with contempt, “in fact I’m gonna say we probably love Israel more than a lot of Jews do.”^[44]

Far-right politicians like Mastriano peddle antisemitism with one hand while accusing left-wing critics of Israel of antisemitism with the other. It’s no surprise that authoritarian Christian nationalists in the United States see their Jewish counterparts in Israel as worthy allies, and it’s easy to expose their hypocrisy. But how, exactly, can progressives ensure that when we criticize Israel or Zionism, we avoid antisemitism? Questions like these are some of the most vexing and controversial in contemporary political discourse, and it is to them that we now turn.