

Making Monsters: Right-Wing Creation of the Liberal Enemy

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human beings with good intentions, not demons. I suspect you would not like this thesis if you read it, but I hope you would recognize yourselves in the portraits I have painted of you.

Preface

Saturday dawned sunny and cold. I put on my USA flag T-shirt, the only pair of jeans I own, and a warm lumberjack-style hat. I debate taking Luna, my German Shepherd mix, to the rally. This one is in Vancouver, so it's likely to be peaceful. Of course, that's what I thought last time, on Burnside, when things got loud and weird. I decide to leave her at home.

I merge onto I-5 and drive north. Over a bridge, someone has hung a pink banner with a circle and three arrows—the sigil of Antifa. In purple letters: “These Queers Bash Back.”

On the car stereo, Die Krupps is singing in heavily accented English. “In my native language, in my native land, I’m still the alien on a different planet. Makes it clear, I understand: We’re all strangers in a foreign land.” It certainly feels that way.

Ethnographies are funny things. One studies and writes about the other, yet every word inevitably reflects the fatally biased perspective of the self. In this ethnography, I have done my best to present my subjects fairly and without bias, and I have undoubtedly failed. You, the reader, should therefore know what those biases are.

I was raised in a conservative area, by a conservative family that subscribes to what are often termed far-right beliefs. I grew up reading the Limbaugh Letter and demonstrated in favor of the Iraq war. I strongly felt the appeal of violence as a solution to political problems, which was a major and explicit reason for my enlistment in the United States Army immediately upon graduation from high school.

I am no longer a conservative, far-right or otherwise, and my faith in violence as a political tool has decreased significantly. When I think about far-right conservatives, however, I do not think about rednecks, or sociopaths, or specimens under glass. I think about friends and family. I think of myself. For me, the people of the far right are real human beings who do their best with the ideology and information they have. I cannot escape this knowledge, nor would I want to.

I am also the daughter of a Syrian immigrant of color and am, therefore, a product of miscegenation—what the alt-right terms “white genocide.” I am intimately aware of

my own humanity and the fundamental irrelevance of blood, and I have a vested interest in defeating forces that believe my existence is a problem to be solved in some way. I also have an interest in defeating those who help them, intentionally or not.

This thesis uses sociological methods based in phenomenology to analyze the far-right. Phenomenology explicitly discards questions of objective truth or falsehood in favor of the question: what do the subjects believe to be true? This approach allows the ethnographer to get beyond their own biases and truly understand the subject. Moralization creates distance, and distance impedes understanding. My goal for this ethnography is to facilitate understanding through reduction of that distance.

According to phenomenology, our beliefs create the world we see. As such, they also create our enemies. We make our own monsters. This thesis is about how a group called Patriot Prayer constructs their monsters, and how they spread this construction far beyond their own small membership.

Phenomenology—and, by extension, this thesis—can only take us so far. Sociologist James Aho, whose book *This Thing of Darkness* was a principle inspiration for this approach, warns that phenomenological analyses of events risk a sort of ethical flattening, in which morality itself becomes a social construct.¹ As such, humanistic phenomenology carries moral hazard. To complete this work, the reader must ultimately bring their own moral judgments to bear on the conclusions reached.

¹ Aho, *This Thing of Darkness*, 18–20.

List of Terms

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Alt-Right | Explicitly ethnonationalist, racist right-wing movement: e.g. Richard Spencer, the Daily Stormer |
| Alt-Lite | Civic nationalists who deny racial or antisemitic beliefs: e.g. Breitbart, the Proud Boys |
| Liberal | As used in this thesis: The Far Right's conception of the Leftist enemy. Can include leftists, Democrats, and/or centrists |
| Nihilation | The negation of information that conflicts with one's own perception of reality, either through diminishing the status of the people providing the information or through denying their sincere belief in it. |
| Troll | An individual who purposefully presents themselves as something they are not in order to evoke a reaction from unaware second parties. |
| Performative Trolling | A troll who elicits reactions not solely for their own amusement, but also for consumption by a third-party audience. |
| Fabling | The construction of a simple narrative involving a protagonist and an antagonist who stand in for larger groups |
| Racialist | Someone who believes in biologically distinct races. |
| Racist | A racialist who also believes in a hierarchy of races and racial supremacy. |
| Non-Racialist | A person who holds neither overtly racialist or racist beliefs. This person may support institutional racism or hold subconscious racial bias. |
| ENR | European New Right. |
| NWO | New World Order |
| Doxx | To reveal an Internet personality's actual identity, which can include home address and other personal details. |
| Protagonist | A member of the group under discussion |
| Antagonist | A member of the group that the protagonist seeks to portray as the enemy |

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Abstract

This thesis explores Patriot Prayer, a far-right organization that holds rallies primarily in Oregon and Washington. It seeks to answer three central questions. Where does Patriot Prayer fall within the far-right milieu? How are attendees and participants recruited? And what, if anything, do Patriot Prayer rallies accomplish?

Patriot Prayer is an offshoot of the Pacific Northwest Patriot movement, which has evolved over the last several decades from ideologies such as Posse Comitatus, Christian Dominionists, and American white nationalism. In its current form, it is racist but not fascist. Patriot Prayer is closely allied with The Proud Boys, an alt-lite fraternal organization, and uses troll tactics developed by the alt-right.

The group recruits members and fosters group solidarity through what I call the fabling process. Using this fabling process, Patriot Prayer both sanctifies its actions as righteous and demonizes counterprotesters as unreasonable and malicious. The process generates protest violence, which in turn creates group solidarity and generates video fables. Potential rally attendees watch these videos, decide they must act against the fabled enemy, and begin to attend Patriot Prayer events. Hierarchies within the Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys serve to encourage behavior that creates more and better fables. The fabling process breaks down when the enemy fails to show up or when something disrupts either the sanctification or demonization process.

For Luna, the finest of dogs: eternally fluffy and cheerful. Thank you for making me take walks and for coming with me to rallies.

Introduction

Approximately once every two months for the past year and a half, Portland Police erect movable barricades that, for a few hours, create a physical barrier between two different realities.

Outside of these barriers, citizens of Portland, Oregon come to protest a growing alt-right cancer inexplicably metastasizing within their dark-blue city. The rally-goers behind the barriers and police are racists who threaten Portland's most vulnerable minorities. They are crypto-fascists who disguise their ethnonationalist agenda behind dog-whistle phrases like "western culture" and "real Americans." They can hear the enemy from inside the barriers: Nazi scum who want to enact a jack-booted patriarchal ethnostate. The enemy chants "Build the Wall." They use megaphones to call the anti-fascist (Antifa) counterprotesters "Soyboys" and "Snowflakes," or to blast right-wing rap songs about the "alt-left." They bristle with Gadsden flags, Trump 2020 banners, and—occasionally—the green flag of Kekistan.

Inside these barriers, the activist group known as Patriot Prayer asks God for the strength to be peaceful and to spread love to the city of Portland. They talk about the importance of free speech and the bravery of great Americans who risked everything for human rights—people like George Washington and Martin Luther King Jr. The enemy who howls at them from across the barrier are masked communist thugs who want to limit free speech, terrorize conservatives, and tear down everything that makes America great. The enemy chants "No Trump! No KKK! No Fascist USA!" They blast air horns. They hurl ridiculous slurs over the border: "Nazi," "Racist."

Eventually, the barriers come down and the two realities collide. Patriot Prayer marches through the city of Portland. The police attempt to keep protesters and counterprotesters apart with varying degrees of effort and success. The two worldviews often clash in the form of street brawls between activists: a physical battle for the narrative and for the soul of the city.

This battle rages beyond the streets of Portland. Across America—across the world—far right nationalism is on the rise. The rise of politicians such as Trump in

America, Duterte in the Phillipines, and Bolsonaro in Brazil, along with legislative gains for parties like AfD in Germany and the RN in France, demonstrate that the world can no longer dismiss far-right ideas as antiquated relics. Nor can it content itself with hand-wringing and name-calling. Twenty years ago, accusations of racism or fascism had some effect. There was a general consensus that these things are negative, even evil, and that multicultural cosmopolitanism is a desirable goal. In many areas, this universal and assumed understanding no longer exists. National populism and xenophobia appeal to broad swaths of mass publics in both democratic and undemocratic nations who are learning to be unashamed of those impulses.²

If we wish to stem the tide, it is imperative that we understand the appeal of these ideas and the manner in which they spread. What does the far right believe? What inspires them to be politically active? What tactics do they use, and what are the best ways to counter those tactics?

To help shed light on these questions, I chose to study a small and local corner of the far-right universe: the Pacific Northwestern activists known as Patriot Prayer.³ This group is based in Vancouver, Washington and is especially active in Portland and Seattle. Occasionally, they venture farther afield. Joey Gibson, a half-Japanese former high school football coach and real estate speculator, is the primary organizer and charismatic leader of this group. A few other people, such as Tusitala “Tiny” Toese and Haley Adams, feature prominently in the movement as organizers and public speakers. Gibson presents Patriot Prayer as an organization that opposes government corruption, promotes free speech, and advocates for love and understanding. While Gibson claims to welcomes people of all pro-free-speech political orientations,⁴ attendees tend to be extremely conservative and vocally pro-Trump in practice. Patriot Prayer has also engaged in many anti-abortion protests and is currently mounting a somewhat successful campaign to nullify a recently-passed Washington state gun control law at the county level.

² Einzenberger and Schaffar, “The Political Economy of New Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia”; Plattner, “Illiberal Democracy and the Struggle on the Right.”

³ “Laura Swann Thesis” IRB approval granted on October 25th, 2018.

⁴ Gibson, *What Is Patriot Prayer?*

Other groups attend Patriot Prayer rallies and events, most notably the Pacific Northwest chapter of the Proud Boys. This group not only attends Patriot Prayer rallies, but helps lead the group; Toese, one of the most prominent organizers of Patriot Prayer, is a Proud Boy. The Proud Boys, a fraternal organization of self-proclaimed Western chauvinists, denounce racism but believe strongly in cultural difference and Western superiority. They are civic nationalists who are heavily influenced by Internet culture, especially the troll tactics pioneered by 4chan and the Gamergate movement.

Together, these groups attempt to push back against what they see as their biggest threat to America: not immigrants or Muslims, but “the Liberals.” For the far right, “Liberals” does not mean center-left, but rather serves as a convenient shorthand for the dangerous leftists whose ideas will ultimately destroy America. The label expands and contracts as necessary to encompass communists, socialists, the identitarian left, party Democrats, and occasionally centrists. According to the far right, Liberals despise free speech and seek to suppress conservative ideology. They hold absurd ideas about gender and sexuality, and they subscribe to racist beliefs that infantilize people of color and imperil white people. Their ultimate, semi-covert goal is to plunge America into a godless, globalist, and socialist hell.

In this thesis, I will echo right-wing language and refer to the left-wing enemy as “Liberals.” When not capitalized, the word “liberal” refers to liberal political ideology as understood by political scientists.

Antifa and other left-wing groups, who accuse the group of alt-right, fascist sympathies and activity, actively counter-protest Patriot Prayer events in Portland and beyond. These counterprotesters, according to many on the right, are avatars of the Liberal menace. Most Portland rallies end in violence. YouTube videos composed from footage of this street violence circulate widely on social media and occasionally break into the national news cycle.

I attended my first Patriot Prayer rally on June 4th, 2017, just nine days after a violent attack by a self-proclaimed white supremacist left two dead and one severely injured in Portland, Oregon.⁵ The murderer had attended at least one Patriot Prayer rally.

⁵ Ryan, “2 Killed in Stabbing on MAX Train in Northeast Portland as Man Directs Slurs at Muslim Women, Police Say”; Office, “UPDATE #2.”

Despite significant pressure, the group decided not to cancel its “Trump Free Speech Rally,” which had been planned and permitted well in advance. I attended as one of hundreds of counterprotesters who was outraged at the presence of fascism in my city. Once there, I decided to enter the Patriot Prayer rally to see these fascists up close.

The rhetoric I heard within that rally did not match the news coverage that had inspired me to counter-protest. Joey Gibson spoke about free speech, love, religion, and the need to come together. Many of the participants seemed like ordinary Republicans. They reminded me of the people I grew up with. They did not seem like fascists to me.

My experience at that 2017 rally inspired three basic questions, which this thesis seeks to answer. What is Patriot Prayer, and where does the group fall within the right-wing milieu? What inspires people to attend Patriot Prayer rallies? And finally, what, if anything, do these rallies accomplish within the wider political sphere?

Methodology

To answer these questions, I spent the last year and a half attending Patriot Prayer-affiliated rallies and events in the Pacific Northwest (and one in Austin, Texas).

| Rally Name | Date | Location |
|---|-------------|-----------------|
| Trump Free Speech Rally | 06/04/2017 | Portland, OR |
| March for Kate Steinle | 12/09/2017 | Portland, OR |
| Joey Gibson’s Senate Campaign Announcement | 02/26/2018 | Vancouver, WA |
| Freedom and Courage Rally | 06/30/2018 | Portland, OR |
| Free Alex Jones Rally | 09/22/2018 | Austin, TX |
| Clark College: Oppose Fascist Gun Law | 10/22/2018 | Vancouver, WA |
| Himtoo Movement | 11/17/2018 | Portland, OR |
| Liberty or Death II: Against Media Bias | 12/01/2018 | Seattle, WA |
| Demand 2nd Amendment Ordinances Now | 01/12/2018 | Stevenson, WA |
| IWW Flash Mob Protest | 01/19/2019 | Portland, OR |
| Heat Vision - ICE Resistance Rally and Concert (counter-protest) | 01/26/2019 | Portland, OR |
| Free Billy Wilson Rally | 03/02/2019 | Vancouver, WA |
| Clark City Council Meeting | 03/05/2019 | Vancouver, WA |

Table 1: Patriot Prayer Events Attended and Observed

In the course of attending these rallies, I listened to countless speeches, watched taunts escalate to street brawls, and, at one point, found myself in the midst of a riot. I also listened to and got to know my fellow rally attendees. After two of these rallies, I drank and chatted with Patriot Prayer members at nearby bars. Though many members of Patriot Prayer did not fully trust me, I was able to gain good access to this group over the course of this ethnography.

I also conducted unstructured interviews with nine rally attendees of different backgrounds and beliefs. These interviews, which ranged in length from 45 to 90 minutes, took place in bars, coffeeshops, and, once, on a bridge during morning rush hour while we displayed an enormous, hand-painted “Free Alex Jones” banner to oncoming traffic. I asked basic questions about recruitment, motivation, and beliefs, but largely allowed my interviewees to talk about whatever they felt was important. Though these interviews did not include every demographic or group that attends Patriot Prayer rallies, they shed light on the motivations of many of the people who choose to spend their time at such events.

Not only did I get to know many of the participants at Patriot Prayer events, I experienced first-hand the emotions such events can evoke. I felt the provocation of counterprotester taunts and experienced fear for my physical well-being. When violence broke out, I depended in part on the martial ability of the far right for my own physical safety and experienced the camaraderie such dependence necessarily engenders. After rallies, I went directly to my computer to see how the news reported the day’s events and the videos such events generated. This exploration went beyond intellectual curiosity and thesis research. I wanted to see whether I or the people I’d met were in the videos, and to hear how the media spun the speeches and events I had experienced first-hand. I wanted to re-live the excitement of participating in something larger than myself. Through participant observation, I have gained visceral knowledge of some ways in which these rallies can affect attendees.

Understanding Patriot Prayer

Chapter 1 introduces the methodology used to analyze Patriot Prayer rallies. I draw from theories regarding the social construction of reality and frame analysis to propose a mechanism by which Patriot Prayer rallies create simplified morality plays for consumption by a wider audience. I call this process “fabling.” This chapter also explores the theory of group solidarity, which helps explain how the fabling process works to facilitate groupness. The chapter concludes with a brief explanation of terminology used within the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a brief history of mainstream conservatism and the ways in which its historical gatekeeping separated the right from the far-right. It also discusses ways that the breakdown of that gatekeeping mechanism has enabled far-right groups such as Patriot Prayer to become politically relevant. The chapter goes on to define two prominent far-right movements that overlap with, but are not, Patriot Prayer: the ethnonationalist “alt-right” and the civically nationalist “alt-lite.” Chapter 2 concludes with an exploration of the Proud Boys, an alt-light organization closely allied with Patriot Prayer.

Chapter 3 turns to the intellectual and tactical evolution of Patriot Prayer. It demonstrates that Patriot Prayer is an offshoot, not of mainstream conservatism or the alt-right, but of the Pacific Northwest Patriot movement. The chapter describes the history of this movement, which evolved over the last several decades from ideologies such as Posse Comitatus, Christian Dominionists, and American white nationalism. Chapter 3 concludes with a brief overview of Patriot Prayer’s history and ideology.

Chapter 4 pivots to an exploration of Patriot Prayer’s primary export: fables of a Liberal enemy (see the green box in Figure 1 below). Chapter 4 explores the way these fables communicate simple messages of victory or victimhood to a receptive audience.

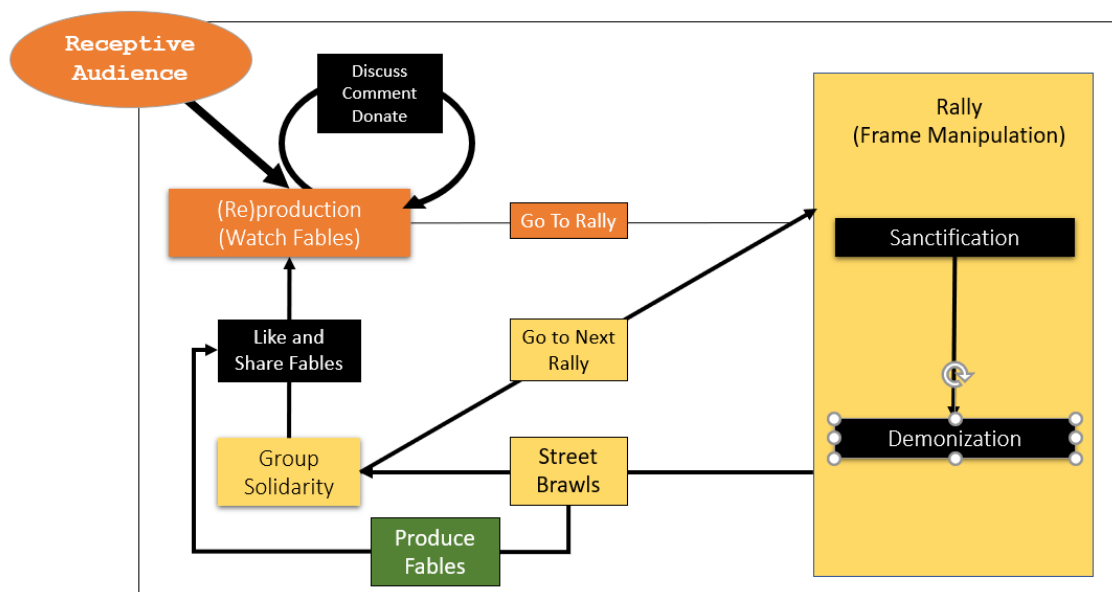


Figure 1: The Patriot Prayer Rally Cycle

The Patriot Prayer rally cycle. Chapter 4 covers the green box, Chapter 5 discusses the orange boxes, and Chapter 6 explores the yellow boxes.

Chapter 5 discusses the orange boxes in Figure 1: the nature of the audience that watches these fables; the effect these fables have on that audience; and the way fables ultimately influence the decision to attend rallies. I base these conclusions on semi-structured interviews conducted with nine rally participants.

Chapter 6 explores both the rallies themselves and the group solidarity they can create, as illustrated by the yellow boxes in Figure 1 above. The chapter uses examples from successful iterations of the Patriot Prayer Rally section of Figure 1 as examples of what sanctification and demonization look like—and feel like—in real time. It also discusses the ways that sanctification and demonization directly build group solidarity and reinforce conceptions of the enemy in the moment. At these rallies, unofficial hierarchies within Patriot Prayer and official hierarchies within the Proud Boys act to encourage behavior that creates more and better fables.

Finally, Chapter 6 discusses what happens when the fabling process breaks down—when either sanctification or demonization fail to happen. It explores different ways in which this breakdown can occur and concludes with ways that counter-protesters can successfully derail the fabling process.

Chapter 1: Theories of Analysis

To analyze my findings, I drew from two phenomenological theories: the social construction of reality and frame analysis. Theories on the socially constructed nature of our experienced realities explain how people can “know” radically different things. This is especially relevant in light of the conspiratorial logic present within the far-right generally and within the Patriot movement particularly.

Whereas social construction theory concerns itself with constructed realities inhabited by groups, frame analysis focuses on individual interactions. In everyday life, individuals use prefabricated frames of reference to interpret events quickly. When two individuals involved in an interaction use different prefabricated frames, the resulting confusion can quickly lead to trouble in the form of frame dissonance. Troll tactics pioneered by the alt-right and used by members of Patriot Prayer (especially the Proud Boys) purposefully create frame dissonance in order to elicit inappropriate or funny reactions from their victims.

I used these phenomenological theories to develop the concept of “fabling.” Fabling is the creation of video narratives featuring interactions between individuals understood as stand-ins for larger groups. These videos act as morality plays and feature clearly-defined protagonists and antagonists—in this case, left-wing counterprotesters. These narratives appear organic but are in fact created explicitly for a third-party audience.

Finally, I drew on theories of group solidarity to better understand how Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys maintain “groupness” and keep people returning to rallies and events. Group solidarity also sheds light on the way formed hierarchies within the groups reward and punish desirable and undesirable behaviors, often in ways that contradict stated goals and aims of these two groups.

Social Construction of Reality

Phenomenology as a whole does not concern itself with positive or normative questions of objective reality. Rather, it focuses on the way individuals experience and conceive of the world. A large part of this experience involves shared social institutions that we do not question. We treat things such as income inequality or total war as non-negotiable, inherent realities of the human experience.⁶ In *The Social Construction of Reality*, sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann explore the implications of way groups of people operate using a shared “social stock of knowledge”—a mutual understanding of themes, meaning, and reality that we can assume others will implicitly grasp without explanation. For example, if I say that someone is “poor,” people within American society will have a good idea of what I mean without any further elaboration. If, however, I described someone as “poor” to a person in sub-Saharan Africa, communication might break down due to very different understandings of this semi-shared concept.⁷

This social stock of knowledge comes from institutions within society, which Berger and Luckmann define as “a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors.” This occurs when two (or more) parties get in the habit of treating each other a certain way based on preconceived notions of where the other fits in society. For example, a man and a woman on a desert island might typify themselves as “house-builder” and “hunter,” respectively. The man builds and maintains the shelter while the woman goes hunting. They will do this without needing to think about it, out of habit. This is useful, since habits allow human beings to cut down on the number of conscious decisions they need to make and to save time and energy for more difficult decision-making.

If possible, we cut down on decision-making even further by applying habits used in familiar situations to new but similar situations. For example, if another woman arrives on the hypothetical island, both of the current inhabitants will likely treat her as a hunter and expect hunter-like behavior from her. This enforcement of norms does not require

⁶ Aho, *This Thing of Darkness*, 5.

⁷ Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 41–42.

oversight or enforcement but happens organically and without thought. Although laws and enforcement agencies can force institutionalized behavior, such controls are necessary only to the extent that institutionalization is incomplete. Individuals acting within a complete institution would never think to step outside of institutionalized boundaries. The institution is taken for granted.⁸

Those who remember the formation of institutions remember the reasons for their establishment. Someone born into a society with already-established institutions, however, does not view those institutions as a structure developed by human beings in response to situations and events. Instead, they experience the institution as a historical reality.⁹ The more historicized an institution becomes, the more society perceives it as an unquestionable part of the natural order of things and the more difficult it is to change the institution. Eventually, one may see the institution, not as a historical creation of one's predecessors, but as an unchangeable natural or supernatural fact.¹⁰

As these historicized institutions become entrenched, the original reasons for the institutions may cease to hold relevance within a changing society. When this breakdown occurs, deviation from institutional behavior becomes more likely. To counter this and maintain stability, societies "legitimate" institutions through the development of new reasons for their existence. These reasons may not—likely do not—resemble the original reasons for the establishment of the institution. Rather, society creates legitimations that utilize the same overarching logic as the legitimations of other institutions. This increases social cohesion through the creation of a single all-encompassing narrative.¹¹

If successful, this cohesive narrative becomes a "symbolic universe": a theoretical framework that resolves contradictions and integrates all possible experiences into a coherent whole. Within the structure of a symbolic universe, everything makes sense. The things that happen are natural, inevitable, and correct, and we understand the "correct" way to act, think, and live our lives. The symbolic universe allows us to maintain our sense of identity even if the people and circumstances around us change

⁸ Berger and Luckmann, 53–55.

⁹ Berger and Luckmann, 58.

¹⁰ Berger and Luckmann, 58–60, 89–90.

¹¹ Berger and Luckmann, 92–95.

drastically. Since the symbolic universe encompasses reality, nothing can exist beyond it. The system thus excludes chaos, disaster, and—above all—the inevitability of our own death from consideration, thereby mitigating fear of those things. For example, the symbolic universe replaces the reality of death and loss with prescriptions for a “correct death.” Such a prescription can give meaning to both our own deaths and the deaths of loved ones. Individuals can continue to function without becoming overwhelmed by grief or fear of the inevitable end of life.¹²

As our “shield against terror,” the symbolic universe feels—and is—essential for a functioning society. The destruction of this universe leaves us “exposed, alone, to the onslaught of nightmare.”¹³ For this reason, people will fight to preserve their symbolic universes even in the face of contradictory information. An attack on a fundamental precept feels like an attack on sanity, because, in a very real way, it is.

Unfortunately for the collective sanity of the human race, no symbolic universe perfectly matches reality. They are human constructs stretched more or less successfully over a complicated, messy, and ultimately chaotic reality.¹⁴

In order to preserve society, maintainers of the symbolic universe must work to legitimate the universe in the face of information that appears to contradict it. If it fails to do so, deviant versions of the universe may gain traction and “congeal” into a rival symbolic universe. Rival symbolic universes provide concrete evidence that the dominant symbolic universe isn’t nearly as inevitable as it pretends to be. A heretical alternative universe thus presents a practical and immediate threat to the institutions legitimated by the dominant symbolic universe and, by extension, to social stability.¹⁵

To avoid this existential challenge, societies use a variety of tools and tactics to eliminate deviant realities before they spread and congeal. The most obvious way to eliminate deviance is through force, but this is far from the only solution. Societies may also use “conceptual machinery” to neutralize the threat: specifically, therapy or nihilation.

¹² Berger and Luckmann, 95–101.

¹³ Berger and Luckmann, 101–2.

¹⁴ Berger and Luckmann, 102–4.

¹⁵ Berger and Luckmann, 102–8.

Deviants within the bounds of the symbolic universe often receive therapy—a sort of treatment for deviance intended to “prevent the ‘inhabitants’ of a given universe from ‘emigrating’.” Depending on the society, therapeutic tactics could range from exorcism to psychoanalysis. Either way, the therapy seeks to re-educate deviants and prevent deviation before it becomes serious. Internalized therapy can be extremely effective at preventing deviation. For example, individuals within a symbolic universe that forbids homosexuality may exhibit “gay panic” at any latent homosexual thoughts that will effectively prevent the individual from thinking about it any further, never mind acting on the impulse.¹⁶

Therapy can shore up the symbolic universe for those already inside it, but it cannot instill it on those already outside of the symbolic universe. Those perceived as alien and outside the bounds of society require a different tactic: nihilation. Nihilation acts to neutralize the influence of anything outside the symbolic universe that appears to contradict its constructed reality. One form of nihilation involves a reduction of the ontological status of said heretics. For example, a society might portray a culture with a prohibition on eating meat as primitive and barbaric. A vegetarian diet thus becomes “barbaric nonsense, not to be taken seriously by reasonable men.”

The second method of nihilation accounts for outsider deviation by reframing the deviation in terms of one’s own symbolic universe. Under this construction, the apparent heretic is no heretic at all. In fact, despite appearances and assertions to the contrary, they believe the same thing as those within the symbolic universe. Maintainers of the symbolic universe might accomplish this through claims that the outsider is speaking unclearly, and actually means to say something that makes sense within the upheld system. Alternately, they might say that the heretic lacks information and context. If they knew everything we knew, the logic goes, they would agree with us. Sometimes, maintainers ascribe a more malicious cause to the illusion of difference. Under this construction, the heretic denies, or actively lies about, their lived experience and beliefs in an effort to deceive and undermine the in-group. In all three methods of nihilation, the heretic’s

¹⁶ Berger and Luckmann, 109–13.

opposition is reframed both to affirm the symbolic universe and to affirm the heretic's identity as an untrustworthy, deceitful outsider.¹⁷

Sometimes, two different and incompatible symbolic universes take root within the same society. The proximity of these two rival worldviews renders exposure to heretics both inevitable and constant. No easy path to resolution exists in this situation. The abstract and theoretical nature of symbolic universes eliminate the possibility of a decisive pragmatic test to determine which most accurately describes the real world. Proponents of each worldview can and will argue with each other in an attempt to change minds and win converts. Because they are arguing from two incompatible frameworks of reality, however, the arguments offered by each side will not make sense to the opposition. Evangelists will talk past each other and experience mounting frustration as their best arguments are met with indifference and apparently malicious incomprehension.¹⁸

Reality peddlers—those who wish to see their own symbolic universe dominant within wider society—have two realistic options in such a scenario. They can either use violence to suppress the other symbolic universe, or they can recruit others into their own version of reality. This recruitment will not occur through intellectual arguments for the reasons cited above, but must occur through socialization mechanisms such as schools, public media, and so on. Both violence and recruitment act to increase the proportion of adherents to one's own symbolic universe to the adherents of the enemy construction. In the end, this is what either primarily or entirely decides the contest. The more people believe in a symbolic universe, the more society as a whole and interactions on the individual level will reflect and require belief in that symbolic universe. This ubiquity fuels recruitment and lessens the ability of people within it to question its tenets. Mass following, not empirical evidence or logical argument, will determine which symbolic universe triumphs.¹⁹ If one wishes to fight against a different construction of social reality, one must either find a way to recruit or begin to construct gulags.

¹⁷ Berger and Luckmann, 114–16.

¹⁸ Berger and Luckmann, 118–20.

¹⁹ Berger and Luckmann, 118–20.

The Conspiratorial Universe

One genre of symbolic universe of particular salience to this is the conspiratorial symbolic universe. The logic of the conspiratorial symbolic universe functions as a closed system: it does not seek information outside of the conspiratorial argument to confirm or deny its proposition. This stands in contrast to open systems, such as science, whose adherents actively attempt to prove their theories true or false through outside knowledge, such as experimental results. If evidence accumulates that disproves a given scientific theory, scientists will change the theory. Conspiracy theories do not work this way. For example, when Donald Trump led the birtherism conspiracy in the early 2010s, Obama presented both his short-form and long-form birth certificate as evidence that the theory was false. The conspiracists were not persuaded by this outside information and would likely not have accepted any outside information as authoritative.²⁰

Symbolic universes that depend on conspiratorial logic do a poor job of synthesizing all experience into a coherent whole because the conspiratorial vision so poorly maps onto the real world. According to conspiratorial logic, all human interactions involve maneuvers towards a strategic, conspiratorial goal.²¹ The conspiratorial symbolic universe synthesizes this theory into a worldview in which a large, powerful, and mysterious cabal manipulates world events in accordance with a secret plan. Everything that happens is part of this plan; there are no accidents within the conspiratorial symbolic universe.²² In reality, however, even small social actions produce unforeseen and unforeseeable consequences. As Richard Hofstadter puts it in *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*, “the paranoid mind is far more coherent than the real world.”²³ The level of control over events and outcomes necessary for a centrally-planned and perfectly-maintained conspiracy on a global or even a national scale is impossible.²⁴ The conspiratorial symbolic universe therefore often contradicts observable reality.

²⁰ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 9, 55–57.

²¹ Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics”, quoted in; Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 65.

²² Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 65.

²³ Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics.”

²⁴ Popper, *The High Tide of Prophecy*, 94–95, quoted in; Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 76–77.

What conspiratorial symbolic universes lack in unifying explanatory power, however, they make up for with a powerful nihilation technique to eliminate inconsistencies from consideration. The conspiracist first mounts an ontological attack against the would-be refuter: they are either a conscious or unconscious agent of the shadowy cabal. Therefore, their words and evidence cannot be trusted. After establishing that apparent inconsistencies are actually deliberately-crafted falsehoods, the conspiracist further nihilates the inconsistency by reframing it as evidence of the power and craftiness of the cabal. Under this construction, the more compelling the evidence appears to be, the more powerfully it reinforces the conspiracy. After all, only a truly powerful and nefarious cabal could craft such a convincing piece of propaganda.²⁵

The conspiratorial symbolic universe also offers its adherents benefits out of reach for those who subscribe to an open-system worldview. Conspiracies provide certainty and a stark good-vs-evil dichotomy that appeals to people who want simple explanations. Such theories also play upon what Aho calls the “narcissism of lived time”—the belief that the time in which we live is a pivotal moment in history with “immeasurable, eschatological significance.” This belief is extremely effective at mitigating fear of death in that it projects the urgency and fear that death inspires onto the world at large in the form of an existential struggle for truth. Conspiracies also provide a sense of importance and purpose for believers. Finally, a conspiratorial universe is an ordered universe. The idea that a shadowy cabal controls everything is, in a strange way, more comforting than the idea that no one is control of anything and that much of the world is a product of chaos and chance.²⁶

Acceptance of a conspiracy theory—*any* conspiracy theory— by a denizen of a non-conspiratorial symbolic universe introduces conspiratorial logic into the repertoire of the accepter. Studies suggests that belief in one conspiracy theory predisposes belief in other conspiracy theories,²⁷ which in turns suggests that a single conspiracy can act as a gateway to acceptance of a conspiratorial symbolic universe.

²⁵ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 35, 44; The birther conspiracy is an excellent example of this. See Neiwert, 97–103. See also the Boston Marathon false-flag conspiracy theory: Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 76.

²⁶ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 9, 66.

²⁷ Goertzel, “Belief in Conspiracy Theories”; Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 35.

Survey analysis by political scientists Eric Oliver and Thomas Wood supports the idea that acceptance of a conspiracy theory implies acceptance of a set of core beliefs about the world that align with the appeal of a conspiracist symbolic universe. According to this study, the best predictors of belief in any given conspiracy theory are: belief that politics is a struggle between good and evil, belief that we live in the End Times, belief in the paranormal, and belief that a secret cabal controls world events.²⁸ While the study does not establish direction of causality—whether the conspiracy or conspiratorial logic came first—it supports the idea that individuals who subscribe to even one conspiracy theory are potential recruits into a conspiratorial symbolic universe.

Not everyone who subscribes to a conspiracy theory is beyond the reach of therapy from non-conspiratorial realities, however. For example, one-time Fox news show host Glenn Beck gave air time to the theory that FEMA is secretly erecting concentration camps. However, he apologized for doing so after a *Popular Science* journalist disproved the evidence used in the segment.²⁹ By all appearances, outside evidence convinced Beck that he was wrong, which suggests that belief in a conspiracy does not inevitably lead to ironclad conspiratorial logic. This is good news, since half of America believes in at least one conspiracy and since that number is growing.³⁰ Whether Beck is a typical case or not, however, remains to be seen.

Conspiracy theories have long held a place within American political discourse, both on the left and on the right.³¹ Their presence now does not mean that the United States will shortly succumb to a conspiratorial symbolic universe. The commonality of conspiratorial logic within the American public remains worthy of concern, however, especially as genuinely conspiratorial symbolic universes on the far-right attempt to appeal to the general American public. As this thesis demonstrates repeatedly, conspiracy and conspiratorial logic influences and permeates the ideology of Patriot Prayer and rally attendees.

²⁸ Oliver and Wood, “Conspiracy Theories and the Paranoid Style(s) of Mass Opinion.”

²⁹ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 104–5.

³⁰ Oliver and Wood, “Conspiracy Theories and the Paranoid Style(s) of Mass Opinion”, quoted in; Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 47.

³¹ Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics.”

Frame Analysis and Trolling

Whereas social construction theory applies phenomenological concepts to groups of people, frame analysis applies phenomenology to individual perceptions of the world. Frame analysis, first developed by Ervin Goffman in his book of the same name, is the study of how individuals answer the central question of day-to-day existence: “what is it that’s going on here?” According to Goffman, we answer this question through framing: a process by which we apply various “principles of organization” in order to construct a cohesive story about the events we experience. In order to interact with others also witnessing or participating in these events, our frame analysis needs to match.³²

All frames of reality begin with a primary framework: the application of a socially prefabricated story to an event that gives meaning to that event. Examples might include “he is walking to the store” or “she is playing chess.” These are basic, irreducible interpretations of occurrences. Goffman describes society’s collective group of primary frameworks as “a central element of its culture.”³³ Becker and Luckmann might describe the framework group as the institutions that the symbolic universe legitimates.

People also use frameworks that do not fundamentally grant meaning to events, but rather cast those events in a new light. For example, if I see two children playing at sword-fighting, I understand the event primarily in terms of the concept “sword-fighting” and then modify it with an understanding of the concept “play.” Goffman calls this reframing “keying,” which can include play, daydreaming, movies, jokes, and so on. Observers understand the keying of the event based on cues that are available to all. Keying frameworks usually have built-in limits—for example, if one of the play-fighting children pokes the other child in the eye, the game is over, since eye-poking is understood to be outside the bounds of our society’s conception of play fighting. The keying process need not stop at a single level—a movie that features two children play-fighting involves a primary framework (fighting) that goes through a keying (play) and

³² Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 8–13.

³³ Goffman, 21–27, 40.

then a re-keying (a scene put on by actors). A given situation can have any number of “layers” of keying.³⁴

Successful, satisfactory, and comprehensible interactions between individuals require that participants act from roughly the same framework of understanding.³⁵ Sometimes, perspective interferes with this alignment. For example, two attendees at a party where one attendee is ignored and the other finds themselves at the center of attention will remember two very different parties later.³⁶ If these individuals talk about the party, they will initially be unable to coherently discuss it. Only through explanation can each individual communicate their own framing of the party so that the other understands their perception of the mutually-experienced event.

It is also possible for a deceptive individual to purposefully manipulate activities and cues so that one or more participants in an event has a false framework of what is going on. Goffman calls this “fabrication.” Fabrications can range from “benign”—for example, a joke with shifting premises—to “exploitative”—in which the deceiver creates a framework that is “clearly inimical to [the deceived’s] private interests.”³⁷

There are many ways in which a deceiver can fabricate a false framework. “Trolling” is one of them. Judith Donath, founder of the Sociable Media Group at MIT Labs, defines trolling as a type of “identity deception” in which the troll presents themselves as a “legitimate participant” in the activity in question—for example, a participant on a discussion forum about weddings. However, the troll has a secret purpose for participating not revealed to the other participants. For example, a troll might post deliberately bad advice in an attempt to deceive well-meaning participants into doing something against their own interests. Alternately, they might post inflammatory opinions or ad-hominem attacks in an effort to derail conversation and make people angry in the process. Regardless of method or ultimate goal, the troll fabricates a false frame in which

³⁴ Goffman, 40–82.

³⁵ Goffman, 27.

³⁶ Goffman, 8–9.

³⁷ Goffman, 83, 103.

the deceiver appears to pursue the shared goal of the other participants, but actually works to derail the group's shared goals in some way.³⁸

Some trolls engage in trolling for their personal enjoyment. Others do so in an effort to create a spectacle for a third-party audience. I call this “performative trolling.” Unlike trolls who engage in identity deception for their own amusement, the performative troll seeks to elicit a reaction from their interlocutor for the sake of a third-party audience. For example, a troll might seek to destroy a message board by provoking other users and derailing conversations until every post features ad-hominem attacks and vicious flame wars. The troll's ultimate target, however, is not the flame war participants but third parties—newcomers and those who do not participate in the flame wars. This audience will likely interpret the toxic atmosphere of the message board as indicative of users generally and not as a curated outcome. Newcomers will decide not to join the message board, and nonparticipants will eventually leave. As the process continues, content deteriorates and, eventually, the board either shuts down or becomes a ghost town.

As this thesis will show, performative trolling is central to the operation of Patriot Prayer as well as to the current far-right milieu in general. Many on the far-right view performative trolling as a tool for exposing their enemy's true nature to an audience of potential recruits. The troll is therefore justified in that they expose a larger truth. Consider the way the alt-right website *Radix* justified a vote for Donald Trump before the election:

Trump is worth supporting...because we need a troll. We need someone who can expose the system that rules us as the malevolent and worthless entity it is. We need someone who can break open public debate. We need someone who can expose and heighten the contradictions within the system. And we need someone who can call out the press, the politicians, and the pseudo-intellectuals as the empty shells they are. The fact that Trump himself is part of this same farce is utterly irrelevant.³⁹

³⁸ Donath, “Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community,” 13–14, quoted in Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 2017.

³⁹ “Why We Need a Troll as President”, quoted in Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 271.

Fabling

As the wolf feasted on the carcass of his recent kill, he ate too quickly and got a bone stuck painfully in his throat. Unable either to swallow or regurgitate the bone, the wolf traveled to the long-necked crane and promised the crane a great reward for removing the bone. The crane, suspicious yet greedy, stuck her head down the wolf's throat and removed the bone. Relieved of his painful problem, the wolf began to walk away. "What about my reward?" the crane demanded angrily. "Fool!" the wolf growled in reply. "Your reward is that I did not bite your head off as you withdrew it from my mouth."⁴⁰

This short story, *The Wolf and the Crane*, is one of Aesop's many fables. A fable is a short vignette involving one or two archetypal characters that conveys a simple and easy-to-understand moral lesson. As this thesis will demonstrate, Patriot Prayer strives to create precisely this type of story—a fable—for consumption by a wider audience.

I have coined the term "fabling" to describe the process by which Patriot Prayer creates these stories. A fabler uses performative trolling tactics to create curated spectacles for a third-party audience. These fables can both provide therapy for audiences already within the fablers' symbolic universe and recruit from audiences sympathetic to, but not yet within, that universe.

Background: Reification

My concept of fabling owes a great deal to Berger and Luckmann's theory of reification as applied by James Aho in his book *This Thing of Darkness: A Sociology of the Enemy*. In this book, Aho uses the theory of reification to analyze the far-right Patriot movement of the Pacific Northwest in the 1990s (discussed further in Chapter 3) and the way in which they created and reinforced the concept of their political enemies. This "reification process" consists of five steps, which can occur in any order. The first step,

⁴⁰ Scholastic, *The Aesop for Children with Pictures by Milo Winter*.

however, is usually the “naming” stage, in which the group comes up with a derogatory term for the enemy.⁴¹

“Legitimation” makes the selected name “stick” to the enemy, often through what Aho calls a “public degradation ceremony.” This ceremony, in which the enemy is charged with some kind of violation of norms, must be formalized in some way and respected by both group and enemy. In the course of the ceremony, the enemy appears consistently and purposefully evil while the group appears just and righteous. Whether or not the ceremony concludes with a conviction or an acquittal, the degradation ceremony cements the derogatory name to the enemy group in question.

“Mythmaking” creates reasons for why the enemy acts in the evil way that they do. These explanations can be rooted in biology, psychology, sociology, religion, and so on. For example, a mythmaker might claim that a “thug” breaks the law because they come from a broken home, have a mental illness, are of a certain race, or are possessed by demons. Regardless of the actual explanation, mythmaking both reinforces the name used for the enemy (“thug”) and the narrative that the enemy is evil.⁴²

“Sedimentation” occurs when notions of the enemy pass to other generations or groups of people with no direct experience with that enemy. Something is always lost in translation: ideas about the enemy become simplified and exaggerated for easier transmission. At this point, ideas about the enemy pass into “common sense”—in other words, it becomes part of the wider group’s symbolic universe.⁴³

Finally, “Ritual” occurs when the group responds “appropriately” to the evil enemy: “with secrecy, caution, cunning, and, if necessary, cruelty.” By the time ritual occurs, the group has a highly reified conception of the enemy which demands action. After all, the enemy will take merciless advantage of any hesitation or weakness on the part of the group. The enemy’s response to actions against them further reify their status as enemy. If they respond badly or aggressively, it cements the idea of the group as

⁴¹ Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*; quoted in Aho, *This Thing of Darkness*, 27–28.

⁴² Aho, *This Thing of Darkness*, 29–30.

⁴³ Aho, 30–31.

adversarial and dangerous. Lack of aggressive response, on the other hand, indicates a manipulative ploy on the enemy's part to garner sympathy.⁴⁴

Fabling Theory

My concept of fabling bears most resemblance to the legitimation stage of reification, but also contains elements of ritual and sedimentation. Those who engage in fabling use performative trolling tactics to create curated fables: packaged depictions of events that appear organic and unscripted and that are intended for a third-party audience. These fables can unfold for a participating audience in real time or, more potently, appear on video for wide dissemination. The fable offers a short, simple, and easy-to-understand morality play with two distinct sides: the protagonist stand-in for the fabling in-group and the antagonist stand-in for the enemy group.

Successful fable creation involves two basic processes: sanctification and demonization. Sanctification establishes that the in-group protagonist's actions are justified, positive, and nonthreatening. Demonization portrays the out-group antagonist as unreasonable, unrighteous, and dangerous.

The successful fable nihilates the antagonist. Within the framework of the successful fable, the sanctified protagonist and demonized antagonist occupy the same symbolic universe and perceive reality in identical ways. They do not disagree on the best way to do good: both understand the protagonist's goals as desirable. The demonic antagonist opposes these goals because they want to do harm to the protagonist and, by extension, the group the protagonist represents.

Since we do not live in a comic book universe populated by two-dimensional heroes and villains, the nihilating fable rarely corresponds to reality. The fabler often gets around this difficulty through use of performative trolling techniques. Through framing cues that the antagonist group will pick up but not the audience—or vice versa—the protagonist group essentially creates two different realities: one for themselves and one for the enemy. The antagonist group responds to a different reality than the one the audience perceives. Frame manipulation becomes easier when the enemy inhabits a

⁴⁴ Aho, 31–32.

significantly different symbolic universe from the in-group itself. It becomes easier also when the in-group and the third-party audience occupy similar or identical symbolic universes.

A fabler need not perceive the fabling process as a slight of hand designed to fool a third-party audience into believing something untrue. Many fablers—including, I believe, the ones described in this thesis—believe that their frame manipulation serves to uncover the hidden, nihilating truth of their enemy. Similarly, some fables align more closely with reality than others. Fables are not lies by definition. They are simply curated stories: simplifications that may or may not align with actual events and motivations.

Phenomenological analysis on both a macro and micro level helps explain communication and miscommunication. It also provides an implicit reason for group cohesion: a shared symbolic universe or frame. Fabling draws from these theories and describes a mechanism with the ability to socially construct reality. However, the fabling mechanism is not enough to explain the perpetuation of groups like Patriot Prayer. Why do people join the group? Why do they stay? What makes the group cohere? Group solidarity theory helps answer these questions.

Group Formation and Solidarity

Theories of group solidarity can help explain why people join and remain in groups, and what makes a successful group cohere. In *Principles of Group Solidarity*, Michael Hechter defines a group as a set of individuals who come together to accomplish one or more “mutually oriented activit[ies].” A group must have membership criteria, or else it is merely a “crowd.” Groups form around the creation of collective goods, whose consumption can be somewhat limited but not to the extent of private goods. Only a group can create a collective good, or people would create it on their own.⁴⁵ Friendship is an example of a jointly-produced collective good.

⁴⁵ Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity*, 10, 16.

Since the production of this good is the sole reason for the existence of said group, the group must establish rules to ensure that the good continues to be produced. Group members might obey these rules because the group compensates its members monetarily. Alternatively, members might obey the rules because it's worth it to them to get the end product. Hechter defines this "quid pro quo" arrangement as "solidarity"—"compliance in the absence of compensation."⁴⁶

An individual will agree to participate in a group in exchange solely for its collective good only if they depend on that end product in some way. The harder it is to replace the product and the costlier it would be to leave, the more an individual will be willing to contribute or conform in order to continue membership. Personal friendships and social ties raise the cost of exit considerably. Since these kinds of bonds form over time and with repeated contact, they represent a "sunk cost" for the individual. The longer an individual remains within a group, the more difficult it will be for that individual to find a replacement for the group and the less likely they are to leave.⁴⁷ This difficulty compounds for individuals who are socially isolated outside of the group and/or cannot easily join other groups.⁴⁸ This makes leaving stigmatized groups extremely difficult, since the group is often the only source of support for its members.

In his book *Far-Right Fantasy*, James Aho explores this dynamic as it pertains to apostate neo-Nazis. In order for a group member to leave, they must experience a "push." A push occurs when the social support network of the neo-Nazi group breaks down in some way and the group ceases to meet the individual's needs. By itself, this is not enough. An individual who does not feel satisfied within the stigmatized group, but who perceives no other options outside of the group, will radicalize in an attempt to diminish "psychological dissonance" and better fit in with the group. For apostasy to occur, there must also be a "pull"—a connection outside of the movement that provides an alternative source of social support. When an individual exits a neo-Nazi group, the push is usually

⁴⁶ Hechter, 10.

⁴⁷ Hechter, 10, 46–47.

⁴⁸ Hechter, 54.

generalized discontent, but the pull is almost always a specific person. Aho notes that this social push/pull dynamic precedes ideological change.⁴⁹

Dependence leads to group membership but does not guarantee rule-following; an individual who can obtain the produced collective good without following the rules will do so. To eliminate this “free rider problem,” the group must have some form of “formal controls” that reward compliance and punish rule-breaking. The lower the cost of conformity, and the higher the natural cost for defiance, the fewer formal controls are needed.⁵⁰

This implies some form of monitoring—the ability to discover whether rules are followed or not. To do this, groups must either hire or appoint “agents,” who monitor and enforce rule compliance. The agents’ task is easiest in culturally homogeneous groups—groups of individuals operating within the same symbolic universe—because observers can easily interpret the meaning of member actions and statements. The group can also make observation easier through the establishment of public rituals in which members place their conformity and commitment on display. Groups can also establish communication frameworks in which members are encouraged to say exactly what they think, or they can create an environment of limited privacy.⁵¹ Social media serves a monitoring function in many groups today.

Once monitoring reveals the extent of conformity and/or rule-breaking, the group will impose sanctions and distribute rewards. The ultimate sanction is expulsion from the group, but most groups have lesser sanctions that don’t directly pertain to access to the joint good. For culturally homogeneous groups, symbolic sanctions and benefits such as “honor, shame prestige, and so forth” work extremely well. Successful groups often make sanctions and benefits public in order to encourage good behavior and discourage deviance. Formal rank systems, such as Proud Boy membership levels (see Chapter 2), operate as positive sanctions that encourage group behavior. Whether formal or informal, solidary groups evolve hierarchies. The more rigid the hierarchy, the more likely long-

⁴⁹ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 125–30.

⁵⁰ Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity*, 10–11, 49–51; Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, 2.

⁵¹ Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity*, 10–11, 49–51, 150–54, 156–57.

term success becomes for the group. Not only does the prospect of moving up in the hierarchy inspire compliance, but hierarchy vests those at the top with the authority to judge disputes and determine rankings of those below them.⁵²

One source of group solidarity that Hechter hints at but does not explicitly address is the creation of an external enemy. Social scientists have observed that hostility toward an outside entity can powerfully promote peace and solidarity within the group.⁵³ In *This Thing of Darkness*, Aho examines the way conceptions of an external enemy help American far-right groups maintain cohesion. People with different backgrounds or who disagree on important points of ideology will unite in the face of a large enough common threat.⁵⁴ As such, enemies created through fabling help bolster group solidarity.

Carl Schmitt, German philosopher and Nazi party member, took the concept of solidarity through enemy to the extreme. In his 1932 work, *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt postulated that the friend/enemy dichotomy fundamentally defines politics. According to Schmitt, nations always coalesce around the concept of a shared enemy.⁵⁵

Group solidarity that depends heavily on an external enemy bring Schmitt's version of politics into reality. If a group defines itself primarily through opposition to an enemy, that group must see their enemy as implacable and unreasonable. In other words, the enemy must inhabit a rival symbolic universe. As explained in the social construction section above, the close proximity of two symbolic universes threatens the illusion of each symbolic universe as a default and all-encompassing way of looking at the world. Both symbolic universes attempt to escape this untenable situation through attempts at eliminating the rival universe, either through recruitment or through the use of violence. In other words, Schmitt's friend/enemy vision of politics inevitably takes hold.

⁵² Hechter, 157–60.

⁵³ See, for example: Helly, Barsky, and Foxen, "Social Cohesion and Cultural Plurality"; Tsoukala, "Boundary-Creating Processes and the Social Construction of Threat"; Vollhardt, Migacheva, and Tropp, "Social Cohesion and Tolerance for Group Differences."

⁵⁴ Aho, *This Thing of Darkness*, 85–86.

⁵⁵ Schmitt and Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 26–28.

The danger of this situation increases dramatically with proximity. When the constructed enemy lives in your neighborhood and votes in your elections, the situation turns into a powder keg. When sparks fly, everyone is in danger.

Terminology

Before applying this theory to the question of the far-right milieu generally and Patriot Prayer specifically, a word on terminology is in order.

As of 2019, no universally accepted terminology to describe either general or specific elements of the far right exists. For example, David Neiwert refers to far-right milieu as “Alt-America.”⁵⁶ Mike Wendling defines the entire movement as “Alt-Right,” as do many other academics.⁵⁷ Matthew Lyons describes a deracialized “Alt-Lite” within the wider alt-right milieu,⁵⁸ while Hawley and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) characterizes the alt-lite as a separate but related group.⁵⁹ Neiwert, Lyons, and James Aho discuss the Patriot movement as an additional group within the far right.⁶⁰

In this thesis, I will continue to use the term “far right” to describe right-wing groups with an ideology excluded from mainstream conservatism prior to the 2000s. Within the far right, I will discuss three semi-distinct movements: The Alt-Right, the Alt-Lite, and the Patriot movement. Individuals and groups often do not fit neatly into just one of these three categories, and the movements themselves have many things in common. Nonetheless, there are key ideological and practical differences between the three movements that make distinguishing between them crucial for understanding and responding to the current political climate. Chapter 2 provides thorough definitions and explanations of the Alt-Right and Alt-Lite. Chapter 3 explores the evolution of the Patriot movement.

⁵⁶ Neiwert, *Alt-America*.

⁵⁷ Wendling, *Alt-Right*; Massanari and Chess, “Attack of the 50-Foot Social Justice Warrior”; Michael, “The Rise of the Alt-Right and the Politics of Polarization in America.”

⁵⁸ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*.

⁵⁹ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*; “From Alt Right to Alt Lite.”

⁶⁰ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*; Neiwert, *In God’s Country*; Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*.

Racial attitudes are one of the main attributes that differentiate ideologies within the far-right milieu. An exploration of these attitudes requires precise terms to describe types of racial thinking. Merriam-Webster defines “racism” as “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that **racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race**” (emphasis added).⁶¹ I use this term to describe ideologies that explicitly endorse any type of racial hierarchy. The same dictionary defines “racialism” as “a theory that race determines human traits and capacities.”⁶² I use this term to describe ideologies that subscribe to the idea of innate racial difference, but not to the idea of a hierarchy of superior and inferior races. Though some racialists are racist beneath the surface, the distinction is nonetheless important. Racialists and racists publicly advocate for different policies and appeal to different groups of people.

This distinction is not an effort to downplay racialism, which is a dangerous and caustic ideology even without belief in supremacy. Racialist beliefs, which appeal to a wider audience than more-stigmatized racial beliefs, can act as a gateway to full racism. Those who subscribe to ideologies that eschew the concept of equality in general are at even greater risk for transitioning from racialist to racist.

Some people and ideologies explored in this thesis subscribe to a “color-blind” theory of race, in which people ought to be judged as individuals and in which any sort of racial collectivism is denied. Many would argue that this attitude ignores systemic racial discrimination and thus upholds institutional racism. However, the attitude is distinct from both racialist and racist belief structures. As such, I elect to refer to the “color-blind” approach to race as “non-racialist.”

As with racialists, espoused non-racialist ideology may obscure racialist or racial beliefs; however, the difference in declared beliefs has important policy and propaganda implications. Potential recruits will likely take beliefs articulated by far-right groups at face value; if we are to explore recruitment and retention, we must approach far right ideas in the same way. This thesis therefore largely avoids speculation about what individuals “really” believe. Unless presented with concrete evidence for deception, this

⁶¹ “Definition of RACISM.”

⁶² “Definition of RACIALISM.”

work instead takes declarations on racial beliefs at face value, much as a potential recruit would do

Chapter 2: Birth of a Far-Right Nation

Armed with the theoretical frameworks explored in Chapter 1, we can begin to formulate answers to the first question: What is Patriot Prayer, and where does it fall within the far-right milieu?

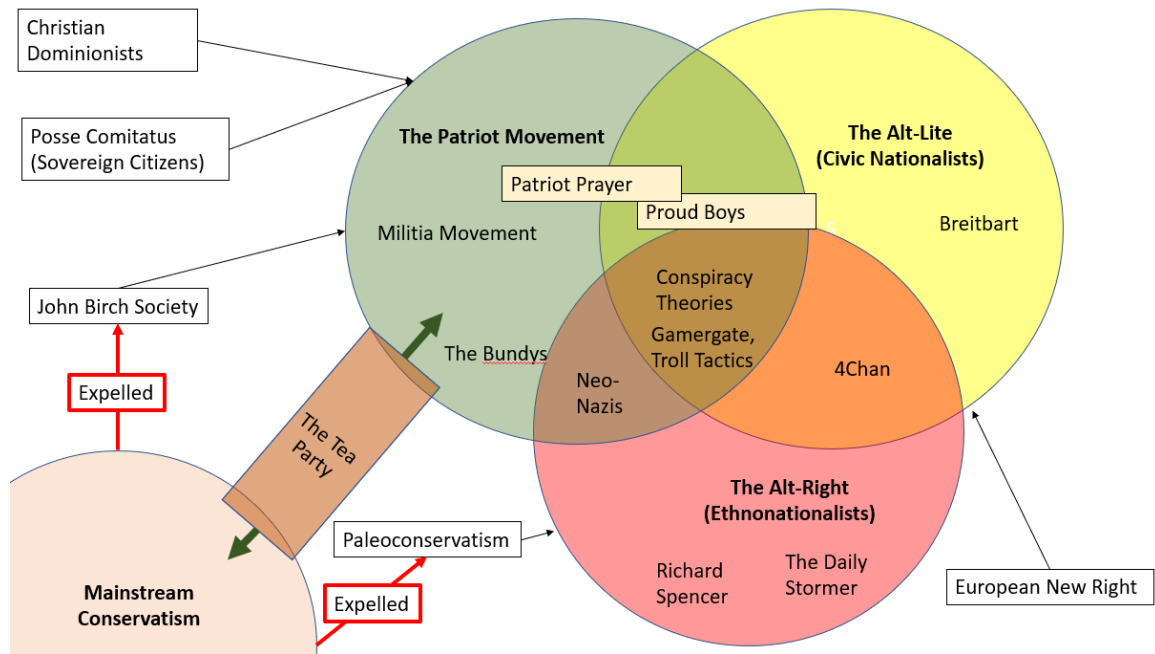


Figure 2: The American Conservative Landscape

Patriot Prayer does not exist in a vacuum, nor did it develop in one. An understanding of Patriot Prayer requires an understanding of its ideological history, which in turn requires an understanding of the American conservative landscape as a whole (see Figure 2). Furthermore, much of the group's political importance stems from the way it interacts with other movements on the right, including the mainstream conservative movement, the tea party, the alt-right, and the alt-lite.

Where does Patriot Prayer fall within the political spectrum? It depends on who you ask. Many news articles describe the activist group as “conservative.”⁶³ Other articles—some from the same publications that describe the group as “conservative”—describe Patriot Prayer as “alt-right.”⁶⁴ Patriot Prayer is not conservative in the traditional sense, nor are they alt-right. To understand why this group falls into neither category, one must understand the history and beliefs of the conservative and alt-right movements, respectively.

Mainstream Conservatism since 1955

The mainstream post-World-War-II Conservative platform consists of three basic tenets: limited government interference with the economy, laws that reflect traditional religious values and faith, and a military able and willing to protect American interests abroad. Although Americans are accustomed to hearing these ideas bundled into a single package, the ideas do not rest on a mutual foundation. No inherent reason exists for their confluence within the American Right.⁶⁵

Mainstream Conservatism exists in its current form because of an alliance formed in the 1950s between three groups united in their opposition to the USSR. Fiscally conservative libertarians vehemently opposed communism as an economic system. Evangelical Christians knew that a victory for Communism would mean militant atheism across the globe. War hawks worried about a USSR military takeover. All three groups saw the expansionist USSR as an existential threat. Survival, they believed, was paramount. As such, they banded together to oppose Soviet Russia. These groups also

⁶³ For example: Burke, “Patriot Prayer”; Casiano, “Patriot Prayer Rally in Portland Turns Bloody; American Flag Saved from Flames”; Kenney, “Joey Gibson Thrives On Controversy, But Finds None At UW”; Millman, “Portland Mayor Calls for Investigation Following Texts between Patriot Prayer Leader and Police”; Sparling, “UPDATE”; Wilson, “Portland Fears Planned Rightwing Rally Could Be ‘Another Charlottesville.’”

⁶⁴ For example: Burley, “How Patriot Prayer Is Building a Violent Far-Right Movement in Portland”; Carless, “The Hate Report”; Crosbie, “Right Wing Militia Set Up ‘Cache’ of Firearms for August Rally”; Moritz-Rabson, “Portland Police Accused of ‘Collusion’ with Far-Right Group Patriot Prayer after Texts Show Friendly Relationship”; Zielinski, “Resisting Patriot Prayer, Part One.”

⁶⁵ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 5.

worked together to oppose the Left, which they believed were either inadvertently or consciously helping the Red Menace achieve world domination.⁶⁶

Beginning in the 1960s, polarization within America provided a base that made this alliance politically viable. The Civil Rights movement divided the Democratic party between Progressives and Southern Democrats. The Republicans moved to pick up the Southern Democrats who opposed the Civil Rights movement. In 1964, Barry Goldwater became the first Republican candidate to win the majority of the Deep South. Though Goldwater did not win the election, his campaign was a watershed moment for mainstream Conservatism. At the same time, America quietly experienced a religious revival. The upswing in religion further polarized America and increased the Evangelical base of mainstream Conservatism.⁶⁷

A fourth group joined the Conservative movement in the 1970s: Neoconservatives. The “Neocons,” former leftists, moved rightward after becoming disillusioned with what they perceived as the passive foreign policy of the Left. This group pushed a strong, interventionist vision of foreign policy as their primary focus, above and beyond left-wing egalitarian concerns.⁶⁸ Though Neocons are not terribly invested in domestic policy, they often maintain their aforementioned left-wing roots and attack the Left for a claimed failure to adequately advance egalitarian causes. According to Neocons, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. should best be understood as conservative figures because, like conservatives, they championed freedom. The fact that the *National Review* and other conservative platforms opposed Martin Luther King Jr. throughout his life is conveniently forgotten. The Neocons completed their successful co-option of the Republican party in the early 2000s with the election of Neocon George W. Bush and the invasion of Iraq. Egalitarian discourse had become the norm within mainstream conservatism: something that was not the case a few decades previously.⁶⁹ This starkly contrasts with Patriot Prayer, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

⁶⁶ Hawley, 22–27.

⁶⁷ Hawley, 33.

⁶⁸ Hawley, 28.

⁶⁹ Hawley, 29–30.

In order to survive, this alliance of ideologically inconsistent factions needed to find a way to advance a unified platform: a nearly impossible task. Enter William F. Buckley and his conservative journal, *The National Review*. Hawley gives Buckley the majority of the credit for creating a unified political movement out of tenuous Conservative alliances. Founded in 1955, *The National Review* hosted libertarian, evangelical, and war hawk thinkers who worked to develop ideological rationales for their alliance of convenience.⁷⁰

As it grew to eclipse other conservative journals, *The National Review* took on its most important function: ideological gatekeeping. Buckley and other editors actively “purged” ideological movements that they felt endangered Conservatism and its appeal to the moderate voter, both through exclusion from the publication and active denunciation within it. Examples of purged movements include the conspiratorial and isolationist John Birch Society, the militantly atheist Objectivists, Southern paleoconservatives such as Pat Buchanan, overt racists such as ex-KKK member David Duke, and—most recently—Iraq war opposition. In this way, Buckley exerted a tremendous unifying and stabilizing influence on mainstream conservatism for decades.⁷¹

These expelled elements did not disappear but formed fringe movements that eventually emerged as the far-right movements in evidence today. As this chapter later discusses, the Paleoconservatives exerted important influence on the alt-right. Both the Paleoconservatives and the John Birch society influenced the Patriot movement from which Patriot Prayer developed, discussed further in Chapter 3.

These once-excommunicated ideas are resurging today in part due to the recently-increasing fractures and instabilities within mainstream American conservatism. The fall of the USSR in 1989 removed the external enemy that originally brought together the tripartite conservative alliance of the 1950s, leaving the party vulnerable to the events and shifts of the 21st century. The humiliation of the Iraq War, combined with other scandals

⁷⁰ Hawley, 25–27.

⁷¹ Unlike Hawley, who perceives *The National Review* as a bulwark against alt-right-style ideas, Thomas Main claims that the Alt-Right can trace its “ideological origins” to Buckley's conservative journal. He does, however, concede that the alt-right developed from “exiles from conventional conservatism.” Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 9; Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 37–73.

during the Bush presidency, damaged mainstream Conservatism's projected image as strong and competent in the arena of foreign policy. Religion in America is on the decline once more, and nonwhite American populations are growing: developments that whittle down two key conservative voting contingents. Perhaps due to a surfeit of stability and unity in the preceding decades, the conservative movement has failed to change and adapt to the times. It lacks intellectual energy.⁷²

Buckley's death in 2008 deprived the conservative movement of its central ideological guardian and arbiter at a time when the party desperately needed unifying institutions. No one has risen to take his place. In 2009, when the Tea Party burst onto the political scene (see Chapter 3), Republican intellectuals did not challenge the movement. Conservative media outlets such as talk-show radio and Fox News not only failed to act as gatekeepers, but actively gave the group a platform. While alive, Buckley sought to grow conservatism through appeals to moderates. With his death, this impulse within the conservative movement died as well.⁷³

The fact that no one has replaced Buckley may be due to the ideological decentralization made possible by the Internet.⁷⁴ In *The Rise of the Alt Right*, Thomas J. Main describes the radical differences between the era of television and today's online world. Not only is national presence on TV extremely expensive, it is also publicly regulated. Because of this, radical fringe ideas never made it onto television. Since the information pipeline during *The National Review's* heyday flowed from experts to intellectuals, through mass media, and then to the viewer, intellectuals such as Buckley could effectively control the outer limits of discourse. The Internet, on the other hand, is a place where anyone can post their ideas for little to no money. This informational Wild West removed syndicated mass media from its position as sole conduit of information from party to public. The Internet as it exists today has eliminated the ability of small, centralized groups of people to keep radical ideas away from the average American.⁷⁵

⁷² Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 270–86.

⁷³ Hawley, 70–71.

⁷⁴ Hawley, 72.

⁷⁵ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 85–90, 246–50.

To sum up: in recent history, the central conservative alliance has weakened in the aftermath of the USSR's collapse. Changes in demographics and religious beliefs have whittled away at the conservative voting base. The great gatekeeper of the right has died, and the Internet makes it unlikely that anyone will be able to take his place and successfully purge radical elements from mainstream discourse. Alone, any of these things might spell serious trouble for mainstream conservatism. Taken together, they spell disaster. In 2016, before Trump's surprising primary victory, Hawley predicted serious trouble for the movement. Although many speculated that these disruptions would inevitably lead to progressive ascendancy, Hawley presciently cautioned that it could also mean the emergence of one of the many far right ideologies discussed within *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*. Without a strong conservative movement to keep overt racism in check, Hawley worried that those ideas could gain traction among disillusioned voters.⁷⁶

The events of 2016 proved Hawley prescient. A few months after the publication of his book, the world stood open-mouthed as Chief Justice John Roberts swore in Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States. Google searches for "alt-right" skyrocketed.⁷⁷

The far right would no longer be ignored.

The Alt-Right

In November of 2008, shortly after Obama's election, paleoconservative Paul Gottfried gave a speech entitled "The Decline and Rise of the Alternative Right" to the H.L. Mencken Club's annual meeting.⁷⁸ It was the first known instance of the political label eventually shortened to "alt-right."⁷⁹ Richard Spencer, who had recently become editor at *Taki's Magazine*, popularized the term within its pages. At the time, the term covered all non-neoconservative right-wing movements, especially those that had

⁷⁶ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 287–91.

⁷⁷ "Google Trends."

⁷⁸ Gottfried, "The Decline and Rise of the Alternative Right."

⁷⁹ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 63; Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 51–52.

coalesced around independent 2008 presidential candidate Ron Paul.⁸⁰ In 2010, Spencer founded *alternativeright.com*, a “cultural webzine” that promoted a far more specific movement and set of beliefs.⁸¹

Throughout this thesis, I use the term alt-right to refer to the ethnonationalist ideology advanced by Spencer and others, despite the fact that it has fallen out of favor with the proponents of those beliefs. Spencer rejects the term because it defines the movement in opposition to the mainstream right, and also because it reinforces the left-right dichotomy he would like to disrupt. Jared Taylor, founder of the alt-right journal *American Renaissance*, has similar complaints.⁸² Despite this dissatisfaction with the term, the movement has not come up with a new label in common use. As such, “alt-right” remains the most appropriate term to describe the movement.

Patriot Prayer shares some, though not all, policy positions with the alt-right. They also use troll tactics first used for political ends by the alt-right. Despite this, Patriot Prayer is not an alt-right group. To understand why not, one must first know something of the intellectual history and beliefs held by the alt-right.

Intellectual Heritage

Unlike the alt-lite and even, to some extent, the Patriot movement, the alt-right possesses a cohesive and internally consistent symbolic universe. At the core of this symbolic universe lies pseudoscientific racism and ethnonationalism. Alt-right ideology, which has no direct precedent within American politics, has two ideological ancestors: Paleoconservatism and the European New Right.⁸³

⁸⁰ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 55–56.

⁸¹ Hawley, 56–57.

⁸² Hawley, 64–66.

⁸³ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 12, 33–84; Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 56–57; Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 21–49. Hawley also sees influence from traditional white nationalism, mainstream conservative war on political correctness, Neo-Reaction (NRx), and the “white genocide” campaign by Bob Whitaker. A thorough review of the intellectual history of the alt-right is beyond the scope of this thesis; as such, I will focus on the two largest and most agreed-upon intellectual inspirations for the alt-right.

Paleoconservatism

Paleoconservatism began as resistance against mainstream conservatism and later opposed the neoconservative takeover of the Republican party.⁸⁴ The movement rejects liberal democracy and is, in many ways, anti-American. Many members are openly anti-Semitic and, at a minimum, racist.⁸⁵ The movement itself met with little success. As late as 2016, George Hawley saw Paleoconservatives—poorly funded, few in number, and on the fringes of discourse—as an evolutionary dead-end without influence or a political future.⁸⁶

As mainstream conservatism moved away from open racism and racialism, many of those exiled by the *National Review* for their opinions on race found a home in Paleoconservative circles. Thomas Fleming, one of the movement’s most influential thinkers, defended and admired the antebellum South as a source of “social” and “moral order” worth fighting for.⁸⁷ Pat Buchanan, prominent Paleoconservative and 2000 presidential candidate, included a chapter entitled “The End of White America” in his 2011 book *Suicide of a Superpower*. In this chapter, Buchanan argues that “tribal politics” are the human norm and that American diversity will lead to a political landscape defined by racialized competition. Although Francis explicitly rejects the concept of a white ethnostate and Buchanan has never explicitly declared the white race superior, both men engage in a brand of racialized thinking that the Alt-Right has developed to its natural conclusion.⁸⁸

This racialism explains why Paleoconservatives were among the first modern groups in America to make opposition to immigration a major part of their platform. Often, this opposition rested explicitly on arguments for maintaining the United States’ racial composition. As early as 1984, Thomas Fleming opposed immigration—legal and illegal—in his paleoconservative journal *Chronicles*. In his 2002 book, *The Death of the*

⁸⁴ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 33–34; Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 178.

⁸⁵ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 33–34.

⁸⁶ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 178, 206.

⁸⁷ Hawley, 179, 191.

⁸⁸ Hawley, 188–90, 196.

West, Pat Buchanan explicitly states that one of the problems with current immigration laws is that it allows too many non-Europeans into the country. This, according to Buchanan, threatens the “Anglo-protestant” character of the United States.⁸⁹

This cultural isolationism extends into foreign policy. Paleoconservatives oppose military interference abroad. Pat Buchanan, who believes that even World War II was a mistake, is radically anti-war.⁹⁰ These old-school conservatives also generally favor economic protectionism and oppose free trade initiatives.⁹¹ Before 2016, both of these ideas were anathema to hawkish, free-market Republicans.

Beyond mere policy disagreement, Paleoconservatives diverge ideologically from traditional conservatism in their explicit opposition to liberal democracy and their promotion of authoritarianism. Robert Michels and James Burnham both contributed to the development of elite theory, which argues that all democracies inevitably develop an elite “management” class. This class develops solidarity and works to both maintain and expand power. As such, democracy is inherently oligarchical. Burnham claims that the USSR, Nazi Germany, and the New Deal were all similarly oppressive products of managerial class consciousness that resulted from liberal democracy.⁹²

In *Leviathan and his Enemies*, Samuel T. Francis further develops elite theory through the division of managerial regimes into “soft” regimes, such as the United States government, and “hard” regimes, such as fascist Italy. Soft regimes resemble Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* in that they maintain control through manipulation, hedonism, and mass consumption. Hard regimes are closer to Orwell’s *1984* in that they maintain control through force and emphasize group solidarity. Francis claims to find both regimes equally problematic and oppressive. In practice, however, he advocates for the “lumpenbourgeois”—who value security over rights, solidarity over constitutionalism, and centralization over limited government—to violently overthrow America’s soft regime and replace it with a hard one.⁹³

⁸⁹ Hawley, 187–88, 192. Hawley points out that Buchanan has never explicitly stated that the white race is superior.

⁹⁰ Hawley, 186.

⁹¹ Hawley, 182, 187.

⁹² Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 37–39.

⁹³ Main, 43–53.

Paul Gottfried—the Paleoconservative who first coined the term “Alternative Right”—dispenses with all claims of neutrality between hard and soft managerial regimes. He argues for “generic fascism” as practiced under Mussolini. Gottfried argues that fascist Italy was a relatively peaceful regime except for the violence inspired by Nazi Germany and implies that those living in modern-day Germany are no freer than they were under the Third Reich. Gottfried, like Francis, is so opposed to liberal democracy that he believes no one can honestly support it; those who pretend to, he claims, are promoting some sort of hidden, conspiratorial agenda.⁹⁴ This is an example of nihilation, as described in Chapter 1.

According to elite theory, power within a soft regime derives from control of acceptable ideas within the culture. Francis borrows Antonio Gramsci’s theory that cultural and social change precedes political change to propose that Paleoconservatives think of their struggle as one to change America’s culture, not its politics.⁹⁵ The concept of the culture war is fundamental to the Alt-Right and will be explored in more detail below.

Paleoconservatism shares some common ideological ancestors with the Patriot movement: specifically, post-Civil-War Southern nostalgia and racism. Nonetheless, Paleoconservatism as such is not directly related to or influential within the Patriot movement, which has never explicitly supported fascism and does not subscribe to elite theory. These components instead contributed to the formation of the alt-right.

The European New Right

The European New Right (ENR), the second large intellectual precursor to the Alt-Right, is in some ways at loggerheads with Paleoconservatism. Unlike many Paleoconservatives—and indeed, most previous right-wing movements in America to this point—the ENR is anti-capitalist, anti-Christian, pro-Pagan, atheist, and anti-American.⁹⁶ The ENR also condemns racism, though this may have more to do with speech

⁹⁴ Main, 55–61; Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 193–94.

⁹⁵ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 194; Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 40. Nagle, who summarizes Gramsci’s argument, attributes its adoption by the Right to the French New Right. .

⁹⁶ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 208.

restrictions in Europe than actual conviction.⁹⁷ The movement finds common ground with Paleoconservatism in its antipathy towards liberal democracy. The ENR rejects Enlightenment thinking on the grounds that it misunderstands human nature and therefore creates an untenable society defined by alienation and chaos.⁹⁸

This worldview rests on a far more intellectual tradition than that of the Paleoconservatives. Despite efforts by the ENR to distance itself from its intellectual history, the fact remains that the foundational philosophers of the movement are fascists, authoritarians, and racialists. Oswald Spengler, a fascist who focused on cultural rather than racial differences, believed that human beings are “beasts of prey” and that group struggle is inevitable.⁹⁹ Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, who wrote “The Third Reich” in 1923 and espoused ideas that later developed into the Nazi concept of lebensraum, was hugely influential on the development of Nazi ideology.¹⁰⁰ Carl Schmitt, a member of the Nazi government, pioneered the theory of politics as fundamentally and ideally a friend/enemy dichotomy, as discussed in the Introduction.¹⁰¹ Julius Evola, a mystical ultra-elitist who lived in both Fascist Italy and the Third Reich, believed that fascism was “insufficiently hierarchical and radical.”¹⁰² Alexander Dugin, a contemporary philosopher whose authoritarian ideas are popular with the current Russian government, believes that the world needs a traditionalist, nationalist and authoritarian alternative to liberalism, communism, and fascism.¹⁰³

The ENR not only shares authoritarian leanings with the Paleoconservatives but also shares concerns about cultural drift. Reasons behind these concerns differ. Alain de Benoist, founder of GRECE (Research and Study Group for European Civilization) is explicitly antiracist. Instead, he opposes immigration on the grounds that different cultures should not mix.¹⁰⁴ De Benoist does not believe in a hierarchal ranking of these cultures, merely that they are incompatible. ENR writer Guillaume Faye, on the other

⁹⁷ Hawley, 264.

⁹⁸ Hawley, 211.

⁹⁹ Hawley, 216–18.

¹⁰⁰ Hawley, 219–22.

¹⁰¹ Hawley, 211–13.

¹⁰² Hawley, 225.

¹⁰³ Hawley, 216–18. Hawley points out that this “fourth way” is very similar to fascism.

¹⁰⁴ Hawley, 229–33.

hand, unapologetically supports European culture over all others. He believes that Muslim immigrants pose an existential threat to Western culture and that America deliberately encourages Muslim immigration to Europe as part of a conspiracy to weaken the continent.¹⁰⁵ The ENR's concern over the degradation of cultural and social order stems from Gramscian ideas about cultural change preceding political change. The French New Right especially focuses on this concept of culture war.¹⁰⁶

Around 2008, these two movements inspired the birth of a new movement in American politics: the alt-right.

Alt-Right Ideology

BBC Journalist Mike Wendling perfectly describes the foundation of alt-right ideology as ethnonationalism, whether peaceful or violent.¹⁰⁷ As with the National Socialists of Germany in the early 20th century, the alt-right's worldview fundamentally depends on the ideology of biological and genetic inequality and/or incompatibility. Lawrence Murray, a blogger on major alt-right platform *The Right Stuff*, defines the movement in part as the belief that “races and their national subdivisions exist for a reason.” Alfred W Clark, writer at Spencer's *Radix Journal*, defines the alt right as a movement that “[recognizes] human biodiversity”—a pseudoscientific term for racialism at best, racism at worst.¹⁰⁸

According to the alt-right, race determines “intelligence and temperament.” Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that lower races construct worse societies. While some alt-right thinkers deny supremacist thinking and instead claim to simply believe in difference, their actual rhetoric strongly suggests a belief in the superiority of the white race. Either way, the alt-right believes in and explicitly espouses the importance of racially homogenous nations.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Hawley, 233–35.

¹⁰⁶ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 40.

¹⁰⁷ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 11–12. See also: Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 8; Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 62–63.

¹⁰⁹ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 167–68.

The “white genocide” conspiracy theory adds urgency to the alt-right’s call for an Aryan homeland. According to this theory, some “shadowy cabal” is orchestrating a nefarious plot to wipe out the white race through miscegenation. Depending on who you ask, this cabal may be comprised of Jews, globalists, the other races themselves, or Liberal “cultural Marxists.” This concept of genocide, problematic for several reasons, depends on the “one drop” theory of race in which a single non-white ancestor eliminates whiteness from all their descendants forever.¹¹⁰ When the alt-right chants “you will not replace us,” they refer to the white genocide conspiracy. The idea that the white race is in imminent danger of extinction lends the project of racial separatism existential urgency. White separatism must be achieved at any cost.

Roadmaps for how to establish a white ethnostate capable of combating white genocide vary within the alt-right. A few extreme websites such as Andrew Anglin’s *The Daily Stormer* flirt with the traditional Nazi method of genocide. The majority of the alt-right distance themselves from this kind of rhetoric, opting instead for “encouraged” emigration or the cessation of nonwhite immigration. Some members of the alt-right, such as Richard Spencer, evade the question entirely.¹¹¹

As with any racist movement, anti-Semitism occupies a central, if complicated, place within the alt-right. Many prominent members of the alt-right, such as Kevin MacDonald at the *Occidental Observer*, most of the staff at *The Right Stuff*, *The Daily Stormer* and, recently, Richard Spencer, openly believe that the Jewish people are the conspiratorial masterminds of multiculturalism and actively work towards the destruction of the white race. Other alt-rightists, such as Jared Taylor of *American Renaissance* and Greg Johnson of *Counter-Currents*, refuse to take a position. “Neutral” platforms like these give a platform for anti-Semitic viewpoints as well as Jewish members of the far right. Some members of the alt-right advocate for an alliance with Jews against larger threats. Despite this variance, anti-Semitism is an important plank in the alt-right platform as a whole.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 44–45.

¹¹¹ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 14–18.

¹¹² Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 65–66.

It should come as no surprise that a movement centered around racial inequality should subscribe to ideas of biological inequality between the sexes as well. The movement rejects the idea of equality between men and women and believes in the necessity of gendered duties.¹¹³ In his statement defining the alt-right, *The Right Stuff*'s Murray advocates separate roles for men and women and the importance of “heterosexual monogamy.”¹¹⁴ In *A Normie's Guide to the Alt-Right*, Anglin advocates for the removal of women from the workplace and their restoration as housewives and mothers.¹¹⁵

More than any other far-right movement, the alt-right is fundamentally incompatible with mainstream conservatism and its offshoots. For the alt-right, conservatism has more in common with liberalism than with themselves. Most conservatives—and, for that matter, most of the people within the right-wing milieu—are individualists. The alt-right is collectivist and identitarian. Like many on the left, the alt-right believes that conservatives use identity politics and dog whistles to gain votes. Their issue with this strategy is that conservatives don't actually do anything to promote white interests.¹¹⁶

The alt-right's most fundamental philosophical point of departure with conservatism involves liberal democracy which, like their ENR and Paleoconservative predecessors, the alt-right explicitly rejects. Murray describes universal suffrage as a system that “gives power to the worst and shackles the fittest.”¹¹⁷ Richard Spencer believes that only “wise people who care” should be permitted to vote. Who are these wise people? A blogger at *The Right Stuff* defines wisdom as a salary of over six figures.¹¹⁸ Regardless of how one defines the upper crust, the alt-right are elitists at their core. As a different blogger at *The Right Stuff* puts it:

Drastic measures are required. We're too far gone now. A small elite always rules over the herd, and this elite has the power to mold public opinion. We must become the elite, by any means necessary. Martial law is probably required, and that means the imposition of a fascist

¹¹³ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 17; Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 6–7.

¹¹⁴ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 62.

¹¹⁵ “A Normie's Guide to the Alt-Right – Daily Stormer.”

¹¹⁶ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 7, 18, 91–94.

¹¹⁷ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 62.

¹¹⁸ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 147–48.

leader's arbitrary will...Our democratic constitutions are tantamount to a suicide pact for the Western world.¹¹⁹

As one might expect from such an elitist and anti-democratic movement, the alt-right does not venerate the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence.¹²⁰ The alt-right rejects individual rights and instead believes that rights are granted by the state to its citizens. Since the state determines who is and is not a citizen, the state determines who does and does not have rights.¹²¹ This attitude is unprecedented in the history of American conservatism and differentiates the alt-right from all other extant conservative movements.¹²²

Significant portions of the alt-right reject mainstream conservatism's commitment to laissez-faire capitalism as well as their commitment to the constitution.¹²³ Richard Spencer endorses universal healthcare.¹²⁴ VDARE contributor John Derbyshire believes that socialism is a great system, but only for racially homogenous countries.¹²⁵ Eli Mosley of Identity Evropa advocates an "explicitly anti-Capitalist" economic stance.¹²⁶ Though rejection of capitalism is not central to the movement, the fact that the movement permits anti-capitalism radically differentiates the alt-right from mainstream conservatism.

None of these ideological components are new to the world. This particular ideological arrangement, however, is innovative within American politics. George Hawley cautions us against dismissing the group as simply the newest far-right movement in America.¹²⁷ As Chapter 3 will make clear, alt-right beliefs differ significantly from traditional American far-right thought.

¹¹⁹ Main, 148.

¹²⁰ Main, 127–28; Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 4.

¹²¹ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 134–35.

¹²² Main, 128. See also: Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*.

¹²³ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 17 states that the alt-right largely embraces capitalism, though they don't focus on the issue. I disagree with this assessment for the reasons set forth in this paragraph.

¹²⁴ Spencer, "Why Trump Must Champion National Healthcare."

¹²⁵ "Radio Derb Transcript."

¹²⁶ Minkowitz, "The Racist Right Looks Left."

¹²⁷ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 50.

Troll Tactics

Not only has the alt-right created a new American political movement, but it has also produced a new and potent political tool: weaponized troll tactics. Since the turn of the century, 4Chan users, or “anons,” have honed and perfected the art of trolling. See Appendix B for a brief history of 4Chan and the development of troll tactics as a political weapon.

One of these troll tactics, which Ico Maly terms “entextualization,” relies in part on the participation of non-alt-right groups like Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys. The act of entextualization changes the meaning of previously-inoffensive symbols through frame manipulation. The alt-right removes a symbol, such as Pepe the Frog or the “milk” emoji, from its original and innocuous context and puts it into the context of racist 4Chan memes.¹²⁸ These memes gain traction as part of the edgy and ironic brand of 4chan humor. Eventually, these memes propagate into the mainstream, at which point watchdogs decry the original symbol as a tool of the far right. The far right then uses Poe’s Law—an Internet axiom that states that it is difficult to tell whether a post is a joke or not—to claim that the symbol is not racist but was instead used ironically. The mainstream media, they say, cannot take a joke and sees racism everywhere.¹²⁹

At this point, the symbol in question both does and does not signify alt-right racism. It becomes, simultaneously, a way to signal alt-right allegiance and a monument to the perceived irrational hatred and paranoia of the left towards those on the right. Members of the far right not affiliated with the alt-right, such as denizens of the alt-lite or the Patriot movement, further confuse the issue when they adopt the symbol as an ironic reminder of Liberal irrationality. Ultimately, memes featuring the rekeyed symbol serve both to remind the audience that media reporting cannot be trusted and to spread far-right propaganda in meme form.

Two entextualized symbols appear repeatedly throughout this thesis. The first of these is the “OK” symbol, formed by connecting thumb and forefinger with the other

¹²⁸ Maly, “Pepe the Frog, Het Ok-Teken En Poe’s Wet.”

¹²⁹ Maly, “Pepe the Frog, Het Ok-Teken En Poe’s Wet”; “Poe’s Law.” Often, 4Chan anons and other propagators of the meme Often, a 4Chan anon intends the now-racist meme both ironically and unironically. See; Innuendo Studios, *The Alt-Right Playbook*.

three fingers outstretched. In early 2017, 4Chan began an ultimately successful campaign to troll mainstream media outlets into reporting that the OK symbol stood for White Power. After these reports, use of the OK symbol became a popular way to troll Liberals, especially in the Pacific Northwest. White nationalists have added to the confusion by also adopting the symbol. It is now impossible to tell whether someone who flashes the “OK” symbol is signaling that everything is all right, trolling the Liberals, or broadcasting white supremacist beliefs.¹³⁰

The second symbol of interest is the flag of Kekistan. The flag’s origins differ slightly from the OK symbol in that the flag had no initial mainstream meaning but was instead created by 4Chan. The green and white banner is the culmination of a series of in-jokes involving the Korean version of “lol” (“kek,”), a World of Warcraft emote, Pepe the Frog, and the discovery of an Egyptian frog-headed god named Kek who was the “bringer of chaos and darkness.” Delighted by these coincidences, 4Chan created a satirical religion based around Kek. The created mythology of the religion eventually involved the mythical national homeland of Kekistan. A clever troll created a green and white Kekistani flag patterned on the Nazi battle flag, but distant enough from it that those not steeped in World War II history would not recognize the similarity. Trolls use the concept of Kekistan to parody identity politics and “PC culture,” but also as a covert nod to Naziism. Though the origination of the Kekistani flag on 4Chan makes its meaning less obscure than the newly-purposed OK sign, it is still difficult to know whether or not someone is using the flag ironically.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Neiwert, “Is That an OK Sign?”

¹³¹ Niewert, “What the Kek.”

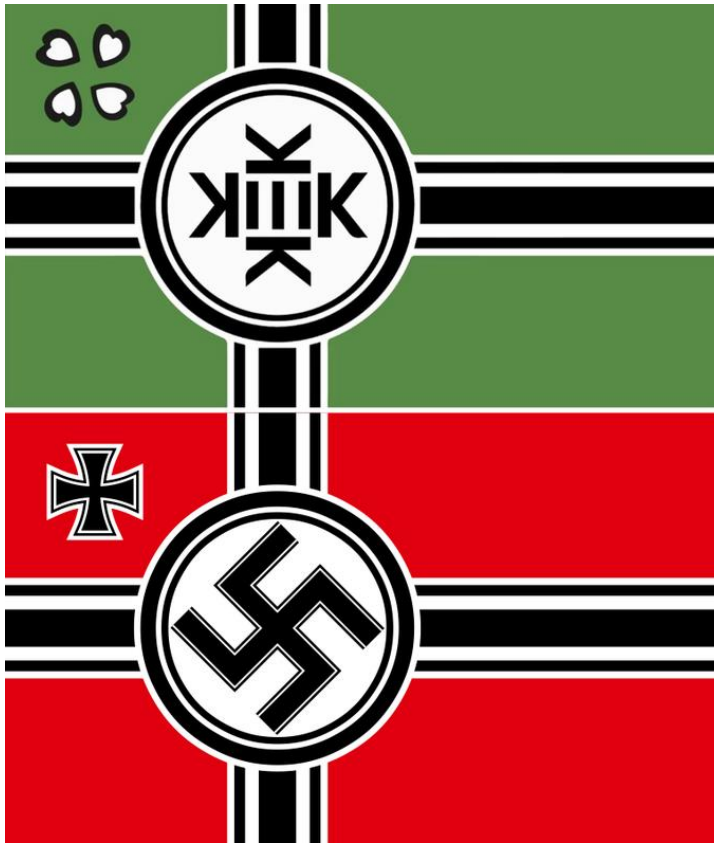


Figure 3: Comparison between the Kekistani flag and the Nazi battle flag.¹³²

The Kekistani flag appears at many Patriot Prayer rallies, and the Proud Boys especially like to flash the “OK” symbol. The presence of these ambiguous but alt-right-affiliated symbols immediately frame these rallies as alt-right to counterprotesters who are aware of the symbols’ alt-right implications. A casual observer will not, however, catch the re-keying. As we shall see in Chapter 6, performative troll tactics like these aid in the manufacture of successful fables possible for Patriot Prayer.

A Movement in Decline?

When Donald Trump achieved his surprise victory in the 2016 presidential election, the alt-right looked like a rising force in the American political landscape. Two and a half years later, however, observers both inside and outside the movement believe that the alt-right is in decline. Events immediately following the Trump victory revealed

¹³² Pohtast, “I Talked to the Alt-Right So You Don’t Have to.”

fracture points within the movement. The murder in Charlottesville in the summer of 2017 broke the movement along these fault lines. Today, few if any groups use the label “alt-right.” The ideology, however, remains active and virulent.

On November 19th, eleven days after Trump’s presidential victory shocked the world, Richard Spencer got carried away. In a moment which Greg Johnson of the alt-right website *Counter Currents* calls “Hailgate,” Spencer greeted attendees of the annual National Policy Institute conference with the words “Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!” The audience responded with cheers and Nazi salutes.¹³³ Johnson identifies this moment as the end of an internal strategy debate within the alt-right. Some, including Johnson, advocated a ‘big tent’ approach that attracted civic nationalists as well as ethnonationalists. Others advocated ideological purity and resisted the dilution of the racial ideology at the center of the alt-right. Spencer not only hailed the victory of Donald Trump, but the victory of ideological purity over ambiguity within the movement he helped christen.¹³⁴

A few months later, on the evening before Trump’s inauguration, Mike Cernovich hosted the Deploraball, billed as an alt-right celebration of their candidate’s electoral victory. However, Cernovich disinvited edgier members of the alt-right such as Twitter personality and anti-Semite Anthime Gionet, more widely known by Twitter handle “Baked Alaska.” Richard Spencer was irritated at what he saw as cowardice and, in one of the first public uses of the term, dismissed the organizers as “alt-light.”¹³⁵

It was becoming increasingly clear that the so-called “alt-right” was actually two very different movements: racial and civic nationalists. The civic nationalists were uncomfortable with overtly fascist and Nazi imagery. The racial nationalists were annoyed by the refusal of the civic nationalists to follow nationalist thinking to its logical conclusion. This conflict came to a head in the summer of 2017 at the ironically-named “Unite the Right rally” in Charlottesville, Virginia. This rally undermined the argument that the fascist and Nazi imagery and allusions within alt-right culture were merely jokes

¹³³ Appelbaum, “‘Hail Trump!’”; Johnson, “Beyond the Alt Right: Toward a New Nationalism.”

¹³⁴ Johnson, “Beyond the Alt Right: Toward a New Nationalism.”

¹³⁵ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 209–11.

and “shitposting.” There was nothing funny or tongue-in-cheek about the Charlottesville marchers, some of who carried Nazi flags. Journalist Angela Nagle, who specializes in examinations of Internet culture and the alt-right, describes the rally as “a uniformed procession of politically serious white nationalists prepared for violence and employing deadly serious chants of ‘blood and soil’ and ‘you will not replace us.’”¹³⁶

The seriousness of the event became impossible to ignore when James Alex Fields injured nineteen counterprotesters and killed Heather Heyer when he drove his car into the counterprotest.¹³⁷ Photographs from earlier that day show Fields marching at the rally with the white-supremacist group Vanguard America.¹³⁸ Self-proclaimed members of the alt-right could no longer easily pretend that the movement’s most offensive statements were merely jokes, as perfectly encapsulated by anti-fascist YouTuber ContraPoints’ ironic description of the incident: “an edgy shitposter hilariously memed his car into a crowd of people.”¹³⁹ The public backlash was huge and immediate. *Stormfront* and *The Daily Stormer* temporarily lost their internet hosting services and went offline.¹⁴⁰

These PR disasters punctuated an overall trend of fragmentation and decline. Paul Gottfried has distanced himself from Richard Spencer. Spencer and Milo Yiannopoulos have denounced each other. Doxxers revealed that Mike Enoch, founder of anti-Semitic website *The Right Stuff*, was married to a Jewish woman. Breitbart, which once claimed to be “the platform of the alt-right,” distanced itself from the movement.¹⁴¹ The decline of the Alt-Right was especially obvious during the “Unite the Right 2” rally organized a year after the murderous Charlottesville protests of 2017. Less than 30 people showed up to the rain-soaked event, which ended early due to pressure from massive crowds of counterprotesters.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Nagle, “Goodbye, Pepe.”

¹³⁷ “One Killed in US Far-Right Rally Violence.”

¹³⁸ Bromwich and Blinder, “What We Know About James Alex Fields, Driver Charged in Charlottesville Killing.”

¹³⁹ ContraPoints, *Decrypting the Alt-Right*.

¹⁴⁰ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 223.

¹⁴¹ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 214–19.

¹⁴² CNN, “White Nationalists Dwarfed by Crowds of Counterprotesters in Washington.”

Despite these serious setbacks, rumors of the demise of the alt-right are greatly exaggerated. The personalities and theorists of the alt-right have not gone away. Both *Stormfront* and *The Daily Stormer* have found new Internet hosts. *The Occidental Observer*, *The Right Stuff*, *Counter Currents*, and many more alt-right websites continue to produce and publish content.

Beyond the continued activity of alt-right personalities, however, the so-called death of the alt-right should be understood not as an end, but as a lopsided split. In late 2018, alt-right writer Greg Johnson mused that the best thing about the #altright hashtag was its “vagueness,” which allowed anyone who opposed the mainstream conservative movement to come together under one “big tent.” Importantly, they were able to do this without having to come out to themselves or the world as white nationalists or national socialists. This began to change with Hailgate. In the words of Johnson:

This led to a split between White Nationalists and civic nationalists, who came to be called the Alt Lite. To differentiate itself from the Alt Right, the Alt Lite dug in its heels on the one issue that White Nationalists most urgently need to destroy: the moral taboo against white identity politics. The great big beautiful tent, where civic nationalism and ethnonationalism could be debated—an argument that White Nationalists always win—was replaced by a great big ugly wall, over which only venomous tweet barrages were exchanged.¹⁴³

The label “alt-right” as used until 2016 encapsulated—and was used by—two distinct groups: the alt-right and the alt-lite. As of 2019, the alt-right has diminished in power, influence, and visibility.

Alt-lite groups such as the Proud Boys, on the other hand, are doing quite well.

The Alt-Lite

In the aftermath of the Deploraball spat of early 2017, in which Mike Cernovich disinvited the anti-Semitic Baked Alaska and earned the ire of the alt-right, Cernovich declared himself satisfied with the results. “There’s the alt-right which wants to do white identity politics,” he explained, “and then there’s people like me and Jeff [Giese] who,

¹⁴³ Johnson, “Beyond the Alt Right: Toward a New Nationalism.”

we want to do nationalism without white identity politics.” Around the same time period, Paul Joseph Watson described “two ‘Alt-Rights.’” The people in his alt-right “like to wear MAGA hats, create memes, and have fun. They include whites, blacks, Asians, Latinos, gays, and everyone else. These are the people who helped Trump win the election” Watson dismissed the alt-right described in the previous section as people that “fester in dark corners of sub-reddits and obsess about Jews, racial superiority, and Adolf Hitler.”¹⁴⁴ Richard Spencer agrees with this assessment, albeit from the other side of the divide:

...As civic nationalists, their idea of ‘us’ is the people who occupy the current multiracial landmass known as the United States. The Alt Right fundamentally differs from Trump’s civic nationalism by considering ‘us’ to be all people of European ancestry across the globe.¹⁴⁵

All of these definitions encapsulate the fundamental difference between the alt-right and the alt-lite. **The alt-right are ethnonationalists. The alt-lite are civic nationalists.**

Both believe in a Schmittian us-vs-them dichotomy, but they differ on who “us” is.¹⁴⁶

Examples of the alt-lite include Breitbart, Milo Yiannopoulos, and Steve Bannon.¹⁴⁷

Though all three have, at one time, claimed the label “alt-right,” and though all are guilty of racist language, all of them have actively distanced themselves from the ethnonationalist ideology of the alt-right proper.¹⁴⁸

It took most observers a bit longer to perceive the schism within the so-called “alt-right.” In early July 2017, Andrew Marantz, a staff writer for the *New Yorker* who focuses on social media and extreme political movements, covered the last-minute bisection of the Rally for Free Speech in Washington DC. When organizers revealed Richard Spencer as a last-minute addition to the speaker lineup, speakers like Laura Loomis and Jack Posobiec withdrew from the event. “I’m not sharing the stage with an anti-Semite,” explained Loomis, who is Jewish. Posobiec put together a competing event,

¹⁴⁴ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 153.

¹⁴⁵ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 224.

¹⁴⁶ Main, 224–25. See also Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 137–38, 143.

¹⁴⁷ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 81.

¹⁴⁸ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 105, 119, 121–122; Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 212–15; Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 143, 154.

held across the city at the same time, that attracted roughly the same number of attendants as the original event. Marantz observed that “Spencer and his allies had won the branding war” over the term alt-right: people both inside and outside of the far right now associated that term with ethnonationalism.¹⁴⁹

One week later, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) published “From Alt Right to Alt Lite; Naming the Hate.” The ADL defined the Alt Lite as a “loosely connected movement of right-wing activists who reject the overtly white supremacist ideology of the alt right, but whose hateful impact is more significant than their ‘lite’ name suggests.” The article classified prominent figures on the far right into alt-right and alt-lite camps, with the caveat that the boundary between the two groups can be fluid and that many alt-lite figures actively collaborate with people on the alt-right.¹⁵⁰

The ADL points out that “alt-lite” is the term which the alt-right uses for their less extreme brethren, and that members of the so-called alt-lite dislike the term.¹⁵¹ George Hawley has never heard anyone refer to themselves as “alt-lite”; neither did I during my research.¹⁵² Many within this group prefer the term New Right.¹⁵³ I have elected to use the term alt-lite for a few reasons. I want to avoid confusion with the European New Right, as well as Greg Johnson’s latest alt-right journal, *North American New Right*. Further, those who observe the movement use the term “alt-lite” to describe it far more than they do “new right.” The terminology of the far right, the alt-right, and the alt-lite is already less unified than one might like. Far be it from me to disrupt it further.

The name “alt-lite” has additional value in that it accurately captures a central fact about the movement: it is, in many ways, a low-calorie version of the alt-right. The alt-lite might believe in biological difference between the races and sexes, but does not

¹⁴⁹ Marantz, “The Alt-Right Branding War Has Torn the Movement in Two.” A year and a half later, alt-right author Greg Johnson echoed this assessment (“Beyond the Alt Right: Toward a New Nationalism”).

¹⁵⁰ “From Alt Right to Alt Lite.”

¹⁵¹ “From Alt Right to Alt Lite.”

¹⁵² Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 143.

¹⁵³ Marantz, “The Alt-Right Branding War Has Torn the Movement in Two”; Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 153.

endorse separatism or supremacy—they may be racialists, but they are not racists.¹⁵⁴ Although the alt-lite sometimes uses a tone that could be interpreted as anti-Semitic or engages with ambiguously anti-Semitic concepts (such as “globalists,” explored in more detail below), the movement does not tolerate overt anti-Semitism, as exemplified by the Cernovich-Baked Alaska altercation detailed above.¹⁵⁵ They believe in the superiority of “Western culture,” but believe that non-whites can be culturally Western.

The alt-right and alt-lite align on important policy issues, such as immigration. Like the alt-right, the alt-lite opposes immigration, but does so through legal arguments, concerns about cultural assimilation, and fear of Islamic terrorism.¹⁵⁶ These positions, while not identical to the alt-right, lead to the same policy positions on immigration, at least in early stages.

The two groups also share a penchant for conspiracy theories. The alt-lite subscribes to a racism-free version of white genocide borrowed from the Patriot movement (see Chapter 3). According to this version of the conspiracy, Liberals are deliberately plotting to flood the United States with illegal immigrants, who will vote Democrat and ruin America through their dependence on welfare and other government handouts.¹⁵⁷ Some members of the alt-lite, such as the conspiracy theorists on Alex Jones’ *Infowars*, go farther: they believe that efforts to overwhelm the United States with immigrants originate with “globalist forces,” such as the UN and billionaire George Soros.¹⁵⁸ Whether Soros’ centrality to this plot has to do with his Jewish heritage is an exercise *Infowars* leaves to the reader. This vision of a shadowy cabal plotting to dilute America’s nature through immigration is essentially identical to the white genocide argument but stripped of overt racism. Believers in either conspiracy agree that restricted or closed borders are the urgently-needed initial solution to an existential threat from abroad.

¹⁵⁴ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 143. The question of whether the alt-lite is lying about their level of racism--and whether it matters--will be discussed later.

¹⁵⁵ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 214–15.

¹⁵⁶ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 143.

¹⁵⁷ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 34.

¹⁵⁸ White, “Report.”

In addition to these similarities, however, the groups have significant ideological differences that make cooperation between them challenging and, perhaps, made schism inevitable. The alt-lite tends to be more economically libertarian than the alt-right which, as seen above, can verge into the territory of socialism.¹⁵⁹ Unlike the elitist and anti-enlightenment alt-right, the alt-lite subscribes to the enlightenment idea that “all men are created equal.” Like the neoconservatives, the alt-lite praises figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Lincoln as pro-freedom and therefore fundamentally right-wing.¹⁶⁰ The alt-lite includes many Jewish members, and alt-lite rallies often prominently feature people of color and members of the LGBT community.¹⁶¹

Unlike the alt-right, the alt-lite does not have a unique intellectual history or a cohesive worldview. They have borrowed the alt-right’s troll tactics, much of their language, and a watered-down version of ethnonationalism. They have also borrowed Patriot movement ideas, such as conspiracy theories, and acquired a homeopathic dose of fundamentalist Christianity in the form of “Judeo-Christian values” (see Chapter 3). Because both the Patriot movement and the alt-right offer more consistent and better-justified versions of the alt-lite symbolic worldview, the alt-lite is likely susceptible to recruitment from either party.

Example: The Proud Boys

The Proud Boys are an alt-lite fraternal organization of “Western chauvinists who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world.”¹⁶² Members of the Pacific Northwest chapter of the Proud Boys frequently attend Patriot Prayer rallies, and one Proud Boy—Tusitala “Tiny” Toese—is a core member of Patriot Prayer. Despite this close collaboration, the two groups are distinct. Whereas Patriot Prayer is a Patriot movement (see Chapter 3), the Proud Boys are an alt-lite organization that walks the line between alt-right and alt lite, but never crosses into overt ethnonationalism.

¹⁵⁹ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 143.

¹⁶⁰ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 214.

¹⁶¹ Examples include Milo Yiannopoulos, Laura Loomer, and Joey Gibson.

¹⁶² McInnes, “Introducing.”

The Proud Boys are a creation of Gavin McInnes, a Canadian journalist who co-founded *Vice Magazine* in 1994. In 2008, McInnes left the magazine and, around that time, began to write for *Taki's Magazine* under the editorship of Richard Spencer. The journalist remained at *Taki's Magazine* for nearly ten years.¹⁶³ During this period, McInnes embarked on a number of other media projects, including the launch of *The Gavin McInnes Show* video podcast in 2015.¹⁶⁴ McInnes also has a history of writing for white nationalist and alt-right-affiliated publications, such as VDARE in 2005 and American Renaissance in 2013.¹⁶⁵ McInnes nonetheless claims that alt-right racism is a boogeyman of the Left. For example, he believes that the radically racist *Daily Stormer* editor Andrew Anglin is a left-wing plant.¹⁶⁶

According to McInnes' article introducing the Proud Boys organization in *Taki's Magazine*, the group began in the fall of 2016 when McInnes and fans of his podcast met up at a bar after an episode taping. In-jokes, such as singing "Proud of Your Boy" from the Aladdin musical, eventually developed into a fraternal organization with a set of "rituals, traditions, and even its own in-house court called 'The Sharia.'"¹⁶⁷

The Proud Boys accept members of all ethnicities and sexual orientations so long as they are assigned male at birth. Proud Boy Magazine lists a set of rather abstract core values: "Minimal Government, Maximum Freedom, Anti-Political Correctness, Anti-Drug War, Closed Borders, Anti-Racial Guilt, Anti-Racism, Pro-Free Speech (1st Amendment), Pro-Gun Rights (2nd Amendment), Glorifying the Entrepreneur, Venerating the Housewife," and "Reinstating a Spirit of Western Chauvinism." This last value is the most important: a man joins the Proud Boys by declaring that he is "a Western chauvinist who refuses to apologize for creating the modern world."¹⁶⁸

Many observers of the far right classify the Proud Boys as alt-right, not alt-lite. The SPLC has designated the Proud Boys as an alt-right hate group. The watchdog

¹⁶³ "So Long, Taki!"

¹⁶⁴ "Compound Media | Shows | The Gavin McInnes Show."

¹⁶⁵ "Gavin McInnes, Author at American Renaissance"; "Gavin McInnes | Writers"; Feuer, "Proud Boys Founder."

¹⁶⁶ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 146–47; Feuer, "Proud Boys Founder"; Moynihan and Winston, "Far-Right Proud Boys Reeling After Arrests and Scrutiny."

¹⁶⁷ McInnes, "Introducing."

¹⁶⁸ Culkin, "Proud Boys."

organization points to Gavin McInnes' collaboration with alt-right media outlets mentioned above and points out that some members of the alt-right have described "western chauvinism" as a crypto-fascist dog whistle. Proud Boys were present at the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville described above, though not as representatives Proud Boys. In fact, former Proud Boy Jason Kessler helped organize the rally.¹⁶⁹

Despite these real and troubling connections with the alt-right, the group falls primarily into the category of alt-lite based on the definitions established in Chapter 1. A group that vocally denounces racism and white supremacy is fundamentally different than one that endorses it, regardless of what some or all of its members actually believe. In the wake of Charlottesville, Gavin McInnes wrote an article for Proud Boy Magazine in which he explicitly denounced racism and denied membership in the alt-right. He reaffirmed that Jews and people of color are welcome to become Proud Boys and declared that any Proud Boy found at an alt-right rally for any reason would be immediately expelled from the group.¹⁷⁰ The ability for people of color to gain entrance into the Proud Boys holds true in practice, at least in the Pacific Northwest—Toese, a prominent Proud Boy and Patriot Prayer organizer, is Samoan and a person of color.

The Proud Boys are an alt-lite organization. They are also an excellent example of why alt-lite groups should not be considered inherently less threatening or violent than alt-right organizations. McInnes has stated on several occasions that the Proud Boys "do not start fights; [they] finish them."¹⁷¹ Yet fights start when Proud Boys are around with amazing regularity.¹⁷² The Proud Boys claim that counterprotesters start these fights. Based on my observations, this statement is correct in that Proud Boys do not usually

¹⁶⁹ "Proud Boys."

¹⁷⁰ McInnes, "WE ARE NOT ALT-RIGHT – Proud Boy Magazine."

¹⁷¹ McInnes, "Some Clarification on the 4th Degree"; McInnes, "WE ARE NOT ALT-RIGHT – Proud Boy Magazine."

¹⁷² A few of many examples: Bear, "Arrests Made at Downtown Boulder Rally Staged by 'Western Chauvinist' Group"; Elliott, "Cops Shut down LA Bar after Ruckus with Far Right Proud Boys"; Janik, "Police Intervened to Stop a Proud Boy from Becoming Violent at a 'Free Alex Jones' Event in Austin"; Sepulveda, "Violence Erupts At Nationalist Protest | New Haven Independent"; Wilson, "Who Are the Proud Boys, 'western Chauvinists' Involved in Political Violence?"; "Alt Right 'Proud Boys' Declare Victory In Berkeley Melee."

throw the first punch (though they certainly have done so). Chapter 6 reveals ways that the Proud Boys encourage others to start the fights they end at Patriot Prayer rallies.

An exploration of the Proud Boy “degree” system also sheds light on what values and behaviors the group encourages in actual practice. These degrees act to bolster group solidarity through a variety of mechanisms, including rewards for desired behavior in the form of hierarchical status.

Gavin McInnes revealed the first three degrees in his 2016 article introducing the Proud Boys in *Taki’s Magazine*. To achieve the First Degree, all an aspiring Proud Boy must do is declare his membership and stop hiding his “Western chauvinism.” The Proud Boy must also openly support Donald Trump.¹⁷³ This step initiates the would-be member into the organization but can also initiate self-imposed alienation of—and isolation from—Democratic or left-leaning friends through dogmatic political engagement on controversial topics. As seen in Chapter 1, lack of options outside of the group leads to increased group solidarity.¹⁷⁴

The Second Degree involves perhaps the two strangest initiation rites ever developed by a political organization. For the first step, the initiate “must get the crap beaten out of [him] by at least five guys until [he] can name five breakfast cereals.” The idea behind this bizarre—and hilarious—ritual is “adrenaline control.”¹⁷⁵ A Proud Boy ought to be able to keep his head in a heated debate or a physical altercation. I personally witnessed a breakfast cereal initiation at a rally within a group of teenage Proud Boys, which consisted of playful punches and a great deal of laughter. However, I also heard a report of a Second Degree initiate who had his ribs cracked during the ordeal.¹⁷⁶ McInnes describes this ritual as producing “bonding and comradery.” Research into similar initiation rituals in street gangs and tribal societies indicates that he is correct: the breakfast cereal ritual likely increases group solidarity.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ McInnes, “Introducing.” McInnes later walked this requirement back while distancing himself from the alt-right. “Politically, a good 98% of us love Trump but that is not a requirement.” See: McInnes, “WE ARE NOT ALT-RIGHT – Proud Boy Magazine.”

¹⁷⁴ McInnes, “Introducing.”

¹⁷⁵ McInnes.

¹⁷⁶ Jedeed, Field Notes: #HimToo Rally; Jedeed, Field Notes: Trump Free Speech Rally.

¹⁷⁷ VIGIL, “Street Baptism.”

As a second step of the second degree, the Proud Boy must embrace a policy known as #NoWanks. Inspired by a conversation with Dante Nero, a black ex-stripper, on Gavin McInnes' podcast,¹⁷⁸ second degree Proud Boys promise to look at pornography only once every 30 days and to ejaculate only within one yard of a consenting woman. The idea behind this policy is to get Proud Boys off the couch and on dates with women. McInnes claims that this pledge is the most important and transformative aspect of Proud Boy membership. According to McInnes, gay Proud Boys do not need to complete this step because "they are doing just fine for intercourse."¹⁷⁹ Despite rhetoric of inclusivity, this exemption signals difference between gay and straight Proud Boys. I speculate, but cannot prove, that such differences in treatment may influence the level of solidarity achievable by non-heterosexual Proud Boys.

Third Degree Proud Boy status involves the first permanent commitment to the group: adherents must get a tattoo or brand that says "Proud Boy" somewhere on their body.¹⁸⁰ A decision to get the name of what the SPLC has designated a "general hate group" will inevitably have social effects outside of the movement.¹⁸¹ This step further isolates the Proud Boy from outside society and increases dependence on the group for social needs.

McInnes does not address the Fourth Degree in the *Taki's Magazine* article, and claims it was invented later. According to an article written by McInnes for officialproudboys.com, a Fourth Degree Proud Boy must "[endure] a major conflict related to the cause." The Proud Boy cannot initiate the fight: as stated previously, "We don't start fights, we finish them." McInnes clearly states that the Fourth Degree is not something to aspire to but is instead a "consolation prize" for having to endure the necessity of violence. He then undermines this assertion by listing several Fourth Degree Proud Boys by name and describing their bravery in fighting against bullies. This public recognition rewards Proud Boys who have engaged in fights, creating an incentive for

¹⁷⁸ Pullmann, "The Proud Boys Are Boys In A Sexual Wasteland Trying To Become Men."

¹⁷⁹ McInnes, "Introducing."

¹⁸⁰ McInnes.

¹⁸¹ "Proud Boys."

other Proud Boys to do their best to find themselves in similar situation. Rufio's rise to fame as described in Chapter 4 is an example of this incentive in action.¹⁸²

The Proud Boys have—or had—a paramilitary wing: the Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights (FOAK). Kyle Chapman, also known as “Based Stickman,” announced this offshoot on his Facebook page in 2017. Chapman rose to fame within right-wing circles when he beat a counterprotester with a stick during the Berkeley riots, and capitalized on this fame over the following few years. The activist denies being a white nationalist or a member of the alt-right but uses the #whitegenocide hashtag and associates with people with even closer affiliations to the alt-right. According to the SPLC, Chapman has multiple felony convictions and a history of drug use.¹⁸³

FOAK, officially approved by McInnes and announced on officialproudboys.com, sought to recruit “those who possess the Warrior Spirit” in order to “protect and defend our right wing [*sic*] brethren when the police and government fail to do so.” FOAK has, or had, its own rules and requirements.¹⁸⁴ The paramilitary arm seems to have disappeared from the Internet, though this does not mean it is actually defunct.

In the last part of 2018, the Proud Boys experienced a steep decline—at least publicly. In October, Gavin McInnes spoke at the New York Metropolitan Republican Club. His speech began with a reenactment of the assassination of a Japanese socialist Party leader on live TV in 1960. After much laughter and joking, McInnes reportedly instructed the audience to “never let evil take root” to thunderous applause.¹⁸⁵ A few hours later, after the event let out, Proud Boys got into a brutal street brawl with counterprotesters that eventually led to the arrest of ten members. Though the group initially claimed that they did not start the fight, footage obtained by the New York Times clearly shows the Proud Boys charging a group of three counterprotesters without physical provocation. One counterprotester threw what appears to be a water bottle at the Proud Boys, who proceeded to brutally beat the counterprotesters. The footage shows

¹⁸² McInnes, “Introducing.”

¹⁸³ “Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights (FOAK).”

¹⁸⁴ BaZiLe, “The Kids Are Alt-Knights – Official Proud Boys – The New Home of Proud Boy Magazine.”

¹⁸⁵ Schaeffer, “Inside the Proud Boy Event That Sparked Violence Outside of Uptown GOP Club.”

several Proud Boys kicking their downed opponent.¹⁸⁶ Within a few days, social media companies began to remove Proud Boys content from their platforms.¹⁸⁷

A month later, the Guardian revealed that the FBI had categorized the Proud Boys as an “extremist group with ties to white nationalism” in a Washington State report.¹⁸⁸ Although the FBI walked back this description a few weeks later, the damage was already done.¹⁸⁹ Gavin McInnes publicly resigned as head of the Proud Boys on advice from his legal team, and Facebook removed the Proud Boys from their platform.¹⁹⁰ The group named a new group of “elders,” and Proud Boy Magazine continues to publish articles.¹⁹¹ It remains unclear whether the group will persist in the face of lawsuits resulting from the New York City brawl and without the benefit of social media and a wealthy figurehead. Portland, Oregon will likely find out once the spring rally season begins in 2019.

The ethnonationalist alt-right and civic nationalist alt-lite are the two newest far-right groups to rise to prominence, but not the only ones emerging onto the scene of mainstream politics. A third, much older group is experiencing a revival. The Patriot movement, geographically centered in the Pacific Northwest, awoke in 2008 with the Tea Party. In 2016, Donald Trump energized many of them and galvanized them into action. Patriot Prayer is an offshoot of this storied and profoundly American movement.

¹⁸⁶ Moynihan and Winston, “Far-Right Proud Boys Reeling After Arrests and Scrutiny.”

¹⁸⁷ Eordogh, “Proud Boys Founder Banned For Copyright Infringement.”

¹⁸⁸ Wilson, “FBI Now Classifies Far-Right Proud Boys as ‘Extremist Group’, Documents Say.”

¹⁸⁹ McMillan and Rosenberg, “The FBI Says the Proud Boys Are Not an Extremist Group after All.”

¹⁹⁰ Wilson, “Proud Boys Founder Gavin McInnes Quits ‘extremist’ Far-Right Group.”

¹⁹¹ “Proud Boy Magazine – For Proud Boys, by Proud Boys.”; Crosbie, “The Proud Boys Just Accidentally Doxxed Their New ‘Elders.’”

Chapter 3: The Patriot Movement

Patriot Prayer is the latest manifestation of a far-right undercurrent which many refer to as the Patriot movement. Unlike the alt-right, which espouses an ideology not formerly seen within America, the Patriot movement draws on a rich and uniquely American tradition of far-right thought. It is an evolving byproduct of rural American beliefs in libertarianism and Dominionist Christianity that go back generations. The Patriot movement has made its geographical home in the Pacific Northwest for the last half-century. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Patriot Prayer emerged in the Oregon and Washington area.

To understand Patriot Prayer's ideology and tactics, one must understand the uniquely American history of this far-right movement and the evolution of its ideas over the past few decades. The Patriot movement formed from a variety of small fringe movements, such as the John Birch society, Posse Comitatus, and the Christian Dominionist movement (including the racist Aryan Nations). A restructuring in the wake of the disastrous Ruby Ridge and Waco sieges stripped much of the overtly racist and Christian fundamentalist reasoning from Patriot ideology. This has necessitated new legitimations for institutions originally supported by racist and Christian fundamentalist logic—a process explained within the Social Constructions of Reality portion of Chapter 1. The Patriot movement's legitimation process remains incomplete, however; without racial justifications, the movement's symbolic universe rests on unstable ground. Though Patriot ideology is far more coherent than the ideologically-unmoored alt-lite, it is less coherent than the ethnonationalism of the alt-right. Worse yet, the alt-right has the missing ingredient: racial logic. This may leave members of the Patriot movement susceptible to alt-right radicalization.

Origins of the Far Right in the Pacific Northwest

Modern history of the far right in the American Pacific Northwest begins in the 1920s, when recruiters for the Ku Klux Klan had good success among the majority-white

population of Washington and Oregon. After personal conflicts between rival Klan groups caused the movement to implode, the neo-Nazi Silvershirt movement attempted to replace the Klan with marginal success. World War II put an end to this movement, but not to right-wing xenophobia. Far right groups within the Pacific Northwest had long subscribed to the conspiracy theory that Japanese mass migration to the area was a plot by the Japanese emperor in preparation for an invasion of America. After Pearl Harbor, these groups were instrumental in transforming this conspiracy theory into policies of forced Japanese removal and internment.¹⁹²

After World War II, the John Birch Society became popular in the area. An alliance with the large Mormon population of Idaho helped spread the movement's conspiratorial, isolationist version of right-wing thought. The John Birch society propagated the myth that "international bankers" are responsible for American problems: a myth that has haunted America generally—and the Pacific Northwest specifically—ever since. This theory originated as part of the anti-Semitic conspiracy of "cultural bolshevism" within the Frankfurt school from which the European New Right and, subsequently, the alt-right eventually descended. Despite these origins, the John Birch society denied both anti-Semitism and racism.¹⁹³

In the 1970s, Christian white nationalism arrived in the Pacific Northwest. After long and careful deliberation, Richard Butler—founder of the Christian Identity group Aryan Nations—chose to locate the group's central compound in Northern Idaho. Butler considered the Pacific Northwest, with its small population of non-white people, as the perfect location for an Aryan homeland. The planned white nation encompassed Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and western Montana.¹⁹⁴ The Aryan Nations took advantage of the Farm Crisis of the 1980s to gain a strong foothold in the Pacific Northwest. Unlike mainstream politicians, the group seemed genuinely sympathetic to the farmers' plight and offered a "concrete solution" instead of platitudes. The movement spread across the nation but maintains its home and roots in the Pacific Northwest.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Neiwert, *In God's Country*, 41–68.

¹⁹³ Neiwert, 49–50; Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 72; Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 81.

¹⁹⁴ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 257.

¹⁹⁵ Neiwert, *In God's Country*, 324.

The 1970s also saw the arrival of Posse Comitatus, a group founded in the 1960s in opposition to Civil Rights legislature. This movement shared the John Birch society belief in a cabal of international bankers. Unlike the John Birch society, however, the group embraced the anti-Semitic nature of the conspiracy.¹⁹⁶ Posse Comitatus believed that most laws established after the Bill of Rights are unconstitutional usurpations of power. This was especially true of the 14th amendment, which they believed created two classes of citizens: “State citizens”—white men—and “Federal citizens”—an unconstitutional and invalid form of citizenship given to women and minorities.¹⁹⁷ The group was radically localist and believed in a power structure centered around the county sheriff as “the supreme law of the land.”¹⁹⁸ According to Posse Comitatus, the sheriff has the right to “form a posse” to “assist him in keeping the peace or to pursue or arrest a felon.” These posses were the first of many militia-style groups formed by the Patriot movement. Subscribers to Posse Comitatus-style beliefs about citizenship and the validity of federal authority often call themselves “sovereign citizens.” The concept of sovereign citizenship endures as Posse Comitatus’ largest contribution to the Patriot milieu. Patriot Prayer is currently engaged in a nullification campaign that depends on the supreme power of the county sheriff, as we shall see later in this chapter.¹⁹⁹

Christian Dominionists added a strongly religious element to the simmering cauldron of far-right development in the Pacific Northwest, especially during the 1980s. Dominionists believe that the United States is a Christian nation that needs to be taken back from secular forces and re-established as a theocratic state. “Soft Dominionists” seek to accomplish this return to theocracy through cooperation with the current political system. They tend to align with neoconservatives in foreign policy matters, and typically support Israel. The Evangelical wing of the Republican party are soft Dominionists. “Hard Dominionists,” on the other hand, wish to replace the system with a “totalitarian theocracy.” This version of Dominionism tends to be both anti-interventionist and anti-Zionist.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 43; Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 157.

¹⁹⁷ Neiwert, *In God’s Country*, 11.

¹⁹⁸ Neiwert, 171.

¹⁹⁹ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 157.

²⁰⁰ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 29; Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 85–86.

Despite ideological and strategic differences within the wider Dominionist movement, the groups share a general vision for America. The United States legal code ought to mirror Old Testament law (unless specifically countermanded by the New Testament). Economically, Dominionists are radical *laissez faire* capitalists. They would like to restore the gold standard, privatize the military, and eliminate government land ownership. They would also eliminate the federal income tax, along with most social government programs. This lost revenue would be replaced with either a flat tax, a sales tax, or a tithing system in which donations to Christian charities would be deducted from overall taxes owed. Dominionists oppose immigration of non-Christian people, especially Muslims. Some Dominionists want only white immigration. Others want an apartheid system, and still others “have resigned themselves to the presence of non-Caucasoids” within America.²⁰¹ This vision of America is, according to the Dominionists, ordained by God and therefore not open to negotiation, compromise, or a vote. As such, Dominionism ideology is fundamentally anti-democratic. This religious authoritarianism has the potential to interface well with the secular authoritarianism of the alt-right.²⁰²

Of the many Dominionist sects, Christian Identity (CI) is the most influential. David Neiwert, a journalist who has covered the Patriot movement for decades, describes it as “the greatest common denominator among all the various fragmented factions of the radical right wing in America.” Along with the Dominionist beliefs outlined above, CI members advance the conspiracy theory that a shadowy cabal has usurped power through the creation of an illegal corporate government. Laws passed by this false government are illegal, and following those laws is a sin akin to idolatry. CI groups also hold unorthodox and extremely racist religious beliefs about the origin of man. According to CI dogma, Eve had sex with Satan before she produced children with Adam. Later, Cain (who may or may not have been Satan’s son) had intercourse with the “mud people created before Adam” and produced both the Jews and people of color. These people do not have souls. Only the Aryans—who are the remnants of the 12 tribes of Israel—are truly human. This dichotomy provides a pseudoreligious justification for American racial beliefs that evolved separately from the pseudoscientific justifications of the 20th century Europeans

²⁰¹ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 91–104.

²⁰² Aho, 105.

who influenced the alt-right. As with religious authoritarianism, however, these racial beliefs are compatible.²⁰³

Another less virulent sect of Dominionists, the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), provided a worldview and tactics that have clearly influenced Patriot Prayer. Unlike CI, the NAR is tolerant of other races. They also support Israel due to their belief that, for the end times to arrive, the Jews must occupy Israel and they must believe in Jesus. As such, the NAR often attempts to convert Jews to Christianity.²⁰⁴ NAR believes in “spiritual warfare” against evil spirits, either within individuals or within public spaces, including entire cities. To combat these spirits, the NAR sometimes engages in “prayerwalking,” in which believers walk through a demon-possessed area and combat its presence through prayer. Patriot Prayer’s commitment to “bring light” to liberal cities like Portland by marching through them follows a similar logic.²⁰⁵

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, Patriot ideas inspired the creation of isolated compounds within the Pacific Northwest, such as that of the Christian Identity Aryan Nations described earlier. The movement also spawned organizations dedicated to racial terrorism. Groups such as The Order (also known as Bruders Schweigen) and the Minutemen raised money through violent crime and conducted assassinations against people they perceived as enemies. The Order gunned down Denver-area talk show host Alan Berg after he criticized the movement. In 1965, the Minutemen plotted to assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at an ADL event.²⁰⁶ The United States government did not connect the dots and treated many of these events as isolated incidents. Sociologist James Aho has compiled a list of over 400 violent deaths directly linked to the Christian Patriot movement between 1980 and 2014 alone.²⁰⁷

Although most far-right efforts to transform America depended on extralegal violence, a few groups attempted change from within the system. In 1991, Dominionist Howard Phillips founded the US Taxpayer’s Party (USTP). This would eventually

²⁰³ Neiwert, *In God’s Country*, 11.

²⁰⁴ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 89–90; Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 38.

²⁰⁵ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 38; Oregonian/OregonLive, “Patriot Prayer’s Portland Rally Site Could Allow Supporters to Bring Guns.”

²⁰⁶ Neiwert, *In God’s Country*, 41–68.

²⁰⁷ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*.

become the Constitution Party in 1999, which nominated Paleoconservative Pat Buchanan as their presidential candidate in the 2000 election.²⁰⁸ As discussed in Chapter 2, the Paleoconservative movement and the Patriot movement have important differences. Similarities between the two groups, however, allowed for a cooperative effort that continues to limp along to this day.²⁰⁹

Clearly, these movements did not succeed in turning the Pacific Northwest into an Aryan homeland, a theocratic state, or a combination of the two. Aho points out, however, that the ideology and worldview of these movements lives on. Within the rural Pacific Northwest, these beliefs became integrated into the symbolic universe of its inhabitants, who passed them on to their children. In the 1990s, a largely-deracialized Patriot movement shifted their focus from conceptions of a racial enemy to the conspiratorial “New World Order.”

Patriot Militias: 1992 through 2008

David Neiwert does not like the term “The Militia Movement,” which was the media’s preferred name for Pacific Northwest far-right radicals in the 1990s. In his 1999 book, *In God’s Country*, Neiwert prefers the name used by the movement itself: Patriots. By this time, the Patriot milieu included cross-burning Christian Identity followers, advocates of a return to strict constitutionalism, violent radicals, and “sovereign citizens” who carried on the Posse Comitatus tradition of rejecting federal and state authority. Despite their differences, the Patriots coalesced around their shared reactionary resistance to the existential threat of “encroaching moral and political decadence wrought by a giant world conspiracy of probably Satanic origins.”²¹⁰

In 1992, the movement as a whole underwent significant changes in the aftermath of Ruby Ridge and WACO: two botched and violent government interventions involving Patriot-affiliated members and organizations.²¹¹ One hundred and sixty white nationalists,

²⁰⁸ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 45.

²⁰⁹ “Constitution Party.”

²¹⁰ Neiwert, *In God’s Country*, 4.

²¹¹ Neiwert, 63–67; Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 45–46.

members of Gun Owners of Americans, Dominionists, and other Patriots met to discuss a response to these events in Estes Park, Colorado. This mix of racists, racialists, and non-racialists engaged in predictable disagreement on the racial direction of the movement as a whole. The majority of the groups advocated “color-blind” theories on race, in which individuals are judged on their own merit and in which the impact of institutional or group discrimination is dismissed. When racist elements pushed back against this plan, “some Patriot groups denounced racial and religious discrimination, barred white supremacists from joining, and...directly confronted or harassed white nationalist groups such as the KKK.”²¹²

In the course of the Estes Park meeting, the Patriot movement decided to initiate the formation of decentralized “civilian militias” that would eventually “[transform] the nation into ‘a Christian Civil Body Politic.’”²¹³ Militias of the 1990s began to utilize the concept of decentralized cells later used to great effect by Islamic terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda. The Phineas Priesthood provides a good example of this type of cell-based organization. Unlike The Order and other terrorist groups of the 1980s, no official organization called “The Phineas Priesthood” existed. Instead, the group consisted of six-man cells of “Saxon Warriors” committed to enforcing God’s law. As in The Order, Priesthood cells used armed robbery to fund their murderous agenda, including the murder of four people at a gay bookstore. It is impossible to accurately estimate the extent of murder perpetrated by this group, since the decentralized structure of the Priesthood made it easy to convince officials that such attacks were committed by a “lone wolf.” The Oklahoma City Bombing, while not likely associated with the Priesthood, is another example of violent, decentralized far-right violence during this period.²¹⁴

The majority of so-called militia movements, however, did not dedicate themselves to terrorism but rather but to preparing for inevitable conflict against the latest iteration of the shadow international cabal theory: the “New World Order” (NWO). According to conspiracy theorists, the NWO acts in league with “World Communism” to

²¹² Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 46–47.

²¹³ Neiwert, *In God’s Country*, 67–68.

²¹⁴ Neiwert, 117–36; Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 48.

orchestrate the institution of a “world government” police state in America.²¹⁵ Militias such as the Militia of Montana (MOM) and the Washington State Militia travelled from town to town in the Pacific Northwest and held meetings to recruit people to their cause. In rural Washington, Neiwert observed audiences of approximately 100, though attendance dropped off significantly if the movement returned for a second or third event.²¹⁶

The meetings advanced what Neiwert describes as “an alternate reality” of paranoid conspiratorial beliefs that directly addressed problems faced by the rural meeting attendees. All social problems—from gun control to public education, abortion, or even the weather—could be blamed on NWO. The reason the public doesn’t hear about the NWO, or the black helicopters and the constant movement of military personnel, or the weather-control technology that is purposefully ruining the American farmer, or any other number of nefarious activities, is because the liberal media is engaged in a cover-up of the horrible truth. These kinds of conspiracy theories attract people who “fear and distrust” the modern, urban world.²¹⁷

In order to fight back against these perceived threats, these groups attempted to form large and well-prepared citizen militia groups prepared to defend the country. To facilitate recruitment for these groups, Patriot movement made some ideological adjustments. Although the Patriot movement always appealed strongly to veterans and Second Amendment activists, some members of these groups objected to the radical Dominionist strain of Christianity. To increase recruitment from these two demographics, the Patriot movement began to speak less about scripture and more about the Constitution. Eventually, the Constitution took the place of scripture as the fundamental text of the movement. As one might expect from an ideology that replaced “the bible” with “the Constitution,” Patriots have largely come to perceive the Constitution as a scriptural document: perfect, and unalterable, and directly inspired by God.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Neiwert, *In God’s Country*, 5.

²¹⁶ Neiwert, 5, 22, 26, 30.

²¹⁷ Neiwert, 5, 26–28; Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 5.

²¹⁸ Neiwert, *In God’s Country*, 3.

The militias also downplayed or denied the racist thinking that originally provided a foundation for Patriot beliefs in an effort to make themselves more attractive to these demographics. Patriots began to portray themselves as flag-waving evangelists of true American nationalism. Taken together, these shifts away from Christian dominionism and racism made the overall movement more appealing to mainstream Americans and, eventually, transformed the far-right movement in the Pacific Northwest.²¹⁹

Despite these adjustments, the Patriot movement shrank into near-oblivion towards the end of the 90s. Crackdowns and ideological disagreements in the aftermath of the Patriot-connected Oklahoma City Bombing fragmented the movement. By Bush's election in 2000, the movement was effectively dormant. Conspiracy theorists largely turned their attention to the 9/11 truther movement, which relegated them to the lunatic fringe of politics.²²⁰ Throughout the 2000s, the far-right forces in America slumbered fitfully—that is, until the Obama election, combined with the massive recession of 2008, awakened it into its current form.²²¹

The Tea Party Pipeline

The election of Barak Obama as the 44th president of the United States infuriated both Patriots and mainstream conservatives. Both “set out to delegitimize him by any means possible.” This mutual goal facilitated an alliance between the mainstream and extremist right in the form of the Tea Party.²²²

In his 2017 book, *Alt-America*, David Neiwert explains how the Tea Party movement acted as a pipeline between mainstream conservatives and the far right. In the beginning, the Tea Party advocated for a smaller government that both taxed less and spent less—a stance well within the bounds of mainstream conservatism. However, Patriot elements flocked to the movement and immediately began influencing its agenda.

²¹⁹ Neiwert, 5.

²²⁰ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 41, 48; Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 3.

²²¹ Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 48; Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 3.

²²² Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 3.

Discussions of nullification and succession quickly became commonplace.²²³ Over time, this altered Tea Party turned its focus towards guns and second-amendment issues. Prominent Patriot speakers, such as Lawrence D. Pratt, Red Beckman, and Richard Mack, began to show up as guest speakers at Tea Party events. Some Tea Party groups transformed into Patriot groups, while others spun off separate, overtly Patriot organizations. Often, organizers of Tea Party groups were also local Patriot leaders.²²⁴ Travis McAdam, executive director of the Montana Human Rights Network, described the shift in a local Tea Party group:

“Early on, [they portrayed] themselves very much as just this benign group that was educating the public about the Constitution and American history. Then months down the road, a year down the road, they’re taking out an ad in the local paper where they’re basically saying that if the government tries to restrict our access to firearms, it is our obligation to rise up and overthrow such a government.”²²⁵

Because the Tea Party began as an extreme manifestation of mainstream conservatism, this ideological change introduced mainstream conservative members of the Tea Party to Patriot ideology. This has, in turn, moved Patriot ideology closer to mainstream American political discourse. Likely as a result of this development, the number of Patriot organizations in America exploded from 194 in 2008 to 1,360 in 2011.²²⁶

In subsequent years, it has become difficult to determine where mainstream conservatism ends and where the Patriot movement begins. As mentioned in Chapter 2, conservative gatekeeper William F. Buckley and his *National Review* were a distant memory when the Tea Party emerged. Not only did modern media outlets such as Fox News and conservative talk radio fail to step into the void and become gatekeepers themselves, they actively courted far-right Patriots and made a home for them within mainstream discourse.²²⁷ As a result, mainstream discourse has incorporated Patriot ideas and phrases. One example of the blurred boundaries between Patriot and mainstream conservatism involves the slogan “starve the beast,” which prominent Republicans like

²²³ Neiwert, 4; Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 49.

²²⁴ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 137–39.

²²⁵ Neiwert, *In God’s Country*, 141.

²²⁶ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 140.

²²⁷ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 70–71.

Sarah Palin and Rick Perry have used to describe their desire to shrink the government through spending cuts. Sociologist James Aho first heard this slogan in 1985 at an Aryan World Congress. The speaker was referring to the Beast of the Book of Revelations.²²⁸

Modern Patriot Ideology

Within the last few years, scholars and observers of the far right have largely focused on the alt-right—either directly or through investigation as to how the alt-lite differs from the alt right. The Patriot movement has received far less attention.

David Neiwert defines the modern Patriot movement first and foremost by its strict but erroneous constitutionalism. According to Patriot beliefs, the federal government cannot legally own land. The movement considers many federal laws, sometimes including civil rights legislature, unconstitutional. The movement continues to believe that the county Sheriff wields supreme law enforcement authority. James Aho points out that talk of nullification and succession are common among Patriots.²²⁹

This erroneous constitutionalism informs other policy positions as well. Patriots tend to be extreme libertarians in their economic outlook—they want to abolish the federal income tax and most social safety net programs, which they perceive as unconstitutional. Despite moves in the direction of secularism the movement remains extremely religious, and often fixates on regulating pornography and what they describe as sexual deviancy. They oppose anything that smacks of communism, including labor unions. They tend to be middle-class, with a vision of “authoritarianism” that “marches under the Cross and Flag.”²³⁰

More than any other far-right movement, the Patriot movement embraces a conspiratorial worldview. With the exception of the white genocide conspiracy theory, which originated with the alt-right, most far-right conspiracy theories originate within the Patriot movement.²³¹ The Zionist International Bankers/New World Order/Globalist

²²⁸ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 3–4.

²²⁹ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 5; Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 14.

²³⁰ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 14.

²³¹ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 38.

conspiracy to subvert Americans to an authoritarian globalist hegemony first gained traction in America through the Patriot movement, beginning with the John Birch society in the 1960s as discussed earlier in this chapter. Patriots believe that a strong and organized force is actively moving history in a dangerous, even “satanic” direction, and that they must reverse the trend.²³² Religious language in the service of a profoundly conspiratorial worldview indicates Patriot movement affiliation or influence. Alex Jones is one such example.²³³

Patriots often believe in multiple conspiracy theories. One extremely common conspiracy among Patriots is the idea that the government is planning to confiscate all guns in America.²³⁴ Many Patriots believe that the government conducts false-flag gun massacres, such as Sandy Hook. Other conspiracy theories include the establishment of a “collectivist educational curriculum,” and global warming as a hoax.²³⁵ A recent and bizarre example of a Patriot-style conspiracy, #pizzagate, claims that a pizza parlor in Washington, DC has a basement child sex dungeon that serves the globalist elite.²³⁶ For some Patriots, the larger NWO conspiracy explored above unites all of these theories. According to this construction, a shadowy cabal of “globalists” orchestrates all of these hoaxes in the name of a totalitarian world government takeover.

Example: Patriot Prayer

As the name suggests, Patriot Prayer is an ideological descendent of the Patriot movement, albeit with some alt-lite elements. The movement focuses primarily on the First Amendment right to free speech, though their focus has shifted to Second Amendment and abortion concerns in recent months. As with other Patriot groups, Patriot Prayer upholds the Constitution as a perfect and unalterable document, holds strong Christian beliefs, and espouses American nationalism. The group’s “big-tent” approach

²³² Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 9.

²³³ For example: West, “Worried about the US Being Led by a Tyrant Who May Destroy the Earth?”

²³⁴ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 34; Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 41.

²³⁵ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 78.

²³⁶ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 155–62; Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 330–32. The pizza parlor in question does not have a physical basement.

has more in common with the Tea Party than with historic Patriot groups. Patriot Prayer does not advance a radical agenda but instead centers concepts valued by mainstream American politics as a whole, such as freedom of speech and respectful discourse. This focus makes the group appear, at first glance, more centrist than its members actually are, which in turn allows centrists to support and join the movement in good conscience. As with the Tea Party, however, association with Patriot Prayer exposes members to more radical ideas such as conspiracy theories and the necessity to prepare armed opposition to said conspiracies.

Movement History

On June 2nd, 2016, Joey Gibson sat on his couch and watched presidential election news coverage.²³⁷ Gibson, a former high-school football coach who lives in Vancouver, Washington and made a living flipping houses, watched as a skinny white kid ran from a mob at a Trump rally in San Jose on live TV. Counterprotesters beat up Trump supporters while the Police simply looked on. This is an example of the “victim fable” (see Chapter 4) and an example of the way such fables can galvanize an audience into activism (see Chapter 5).

“That is not America,” Gibson remembered thinking as he spoke to an audience in Skamania County, Washington nearly three years later. “That day, I made a commitment. I didn’t know what I was going to do or how I was going to do it, but I’m going to go down there...and I’m going to change it.”²³⁸ Gibson bought a ticket to the Republican National Convention. At the Free Alex Jones rally, Gibson told his supporters that he experienced a calling from God during his time in Cleveland, Ohio. God wanted Gibson to become a warrior for justice.²³⁹ Gibson phrased his revelation a bit less radically when interviewed by the Columbian. “I noticed that the left owned the streets, and so I came back committed to getting people involved, to getting people on the street, the libertarian,

²³⁷ Matarrese and Dake, “Joey Gibson Aims to ‘Liberate Conservatives’ via His Patriot Prayer Group.”

²³⁸ Jedeed, Field Notes: Demand 2nd Amendment Ordinances Now.

²³⁹ Jedeed, Field Notes: Free Alex Jones Rally.

the conservative.”²⁴⁰ This is an example of the way Patriot Prayer often tweaks its message to suit the target audience.

Upon returning to the greater Portland area, Gibson began to walk the streets of Vancouver with a Trump flag. He estimates he did this about forty times before anything came of it. “I knew all the great spots to go to get the biggest reaction,” he said. Even though it felt like a waste of time, he kept going because he wasn’t sure what else to do. Eventually, someone else joined Gibson’s one-man protests. Before he knew it, Gibson had a following of about 50 people.²⁴¹

The first Patriot Prayer rally occurred on October 2nd, 2016. Over time, Gibson began to go into Portland and Olympia in order to “bring light” into liberal cities. This concept is reminiscent of the NAR practice of “prayerwalking” discussed earlier in this chapter.²⁴²

Despite tensions and occasional scuffles between Patriot Prayer and counterprotesters, Portland-area rallies remained relatively peaceful, with few arrests and no bloodshed.²⁴³ After strong interest in the initial Patriot Prayer rally, excitement for the movement dwindled throughout 2017, reaching a low point of just 36 Facebook RSVPs for a May event.²⁴⁴

This decline in attendance and interest reversed dramatically on May 26th, 2017, when self-described white nationalist Jeremy Christian stabbed three Portlanders on a MAX train.²⁴⁵ After boarding the train, Christian began to yell “hate speech toward a

²⁴⁰ Matarrese and Dake, “Joey Gibson Aims to ‘Liberate Conservatives’ via His Patriot Prayer Group.”

²⁴¹ Jeeded, Field Notes: Demand 2nd Amendment Ordinances Now.

²⁴² Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists*, 38. Examples of Gibson stating he wanted to bring light into a city of darkness include: Oregonian/OregonLive, “Patriot Prayer’s Portland Rally Site Could Allow Supporters to Bring Guns”; Burke, “Patriot Prayer”; Steele, “Patriot Prayer, Antifa Face off in Schunk Plaza.”

²⁴³ Brown, “Photos & Video,” April 2, 2017; Brown, “Photos & Video,” April 29, 2017. Little news coverage of Patriot Prayer rallies before June 4, 2017 exists, probably because these rallies did not generate sufficient interest in the greater Portland area.

²⁴⁴ “Patriot Prayer - Events.” Facebook RSVPs are not a good metric for actual rally attendance but serve as a good metric for comparative public interest between rallies.

²⁴⁵ Office, “UPDATE #2”; Bernstein, “Portland MAX Hero’s Last Words”; Frankel, “Suspected Attacker Jeremy Joseph Christian Stood out amid Rising Tensions in Portland,” May 27, 2017.

variety of ethnicities and religions,” then directed his hatred at two young people of color. Three men attempted to talk Christian down. Christian pulled a knife and stabbed these men, two of them fatally.²⁴⁶ The killer fled the scene and was arrested almost immediately.²⁴⁷

This incident was not the first time Christian’s name had appeared in newsprint. The media spotted the killer at a Patriot Prayer rally a month earlier. Draped in an American flag, the imposing Christian carried a baseball bat, yelled “Fuck all you niggers,” and gave the Nazi salute. Patriot Prayer members did not allow this troubling figure into their rally area.²⁴⁸ One of my interviewees, who attended that protest, told me that Christian attempted to board the TriMet busses sent to pick up Patriot Prayer in order to avoid street violence. However, concerned Patriot Prayer members prevented him from doing so.²⁴⁹

Nonetheless, Christian’s attendance at a Patriot Prayer rally became a major local and national news story. The story took on added urgency when Patriot Prayer declined to cancel their already-planned rally on June 4th, barely a week after the train stabbing.²⁵⁰ When asked for comment, Gibson denied connection to Christian and stated his intent to make the June 4th rally about “freedom,” “love,” and “spirituality.”²⁵¹ This rally generated the second-largest number of Facebook RSVPs of any Patriot Prayer event.²⁵²

Despite the presence of alt-right speakers and attendees (discussed further below) and hundreds of emotional counterprotesters, the June 4th rally was mostly peaceful aside from minor scuffles and disorderly conduct.²⁵³ At one point, counterprotesters began to

²⁴⁶ Office, “UPDATE #2.”

²⁴⁷ Ryan, “2 Killed in Stabbing on MAX Train in Northeast Portland as Man Directs Slurs at Muslim Women, Police Say.”

²⁴⁸ Brown, “Photos & Video,” April 29, 2017; Frankel, “Suspected Attacker Jeremy Joseph Christian Stood out amid Rising Tensions in Portland,” May 27, 2017.

²⁴⁹ Jedeed, Interview: Lisa, 8:07.

²⁵⁰ Associated Press, “Portland Stabbing Suspect”; CBS News, “Portland Pro-Trump Rally Organizer”; KGW Staff, “Mayor Wheeler”; News, “Patriot Prayer Rally to Go on despite Calls to Cancel”; Wilson, “Portland Knife Attack.”

²⁵¹ KGW Staff, “Mayor Wheeler.”

²⁵² “Patriot Prayer - Events.”

²⁵³ Schmidt, “Dueling Portland Rallies End without Major Violence, but Police Intervene.”

throw “marbles and balloons filled with foul-smelling liquid” into the Patriot Prayer protest area. After anarchists reportedly began to rip bricks from a bathroom and throw them at police, the Portland Police cleared that section of the counterprotest with tear gas and flash-bang. As the rally and counter-protests drew to their conclusion, some counterprotesters blocked an intersection and the police made several arrests. Ultimately, fourteen counterprotesters were arrested for charges ranging from “carrying a concealed weapon” to “interfering with a peace offer.” Despite these disruptions, no significant violence or hospitalizations occurred at the June 4th rally.²⁵⁴

Patriot Prayer continued to stage rallies in Portland for the next year; however, rally interest fell off sharply after the June 4th rally and steadily declined thereafter.²⁵⁵ During this time period, Gibson announced his intent to run as a United States senator in the 2018 Washington State election. The activist was a front-runner in the Republican primary field for months after announcing his candidacy, but his support fell as other candidates entered the race and as most of his visible campaign involved rallies and street scuffles with Antifa counterprotesters in Oregon. Gibson ultimately lost the Washington primary with just 2.33% of the vote.²⁵⁶

This trend of declining support and relevance reversed sharply after June 3rd, 2018, nearly a year after the large 2017 protest that generated so much attention. “Tiny’s Freedom March,” a small rally intended as a goodbye party for Tusitala “Tiny” Toese as he returned to his home in American Samoa, attracted about twenty Patriot Prayer participants. The Facebook event for the counterprotest encouraged people to “show Patriot Prayer, just as we showed them last year, that their violence and hatred has no place in Portland.”²⁵⁷ Violence between the two groups broke out almost immediately. Protesters and counterprotesters sprayed each other with pepper spray and “threw

²⁵⁴ Staff, “Opposing Protests Largely Peaceful, despite 14 Arrests.”

²⁵⁵ “Patriot Prayer - Events.”

²⁵⁶ Wilson, “How a Gun-Carrying, Far-Right Activist Plots a Run at the US Senate”; Shepherd, “Patriot Prayer Leader Joey Gibson Gets Clobbered in His U.S. Senate Race”; “Joey Gibson For U.S. Senate - Events.”

²⁵⁷ “Call to Resist Patriot Prayer Bringing Nazis to Portland.”

fireworks, bottles, rocks, and ball bearings at each other during the clash.”²⁵⁸ The Portland police arrested four participants.²⁵⁹

This violence generated media coverage, which in turn generated interest in their June 30th “Freedom & Courage Rally.” This rally degenerated into a vicious street brawl, which Portland Police declared a riot. Four people were hospitalized, including one person with a cracked skull and minor brain hemorrhage.²⁶⁰

The riot became a national news story,²⁶¹ and some worried that Patriot Prayer’s next rally could turn into “another Charlottesville.”²⁶² The August 4th “Gibson for Senate Freedom March” attracted national news teams and generated the most Facebook RSVPs of any Patriot Prayer event thus far.²⁶³ An enormous police presence confiscated weapons and kept Patriot Prayer rally attendees and counterprotesters apart, at times through use of flash-bang, pepper spray, and rubber bullets.²⁶⁴ Thrown projectiles resulted in several injuries, and one person was hospitalized for “minor injuries,” but violence occurred on a smaller scale than at the June 30th riot.²⁶⁵ Police declared the event a “civil disturbance,” but not a riot.

The last planned Patriot-Prayer-affiliated Portland event occurred on October 13th, 2018. Patriot Prayer organized the “Flash March for Law and Order,” announced just a

²⁵⁸ Zielinski, “Patriot Prayer Clash With Antifa Protesters in Downtown Portland.”

²⁵⁹ Staff, “4 Arrested as Opposing Demonstrators Clash in Downtown Portland”; Staff, “Patriot Prayer, Antifa Clash; Multiple Arrests.”

²⁶⁰ Shepherd, “MAGA Mayhem Fractures a Man’s Skull, as Right-Wing Marchers Test the Limits of Free Speech in Portland”; Benderlev, “Police Declare A Riot After Far-Right And Antifa Groups Clash In Portland, Ore.”

²⁶¹ Wilson, “Riot in Portland as Far-Right Marchers Clash with Anti-Fascists”; Herreria, “Right-Wing Portland Rally Declared Riot Amid Clashes With Antifa Protesters”; “Right-Wing Activists Patriot Prayer, Antifa Clash at Portland Protests”; Benderlev, “Police Declare A Riot After Far-Right And Antifa Groups Clash In Portland, Ore.”

²⁶² “Another Charlottesville?”

²⁶³ “Patriot Prayer - Events.”

²⁶⁴ Staff, “Police Use Force to Keep Opposing Protests Apart.”

²⁶⁵ Guevarra, “4 Arrested During Patriot Prayer Rally, Protests In Downtown Portland.” The most violent occurrence at the August 4th rally occurred when a police officer fired a flash-bang projectile directly into the crowd of counterprotesters. The round struck a counterprotester in the head. Only his helmet saved him. The counterprotester is currently suing the city of Portland. “Protester Allegedly Hit in Head by Flash-Bang Plans to Sue Portland.”

day before the event itself, in response to a viral video of Antifa harassing drivers and attacking cars at a protest against a recent police shooting.²⁶⁶ Counterprotesters and Patriot Prayer members fought a vicious brawl while police largely looked on.²⁶⁷ Portland police made no arrests, and national news largely overlooked the incident to focus instead on the New York City Proud Boys brawl of the day before (see Chapter 2).²⁶⁸

Patriot Prayer has not organized any official rallies in Portland since that brawl and has instead focused the majority of their efforts on a campaign to nullify recent gun-control legislation passed in Washington State (discussed later in this section). Offshoots of Patriot Prayer, however, staged a “#himtoo” rally in February that sought to call attention to sexual assault against men and false rape accusations. Though Patriot Prayer did not officially endorse the event, the three most well-known organizers of the group featured prominently. Haley Adams organized the event, while Gibson and Tiny both spoke at the rally. Unsurprisingly, I saw many familiar faces from past Patriot Prayer rallies in the crowd at this event.²⁶⁹

Earlier, on January 19th, the “PDX Crew”—also organized by Haley Adams—staged an impromptu demonstration in response to the beating and hospitalization of two Patriot Prayer members in an altercation two days before (see Chapter 7). Joey Gibson attended, though Tiny and the Proud Boys did not. No counterprotesters showed up to the event.²⁷⁰

Patriot Prayer is active outside of Portland. They have organized many events in Vancouver, Washington, as well as a handful of events in Seattle and Olympia. They have co-hosted a few events outside of the Pacific Northwest, such as the Free Alex Jones rally in Austin, Texas and the upcoming Pro-Life Rally for the Innocent in New York City.

²⁶⁶ “Flash March for Law and Order in PDX.”

²⁶⁷ Bivins, “Huge Brawl Just Happened and Police Came in to Fireless Lethal Rounds on People. Right-Wingers Were Clubbing People w Clubs Outside of Kelly’s Olympian, Way Worse than NYC Last Night. Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer and Antifa Just Had a Huge Wild Fightpic.Twitter.Com/A750y2ai7J.”

²⁶⁸ Sparling, “UPDATE.”

²⁶⁹ “Portland Oregon #HimToo”; Jedeed, Field Notes: #HimToo Rally.

²⁷⁰ Jedeed, Field Notes: IWW Protest.

Core members of Patriot Prayer have attended other alt-lite and Patriot rallies across the country, including the infamous Berkeley protests and riots in 2017.²⁷¹

The question of whether Patriot Prayer will host official Portland rallies in 2019 remains an open question. Rallies occurred largely in the summer and fall in both 2017 and 2018, likely due to the difficulty of recruiting participants in the Pacific Northwest winter rains. With Gibson's attention firmly focused on his nullification campaign and reports of a split between Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys, Portland may receive a reprieve this summer.²⁷²

Alt-Right Connections

Much of the news coverage of Patriot Prayer acknowledges that Gibson himself is not alt-right. Many, however, accuse Gibson of providing space for alt-right figures.²⁷³ Regardless of whether Gibson intends to create such a space, alt-right figures have historically attended Patriot Prayer rallies.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the alt-right decoupled from the rest of the far-right in the wake of the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally in August of 2017. The June 4th, 2017 rally occurred before this decoupling, and Gibson invited two alt-right-affiliated figures to speak at the event. The first of these was "Baked Alaska," aka Anthime Gionet, the Twitter personality whom Mike Cernovich disinvited from the Deploraball due to anti-Semitic tweets.²⁷⁴ I remember Baked Alaska as a sort of second-rate Milo Yiannopoulos: shallow, self-centered, and ultimately harmless. Then again, I did not

²⁷¹ "Patriot Prayer - Events"; "Patriot Prayer - Home"; Jeeded, Field Notes: #HimToo Rally; Carlson, "WATCH"; Jeeded, Field Notes: Demand 2nd Amendment Ordinances Now.

²⁷² Neiwert, "Portland Far-Right 'Patriot' Street Brawlers in Disarray as Proud Boys Part Ways amid Violent Talk."

²⁷³ For example: Fowler, "Patriot Prayer Leader Dislikes Racists, but They Seem to Hear a Whistle"; Neiwert, "Patriot Prayer Whips up Anger in Seattle, but Not Much of a Crowd"; Wilson, "Portland Far-Right Rally"; "Portland."

²⁷⁴ Neiwert, "Defiant Alt-Right 'Patriots' Encounter Portland's Simmering Anger After Train Killings"; Parks, "Live Updates"; Osborne, "Thousands Surge into Portland, Oregon, to Protest an Alt-Right Rally Held Nine Days After Double Stabbings in City Train."; Wilson, "'Alt-Right Celebrities' Are Holding a Rally in Portland. Who Are They?"; Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 209–11.

know what to look for at the time. Rose City Antifa points out a particularly disturbing moment of Baked Alaska’s Portland livestream: an interview with Jake Von Ott, local coordinator for the alt-right group Identity Evropa.²⁷⁵ In this livestream, Baked Alaska asserts that Von Ott has “every right to be here” and chats with the young man about Identity Evropa’s commitment to the Western value of free speech. About one minute into their interaction, Baked Alaska asks Von Ott to recite the Fourteen Words: a slogan coined by David Lane and, according to the ADL, “the most popular white supremacist slogan in the world.” Von Ott recites the words: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” “Hell yeah, brother,” Baked Alaska replies. The two men fist-bump, then embrace.²⁷⁶

Gibson also invited Kyle “Based Stickman” Chapman to speak. As discussed in Chapter 2, Chapman either leads or led FOAK, the paramilitary wing of the Proud Boys. Chapman is, at very least, alt-right-adjacent: he frequently associates with alt-right personalities and has used the #whitegenocide hashtag on Twitter.

Lisa,²⁷⁷ one of the first Patriot Prayer members and a central organizer within the movement, acknowledged the presence of an unnamed Identity Evropa member at some of their events in our late-2018 interview. She stated that although his presence made her uncomfortable, “[they] recognize [Identity Evropa’s] right to be there to support free speech.” Nonetheless, the group realized at some point that “his message was still coming in and clouding our message.” Patriot Prayer “disavowed” Identity Evropa, and the member in question (likely Jake Von Ott) stopped showing up to rallies.²⁷⁸

This claim of disavowal likely referred to Joey Gibson’s denunciation of white supremacy in the wake of the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. As discussed in Chapter 2, many far right groups distanced themselves from the alt-right in the weeks that followed the Unite the Right debacle. The rally concluded on August 12th. On August 15th, Gibson appeared on local news channel KOIN, distanced himself from “extremists,” and stated that white supremacists and neo-Nazis are not welcome at his

²⁷⁵ Rose City Antifa, “Neo-Nazis Deny Obvious White Supremacism to the Media, as Joey Gibson Turns a Blind Eye · Rose City Antifa.”

²⁷⁶ “14 Words”; Gionet, “My Interview with an Identity Evropa Member.”

²⁷⁷ All interviewee names have been changed to protect anonymity.

²⁷⁸ Jedeed, Interview: Lisa, secs. 46:55, 1:18:54.

rallies. He portrayed himself as someone who reaches across the aisle to the Left. “My message does not appeal to a lot of conservatives. In fact, a lot of them hate it. They hate that I reach out, they hate that I believe that there's good Communists, good Antifa members. So I'm not trying to mobilize the right.”²⁷⁹

The day after the KOIN video aired, Gibson posted a livestream Facebook video in which he denies racial ideology. He also establishes what Patriot Prayer does stand for:

“I'm trying to bring people together who believe in freedom. Who believe in love, believe in peace, and believe in free speech. I know there are so many Liberals out there who believe in free speech, they're just afraid to say it.”

Gibson went on to state that the movement is inclusive, does not require a belief in Christianity, and that he supports gay marriage. He denies being purely to the right or to the left. The overall message is moderate, even center-left. It is worth noting that this video exists on Gibson’s personal Facebook page and cannot be accessed directly through the official Patriot Prayer Facebook page.²⁸⁰

In this video, Gibson denounces extremists “on both sides.” The thirteen-minute video focuses primarily on the threat to free speech poised by left-wing ‘SJWs,’ and mentions opposition to Nazis and white supremacists just one time. Though the anti-alt-right message is present, it is far from the loudest message in this video.²⁸¹ A few days later, Gibson posted a video with a still shot of the Patriot Prayer logo with a crossed-out swastika on the official Patriot Prayer page. After about five seconds, the swastika transforms into a crossed-out hammer and sickle, followed by a crossed-out Antifa symbol.²⁸²

Patriot Prayer has never again invited alt-right figures to speak at their rallies, though Rose City Antifa and the SPLC have documented a few other alt-right figures in attendance at various Patriot Prayer rallies at least through mid-2018.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ KOIN 6, *Joey Gibson*.

²⁸⁰ Gibson, *What Is Patriot Prayer?*

²⁸¹ Gibson.

²⁸² Gibson, *Patriot Prayer-Extremists Are Extremists*.

²⁸³ Hatewatch, “Patriot Prayer and Proud Boys Roll into Portland Ready for a Fight”; “Alexander Becker - One of Patriot Prayer’s Steadfast Nazis · Rose City Antifa.” Rose

Despite this very real alt-right presence at Patriot Prayer rallies, these ethnonationalist figures are the exception and not the rule. At its core, Patriot Prayer’s ideology stems from the Patriot movement discussed previously, with heavy alt-lite influences.

Ideology

As previously discussed, Joey Gibson opts for a “big tent,” centrist approach in front of the media cameras. His rallies center the mainstream American values of free speech and liberty and thus seeks to occupy centrist ground.

Nonetheless, Gibson and his movement seem to hold a Patriot-inspired view of the world in practice. His rhetoric at rallies heavily features obedience to the Constitution and the legacy of the Founding Fathers. On June 30th, 2018, Gibson explicitly stated the Patriot belief that the Founding Fathers received their conception of human rights directly from God and scripture. “Rebellion to the corruption in our government right now—that is obedience to God.” Later in the speech, Gibson compared George Washington to Jesus.²⁸⁴

Patriot Prayer has also displayed a tendency toward conspiratorial thinking. For example, on his Senatorial campaign website, Gibson interrupts his call for legal immigration reform to help “law-abiding, hardworking people” enter the country with a claim that “big corporations and Washington DC establishment do not want to fix [immigration] because they literally want to keep an ‘underclass’.”²⁸⁵ Gibson has appeared multiple times on conspiracy theorist Alex Jones’ *Infowars*, and threw a “Free Alex Jones” rally in Austin, Texas to protest his removal from social media.²⁸⁶

City Antifa has documented many more figures which they term “alt-right”; however, the group’s definition of alt-right is considerably wider than the definition used in this thesis.

²⁸⁴ Jeeded, Field Notes: Freedom & Courage Rally; UNITE AMERICA FIRST, *Freedom Rally Portland, Oregon- UAF*.

²⁸⁵ Gibson, “Stream-Line Immigration.”

²⁸⁶ Joey Gibson, *Joey Gibson and Will Johnson Alex Jones Show*; Alex Jones Show, “Joey Gibson”; Alex Jones Show, “Founder Of Patriot Prayer Breakfast Breaks Down Leftist Hatred”; Stone, “Pro-Freedom US Senate Candidate Joey Gibson Will Make Washington Great Again”; “Free Alex Jones Rally.”

Other core members of Patriot Prayer also subscribe to conspiratorial thinking. Haley Adams has posted support of the Pizzagate conspiracy to Facebook, which all commenters agreed was very real.²⁸⁷ Tusitala “Tiny” Toese recently appeared on a YouTube channel associated with the “QAnon” conspiracy theory, which purports to reveal that the Mueller investigation is actually investigating Trump’s enemies.²⁸⁸

Patriot Prayer is most clearly invested in a classic Patriot movement conspiracy: the idea that the government is planning to confiscate all guns in America. On November 6th, 2018, Washington State passed I-1639, which raised the minimum gun purchase age to 21, requires background checks for all purchases, increases waiting periods before purchase, and establishes gun storage requirements.²⁸⁹ Since this bill’s passage, Gibson has organized twenty-five events across Washington State to combat this measure.²⁹⁰ Gibson and allies argue that county sheriffs ought to refuse to enforce this unconstitutional law and declare their counties to be “second amendment sanctuary[ies].” This choice of language deliberately evokes comparisons to “sanctuary cities” that refuse to cooperate with illegal immigration.²⁹¹ The idea that laws that do not conform to a far-right interpretation of the constitution are unconstitutional, and that county sheriffs have the power to refuse to enforce such laws, comes directly from the Posse Comitatus playbook (as discussed above). Gibson’s efforts to nullify I-1639 have been his most successful political effort yet: as of February 2019, thirteen county sheriffs have expressed their intent to not enforce the law.²⁹²

The group also strongly opposes abortion. The pro-life movement is a mainstream Republican phenomenon, but very compatible with Patriot beliefs. The group has a history of protesting at abortion clinics, often in the name of protecting other pro-life

²⁸⁷ Adams, “#HimToo!”

²⁸⁸ Neiwert, “Portland Far-Right ‘Patriot’ Street Brawlers in Disarray as Proud Boys Part Ways amid Violent Talk.”

²⁸⁹ “Washington Initiative 1639, Changes to Gun Ownership and Purchase Requirements Measure (2018).”

²⁹⁰ As of April 24th. “Patriot Prayer - Events.”

²⁹¹ Wilson, “The Sheriffs Resisting Washington’s New Gun Laws”; Feldhaus, “Washougal Urged to Be Gun-Rights Sanctuary.”

²⁹² Gutman, “Sheriffs Who Don’t Enforce Washington’s New Gun Law Could Be Liable, AG Bob Ferguson Says.”

protesters from pro-choice harassment.²⁹³ Patriot Prayer did not list these events on their Facebook page until June of 2018, and still does not list all Planned Parenthood protests. The group is co-hosting the Pro-Life Rally for the Innocent in New York City on May 6th and has sent a rare email to their mailing list to encourage attendance and solicit donations.²⁹⁴

Gibson and Patriot Prayer do not conform to Patriot ideology in every way. For example, Gibson does not believe the government should ban gay marriage, though he believes in the individual's right to refuse to participate in such marriage ceremonies.²⁹⁵ Patriot Prayer is also less concerned with traditional hot-button topics, such as public education and land use, than traditional Patriot organizations. Nonetheless, Gibson and Patriot Prayer are clearly more closely aligned with the Patriots than with any other far-right movement.

Rally organization and attendance costs time, money, and often comes with risks to personal safety. Why do people decide to attend these rallies, and what, if anything, do they accomplish? The short answer to both questions is fable creation. Through video footage generated at these rallies, Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys tell stories of victimhood and victory that have the potential to reach a far wider audience than the 50 to 200 people who show up to the rallies themselves.

²⁹³ For example: EndPlay, "Opposing Protests Saturday at Kent Planned Parenthood"; Joey Gibson, *Joey Gibson Confronts Planned Parenthood*; iFiberone News Radio, *Patriot Prayer Appearance Causes Counter-Protests at Planned Parenthood in Olympia*; Pemberton, "Patriot Prayer Founder Hit with Pepper Spray during Rally in Olympia."

²⁹⁴ Gibson, "Pro-Life Rally- Need Help"; "Pro-Life Rally for the Innocent in NY."

²⁹⁵ Gibson, "Gay Marriage and Liberty."

Chapter 4: Fables of the Enemy

As outlined in the Introduction, Patriot Prayer rallies serve primarily to create fables, both experienced in the moment and as media products for wider dissemination. A fable offers a short, simple, and easy-to-understand morality play between the protagonist stand-in for the fabling group and the antagonist stand-in for the enemy group. Although the fable's protagonists and antagonists are either individuals or small group, the fable must seem to portray a greater truth about the two groups they represent.

For Patriot Prayer, successful fables fall into one of two categories: victory or victim. A victory fable portrays the enemy as cowardly, dishonorable, and ultimately powerless in the face of the noble protagonist. A victim fable portrays the enemy as a threat to innocent bystanders. In order to be successful, groups that strive to create a vision of the enemy must create both types of fables. A propagandistic diet of nothing but victory fables would result in the impression that the enemy is no match for the group. Without a perceived threat, there is no need for an alliance to combat the threat. A group that constructs nothing but victim fables, on the other hand, runs the risk of looking weak and ineffective. In order to achieve success, a group like Patriot Prayer must therefore generate both victory and victim fables on a fairly regular basis.

The Victory Fable

At 255,000 views, Bo Scrivener's "Proud Boy Knocks Out Antifa in Battle of Portland (HQ)" is the first result on YouTube for the search "Proud Boy Punch" and the most popular video dedicated solely to the incident it portrays. The video opens with dramatic slow-motion shots of the June 30th Portland rally (discussed further in Chapter 6) emblazoned with white text: "Battle of Portland." As the text fades, the first words of "Centipede" by the Knife Party begin to play. "Centipede" is a dubstep song that features a spoken introduction from a nature documentary about a battle between a tarantula and a centipede. This song was first associated with Donald Trump's campaign through the 2016 YouTube video "Can't Stump the Trump (Vol4)." The video proved so popular that

Trump supporters began to call both Trump and his supporters “Centipedes,” or “Pedes” for short.²⁹⁶

As the first notes of the actual song creep into the introduction, the video shifts to footage of a masked and slender counterprotester raising his asp to hit a man who has just been knocked down by two other masked, slender counterprotesters. As the three black-clad figures converge on the prone body, a man in a Proud Boy polo and a backwards baseball cap steps forward, arms outstretched in the universal gesture of “come at me, bro.” The counterprotester steps forward and swings at the unarmed Proud Boy with the asp. The Proud Boy, whose alias is Rufio Panman, steps back and barely avoids the blow, then assumes a fighting stance and moves forward. The counterprotester takes a small step backwards, then swings the asp again. Rufio catches the weapon with his left hand, winds his right hand back like a pitcher at a baseball game, then, as the first aggressive beat of the song drops, delivers an incredible right hook that send the counterprotester’s glasses flying and instantly knocks him out (see Figure 4). He falls, stiff as a board. The video proceeds to show slow-motion footage of the punch from different angles, interspersed with larger brawl scenes from the rally, as the song plays out.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Dulis, “Necessary.”

²⁹⁷ Scrivener, *Proud Boy Knocks Out Antifa in Battle of Portland (HQ)*.



Figure 4: Rufio punches a counterprotester in 4K HD footage.²⁹⁸

This video is an excellent example of the victory fable. For a victim fable to function properly, the protagonist must not instigate the fight—the antagonist must clearly initiate violence. Something about this antagonist attack should be dishonorable or cowardly, which marks the antagonist as an enemy that deserves punishment. The enemy then receives this punishment at the hands of the protagonist. In this example, the enemy’s decision to gang up on a fallen opponent, followed by the use of a weapon against an armed foe, reads as both cowardly and dishonorable. Rufio, avatar of the righteous viewer, immediately delivers swift and satisfying justice. This is a simple morality play that any viewer can understand, delivered through the medium of satisfying and entertaining violence.

²⁹⁸ Very Fake News, *[4K] Battle of Portland*, 0:07.

Because this fable is both compelling and entertaining, YouTube features many videos of this punch. All of them have thousands of views. Many of them include high-definition footage of the punch from different angles. Like Scrivener’s popular version many depictions of the punch involve music, which ranges from Hungarian metal (5,000 views), to the “Mortal Kombat” theme song (69,000 views), to Queen’s “We Will Rock You” (101,000 views).²⁹⁹ The most popular video montage of the June 30th rally—a ten-minute production by Very Fake News in 4K resolution—opens with the punch. This video has over 666,000 views.³⁰⁰

These videos do not show the aftermath of this fight or the medical consequences. It is unclear whether the counterprotester in this video is the counterprotester at the June 30th rally who went to the hospital with a skull fracture and a minor brain hemorrhage, but it seems likely.³⁰¹ Footage of the punch victim as he had a seizure immediately after Rufio’s knockout punch is far less popular than the punch itself.³⁰² Victory fables also avoid showing the visceral consequences of violence done against the protagonists. As I walked through this area moments after Rufio’s legendary punch, I saw a Patriot Prayer attendee—possibly the man beaten by the three counterprotester at the beginning of Bo Scrivener’s video—lying prone, face already swelling, as two people attended him.³⁰³ Cinematic violence is useful for fabling. Visceral injuries to human bodies complicate the narrative. To avoid this, victory fable videographers avoid images of suffering and instead favor cinematic devices, such as music and multiple camera angles. These cues frame the incident in the context of an action movie: entertainment, not tragedy.

Within the group itself, victory fabling acts as positive reinforcement that both increases group solidarity and encourages members to exhibit similar behavior. Before

²⁹⁹ Justin Trouble, *Patriot Prayer/Proud Boys - “We Will Rock You”*; Dobies Doberman, *Super Chad - Super Badass Edition*; R E K T O L O G Y, *BEWARE THIS MAN! THIS ANTIFA GOON GETS REKT!*

³⁰⁰ Very Fake News, *[4K] Battle of Portland*.

³⁰¹ Shepherd, “MAGA Mayhem Fractures a Man’s Skull, as Right-Wing Marchers Test the Limits of Free Speech in Portland.”

³⁰² “Antifa Thug Knocked out after Assaulting Participants at PatriotPrayer Rally in Portland Today - Page 2.”

³⁰³ Shepherd, “MAGA Mayhem Fractures a Man’s Skull, as Right-Wing Marchers Test the Limits of Free Speech in Portland”; Jedeed, *Field Notes: Freedom & Courage Rally*.

this incident, few outside the Pacific Northwest chapter of Proud Boys knew Rufio's name. When the police arrested the Proud Boy in the aftermath of this incident, his fellow group members began chanting his name and other rally attendees joined in. This spontaneous moment closely mirrored the scene in *Fight Club*—a movie popular with the alt-right and alt-lite—in which Project Mayhem members memorialize Robert Paulson after he dies for the cause.³⁰⁴

Nor was Rufio's fame fleeting. Almost three months after the incident, Rufio spoke at the Free Alex Jones rally in Austin, Texas. The MC's introduction of the Proud Boy made it clear that this privilege resulted solely from the punch and its popularity. A fellow attendee introduced me to Rufio after his speech with the attitude of one introducing a friend to a celebrity.³⁰⁵ In November 18th, in the aftermath of McInnes' public resignation from the Proud Boys, the group appointed a new council of "elders" to run the national organization. A failed effort at redaction revealed the identities of the Proud Boy elders. Rufio Panman was one of them.³⁰⁶

The impact of this victory fable went well beyond increased group solidarity within the Proud Boy organization. As previously noted, videos of Rufio's punch reached hundreds of thousands of viewers from around the country. Two days after the incident, Proud Boy Magazine named Rufio the "Proud Boy of the Week."³⁰⁷ Five days later, Rufio appeared in a shirtless interview on the Gavin McInnes show and—more importantly—in an hour-long interview on the Alex Jones show.³⁰⁸ This segment broadcast footage of the June 30th riot and showed video of the punch itself several times. Jones framed the incident for his audience as follows:

³⁰⁴ Leo Stratton, *PROUD BOY Rufio Panman Receives HERO Send-off before Eventual Exoneration*; Fincher, *Fight Club*.

³⁰⁵ Jedeed, Field Notes: Free Alex Jones Rally.

³⁰⁶ Crosbie, "The Proud Boys Just Accidentally Doxxxed Their New 'Elders.'"

³⁰⁷ "Proud Boy of the Week."

³⁰⁸ Freedom News TV, *Gavin McInnes Show - VIRAL Knockout Punch To Antifa Bully At Portland Freedom Rally*; Johnny Dogs, *Patriot Who Knocked Out Masked, Commie Thug Joins Infowars LIVE FULL*.

“This is just an incredible, archtypal, Americana--just a good-vs-evil-type story, so we salute you. You're now a folk hero.”³⁰⁹

Jones has a large national audience that goes far beyond rally attendees and Proud Boys. Between March and September of 2018, Infowars.com received over twenty million views.³¹⁰ Although exact viewing statistics on this video are unavailable as a result of YouTube's deplatforming of Jones, a large audience certainly heard the fable of Rufio as presented by Jones.

Between YouTube videos, news appearances, and word of mouth, the fable of Rufio reached far beyond the perhaps one hundred attendees of the Patriot Prayer rally on June 30th. It conveyed a simple message: Liberals are dangerous and unreasonable. Rufio, the Proud Boys, and people like them are upstanding Americans who can protect us against the Liberals. This fable leaves its audience more unlikely to believe claims that the Proud Boys are a hate group and more likely to give their ideas a hearing.

Victory fables advance group narratives through feelings of superiority. They can also serve as tools for recruitment. In the leadup to the August 4th rally immediately following the riot at which the Rufio punch occurred, the Oregonian observed that “Footage of the beatdown has been used in the weeks since to energize right-wing activists nationwide and recruit them to attend Patriot Prayer's next event here.”³¹¹ The popularity of such videos, along with the public rewards Rufio reaped for his actions, entice others to try for a chance at fame and status within a group they respect.³¹²

A propagandistic diet of nothing but victory fables, however, would result in the impression that the enemy is no match for the group. Weak, nonthreatening enemies

³⁰⁹ Johnny Dogs, *Patriot Who Knocked Out Masked, Commie Thug Joins Infowars LIVE FULL*, 2:37.

³¹⁰ “Infowars.Com Traffic Statistics.”

³¹¹ Kavanaugh, “Patriot Prayer, Antifa to Face off in Portland One Month after Brutal Riot.”

³¹² As described in Chapter 5, none of the people I interviewed described victory fables when discussing their motivation to attend Patriot Prayer rallies. However, I was unable to interview anyone who primarily identifies as a Proud Boy, likely due to my gender and academic affiliation. Further research with this population could shed more light on the role of victory fables in recruitment.

cannot create group solidarity: without a threat, there is no need for an alliance. As such, a successful group must also generate fables that depict the enemy as dangerous.

The Victim Fable

In a successful victim fable, the enemy causes harm to someone who is innocent and who poses no physical threat to the enemy. The enemy chooses the victim due to their perceived or real affiliation with the group. Unlike victory fables, victim fables seldom have any music or cinematic effects. Instead, victim fables strive to emphasize the visceral violence and humiliation of the moment. They therefore dispense with all the cinematic devices used in victory fables to create an action movie dynamic that distances the audience from the reality of violence.

Victim fables are more difficult and complicated than victory fables in that the group must not appear to be weak or powerless in the face of the enemy. After all, the reason the perception of enemy creates group solidarity is that the group offers protection against that enemy. A group that cannot protect its members will not be attractive to people who fear the enemy, no matter how good a job they do of convincing the public that the enemy is dangerous. The victim fable must therefore suggest that the group could have prevented the victimization given the chance: with greater numbers, increased funding, a willingness to fight as dirty as their opposition, and so on. At minimum, the fable must not actively present its fighting members as weak.

Joey Gibson often generates victim fables by walking into crowds of counterprotesters with only a couple of people beside him.³¹³ He walks slowly with his hands at his side, which demonstrates to the cameras that he is unarmed and no threat. He remains calm and nonviolent while counterprotesters scream at him to leave, call him a Nazi, pelt him with objects, throw punches at him, steal his hat, and/or pepper spray him. Footage of these victim fables often appears to come from the counterprotesters

³¹³ For example: Carlson, "WATCH"; Joey Gibson, *Evergreen State College Protesters Attack Joey Gibson; WeAreChange, EXCLUSIVE! Joey Gibson ASSAULTED at Portland Rally!*

themselves, who do not seem aware of how badly they come off in clips edited to show only Gibson's peace walk and not any of the more mutual violence within these rallies.

Gibson's purposeful nonviolence within these videos establishes him as a victim without diminishing his masculinity or strength: presumably, Gibson could be violent but chooses not to be. The image of a man walking through a crowd as it hurls abuse at him evokes images of Christ on his way to martyrdom—Jesus, the ultimate Western victim fable. This imagery likely carries special weight for Christian right-wing elements of Gibson's target audience.

Mainstream conservative news outlets like Fox News prefer victim fables to victory fables. In August of 2017, Tucker Carlson covered one of Gibson's peace walks during the Berkeley protests occurring at that time, then interviewed Gibson about the incident. The clip opens with footage of counterprotesters beating up right-wing protesters, accompanied by dramatic music from the *Apocalypse 2012* movie soundtrack. No music accompanies the clip of Gibson's actual walk, however. The audience watches as Gibson's friend is knocked to the ground and smashed with a shield, as the frenzied counterprotesters scream at Gibson to leave, and—ultimately—as someone pepper-sprays Gibson directly in the face. Throughout the ordeal, Gibson walks backwards with his hands up.³¹⁴

When Carlson asks Gibson about the experience, the Patriot Prayer leader provided a succinct summary of the intended message of the video:

“It’s a horrible thing that happened today...And this is America! OK? This is America, where we should be able to go and just exist in public, say our part, just speak, just be Americans without the threat of violence. Without people dressed in all black, covering up their faces, just beating people up—beating them to a pulp. I mean, there’s a lot of horrible injuries yesterday.”³¹⁵

Carlson then extended the Berkeley incident to Liberals as a group:

“This is a political militia that is doing the bidding—in effect—of Nancy Pelosi and Governor Jerry Brown, the mayor of Berkeley, and all these supposedly mainstream Democratic politicians. And this is a

³¹⁴ Carlson, “WATCH.”

³¹⁵ Carlson.

militia, hurting American citizens for saying what they think. It's terrifying."³¹⁶

This news segment—and the Joey Gibson YouTube video it draws upon—entirely excludes the context of the 2017 Berkeley protests. The August 27th protest was the fifth such protest to occur in Berkeley. Three of the previous protests involved street brawls and some of the worst political violence experienced this decade.³¹⁷ As such, protesters and counterprotesters alike had every reason to view the event—and Gibson's peace walk—through a frame of likely violence. Patriot Prayer would probably argue that the counterprotesters started most of this violence at previous rallies. This does not affect the appropriate frame of events, however: the counterprotesters had sufficient reason to expect violence from Gibson such that his outstretched arms failed to shift their framing of his invasion of their space. The victim fable discards this kind of context to create a simpler and more easily-understood story.

Another way to create a victim fable without broadcasting weakness involves the use of footage from events where the in-group was not present. The most effective victim fable of the past year came from an edited compilation of footage shot and published by left-wing protesters, which I will refer to throughout this thesis as the “Antifa traffic video.”

In October of 2018, Antifa members took it upon themselves to divert traffic around a weekend vigil for a black victim of police violence.³¹⁸ When an elderly man in glasses and a sweater verbally questioned this illegal traffic blockage, Antifa members responded with imperious commands and rudeness. One large and threatening white man was especially aggressive:

““Yeah, you white little fucker. Yeah. You're a fuckin' little whitey, aren't you? The first amendment—get the fuck down the road...Oh,

³¹⁶ Carlson.

³¹⁷ St. John, “21 Arrested as Hundreds of Trump Supporters and Counter-Protesters Clash at Berkeley Rally”; Wang, “Pro-Trump Rally in Berkeley Turns Violent as Protesters Clash with the President's Supporters”; staff, “Chaos Erupts, Protesters Shut down Yiannopoulos Events, Banks in Downtown Vandalized.”

³¹⁸ “Portland Demonstrators Protest Death of Patrick Kimmons, Who Was Shot by Police - Oregonlive.Com.”

South Carolina [license plate]. You are a white supremacist. Go back to North Carolina where you came from. We don't need your KKK in Portland Oregon.”

The elderly driver appeared to call the police, but the police were already there: sitting on motorcycles across the road, taking no action. As the video continues, this same large man threatens to “beat the shit” out of drivers that are obediently turning right. This incredible compilation of footage ends with a mob of black-clad individuals pounding on the sides of a car with fists and weapons—possibly the man from South Carolina from earlier in the video. When the car tries to get away, the individuals chase the car down and hit it some more. The elderly motorist gets out, clearly shaken, but then quickly returns to his car as the left-wing protesters charge him. One protester has an asp, similar to the one the counterprotester used in his attempt to hit Rufio on June 30th of the same year.³¹⁹

Though the video depicting the footage clearly cuts out the context immediately before these verbal and physical altercations, it is difficult to imagine circumstances that would justify these actions. The fact that the footage clearly comes from within Antifa implies that the group has no problem with these events and will, if left unchecked, continue to act in a similar fashion. The message of the fable is clear: without groups like Patriot Prayer and their Proud Boy brawlers, Antifa will control Portland.

This footage received a both local and national coverage, especially from conservative news outlets.³²⁰ It also influenced some of the rally attendees I interviewed, as Chapter 5 will show: of the seven interviews I conducted after the event, three interviewees mentioned this specific victim fable as especially illustrative of Antifa’s evil nature.³²¹

³¹⁹ Sang, “Portland Antifa Protesters Caught on Video Bullying Elderly Motorist, Woman in Wheelchair”; Riastrad, *Portland Antifa Violence Against Senior Citizens*.

³²⁰ Sang, “Portland Antifa Protesters Caught on Video Bullying Elderly Motorist, Woman in Wheelchair”; Morefield, “Antifa Protesters Block Portland Traffic, Nearly Start Riot During Patrick Kimmons Vigil”; Kavanaugh, “Portland Police Defend Hands-off Approach to Protest That Sparked Viral Video, Outrage”; Richardson, “Ted Wheeler, Portland Mayor, Stands by Decision to Allow Antifa to Block Traffic.”

³²¹ Jedeed, Interview: Eric; Jedeed, Interview: Freddie; Jedeed, Interview: Lisa.

Both victory and victim fables have the ability to spread and enforce a key element of the far-right symbolic worldview as described in Chapters 2 and 3: a just and righteous in-group besieged by a Liberal, globalist enemy that is both merciless and cowardly. Further research is necessary to establish the full reach and influence of these fables; however, the large reach of these fables as indicated by YouTube view count and media coverage indicates that these fables reach and resonate with a significant portion of the American public.

These fables also perpetuate the movement itself. As the next chapter will show, many of the people I interviewed decided to attend their first rally as a result of some kind of victim fable. This influence suggests that such fables are extremely important for the propagation of the movement itself. The next chapter investigates rally participants: who they are, what they believe, and why they attend Patriot Prayer rallies.

Chapter 5: “I Had to Do Something”

What sort of person gives up a Saturday or Sunday afternoon to stand in a park surrounded by throngs of people who hate them? Who attends Patriot Prayer rallies? What do they believe? What prompts them to go—and to keep going?

To find out, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine rally attendees of varying levels of commitment to Patriot Prayer. All interviewee names have been changed and identifying information has been altered where necessary to protect anonymity. For a description of the methodology and questions used to conduct these interviews, please see Appendix A.

My interviews suggest some general commonalities between rally attendees, though each of these generalizations had at least one exception. Most of my interviewees are blue-collar workers or working poor. Their beliefs largely correspond with the Patriot movement beliefs as described in Chapter 3. Nearly every interviewee agreed that left-wing political powers pose the greatest threat to America today.

Though my interviewees came to attend Patriot Prayer rallies through a few different routes, the most common reported reason for initial attendance was exposure to video fables. Few, if any, of my interviewees decided to attend rallies based on political ideology or friendship ties.

Finally, all nine interviewees believe that the primary purpose of Patriot Prayer rallies is to convey hidden truth about Antifa, Liberals, and the state of the world through use of spectacle. In other words, the purpose of Patriot Prayer is the creation of fables intended for a third-party audience.

Hazards and Limitations

Several factors limit the applicability and reliability of these conclusions. My sample size of nine is both extremely small and likely not representative of the movement as a whole. My interviewees were all people willing to sacrifice an hour of their time to talk to a woman who attends one of the most notoriously left-wing institutions in the

Portland area: a mindset that does not represent the group as a whole. As discussed in Appendix A, Patriot Prayer attendees as a whole mistrust academics and worry about false flag operations by Antifa for the purposes of doxxing. Because of this, I was unable to interview entire subsets of attendees. Most notably, I failed to interview anyone who primarily identifies as a Proud Boy, likely due both to mistrust and to my gender. As explained in Chapter 1, women are not allowed to be Proud Boys or to intrude on that male space. Further research into the Proud Boys likely requires a male interviewer, preferably one who works out.

On a similar note, readers ought to keep in mind that my interviewees delivered all of their answers to a white, middle-class woman in her early 30s with an extremely Anglo-Saxon name.³²² Many of my interviewees expressed rigid ideas of gender roles, and several apologized for cursing in front of me during the interview process. A male interviewer might have elicited very different responses.

Readers should also keep in mind that interviews cannot arrive at objective truth. Assuming my interviewees answered accurately, they told me the story they tell themselves: an idealized and retrospective version of their journey into activism. As James Aho cautions readers of his book *Far Right Fantasy*, group members may not be entirely honest with themselves about their true motives for participation.³²³

Aho further points out that groups often have “vocabularies of motive:” stories provided by the movement and adopted by group members to “disown, exclude, or justify what the public views as offensive.” Group members do not consciously intend to deceive with these scripts: they themselves are also deceived. In order to construct a coherent narrative about their own lives, members adapt their autobiography to conform with their current ideas of self. As such, the patterns I observed in the course of these interviews may reflect a confluence not of motivation, but of adaptation.³²⁴

³²² During my work on this project, my name changed from Laura Swann to Laura Jedeed. My interviewees knew me as Laura Swann.

³²³ Aho, *Far-Right Fantasy*, 25–26, 38.

³²⁴ Aho, 25–26, 38.

The Interviewees

My interviewees displayed varying amounts of commitment to Patriot Prayer. I therefore divide them into three general categories: members, core members, and fellow travelers. Patriot Prayer members feel a connection to Patriot Prayer as a group, rather than as a vehicle for a separate agenda, and have some friendship ties within the group. They have attended several rallies and plan to attend more. Core members attend most if not all Patriot Prayer rallies, help organize rallies and events, and have robust friendship ties with other core members. Fellow travelers, by contrast, attend Patriot Prayer rallies to advance outside causes, not because they feel solidarity with Patriot Prayer as a group.

Members

I considered two interviewees to be “members” of Patriot Prayer. Both individuals attended several rallies and displayed a connection to Patriot Prayer as a group but were not involved in event organization and did not attend every single rally at the time of interview.

Madison

I met Madison at the Clark College: Oppose Fascist Gun Law rally event. Madison is a college student and the daughter of Chris, a core member of Patriot Prayer. We met a few weeks later at a coffee shop in Vancouver, Washington for an interview over tea and sandwiches. Madison is a mixed-race woman in her late teens or early twenties, slender with long black hair. She attended her first rally on August 4th, 2018, and I saw her at two more events after our interview. She repeatedly and enthusiastically expressed admiration for Joey Gibson’s speaking ability and his courage in the face of hate.

Madison considers herself a conservative who supports the second amendment and opposes abortion. She is troubled by a lack of civil discourse within society and believes people should be able to express political opinions without fear of attack or reprisal. Aside from these positions, Madison did not express strong political beliefs.

Scott

I met Scott at the same Clark College event where I met Madison. A few weeks later, I interviewed Scott at a Starbucks at the edge of the Portland area while he waited for repairs on his truck. Scott, a personable and introspective white man in his 50s with a grey crew cut, is stocky and physically fit. Scott began attending Patriot Prayer rallies in June of 2018 and hopes to attend more. He has become friends with the Proud Boys but is not a core member.

Scott owns a small business in the small town where he grew up, one or two hours away from Portland. He travels to Portland once a week to practice martial arts. Scott worries about gun control and does not like the way the population influx into Oregon is changing the character of his town. He considers himself a conservative and a Christian.

Because he lives so far outside of town and because he does a great deal of business on Saturdays, Scott has trouble making it down to Portland for rallies. As of our interview, he had managed to attend four rallies, including the Freedom and Courage rally of June 30th and the Clark College event.

At the June 30th rally, Scott forged ties with the Proud Boys after fighting alongside them. “If...you all got together to fight a common cause, you all of a sudden become comrades. All the differences go away.” Scott has attended some Proud Boy events but is unsure about pursuing membership. “I think they have their problems like every other group,” he said. Although Scott likes the group’s willingness to stand up to bullies and protect people, he believes the group sometime fights out of hate: a feeling he does not share. Additionally, he feels he is too old for a drinking fraternity. “I’m not a guy that’s gonna go out and drink until one o’clock in the morning, get plastered drunk. I just don’t do that anymore.”

Scott identifies as a conservative, which he associates with “hometown values” and the golden rule. He supports everyone’s right to their own systems of values and believes everyone should be treated with respect; however, he does not believe anyone has a right to tell him what to think about other lifestyles. He used to fight more when he was younger “because of maybe beliefs, maybe other things, maybe race, maybe...” This changed as Scott got older.

As a small business owner, Scott is especially concerned about what he terms the “economic civil war”: a phenomenon he has observed in which people cease to do business with people of different political beliefs. He has experienced this phenomenon first-hand and has heard second-hand stories from his customers and the media that support his theory.

Core Members

In addition to these two members of Patriot Prayer, I was lucky enough to gain access to three core members of Patriot Prayer. These interviewees attend nearly every Patriot Prayer event—including ones not advertised on the official Patriot Prayer Facebook page—and know Joey Gibson personally. Two of these interviewees—Lisa and Chris—have attended Patriot Prayer rallies since the beginning. In fact, Lisa is a founding member of Patriot Prayer. Their experience and commitment lend Freddie, Chris, and Lisa a unique perspective on the movement and its impact.

Freddie

I met Freddie at the Clark College rally. Five days later, we met at a dive bar in North Portland for an interview, where we bought each other rounds of PBRs and chatted for nearly 2 hours. Freddie is a friendly and energetic white man of approximately 40, slender and of average height, with short brown hair and scruffy facial hair. Originally from Texas, Freddie speaks with a thick Southern accent. He attended his first rally in June of 2018, but quickly became a core member of Patriot Prayer. He attends nearly every rally, including rallies not listed on Facebook, and helped to organize PDX Crew, a spin-off movement discussed further in Chapter 7.

Freddie is a military veteran who has been involved in Copwatch—an organization that promotes accountability by filming police officers—for many years. This activity caused his small Texas town to turn on him, and he moved to Portland. Upon arrival, Freddie was homeless for six months before he got back on his feet. He currently does mechanic work of some sort, though this became more challenging after

his tools were stolen last year. Although Freddie is not a “bible thumper,” he considers himself a Christian.

Some of Freddie’s policy positions fall outside of traditional, mainstream conservatism. As a member of Copwatch, Freddie is more suspicious of the police than many other members of Patriot Prayer. He is also extremely concerned about the plight of Portland’s homeless population and about addressing the mental illness and addiction that keep so many of them on the streets. Freddie is extremely frustrated at Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler for his failure to adequately address the homeless problem. His deep concern about illegal immigration stems in part from a belief that we must take care of our own impoverished population first, as well as the belief that illegal immigrants bring heroin and other drugs that exacerbate the homeless problem.

Freddie repeatedly expressed his lack of racist beliefs and a lack of racism within Patriot Prayer while answering other questions. He emphasized the mixed nature of his own family, which includes black and Hispanic individuals, and the diverse racial composition of Patriot Prayer itself. Patriot Prayer is not a hate group, he declared. “We preach love.” Freddie also expressed great admiration and affection for Martin Luther King Jr, whom he considers one of his heroes.

Chris

Madison introduced me to her father, Chris, at the #Himtoo rally on November 16th. Three weeks later, I interviewed Chris at a Starbucks in Vancouver, Washington one evening after he got off of work. Chris, a brown-haired white man of average build in his 40s or 50s, works in the construction industry. He moved to Vancouver from Salem, Oregon within the last few years to take advantage of the construction boom in the Portland area. Chris attended his first Patriot Prayer rally in March of 2017, before Patriot Prayer began to advertise their events on Facebook. He attends nearly every rally and is a core member of the group.

Chris describes himself as “between libertarian and conservative.” With the exception of marijuana legalization, which he supports, Chris is socially conservative. He believes that America was originally a Christian nation, and that it must return to its Christian roots in order to prosper and succeed. Chris also supports a limited government

that enforces the tenets of the Constitution without overburdening the people with regulations.

According to Chris, America is in the midst of a “cultural war.” He sees this especially with regards to the schools his children attend. According to Chris, the left forces socially liberal beliefs onto people through institutions such as public school, then exerts intense social pressure to discourage any question or debate of those beliefs.

Ideally, Chris would like a society in which one tolerates people with different lifestyles without necessarily approving of those lifestyles. He especially resents efforts to normalize LGBT lifestyles, though Chris was adamant that this is not the same thing as intolerance of people who live those lifestyles:

My last saying that right there, I think [a left-wing journalist] would take that and say, "We got him to say it, he hates the LGBT community"...That's not what I'm saying at all. I'm just saying kind of what the culture war is. And my kids know that they can say, "Well this is my values and what I believe. I still love you and think you have the same rights that I do."

This concern about the effects of the perceived culture war echo Berger and Luckmann’s theory of social construction of reality and the danger of adjacent symbolic universes (see Chapter 1).

Chris believes that America used to subscribe to his symbolic universe, which he described as “Judeo-Christian values.” According to Chris, even those who were not religious generally agreed on “the basic values that this society in general follows.” Left-wing attempts to change those values read as an existential threat to the stability and identity of America—which, according to social construction theory, is accurate in its own way.

Unlike the Patriot Prayer members discussed thus far, Chris acknowledges that the alt-right might actually exist. Though he has only heard the term on the news, he believes the term refers to people like Richard Spencer. At one time, conservatives made common cause with people like Spencer because they were so outnumbered by Liberals. However, Chris believes the alt-right is actually incompatible with the rest of the conservative movement due to their socialist beliefs. This perception of the alt-right closely mirrors my own analysis in Chapter 2.

Lisa

I met Lisa at the Clark College rally. About a week later, we spoke for over an hour and a half at a sports bar where core members of Patriot Prayer sometimes celebrate after events. Lisa is a petite, friendly, and energetic white woman in her 50s with long brown hair. She is one of five founding members of Patriot Prayer and helps administer Patriot Prayer's private Facebook group.

Lisa is a cancer survivor and a proud foster mother. She has raised many foster children over the past decades and currently cares for some of the children of her foster children. Lisa currently attends college in pursuit of her bachelor's degree, which she hopes will help her found a nonprofit to help foster children transition out of the system and into adulthood at 18. She is a member of the Washington III%, which is a Patriot militia group. Lisa acts as a highly competent field medic at rallies and events.

One might expect a founding member of Patriot Prayer to hold radically right-wing beliefs. In this case, one would be wrong. Lisa considers herself "center-right"—fiscally conservative and socially moderate. Her work with foster children and homeless populations have led her to believe in the necessity of the social safety net.

"A lot of times, conservatives are portrayed as the one who walks by the welfare line and tells people, "Get a job."...Sometimes those people that are standing in that welfare line, maybe they're trying very hard to get a job."

As with most of my interviewees, Lisa believes passionately in civil discourse. She expressed irritation at accusations that the right "instigates violence" through words and actions. "If [someone's] words are so appalling to you that you hit them, it's on you. That's your problem, not theirs. Walk away."

Lisa also dislikes what she sees as "the hidden bigotry of the left," wherein white people take it upon themselves to speak for minorities. She resents accusations of "tokenism" towards non-white members of Patriot Prayer. "That person is just as capable of individual thought as you or I, and them not thinking the way you deem them needing to think makes you a bigot."

Aside from the above political views, which are all well within mainstream bounds political discourse, Lisa said very little about political positions. As previously

mentioned, Lisa is a member of the Washington III%, a rural Patriot organization dedicated to gun rights and the preservation of the United States constitution through violence if necessary.³²⁵ Despite this, Lisa was the only Patriot Prayer member or core member not to explicitly bring up the second amendment during our conversation.

This relative lack of policy opinions may be due to Lisa's late arrival at political activism. Before the 2016, Lisa did not pay much attention to politics. This changed once Trump was inaugurated and "immediately set about starting to do some of the things that he said he was going to do." Trump seemed like a different kind of politician to Lisa: one that wouldn't lie to the American people.

Lisa's first rally was Patriot Prayer's first rally: The Rally for Trump and Freedom on April 2nd, 2017. "It was a good introduction to the knuckleheads," she said, in reference to the counterprotesters. Since then, Lisa has attended nearly every rally.

Based on her stories of rally violence and activity as a street medic, it seems likely that Lisa has witnessed more street violence over the past two years than anyone else I interviewed. She told me many graphic stories about rally violence she has witnessed and people she has treated as a street medic after they were pepper sprayed, punched, or bludgeoned. "I've gotten good at this," Lisa told me with pride. "I've gotten down into getting into the science of the stuff and looking at the chemicals. I want to help my guys the best I can."³²⁶

Lately, Lisa has seen an increase in head wounds and concussions:

"In the last six months, I can think of three concussions just right off the bat, top of my head, that I have treated, myself, on the street. It was an asp every time, a metal baton, that they were hit in the head with every time. It's right on the top of their head that they're split open, every time. So, it's somebody coming up and just whacking 'em right across the top of the head."

³²⁵ ThreePercenters (WA 3%), "Washington State Three Percent."

³²⁶ Lisa recommends a 50/50 solution of Maalox and water to treat pepper spray to the eyes. Unlike the more popular milk of magnesia, Lisa told me, Maalox contains both aluminum hydroxide and magnesium hydroxide. These chemicals both act to neutralize pepper spray and provide relief. For removal of pepper spray from the skin, Lisa recommends coconut oil rather than the more popular Dawn dish soap.

The escalating violence frightens her. “Somebody's going to get killed,” she told me. “These people have zero boundaries.”

By “these people,” Lisa means the counterprotesters, whom she views as the sole source of violence at these rallies. “We never want to fight,” she said. “We just want to have a good time. We could have a good time if they would leave us alone.” Lisa compared accusations that Patriot Prayer instigates this violence to victim-blaming in cases of rape.

“My response to that, now, is, “No, our skirts were plenty long enough. You need self-control. Our skirts are plenty long enough and our tops are cut plenty high enough. Stop victim blaming. Stop victim blaming for your own lack of self-control.”

Lisa approves of the Rufio punch incident described in the previous chapter. The counterprotester swung an asp: it was clear self-defense. Without prompting, she dismissed claims that the punchee had a seizure and had to go to the hospital for a brain injury. “Nobody’s ever been able to confirm all that,” she told me, then mentioned that seizures can be faked. If the brain injury happened, she believes it occurred when the counterprotester hit the ground after Rufio knocked him out.³²⁷

Fellow Travelers

Not everyone who attends Patriot Prayer rallies should be considered a member of the organization. In addition to the five Patriot Prayer members described above, I interviewed four “fellow travelers”: people who attend rallies and events but feel no deep connection with Patriot Prayer. All four interviewees subscribe to a different set of far-right beliefs that are compatible with, but not identical to, the beliefs advanced by Patriot Prayer. Josh and Eric subscribe to the conspiratorial worldview promoted by Alex Jones and Infowars. Michael subscribes to a worldview verging on—or entering into—the alt-right. Caleb is an extremist street preacher with a literal, Dominionist interpretation of the

³²⁷ Jedeed, Interview: Lisa. An analysis of the effect that continuous exposure to street violence might have on rally attendees lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Future scholars may wish to examine whether such exposure can lead to belief shifts and/or PTSD.

Bible. With the exception of Caleb, who attends nearly every Patriot Prayer rally, these fellow travelers attended only one or two Patriot Prayer events. For a variety of reasons explored below, none of these fellow travelers quite fit in with Patriot Prayer.

Of these four fellow travelers, only one began to attend Patriot Prayer events due to exposure to fables of rally violence. The other three attended due to an intersection between Patriot Prayer and the goals of their own movements.

Eric

I met Eric at the Clark College: Oppose Fascist Gun Law rally event and interviewed him shortly thereafter. We met on a bridge spanning one of Portland's interstates during morning rush hour. Once there, we unfurled an enormous "FREE ALEX JONES" banner which Eric had hand-painted in painstaking detail. Eric considers himself part of the "Infowars Army" and often flies this banner by himself. This is a common Infowars Army activity and a theme we will return to when discussing Josh.³²⁸ Eric is a tall, well-built white man in his late 30s or early 40s with a bushy beard and sandy hair. While we flew the banner and waved at those who honked and flipped us off, Eric wore a red MAGA cap and a political T-shirt beneath his jacket.

Eric has attended a few Patriot Prayer rallies but is not involved with the core group and does not seem personally invested in the group itself. When asked about "rallies," Eric always assumed that I was talking about rallies held by Donald Trump unless explicitly prompted otherwise.

Born and raised in the rural Pacific Northwest, Eric became an actor after high school and spent ten years travelling Europe. He was upset about how much Europeans seemed to dislike America, though he agrees with them that our recent foreign wars were probably a mistake. After his grandfather died, he wanted to do something he could be proud of, so he quit the acting business and became an infantryman. He was deployed and had friends die overseas. Eric was medically discharged from the military and receives 100% disability pay. One of his arms has limited mobility and he has some psychological issues, possibly PTSD. Eric goes to the VA for treatment, but also treats

³²⁸ For Example: infowars.com, "Watch: Infowars Army Invades Major Bridge Before Midterm Elections To Support Trump"; "Infowars Army Houston."

both of these issues with Infowars supplements. He told me the supplements have really helped him “keep [his] mind right” and are worth the high price. He currently works for a local food delivery company and cares for his children.

Eric is an ardent Alex Jones fan. He began to listen to Jones while in the process of obtaining his medical discharge, which occurred around the 2016 election. When Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platforms banned Alex Jones, Eric became an even more avid listener.

Before Trump’s campaign, Eric had little interest in politics and had never voted in a presidential election. “I thought it was a waste of time because I thought all politicians were just corrupt and they’re all liars and before Trump, I just didn’t trust any of them,” he told me.³²⁹ Trump, however, is different. Because of his wealth, Eric believes, Trump cannot be bought by special interests, and unlike other politicians Trump keeps his promises. Eric spoke at length about how popular and charismatic Trump is, and how successful he has been as President.

When asked about what an ideal America might look like, Eric briefly described a land of freedom and prosperity, in which everyone has enough to eat and access to clean water. He mentioned concern for the homeless population, though it was unclear whether Eric was concerned about their well-being, the effect homelessness has on the city at large, or both. He spent far more time discussing Trump’s charisma and popularity than he did policy positions, which implies that Eric is not primarily concerned with policy. Instead, Eric is attracted to Trump’s personal qualities.

In the course of our interview, Eric denied racism and racial attitudes. Twice, he declared that he would be happy to have a president of color or a female president, “as long as they love America.” Like Freddie, Eric expressed admiration for Martin Luther King, whom he believes would be pro-Trump if he were alive today.

Although Eric expressed a desire to continue to attend Patriot Prayer events, I did not see him at any Patriot Prayer events thereafter. He did message me a few times to invite me to fly the Alex Jones banner again, which my schedule did not allow for. Eric

³²⁹ Jedeed, Interview: Eric 1:19.

prioritizes Infowars Army activity over Patriot Prayer activity, probably because he feels more of a commitment to the Infowars symbolic universe.³³⁰

Josh

I first met Josh at the Free Alex Jones rally in Austin, Texas, where he open-carried an AR-15 slung over his back. Even for Texas, this was an unusual display of firepower.

A few weeks later, I interviewed Josh over Skype while he sat in a nicely-decorated and expensive living room. Josh, a slender-framed white man in his late teens or early 20s with long blonde hair, was the only vegan I interviewed. He has been an avid InfoWars listener since he was 15 years old and has attended several rallies in Texas over the last year and a half, mostly involving gun control.

Josh decided not to attend college and has a job that causes him to travel, though he did not mention exactly what field he works in. Our conversation indicated that he lives with his parents. Josh subscribes to Alex Jones' conspiracy theories, including the 9/11 truther movement and fluoride poisoning, but avoided elaborate descriptions of these theories or of the globalists behind them.

Josh describes himself as a libertarian. He would like to see a radical reduction of government, including the elimination of all drug laws, civil asset forfeiture, mass surveillance, property taxes, the TSA, the ATF, and the FDA. He believes that vaccines should not be mandatory, that prescribing psychiatric drugs to those under 18 should be illegal, and that water should not be fluorinated. He would also like to see an end to the factory farm system.

Overall, these positions are more consistent with the Patriot movement than with the alt-right. Josh did, however, signal a familiarity with alt-right views and memes not shared by Portland interviewees. When we began our Skype interview, I had trouble with my audio. I asked if he could hear me and he flashed the "OK" sign—a term laden with alt-right meaning, as explained in Chapter 2. He then immediately stopped displaying the sign and looked slightly flustered, as though the sign had been an accident. It seems

³³⁰ Jeeded.

probable that Josh was well aware that the OK sign has real alt-right connotations. This is different from the behavior of the Pacific Northwest protesters, who flash the OK sign without shame, usually with the intent to troll Liberals, and are skeptical about the existence of an actual alt-right.

Josh again displayed familiarity with alt-right ideas when I asked him about the common portrayal of far-right rallies as racist. He quickly denied it and stated that those who attend rallies are “some of the least racist people,” then went on to describe some run-ins with actual “national socialists” on the Internet. According to Josh, national socialists often enter the Discord channels he uses to talk to people. He then explained to me, unsolicited, that the national socialists do not want to gas or murder minorities, but simply to deport them. Throughout this conversation, Josh emphasized that he does not like or approve of Nazis. Nonetheless, he clearly has contact with them and has engaged with them enough to learn some of the finer points of their ethnonationalist platform.

Patriot Prayer has not returned to Austin, Texas, and it is possible that Josh would become an actual member of Patriot Prayer if he lived in the Pacific Northwest. It is also possible that Josh, like Eric, would prioritize his Infowars Army activism instead. Although some of the members and core members of Patriot Prayer that I interviewed believe in conspiracies pedaled by Alex Jones, none of them engage in Infowars Army activity.³³¹

Michael

Michael and I also met at the Free Alex Jones rally in Austin, Texas, where we held a Trump banner together and made small talk. As with Josh, I interviewed Michael a few weeks later over Skype. Michael is a white slender man of above-average height in his late teens or early 20s, clean-shaven, with close-cropped brown hair. Although Michael told me that the Free Alex Jones rally was his first event, he referenced at least two other events he had attended in the course of our conversation.

Michael is an active-duty member of the military. Our interview consisted largely of Michael answering my questions with summaries of positions taken by YouTube

³³¹ Jedeed, Interview: Josh.

personalities he admires, such as Sargon of Akkad, Jordan Peterson, and Milo Yiannopoulos. He is most passionate about individual rights, which he believes the far left and far right both erode through collectivism.

When I asked Michael to describe himself politically, he said he was a “Moderate Republican” because he kept an open mind towards viewpoints to the left of center. As we spoke, it became evident that Michael uses these terms a bit differently than most Americans. He is an individualist who rejects all forms of collectivism. Like Sargon of Akkad and Jordan Peterson, Michael told me, he believes in human rights, not “women’s rights” or “LGBT rights.”

Michael also subscribes to some form of “race realism,” an alt-right euphemism for pseudoscientific racism. He explained at length the difference he perceives between what he calls white supremacy (which asserts that white people are superior to other races) and white nationalism (which asserts that racial IQ differences justify ethnostates). I asked him whether he subscribed to race realism, and he replied that he did not because all people deserve respect, regardless of their IQ. Though Michael clearly feels himself tolerant for this viewpoint, the answer implies that racial IQ differences exist and are significant. He also pointed out that it can be difficult to tell where one ethnicity ends and another begins. According to Michael, white supremacists also use flawed logic in that the whitest people—albinos—are “genetically defective” which means that “the most whitest people go in the oven.”

During this conversation, Michael displayed a solid knowledge of several prominent alt-right figures, such as Jarad Taylor, Richard Spencer, Stefan Molyneux, and Millennial Woes. He told me this is because the YouTube personalities he watches often have conversations with the alt-right. He watches at least one alt-right YouTube personality, however: Styxhexenhammer, a pagan YouTuber who earned Richard Spencer’s Twitter endorsement.³³² Whether Michael is alt-right, alt-lite, or something in between, his “moderate Republican” viewpoint was by far the most alt-right of any of my interviewees.

³³² Spencer, “Everyone Should Follow @Styx666Official.”

Based on my experiences at rallies and my other interviews, Michael’s frank and open discussions of white nationalism and white supremacy would be out of place at a Patriot rally. Michael already has a political outlet—the countless YouTube personalities whose videos he consumes—and his extreme individualism makes it unlikely that he would ever join a group. Throughout our interview, Michael resisted efforts at classification and discussed how much he disliked it when people tried to put labels on him. Michael would likely reject the label of “Patriot Prayer member” as well, even if he lived in the Pacific Northwest.³³³

Caleb

Although Caleb attends most Patriot Prayer events, I first encountered him on a personal level at the IWW Flash Mob Protest. Two weeks later, I interviewed Caleb over hot cocoa and cookies in a Portland coffee shop.

A large-framed, fit black man in his 40s or 50s with close-cropped black hair, Caleb has been active in the Portland area--and across the nation--for many years as a Hell-Shaking Street Preacher. This group of extremist Christian preachers travel around the country and exhort people to follow biblical law, especially its prohibitions on homosexuality, abortion, and promiscuity. Although he has attended Patriot Prayer meetings since the beginning, Caleb is not a core member of the group. In fact, Patriot Prayer has held him at arm’s length due to his radical belief and aggressive approach.

Caleb was not always a street preacher. He grew up in a religious family but stepped away from religion when he was a teenager. Eventually, he became a nightclub DJ and was heavily involved in Portland nightlife and the urban music scene for nearly 20 years. All of this changed in 2010, when one of the Hell Shaking Street Preachers got in Caleb’s face and told him to get right with God. Caleb, who had known the preacher for most of his life, had a revelation and returned to Christ. About six months later, he began to preach with the group.

³³³ Jedeed, Interview: Michael.

When asked about his political ideology, Caleb described himself as an “extreme conservative.” Like the Dominionists of the 1970s (see Chapter 3), Caleb is a biblical literalist. He believes that America followed biblical law much more closely at one time and points out that even MLK was “very biblical in his principles.” He believes that legal changes, such as *Roe v. Wade* and the removal from prayer in schools, have led to modern problems such as school shootings. Caleb worries about free speech and is concerned that his Christian rhetoric might someday be labeled “hate speech.” The street preacher also holds strongly nationalist beliefs with regard to cultural preservation. He is concerned that America has become a cultural “melting pot” and that we therefore lack the kind of robust culture enjoyed by other nations, such as the Chinese and Japanese.

Caleb, who travels all over the country to spread his version of the word of God, sees Patriot Prayer rallies as another outlet for his proselytization. In other words, Caleb attends rallies explicitly to advance his own cause, not as a member of Patriot Prayer. As mentioned earlier, Patriot Prayer distanced themselves from the Hell-Shaking Street Preachers due to their reputation as a hate group, though they allowed them to attend rallies in the name of free speech. The Hell-Shakers also object to LGBT Patriot Prayer attendees, whom Joey Gibson welcomes. For the most part, the two groups simply avoid each other at rallies.

According to Caleb, the main difference between Gibson and himself lies not in belief, but in strategy. Gibson aims to be “seeker friendly” and accept all comers, even if they do not entirely subscribe to his belief system. Over time, Gibson cultivates relationships with the seekers and seeks to gently shift them towards his way of thinking. Caleb has the opposite approach:

“...our point where we come from as street preachers is, we care more about eternal life, the afterlife, what's to come than right, now about people's feelings. I'd rather have my feelings get hurt or crushed, in order to get me right, than enabled, pampered, hugged on type of thing.”

As time passed, the relationship between Caleb and Gibson warmed. Although they do not socialize normally, Caleb has hosted Patriot Prayer members at his house for Bible study. As discussed in Chapter 3, Patriot Prayer has recently begun to list its

abortion protests on its official Facebook page, and will be attending a massive “Pro-Life Rally for the Innocent” in New York City on May 11th.³³⁴ This shift may indicate the influence of Caleb and the Hell-Shaking Street Preachers on Patriot Prayer as a movement and suggests the possibility of radicalization through association with Patriot Prayer.³³⁵

Commonalities and Beliefs

Analysis reveals broad similarities in the backgrounds, beliefs, and motivations of my nine rally interviewees. Taken together, these interviews suggest that Patriot Prayer rally attendees tend to be working class and to subscribe to aspects of the Patriot movement’s worldview. Attendees usually consider Liberals to be their greatest enemy and attend rallies in hopes of exposing the nature of that enemy to a wider audience.

Economic Background

With the probable exception of Josh,³³⁶ every one of my interviewees appeared to be either blue-collar or working poor. Freddie was homeless at one time and still struggles to find repair work. Eric lives on his military disability pay and part-time income as a food deliveryman. Though Madison attends college, her father Chris works construction, which suggests a blue-collar background and lifestyle. Michael is an enlisted soldier. The nature of Scott’s small business (redacted to preserve anonymity) make Scott a member of the working class as well. Evidence (also redacted for purposes of anonymity) suggests that Caleb performs blue-collar work as well. Lisa did not give me details of her economic status or employment: however, statistics show that foster parents tend to have lower-than-average income.³³⁷

³³⁴ “Pro-Life Rally for the Innocent in NY.”

³³⁵ Jedeed, Interview: Caleb.

³³⁶ As mentioned earlier, Josh’s living room was decorated in a style that suggests middle class. At one point, he walked into another area of the house to show me his truck: both house and truck look quite nice.

³³⁷ “Foster-Coalition | Who Are Foster Parents.”

Political Beliefs

Most of my interviewees hold beliefs that correspond to the Patriot movement, but not the alt-right. Seven of my interviewees indicated concern about the erosion of second amendment rights. Madison and Chris both mentioned their support for gun rights. Freddie, Eric, Scott, and Josh all explicitly mentioned the Patriot conspiracy theory that the American government is planning to confiscate all guns from its citizens. In fact, an Alex Jones speech convinced Josh to become an activist. Lisa did not explicitly mention the second amendment, but belongs to the Washington III%, an organization centered around gun rights that has vowed to fight any effort by the government to confiscate guns.³³⁸ Only fellow travelers Caleb and Michael made no mention of guns or the second amendment.

Additionally, many interviewees mentioned other common Patriot conspiracy theories. As avid Infowars listeners, Josh and Eric both mentioned several conspiracy theories. Josh believes that 9/11 was an inside job and that both fluoride and vaccines are dangerous. Eric believes that Obama is secretly Muslim and that the so-called MAGA bomber was a false flag operation.³³⁹ He also told me that George Soros and the UN both pay for—and manipulate—American voting machines. Chris believes that George Soros and the UN fund the caravans of would-be immigrants from Central and South America, and that George Soros funds Black Lives Matter. He also believes that the left pushes identity politics not out of sincere belief, but as part of a plan to seize power in America. Lisa believes that Democrats use dead people to bolster their voting numbers. Freddie believes that the United States government killed John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, and also does not believe that ICE is actually separating families at the border. Scott has heard that some counterprotesters get paid to protest but isn't sure that it's true. All of these theories fall within the Patriot symbolic universe, in which shadowy forces purposefully and maliciously weaken America in order to seize power. None of these conspiracy theories overtly involve race: another attribute of modern Patriot thought.

³³⁸ ThreePercenter (WA 3%), “Washington State Three Percent.”

³³⁹ Orden and Chavez, “Cesar Sayoc Pleads Guilty to Mailing Explosive Devices - CNN.”

Madison, Caleb, and Michael, on the other hand, did not engage in clearly Patriot conspiratorial thinking. Madison, who did not discuss political positions or ideology very much, did not mention conspiracy theories at all. Neither did Caleb, whose focus as ever remained on the Bible and spirituality. Michael, on the other hand, mentioned a conspiracy that may or may not lie outside of the Patriot symbolic universe. He believes that Muslims “[are] trained...to Islamify the countries that they’re going to,” and that they have already destroyed Germany and Paris. Whether or not this falls within the Patriot symbolic universe depends on who Michael believes trained these perceived Muslim invaders. If globalists are responsible, the conspiracy theory falls within the Patriotic worldview. If, on the other hand, Islamic governments trained these infiltrators, the conspiracy properly belongs to the alt-right symbolic universe in which different races inevitably compete for power and resources. Given Michael’s proximity to alt-right beliefs, it remains unclear which version of the Islamic conspiracy Michael subscribes to.

Finally, some interviewees held policy positions not traditionally associated with the Patriot movement or with conservatism as a whole. Freddie’s concern with the homeless and Lisa’s concern for the plight of foster children would be at home within many left-wing political circles. However, these policy positions also imply a concern with caring for the immediate, local community that is compatible with the Patriot movement’s rural, small-town roots.

My interviewees also conformed to recent Patriot beliefs in that, with the exception of Michael, they did not express overtly racist or racist beliefs. All of the interviewees rejected the notion that Patriot Prayer is a racist group, though some acknowledged that racist elements have attended rallies.

Freddie, Madison, and Scott all brought up the multiracial composition of Patriot Prayer as a means of rejecting the charge. Eric also rejected charges of racism as absurd. Lisa believes that the left calls them racist in order to elicit a specific reaction against the group:

You hear ‘Nazi,’ immediately that’s a negative. So, ‘racist,’ immediate negative. ‘Misogynist,’ immediate negative. These labels are carefully chosen for the response that they generate, and then they use them rather loosely. They don’t necessarily apply all the time.

Lisa's argument leaves the door open for the term "racist" to apply some of the time, probably because she knows that racists have attended Patriot Prayer rallies in the past. She mentioned the Identity Evropa representative discussed in Chapter 3, as well as a Hispanic Nazi who attended rallies for a time. According to Lisa, Patriot Prayer made it clear that while they respect these racists' right to free speech, they did not want those figures in attendance. Eventually, both stopped showing up.

Chris, the other Patriot Prayer member who has attended from the beginning, was also less cavalier about dismissing all charges of racist presence within Patriot Prayer. Like Lisa, Chris believes that Patriot Prayer rallies mostly consist of "guys like me who have families and have got conservative values." However, he has run into a few people at rallies that he suspects may be alt-right. Once, he met someone who asserted that the Jews control the news media. On another occasion, Antifa accused a rally-goer with prominent tattoos of white supremacy. Nonetheless, these people comprise a tiny minority of overall rallygoers. "There's no group that I've seen together saying, "Hey, we're white. We've got to fight for the future of our white race."³⁴⁰

The Liberal Enemy

With one exception, all of my interviewees agreed that left-wing political powers constitute the greatest threat to America today. However, the exact shape of this left-wing menace varied from interviewee to interviewee.

Madison believes that Antifa counterprotesters pose the greatest threat to America. She perceives them as "just hateful. They just want to cause fights." Madison then explained to me that Antifa had hit her father in the head with a block of concrete at the Seattle Liberty or Death rally on August 18th, 2018. Although Chris was not seriously injured, Madison is acutely aware of how much worse things could have been:

³⁴⁰ The turn of phrase "for the future of our white race" bears vague similarity to the Fourteen Words, a white nationalist slogan: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." The resemblance is loose and probably a coincidence. When considered in combination with Chris' unusual familiarity with the socialist politics of the alt-right, however, there is a small chance that Chris may have more interaction with the alt-right than he let on.

But it was lucky that it [hit where it did], because what if it hit [on his face] or his teeth?... You could potentially really hurt somebody. You could knock someone out by throwing concrete in the air. That's just so full of hate... There's grandmas that go to these. What if that hit that grandma in the head? These people just don't care.

I did not directly ask Lisa who she felt the biggest threat to America is: however, based on our interview, her answer is likely the Antifa counterprotesters as well. As previously mentioned, Lisa spent much of our interview detailing the sometimes-gruesome injuries Antifa inflicts on her fellow Patriots. She perceives this violence as an attempt to silence conservative thought and sees her work with Patriot Prayer as essential to combat these efforts.

Freddie agrees that Antifa poses a significant threat in the present moment, but that “big government” constitutes the real danger. As mentioned previously, Freddie worries that the government will confiscate guns from American citizens. He believes it will then be able to violate its citizens’ rights with impunity.

Chris also believes that Antifa poses immediate danger but does not constitute the largest threat facing America today. The greatest danger comes from globalists like George Soros who push an “anti-American” agenda. As previously mentioned, Chris believes that globalists sponsor forces that could potentially tear America apart, such as the migrant caravans currently attempting to gain access to the United States and Black Lives Matter.

Eric also believes that globalists constitute the greatest threat to America:

“George Soros, Globalists. the UN. The people that want to make one world order. And they want to take away your guns, first amendment, all those people have all the money...Those people are evil. Like Hillary Clinton...She's so racist! She is an evil, evil lizard lady with lizard blood.³⁴¹ She's not even a real person, she's been so powerful for so long.”

Caleb dispenses with the conspiracy theories. He believes that “progressives and liberals are the biggest threat because they're allowing anything and everything.” Caleb is especially concerned about the “gay agenda,” which seeks to indoctrinate American

³⁴¹ Eric engaged in hyperbole frequently during our interview. I believe it is unlikely (though not impossible) that he actually believes Hillary Clinton is a lizard person.

children into acceptance of an immoral lifestyle. He also despises the pro-choice movement's legalization of "killing babies." Finally, Caleb worries about the encroachment of Islam. According to Caleb, someone who is truly Islamic in the way that Caleb perceives himself to be truly Christian would follow the tenets of the Koran exactly, including an injunction to kill infidels.

Like Caleb, Michael believes leftists and Muslims pose the greatest threat to America. Michael believes that the "post-modernist neo-Marxists" threaten America, though he did not elaborate on how. He also believes that the Muslims constitute a large and dangerous threat to society. He spoke at length about European problems with Muslims, including intolerance of homosexuality, child marriage, and "rape gangs." He believes that Muslims seek to "Islamify" Western nations and that the far left is complicit in this Islamification.

Two interviewees held a somewhat more nuanced view of the threats facing America. Josh, like Chris and fellow Infowars enthusiast Eric, believes that globalists are the real enemy. Unlike Eric or Chris, however, Josh drew a clear line between globalists and the Democrats who unwittingly facilitate the globalist agenda:

The only threat is really ignorance...People not understanding what's at stake, people not recognizing the threat of the globalists, the direction that we're being pushed in without us knowing. And just in general: not understanding what's in your food, what's in the water...That's why it's called Infowars...it's not called 'Texas, let's pick up our guns and go shoot democrats' wars.'

Of all my interviewees, Scott had the least robust conception of an enemy group of people. Scott seemed most concerned about the economic civil war and the escalating tensions between political movements but did not ascribe blame for the situation to any one group of people. Rather, Scott believes that both sides contribute to rising tensions. He felt certain that Antifa and the Democrats have reasons for acting as they do, though he had difficulty understanding what those reasons could be. Scott seemed genuinely curious as to why Antifa and the Left were so against Patriot Prayer and President Trump, respectively, and asked me, a person who identifies as center-left, for my opinion on the

subject.³⁴² Scott believes that Antifa counterprotesters can be violent bullies and feels the need to protect their potential victims. Yet he does not demonize them. Instead, he perceives many of them as young and misguided:

“You know, the kid that's in Antifa and he's 17, and he doesn't have two parents at home and all he does is play video games and he thinks this is a great thing to do with his buddies until he gets smashed in the face, I feel sorry for that kid.”

Reasons for Participation

When I asked my interviewees what made them decide to attend their first rally, four of them—Eric, Scott, Lisa, and Chris—told me that videos of protest violence directly persuaded them that they had to take action. Though Madison stated that she attended her first rally because she was “bored,” she may have also been influenced by stories of violence at Patriot Prayer rallies. Freddie and Caleb attended their first rallies not as perspective members of Patriot Prayer, but as representatives of different organizations. Josh became an activist due to ideological beliefs. Michael’s reasons remain unclear.

Eric was one of the four interviewees who decided to attend his first rally as a direct result of a video clip of protest violence. When he first heard of Patriot Prayer, he “made up excuses” to not attend the groups’ rallies:

“Like, I've got kids, or I'm a combat vet and I don't want to trigger some old feelings, you know? All that stuff.”

This changed after Eric saw the Antifa traffic video online.³⁴³

³⁴² When asked about why Antifa protests Patriot Prayer, I said I think it is because Antifa truly believes that Patriot Prayer is fascist and alt-right. When asked about Trump, I explained that a lot of people have serious problems with his immigration policy. Scott found these explanations interesting, but not particularly compelling.

³⁴³ See the “Victim Fable” section of Chapter 4 for a description of the Antifa traffic video.

“After I saw...the innocent civilians getting harassed and attacked, I was like ‘I will never miss--I will try to make every one I can from now on.’”

Scott had a similar reaction after he searched for Antifa videos on his father’s advice. The video he remembers most vividly depicted left-wing protesters as they harassed Trump supporters who were leaving a campaign rally:

What got me off the couch was I believed it was my time to do something...seeing people that couldn't defend themselves, seeing women that were getting eggs thrown in their face because they had a Trump hat on. Women that were being pushed by men and stuff that were being called every name in the book...And that got to me. That really got to me because I've [never] liked the bully mentality.

Scott viewed several more victim fables, including the Antifa traffic video and a clip of anarchists breaking windows in downtown Portland, probably in the aftermath of the Trump election. As a small business owner familiar with the effect rising costs of insurance can have on a business, Scott was especially upset by this last act of vandalism. Ultimately, he decided he had to do something. “When I saw basically that people that couldn't stand up for themselves were getting harassed and stuff, that's when I felt that I needed to step in.”

Lisa saw a very similar video of Trump supporters harassed after a rally while watching Trump’s inauguration coverage. She too described left-wing protesters throw eggs at a Trump supporter and chase a young, skinny teenager. “I'm like, "No, I can't just sit here anymore” she told me. “I can't just sit here anymore and yell at my TV. I can't. I've got to do something.”

Chris also watched videos of left-wing protesters beat and harass Trump supporters as they exited a rally. He did not act, however, until he began to watch live video feeds of Portland’s riots in the aftermath of Trump’s 2016 election win.³⁴⁴ He remembers watching left-wing protesters with baseball bats smash the windshield of a car driven by a pregnant woman.

³⁴⁴ Domonoske, “Anti-Trump Protest In Portland, Ore., Turns Destructive, Declared A Riot.”

The next evening, as the riots continued, Chris decided to stop in Portland on his way home from work and film the mayhem:

“So I went down there myself and started videotaping people. I was just looking around—these hateful people. I mean, there's teenagers in the street, they're playing, "Fuck Donald Trump". People spray-painting, ‘not my president' and anarchy signs...I was like, these people are crazy. Somebody needs to stand up against this mob.”

Shortly thereafter, Chris heard about the March 4 Trump. He attended the rally, met Joey Gibson, saw Gibson’s video of the march afterwards, and began to follow Gibson on social media. Chris attended Gibson’s first rally the next month and has attended ever since.

Although Madison, Chris’ daughter, did not attend her first rally as a direct result of video fables, it seems likely that Madison’s father at least spoke to her about this large part of his life at home with his family. Madison told me that she was always aware of the group, though she didn’t pay much attention. This changed on August 4th, 2018, the day of the Gibson for Senate Freedom March:

“I dropped my dad off at the meetup spot, because people are always trying to slash tires and stuff...and then I was like...’I’m bored...I want to see this. I want to see what it’s all about.’”

Madison’s decision to attend the rally immediately after June 30th riot is an interesting one. Chris attended that violent event, and likely told his daughter about the chaos. It seems likely that the stories of victimization and victory alike generated that day influenced Madison’s decision to alleviate her boredom at a Patriot Prayer rally on that beautiful summer day.

Freddie and Caleb attended their first rallies not because of video fables, but as activists with a different organization. As previously mentioned, Caleb attends Patriot Prayer meetings in his capacity as a Hell-Shaking Street Preacher. Freddie attended his first rally as a member of Film the Police Portland. On July 20th, 2018, Joey Gibson

confronted Occupy ICE protesters in Portland, Oregon.³⁴⁵ Freddie attended on the counterprotester side to film any police response to the face-off. For reasons Freddie did not explain, Antifa members “shunned and attacked” him. Luckily, Patriot Prayer stepped in and protected Freddie and his film crew:

“Joey Gibson is the one who arranged a way for us to get out of there and arranged a way that we would not be attacked any further that day. So I automatically knew then that Patriot Prayer was not like what people were saying they were...I found out that they are guys just like me. Guys who love this country and guys who will take a stand against anybody who tries to harm individuals for standing up for their rights. AKA: freedom of speech, second amendment, things like that.”³⁴⁶

Michael’s reasons for attending the Free Alex Jones rally were difficult to pin down. When asked directly, Michael said he heard about the rally on Facebook through Patriot Prayer’s page, which he follows, and attended out of curiosity. Yet our conversation made it clear that he perceives himself as part of an alliance against “postmodern neo-marxists”—a Jordan Peterson conception of the left-wing enemy—which suggests that he was more than a mere tourist at this right-wing rally. Michael’s constant reference to far-right YouTube personalities made it clear that he spends a great deal of time watching videos, and he has likely seen rally-generated video fables as well. He did not, however, directly mention video fables as motivation for attending Patriot Prayer rallies.

Alex Jones convinced Josh to attend his first rally approximately a year and a half before the Free Alex Jones rally in September of 2018:

“[Jones said] ‘There are all these people out there talking about how if the globalists win...if they come for the guns [they’re] going to pick up some rifles and...we’re going to have a civil war...If you’re not

³⁴⁵ Kenoyer, “Joey Gibson Plans to Visit Occupy ICE PDX; Activists Say They Won’t Take the Bait.”

³⁴⁶ Freddie’s story is itself a fable: a simplified story of good and evil. It omits details such as why Antifa shunned Freddie and his film crew, or why Freddie attended a protest against immigration services when he explicitly supports ICE and border control. Whether or not these details significantly change the story, the story is nonetheless a curated product intended to convince me, the listener—and you, the reader—of the basic nature of Antifa and Patriot Prayer.

willing to engage in the info war now...then you're not going to pick up a gun and you're not going to fight when the time comes.”

More commonalities exist between my interviewees with regards to what did *not* motivate their rally attendance. With the exception of Josh, none of my interviewees attended their first rally because of a strongly-held political stance. To paraphrase, most attended because they felt they had to do something. Scott was most aware of this lack of political motivation. “What got me off the couch was really for the protection of others,” he told me. “There was no strong belief yet.”

Furthermore, none of my nine interviewees were directly recruited by someone already within Patriot Prayer. Madison comes closest to a direct recruit, yet neither she nor her father believes that Chris recruited her.

Nor have my interviewees had much luck in recruiting others to attend Patriot Prayer rallies. Josh and Eric have both tried without success. Chris has found several people who would like to go, but who worry that Antifa will doxx them and that they will lose their jobs. Lisa brought a friend one time, but health issues precluded the friend from returning. Caleb claims mixed success with his efforts to bring people to Patriot Prayer rallies. This is to be expected, he explained—as with the Church, not everyone is called to witness. Scott has convinced a friend from his martial arts class to attend but is concerned he made a mistake in doing so. “What happens if he got piled on in the street corner and he got his back broke, or he got kicked on the ground somehow, and couldn't go to work for three months?” Scott thinks people have to decide to go to rallies—and accept the risk that comes with attendance—on their own.

Taken together, these interviews suggest that video fables act as the most potent means of recruitment for rally participation. The majority of my interviewees attended due to exposure to video fables. Other potential means of recruitment, such as political motivation or friendship ties, do not appear to generate large numbers of attendees.

Rally Purpose

I asked all of my interviewees except for Joshua and Michael what they thought Patriot Prayer rallies accomplished.³⁴⁷ All seven interviewees agreed that Patriot Prayer rallies primarily serve to convey some kind of truth about the world through spectacle.

Madison, Eric, and Lisa believe that rallies let people know that there are more conservatives than the mainstream media lets on. “[The media] would make you believe that the entire world hates Trump and that he's evil and that he's Hitler,” Eric told me. “It's nonsense.” Madison believes that when people see conservatives standing together, they feel more able to express themselves. “You should not be scared to stand up for what you believe in,” she said. “When there's a group of people...you just feel safe, because you're like, ‘Oh, I'm not the only one.’”

Lisa agrees that rallies help people feel like they can express themselves without fear:

“I'll keep doing this until anybody can walk down any street in any city in America wearing any shirt they want to wear, have any bumper sticker on their car they want to have, and nobody's going to mess with it. They might look at it and give it a sideways look and go, “Pssht,” but that's all that's going to happen.”

Lisa also believes that these rallies expose Antifa as bullies, and also reveal the way that Liberal governments of cities like Portland fail to protect their conservative citizens and enforce order against the far left. She hopes that these rallies will encourage Mayor Ted Wheeler to step up and enforce the law against groups like Antifa. “You've got a motorist being attacked,” she said as an example, alluding to the infamous Antifa traffic video. “[The police] need to get in there and protect that citizen. If [they're] not going to do it, we will.”

Caleb and Chris both share Lisa's point of view. Caleb believes the rallies “expose where the real hate is coming from.” Chris says that:

“[The rallies have] helped a lot already, just bringing to light what happens. So instead of just an individual with a Trump hat on getting the crap beat out of him and then moving on...If you put a huge

³⁴⁷ I interviewed Josh and Michael before I thought to ask this question.

spotlight on where the troubles lie...how [the Portland government has] allowed Antifa, they're basically supporters of Antifa. They let them get away with stuff because it's their agenda.”

Freddie hopes that the rallies will not only serve to hold Portland’s government accountable for their unwillingness to curb Antifa’s excesses, but remove them from office:

“We want big government out. We are sick of it. We are tired of big government, people like Ted Wheeler allowing masked thugs to run around his city, break shit, assault people, and just basically cause chaos... We want all of these criminals to be held accountable for their actions. And when I say criminals, I'm not just taking about Antifa. I'm talking about cops. I'm talking about politicians. I'm talking about government officials.”

Scott provided a very different perspective. When I initially asked him what he believes rallies accomplish, he replied:

“I don't think they're accomplishing anything. I really don't. I don't think there's a—okay, the goal—I will say this. My belief is that the goal for the Patriot Prayer, Proud Boys is to show Antifa's a piece of crap.”

Although Scott went on to speculate that Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys strive to protect our constitutional rights from slow erosion, the small business owner seems keenly aware that Patriot Prayer works hard to cast Antifa in a bad light. “The conservative side, they push the envelope because believe me, they want to show the other side's bad.”

Patriot Prayer’s efforts to portray the other side as bad came up as we discussed the upcoming #HimToo movement rally in Portland:

Why didn't they have the #HimToo movement in Vancouver?... I mean, Antifa's not going over there now because they know the cops will not allow it, right? So why antagonize it?... I just think to myself, it's getting to the point now where they want the conflict. Both sides want the conflict, and you get on the news. And let's face it. Joey, Tiny: they like that publicity.

I agree with all of my interviewees, and especially with Scott. Patriot Prayer rallies serve primarily to create fables that present a simple vision of the world: Antifa

counterprotesters are bad, Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys are good. By extension: Liberals are bad, Conservatives are good.

Not only did my interviewees agree in principle that rallies exist to create a spectacle for third-party consumption, most of them consume that spectacle on their computers after the events themselves. Seven of my nine interviewees described video fables during their interviews. Only Caleb and Michael failed to mention either watching or participating in a protest video.

Patriot Prayer's desire to create compelling fables through their rallies is not necessarily any more malicious than Cliffs' notes' desire to create compelling summaries of literature. Based on my interviews, Patriot Prayer members believe these fables convey an important and objective truth about the world they occupy. Under this framework, Patriot Prayer's efforts to ensure that Antifa acts in a demonic manner do not manufacture truth but instead reveal it.

The next chapter explores the ways Patriot Prayer uses rallies to uncover what they see as hidden truths about their counterprotesters and—by extension—Liberals as a group.

Chapter 6: Kickstart the Fight

The interviews presented in the previous chapter suggest that Patriot Prayer rallies seek to unearth evidence to prove the reality they already know. For rallies in large, left-wing cities like Portland, the successful rally must bring the evil nature of Antifa to the surface. The rally must also expose Portland itself as a place that shelters and coddles these far-left bullies. Finally, the rally must show the world that conservatives can stand strong in the face of this Liberal evil.

Successful Patriot Prayer rallies accomplish all three imperatives through what I term the fabling process. As described in Chapter 1, successful fabling involves two basic processes: sanctification and demonization. Sanctification defines the fable's protagonist as good and justified in their actions. Demonization portrays the fable's antagonist as unreasonable and malicious. To accomplish this, the fabler uses performative trolling techniques to provide cues for two different framings of the same event. If successful, the antagonist and third-party audience experience two different realities while viewing the same set of events. Fblers often believe they are exposing hidden truths through their performative trolling, and some fables more closely resemble reality than others.

Patriot Prayer does not fable in a vacuum. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, rally attendees do not show up at Patriot Prayer events without an idea of what they might find there. The attendees have likely watched fables created in previous rallies. These fables in turn draw on the Patriot symbolic worldview and conceptions of the left-wing enemy sedimented over decades, as described in Chapter 3. Rally attendees arrive with expectations of friendly faces inside of the rally and violent Liberal enemies outside of it.

Left-wing counterprotesters also arrive with a framework for what they expect to see at a Patriot Prayer rally. As discussed at the beginning of Chapter 2, many news outlets describe Patriot Prayer as alt-right.³⁴⁸ The Southern Poverty Law Center has

³⁴⁸ For example: Burley, "How Patriot Prayer Is Building a Violent Far-Right Movement in Portland"; Carless, "The Hate Report"; Crosbie, "Right Wing Militia Set Up 'Cache' of Firearms for August Rally"; Moritz-Rabson, "Portland Police Accused of 'Collusion'

classified the Proud Boys as a hate group since at least February 2018.³⁴⁹ Long before that, Rose City Antifa began to publish articles that accused Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys of hate and white supremacy.³⁵⁰ As a result, counterprotesters arrive primed to see signs of violent, dangerous, and racist activity.

Although every Patriot Prayer rally has a slightly different set-up and timeline, they usually consist of two distinct phases: the assembly and the march. During the assembly phase, rally attendees gather at a set location, where they listen to a set of speeches and exchange taunts with counterprotesters. After the speeches end, the marching phase begins. Patriot Prayer emerges from behind the police barricades set up around their assembly location and walks through the streets of Portland. This entrance into enemy territory creates opportunities for unmediated encounters with the demonized enemy. If the assembly phase has successfully sanctified the rally, demonized the opposition, and performatively trolled the counterprotesters, these encounters almost always lead to violence that can be filmed and turned into video fables of the type described in Chapter 4.

The Assembly Phase

During the assembly phase, Patriot Prayer uses speeches both to sanctify itself and demonize the opposition. At the same time, performative trolling communicates messages of threat to counterprotesters. The counterprotesters cannot hear the speeches, but only experience performative trolling. Conversely, rally attendees do not notice the performative trolling but only experience the speeches. By the end of the assembly phase, rally attendees and counterprotesters have experienced the same event through two completely different frameworks and are ready to fight.

with Far-Right Group Patriot Prayer after Texts Show Friendly Relationship”; Zielinski, “Resisting Patriot Prayer, Part One.”

³⁴⁹ “Proud Boys | Southern Poverty Law Center.”

³⁵⁰ “Patriot Prayer · Rose City Antifa”; “Proud Boys · Rose City Antifa.”

The Speeches

Speeches, regardless of their content, provide both a structural backbone and a sanctified justification for Patriot Prayer rallies. Rallies officially begin when Joey Gibson urges his audience to move closer to the platform or area where the speakers will stand, and the assembly phase ends once all the speakers have spoken. This structural centrality creates the illusion that Patriot Prayer rallies exist primarily to facilitate these speeches. Under this construction, Patriot Prayer gathers in left-wing cities such as Portland in order to create space for the communication of political ideas. In this way, the movement lays claim to the American tradition of public discourse, which for most attendees is self-evidently a justified, righteous, and sanctified activity.

The speaking portion of every rally I have attended follows a basic pattern. Gibson leads the rally in a prayer, then delivers an opening speech. Afterwards, he cedes the microphone to guest speakers. Sometimes Gibson gives a second speech towards the end of this portion of the rally, sometimes not. Once all the rally speakers finish, he re-takes the microphone and provides instructions for the marching phase of the rally, thus concluding the assembly.

The opening prayer acts as a powerful tool for both sanctification and demonization. Gibson asks God for strength and to spread love to the hearts of those in attendance. He prays for help in bringing light to the city of Portland. Because the audience is so quiet during this prayer, rally attendees can hear the counterprotesters across the street even more clearly than usual. Sometimes, the counterprotesters play a brass band in an attempt to block the words of the speakers. More often, they chant and shout. Evangelical conservatives—far right and otherwise—often claim that they are persecuted for their Christianity.³⁵¹ Hence, the frame of “Christians persecuted by Leftists” already exists within the symbolic universe of most attendees. By the time the prayer is over, rally attendees likely feel that familiar sense of persecution and, hence, sanctification.³⁵²

³⁵¹ Castelli, “Persecution Complexes.”

³⁵² For example: Joey Gibson, *Patriots Take a Knee for God*.

Gibson sometimes continues this motif of Christian persecution into his opening speech. For example, a video from Gibson's YouTube channel features the following diatribe:

"They hate Christians in Portland. I've been spit on for being a Christian, a lot of these preachers know that. They don't respect Christians, they disgust them. Because Jesus was a man of love, OK? I'm not here to preach all day, but I just want to tell you something. If you look at Jesus, even from a historical perspective, he was a man of wisdom, he was a man of love, and he was a rebel! A complete rebel, and he took on the establishment. And he changed the whole world with nothing more than just his beautiful words."³⁵³

In this excerpt, delivered in August of 2017, Gibson overtly draws on tropes of Christian persecution already likely evoked through an earlier prayer. This excerpt also implicitly compares the mission of Jesus Christ with that of Patriot Prayer. After all, both Christ and Gibson rebel against the system and attempt to change the status quo through the power of words. Many of Gibson's actions, from his peace walks through hostile crowds to his choice of profile picture (see Figure 5), invite similar comparisons.

³⁵³ Joey Gibson, *Joey Gibson Quick Speech in Portland*.



Figure 5: Joey Gibson's Former Facebook and Current YouTube Profile Picture
 Joey Gibson assumes a Christlike pose as he speaks to his audience.

Usually, however, Gibson focuses on somewhat more secular messages: his desire to bring love and tolerance to the city of Portland, the importance of free speech, and the need to keep calm in the face of opposition. These three values fall well within mainstream political discourse and serve to sanctify Patriot Prayer as an innocuous event. At the same time, the messages implicitly remind the audience that an enemy waits just outside the boundaries of the rally: one who opposes this message of love and tolerance, thinks free speech is unimportant, and provides the opposition that makes it so difficult to keep calm. Because the values Gibson advocates are uncontroversial, the counterprotesters' apparent opposition to free speech, love, and tolerance of difference effectively demonizes them as incomprehensibly vicious and hateful enemies.

Occasionally, Gibson presents his audience with a more directly incendiary framing of the conflict between attendees and counterprotesters. During the Freedom and Courage rally of June 30th, 2018, Gibson drew direct parallels between the American Revolution and today's struggle for freedom against "politicians that rejected God a long time ago:"

“[The founding fathers] had a spirit that we are missing today in this country. Because they said that if you want my property, you’re going to have to come and take it, but you’re not going to get it without a fight. They said, if you want my life you’re going to have to come and take it but you’re not going to take it without spilling your own damn blood. And that’s what we’ve got to have in this country. That’s the spirit—the courage—that we’re going to have to bring back.”³⁵⁴

Not only does this incendiary rhetoric sanctify rally attendees through comparison with America's founding fathers, it also frames the relationship between attendees and Liberal counterprotesters as an existential struggle for freedom that may require bloodshed. Gibson went on to assert that “rebellion to the corruption in our government right now—that is obedience to God.” What America needs now, Gibson stated, are “warriors for Christ, who are willing to go out and to fight this evil that we have all over this country.”³⁵⁵ This method of sanctification and demonization proved extremely effective that day: as mentioned before, the Freedom and Courage rally ended when the police declared a riot. This rally generated the extremely popular Rufio victory fable video analyzed in Chapter 4.

Regardless of whether Gibson chooses to sanctify his audience and demonize the counterprotesters through religious allegory, support of uncontroversial secular values, or direct allusion to rebellion, his speeches usually engage his audience better than any of the other speakers who participate in the speech portion of Patriot Prayer rallies. Gibson is a passionate, compelling, and charismatic speaker who is good at holding rallygoers' attention. By contrast, most other speakers at Patriot Prayer rallies are unpolished and far less interesting. These speakers tend to repeat the same common Patriot movement talking points: freedom of speech, the second amendment, love of country and flag, the

³⁵⁴ Joey Gibson, *Joey Gibson's Speech about Courage in Portland*.

³⁵⁵ Joey Gibson.

Liberal enemy, and so on. After a few rallies, these speeches all begin to sound the same. This is especially true for people who regularly consume far-right and right-wing news media.

Most public events with multiple speakers determine speaker order based on speaking ability and prominence in order to maintain audience interest and build anticipation. Patriot Prayer usually places its best speaker—Joey Gibson—at or near the front of its speaker lineup, which has the opposite effect. The Proud Boys, who don't listen closely to speeches given by anyone other than Gibson himself or a fellow Proud Boy, are usually the first to drift to the edges of the park, where they exchange taunts with Antifa counterprotesters. Rally attendees slowly drift in that direction to watch—and perhaps join in with—the fun. A few of the feistier older women enjoy taking turns at the megaphone the Proud Boys usually bring. As always, cameras capture every taunt and every counterprotester reaction, waiting for good footage. Those who stay to watch often look bored or, if they attended with someone they know, begin to carry on side conversations.

The fact that Patriot Prayer persists with their speaking order despite this noticeable drop in audience engagement implies that this is a feature, not an accident. I believe that the decreased quality of the assembly speeches after Gibson fires up the audience accomplishes a dual purpose. First, relatively unarresting rally speeches further sanctify the event. The dullness of these speeches suggests an academic frame of meaning, created during long years of school, for the event. The speeches are instructive and edifying, but like all serious and important things they are a bit boring.³⁵⁶ The monotony not only bestows a patina of academic respectability on the event, but also reinforces the frame of “not a big deal.” The rally is a bunch of people saying things that are obviously true and relatively noncontroversial. It would clearly be absurd to take offense at this boring and therefore respectable event.

³⁵⁶ An urban progressive Democrat would view these speeches through a completely different framework. Speakers often speak with a rural accent of some sort and use unpolished rhetoric. For Left-wing observers, these speeches often read as unconvincing, ignorant, even laughable. The far right does not see things this way.

More importantly, however, dull and repetitive speeches free rally attendees to engage in the other important work of the assembly portion of the rally: performative trolling.

Performative Trolling

As attendees lose interest in the assembly speeches, they drift to the edges of the assembly area and exchange taunts with counterprotesters. I suspect rallygoers feel justified in provoking the enemy on the other side of the barriers due to the successful sanctification and demonization process that has already occurred both before the beginning of the rally and during the initial portion of the assembly phase as described above. These taunts occur at the periphery of the rally: those who are engaged with the speeches or watching a livestream of the rally at home do not hear them. They therefore do not endanger the sanctification of the rally itself.

Such taunts are an example of performative trolling, which prompts the target of the troll to view an event through a different frame of meaning than the one used by the troll or their third-party audience. Rallygoers purposefully use language and symbols that they know counterprotesters believe to be indication of alt-right or white supremacist beliefs. Examples include the “ok” sign and Kekistani flag discussed in Chapter 2, and verbal taunts such as “It’s OK to be white.”³⁵⁷

Performative trolling can also occur on center stage of the rally if it is subtle enough. The best example of performative trolling I witnessed during my ethnographic research occurred as I entered Terry Schunk Plaza on June 30th. LasicBEATS, a local rapper and rally attendee, was finishing a live performance of his original song entitled “Alt-Left.” This song is itself a fable of protest violence, in which besieged but brave right-wing protesters stand strong against the counterprotester “Alt-Left.” According to

³⁵⁷ As with the “OK” sign and the Kekistani flag, 4chan breathed new life into the historically white supremacist slogan in order to trigger leftists who knew the racist origins of the saying but not centrists who were unaware of the history. See: Mealey, “Here’s How ‘It’s OK to Be White’ Made Its Way from Internet Trolls to a Vote in Our Senate.”

the song lyrics, the police refuse to protect rally attendees against the Alt-Left, who use vicious and underhanded tactics to terrorize the courageous protagonists.³⁵⁸

Counterprotesters who hear this song receive a very different message. Donald Trump popularized the term “alt-left” in the aftermath of Charlottesville, when he refused to condemn the Unite the Right rally that left Heather Heyer dead and nineteen other counterprotesters injured.³⁵⁹ Trump did not decisively denounce the alt-right until 48 hours after the incident,³⁶⁰ then seemed to walk back that denunciation a day later when he stated that there were “very fine people on both sides” of the protest and counterprotest. When asked directly about the alt-right, Trump replied:

“Okay, what about the alt-left that came charging at [indiscernible] – excuse me – what about the alt-left that came charging at the, as you say, the alt right? Do they have any semblance of guilt?”³⁶¹

LasicBEATS’ “Alt-Left” deliberately invokes this turn of phrase. The music video for this song, which consists mostly of clips of protest violence, includes audio and video of this Trump quote.³⁶²

This song is a performative troll in that it deliberately conveys two radically different messages to its two target audiences. Rally attendees hear a fable of sanctified resistance against a demonic enemy. Counterprotesters, on the other hand, hear “Alt-Left” and immediately think of the horrific violence of Charlottesville. The song reminds the counterprotesters of the kind of deadly violence against left-wing counterprotesters that can and has occurred at protests just like the one they are currently attending. “Alt-Left” creates frame dissonance and encourages both sides to regard the other as an implacable and dangerous enemy.³⁶³ This remains the most blatant and extreme example of performative trolling that I witnessed in the course of my field research.

³⁵⁸ LasicBEATS, “*Alt-Left*” - *Produced by LasikBEATS | Joey Gibson | Yvette Felarca ANTIFA/BAMN/BLACK BLOC.*

³⁵⁹ “One Killed in US Far-Right Rally Violence.”

³⁶⁰ Lemire, “Bowing to Pressure, Trump Denounces Hate Groups by Name.”

³⁶¹ Staff, “Full Text.”

³⁶² LasicBEATS, “*Alt-Left*” - *Produced by LasikBEATS | Joey Gibson | Yvette Felarca ANTIFA/BAMN/BLACK BLOC.*

³⁶³ Jedeed, Field Notes: Freedom & Courage Rally.

Another striking example of performative trolling occurred at the August 4th Gibson for Senate Freedom March, at which Tiny and several other attendees wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the words “Pinochet Did Nothing Wrong” on the front. The back of the T-shirt depicted cartoon figures marked with the Antifa logo tumbling from a helicopter along the words “Make Communists Afraid of Rotary Aircraft Again” (see Figure 6). This shirt references Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, who violently suppressed his left-wing opposition through torture and execution. Pinochet’s methods included throwing his enemies from helicopters.³⁶⁴ Rally attendees likely framed this shirt as a joke, while counterprotesters had ground to interpret this shirt as an explicit threat.



Figure 6: “Pinochet Did Nothing Wrong” T-Shirt

Tusitala “Tiny” Toese was one of many who wore this “Pinochet Did Nothing Wrong” T-Shirt at the Gibson for Senate Freedom March of August 4th, 2018.³⁶⁵

Later that day, Gibson performed a peace walk into a crowd of counterprotesters, who immediately surrounded Gibson and hurled abuse at him. One counterprotester slapped Gibson in the face. The resulting video fable captured an ugly act of violence

³⁶⁴ Staff, [“Pinochet Did No Wrong.” I was unfortunately unable to attend this rally: analysis of the Pinochet T-shirt incident relies exclusively on cited news content and video.](#)

³⁶⁵ Michel, “Why Is Amazon Selling Shirts Praising a Murderous Dictator?”

against someone who clearly posed no physical threat, but omitted the earlier threat of violence from Gibson's right-hand man.³⁶⁶

The Marching Phase

If the speeches and performative trolling within the assembly phase of the rally go as planned, both sides are primed for conflict by the time Patriot Prayer prepares to march. The attendees line up and prepare for the worst. Proud Boys and other men prepared to fight usher women and the elderly into the middle of the marching column.

The act of marching with Patriot Prayer into an area where counterprotesters may decide to attack engenders group solidarity with Patriot Prayer regardless of one's political beliefs. As discussed in Chapter 1, Hechter believes that dependence on a group for the public good they produce leads to feelings of group solidarity. The more difficult it is to find a replacement for the group's produced public good, the more solidarity the member will experience.³⁶⁷ During the marching phase of the rally, Patriot Prayer produces the public good of physical safety, and there is no substitute for it.

Memory of this dependence can continue to engender group solidarity long after the march has ended, especially when combined with effective demonization of the left-wing counterprotesters. If a rally attendee believes that counterprotesters are likely to assault them for expressing conservative opinions, and if that attendee also believes that "globalists" or Democratic politicians fund or direct the counterprotesters (as Chris believes and Scott suspects), the attendee may continue to feel unsafe within American society long after they safely leave the rally.³⁶⁸ As discussed in the previous chapter, many of my interviewees believe that Patriot Prayer rallies strive to create a world in which conservatives can express political opinions without fear. If our hypothetical attendee also believes this, fear of Antifa will cause their group solidarity with Patriot Prayer to increase along with their likelihood of attending the next rally, donating, helping to organize, and so on.

³⁶⁶ WeAreChange, *EXCLUSIVE! Joey Gibson ASSAULTED at Portland Rally!*

³⁶⁷ Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity*, 10, 46–47.

³⁶⁸ Jedeed, Interview: Chris; Jedeed, Interview: Scott.

The violence and chaos of a marching phase gone right produce a second public good as well: the chance to enact justified violence against one's enemies. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Proud Boys reward members who "[endure] a major conflict related to the cause" with their highest degree of membership.³⁶⁹ Such violence can bring prestige and fame, as it did for Rufio after his punch became a victory fable (see Chapter 4).

Additionally, some rally participants find violence rewarding for its own sake. Based Spartan, a nationally-known far-right brawler who has attended at least two Patriot Prayer rallies, described how much he enjoyed the freedom to enact violence against others at the Berkeley riots:

"I got stabbed, I got maced like multiple times...there's so much mayhem. I'm able to cuss everyone out, I'm like "Shut up! Die! You: hang yourself. Whore!" No one's stopping me. Where can you go anywhere and act like a total savage and no one gives a shit? We had explosions. We had violence. That is the most incredible, memorable feeling of my entire life, and nothing is ever going to compare to that."³⁷⁰

Based Spartan is, of course, capable of performing these types of actions against anyone at any time. What makes situations like riots in Berkeley and Portland special is that such acts become justified in the eyes of both fellow rally attendees and sympathetic fable viewers at home. This permission for violence constitutes a second public good for certain kinds of attendees and thus a second path towards group solidarity.

This violence not only increases group solidarity for those already at the rally but provides the opportunity to create new video fables and recruit new attendees. All the rules of fabling still apply. The footage of violence must clearly show that counterprotesters initiated the actual physical violence. Luckily for would-be fable creators, many counterprotesters feel no compunctions about the necessity of waiting for the other side to instigate violence.³⁷¹ The question of whether it is moral to initiate physical violence against members of the far right lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

³⁶⁹ McInnes, "Introducing."

³⁷⁰ Staff and Messman, "The Rise and Fall of Based Spartan."

³⁷¹ For example: "FAQ · Rose City Antifa"; Maamoon, "Opinion"; Cross, "Why Punching Nazis Is Not Only Ethical, But Imperative."

Based on my observations, however, counterprotesters' willingness to strike first helps Patriot Prayer create the fables that fuel recruitment.

Based on the above observations, I believe that the true product, and therefore purpose, of Patriot Prayer rallies in left-wing cities like Portland, are: protection from violence, justification for violence, and fables of violence. Although Gibson and my interviewees would likely object to this interpretation, and although I doubt they consciously set out to create this dynamic, this theory accurately describes the way Patriot Prayer rallies in Portland function as a self-perpetuating cycle.

Facebook engagement patterns for Patriot Prayer events support this interpretation, as illustrated in Figure 7 below:

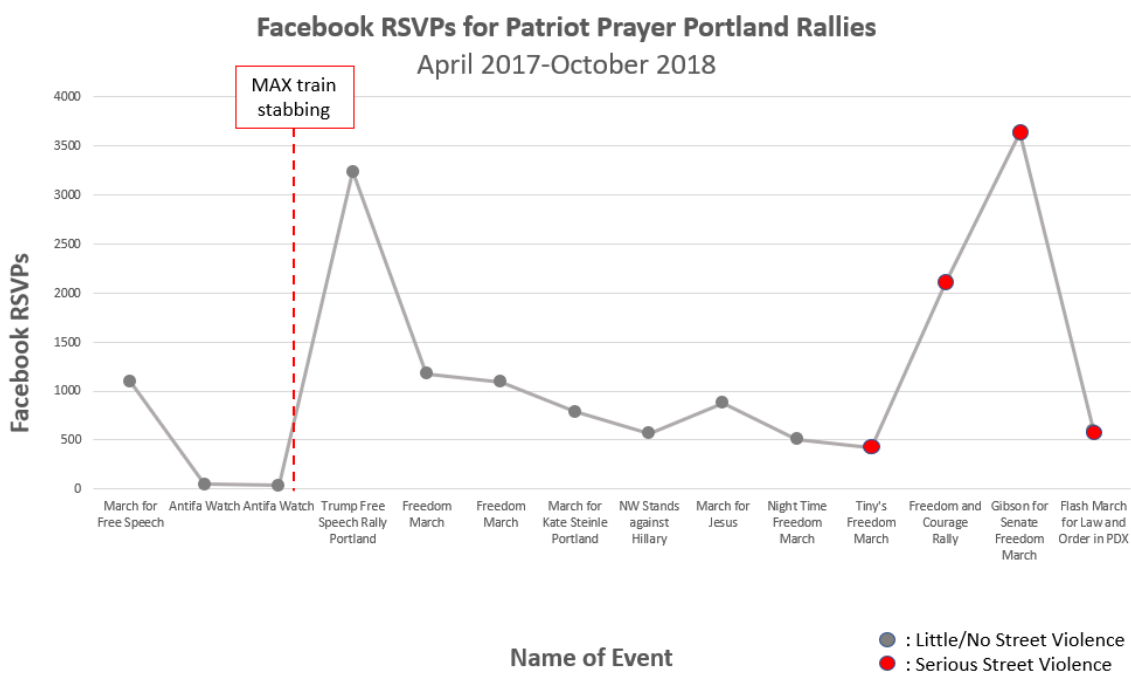


Figure 7: Facebook Engagement for Patriot Prayer Portland Rallies: April 2017 – October 2018

This chart measures the number of Facebook responses (both “interested” and “going”) for each rally. These numbers do not represent actual rally attendance (which is usually much smaller, but roughly proportional).³⁷² Note that Facebook engagement tends to spike after violent events and rallies.

³⁷² “Patriot Prayer - Events.”

As Figure 7 illustrates, Facebook engagement with Patriot Prayer rallies held in Portland increased when potential attendees perceived an elevated chance of protest violence at the next rally. The Jeremy Christian stabbings in late May of 2017 generated many predictions of rally violence at the June 4th March for Trump, and Facebook engagement spiked.³⁷³ When little serious violence occurred,³⁷⁴ interest decreased steadily until June 3rd of 2018, when unexpected levels street violence erupted at Tiny's Freedom March.³⁷⁵ This violence increased the perceived likelihood of violence at the June 30th Freedom and Courage rally, and Facebook engagement also increased. When the Freedom and Courage rally became the Freedom and Courage riot, engagement for the next event rose even further and reached its highest point in Patriot Prayer history.³⁷⁶ Although protest violence did occur at the August 4th rally, it fell far short of the dire media predictions of "another Charlottesville."³⁷⁷

No one had time to predict catastrophic protest violence at Patriot Prayer's next rally, the last-minute Flash March for Law and Order, which Patriot Prayer announced the day before the event itself. Facebook engagement for this event was far lower than that of the August 4th rally that preceded it, probably due in large part to its last-minute organization but possibly also due to lower-than-expected levels of violence at the August 4th rally.

The Patriot Prayer rally cycle within Portland theoretically has the ability to build upon itself with every iteration, as it did from June 3rd to August 4th. Fables of violence encourage rally attendance, which engenders group solidarity and produces new fables that recruit more members for the next rally. As long as the fabling process goes as planned, Patriot Prayer can successfully expand its reach and membership through the continued production of violent public goods.

³⁷³ Kaleem, "Portland Braces for Violence at Pro-Trump Rally This Weekend after White Supremacist Is Charged with Murder"; Wilson, "Portland Knife Attack."

³⁷⁴ Staff, "Opposing Protests Largely Peaceful, despite 14 Arrests."

³⁷⁵ Zielinski, "Patriot Prayer Clash With Antifa Protesters in Downtown Portland."

³⁷⁶ Shepherd, "MAGA Mayhem Fractures a Man's Skull, as Right-Wing Marchers Test the Limits of Free Speech in Portland"; Benderlev, "Police Declare A Riot After Far-Right And Antifa Groups Clash In Portland, Ore."

³⁷⁷ "Another Charlottesville?"

The rally cycle does not always go smoothly, however. In fact, there are several ways that counterprotesters might derail the rally cycle and limit the effectiveness of Patriot Prayer in Portland. In the next chapter, we explore an incident in which the fabling process failed and observe the way the sanctification/demonization process can backfire on its user.

Chapter 7: Today We Are All Demons

As Chapter 6 demonstrates, the fabling process of sanctification, demonization, and performative trolling can yield powerful results. There are also two potential ways that the fabling process can break down. The first is the most obvious: without an enemy to demonize and troll, the fabling process fails apart before it begins. The process can also backfire if sanctification of self or demonization of the enemy fails. If the fabling group appears unjust or is caught provoking the violence it seeks to fable, or if the would-be enemy acts in a way that appears justified, that group cannot compose a compelling fable. While a fable deprived of an enemy merely fizzles, a fable in which sanctification or demonization fails can provide the enemy group with material for fables of their own that can diminish the fabling group's base of support and reputation.

When confronted with a breakdown in the fabling process, the fabling group has a few options. In the case of a fable that fails due to a lack of enemy, the best option seems to be to simply proceed as though the enemy were there. While this cannot result in violence or video fables, it does allow a fabling event to go on as planned and not cause further harm to the group. An example of this occurred at the Free Alex Jones rally in Austin, Texas on September 22nd, 2018. Several speakers at this rally pre-wrote speeches that referenced an expected counterprotester presence. When no counterprotesters showed up, the speaker gestured lamely to the area where the counterprotesters would have been. While this was a bit comical in the moment, it allowed the rally to go on as planned and did no further harm to the fabling group. The Free Alex Jones rally also largely focused on an enemy not immediately present: the shadowy cabal of globalists that had recently conspired to remove Jones from social media platforms.³⁷⁸

A fabling group without an enemy can also try to locate a new enemy. This can have disastrous results, as we shall see later in this chapter.

A fable that backfires due to a failure of either sanctification or demonization is more difficult. The fabling group can either try to suppress the fable or reframe the incident as a victimization narrative. The first option is often impossible in the age of live

³⁷⁸ Jedeed, Field Notes: Free Alex Jones Rally.

streaming: video footage is ubiquitous and sometimes cannot be removed once it hits the Internet. The second option is risky, since reflection on the event or an inspection of context could reveal the failure. Reframing works only for audiences who already hold an entrenched concept of the antagonist as enemy.

On January 17th, Patriot Prayer spin-off group PDX Crew experienced a minor fabling failure that quickly snowballed into what could have been a catastrophe had a group like Antifa chosen to exploit it. This incident demonstrates the vulnerability of groups that rely on fabling for group solidarity and recruitment.

“Beaten to Death”

As previously mentioned, PDX Crew (now called Portland’s Liberation) is a Patriot Prayer spin-off group organized by Haley Adams. PDX Crew events are not official Patriot Prayer events, yet the core members of Patriot Prayer show up at PDX crew events such as the November 17th, 2018 #Himtoo Movement rally.

On January 17th, 2019, four members of PDX Crew went to the International Workers of the World (IWW) house on Burnside Blvd. In a video released after the incident, PDX Crew explained their reasoning as follows:

“Last night...there was supposed to be a DSA meeting, which stands for Democratic Socialists of America. The meeting was supposed to go over some things that Antifa was apparently going to be planning on doing. And we were going over there to, um, just go and listen and exchange some ideas if at all possible. And they didn't let us in.”³⁷⁹

A different PDX Crew video provides the most thorough available description of what happened next:

"So we was leaving, you know. And they started--threw rocks at the car that I was riding in with [redacted]. We pulled over, confronted them. And then they started engaging us. There was like 20 of them, I mean, they just popped out of nowhere. I remember, when I seen

³⁷⁹ Adams, *IWW Building*.

them in the car, it looked like there was maybe 4 of them, but then as we got out we seen like 20 of them.”³⁸⁰

To summarize, PDX Crew decided to crash a meeting held by Antifa, Patriot Prayer’s much-demonized enemy, supposedly out a desire to cooperate with the group. This sanctification of PDX Crew’s invasion of Antifa space strains credulity. Given the groups’ history, Antifa’s hostile reaction reads not as demonic, but as reasonable.

Antifa then followed them and threw rocks at PDX Crew’s car. Despite weak sanctification, this destruction of property could be depicted as an inappropriately violent (and therefore demonic) action. PDX Crew had a choice: they could turn this into a victim fable in which they were pelted with rocks while trying to leave, or they could try for a victory fable in which PDX Crew members punished the cowardly, rock-throwing Democratic Socialists.

PDX Crew opted for the latter option. Two strong, able-bodied men of PDX Crew chose to confront Antifa. What PDX Crew thought would be an easy fight with just four Antifa members turned into a one-sided beatdown at the hands of twenty brawlers. Both PDX Crew members went to the hospital: one with a fractured rib, the other with a head wound. The outcome suggests, at best, poor judgment.

This narrative provides for a shaky fable at best. PDX Crew nonetheless attempted to fable the incident by framing the incident as a hate crime, since one of the two beaten PDX Crew members is black. The group created a video of the black PDX Crew member in the hospital. The hospital video, which clearly shows James recovering from a non-life-threatening injury, is captioned: “A white mob of masked thugs (Antifa) beat a Black Man almost to death with metal batons.”³⁸¹

PDX Crew decided to use this fable as fodder for a flash event. They quickly organized a protest outside IWW headquarters on January 19th, two days after the attack.³⁸² As it so happened, January 19th was also the day of the Women’s March on

³⁸⁰ Strong, *ALERT*.

³⁸¹ Adams, *IWW Building*; Strong, *ALERT*.

³⁸² Adams, “HOLDING IWW BUILDING (DSA MEMBERS) ACCOUNTABLE FOR HATE CRIME.”

Portland.³⁸³ Individuals that might otherwise have counterprotested the flash mob were therefore otherwise occupied. As a result, PDX Crew found themselves angry and ready to fight, but with no enemy in sight. I attended this rally and watched as PDX Crew demonized themselves for two hours.

Fable Failure on Burnside Blvd.

Between 20 and 25 people showed up for this impromptu rally, including Joey Gibson. The rally took place on the sidewalk outside of the empty IWW house on Burnside Blvd. All around us, people enjoyed their Saturday at the various boutiques and brunch spots that surround the grey and nondescript IWW headquarters.

Haley Adams took the bullhorn and began to speak to passersby about the “hate crime” that took place in the IWW house two days previously. As James stood quietly behind her, looking perfectly healthy, Adams repeatedly claimed that a white gang had “beaten a black man to death.” At last, someone corrected her, and she modified her claim to “beaten nearly to death.” In the absence of an appropriate body of counterprotesters to target, Adams began to accuse passers-by of complicity in the crime due to their tolerance of Antifa’s presence in Portland. A few people stared at the rally in confusion, but most did their best to ignore the invective.

Shortly thereafter, a different member of PDX Crew took the bullhorn that I had not seen before that day, but whom I have seen at several events since. She stated that she used to be a member of Antifa, but discovered that they were horrible, violent people. “They’re all communists!” she exclaimed.

At last, someone responded to the commotion in front of the IWW house. A normal-looking woman, not wearing Antifa black or a mask, with long dark hair and a pleasant face, responded from across the street. “Oh come on now,” she said, “that’s a simplification and you know it!”

The protesters found a target for their anger. “Come over here!” a few of them shouted as they began to advance across the street. They began to lecture her about things

³⁸³ Powell, “Portland Women’s March Scheduled For Sunday.”

that had nothing to do with the “hate crime” that took place at the IWW house two days ago. Someone began to talk about building a wall. Someone else accused her of having multiple abortions, and someone else called her a feminist.

The woman attempted to respond at first, but quickly realized there was no point. She stood there, staring down the protesters, neither responding nor moving. Haley accused her of beating a black man to death, then once again amended the accusation to “nearly to death.” Eventually, the woman left.

As I watched this ugly scene unfold, I remembered how my interviewees spoke about Patriot Prayer’s commitment to civil dialogue and free speech. How so many of them hoped that Patriot Prayer would eventually create a world in which anyone could say anything without fear of consequences. I remembered not only my interviewees, but speeches at rallies and attendees in passing conversation claim that Patriot Prayer rallies become violent and uncivil because Antifa will not allow them to speak.

Shortly thereafter, the Hell-Shaking Street Preacher in attendance took the bullhorn and accused every liberal and democrat of complicity in the attack of two nights ago:

“You come out with a bunch of liberals, a bunch of democrats, and attack a black man. And yet all through your neighborhood, you have all these signs up that say Black Lives Matter. You talk about hate, you say that we stand for hate. What about your actions? You try to kill people, you hit them with batons, you try to beat them brutally, just like the Democrats and the Communists did to Jesus Christ back in the day.”

As he continued to speak, a woman stopped her car to confront the rally. As she advanced across the street, the Hell-Shaking Street Preacher turned his attention on her:

“And there's the typical problem right there: a loud feminist...How many children have you aborted, Jezebel?...You're evil! You're nasty. I'm glad your cooter smells like vaginal [inaudible], snowflake!...The bible says you need to fear the one that has the power to destroy both your body and your little sorry soul in hell...Once God brings chlamydia on you, once God curses you with cancer, you going to be

crying out like a little toddler. You're going to be crying like a little baby when God curses you with breast cancer.”³⁸⁴

Joey Gibson, champion of civil dialogue, drank water and said nothing.

Five minutes later, someone else took the bullhorn and announced that the rally attendees just want to live in peace, come together and talk. We're not going anywhere, the attendee said, so you have to learn to tolerate us conservatives.

Eventually, the rally decided to march up and down Burnside. We walked through afternoon brunchers waiting for tables, most of whom attempted to ignore us. A large and powerfully-built man with a leather newsboy cap accused some people sitting at a table outside a restaurant of Antifa membership. “Do you want me to call your dad to pick you up?” he demanded as he shoved a finger in their face. I did not see what precipitated the confrontation, but by the time I got there, the two men were silently staring at the enormous and aggressive attendee.

A woman on a balcony yelled “Go home! We don't want you here!” A large white van followed the rally for a time while blasting the Darth Vader theme song at ear-splitting volume. I overheard two attendees talk about how unsafe conservatives are in Portland.

As the march began to lose steam, Haley turned to someone and said “That was fun!” Several attendees decided to walk down to the Women's March and continue their activities there. I decided to go home.³⁸⁵

A rally attendee eventually posted video of the Hell-Shaking Street Preacher's invective against the woman who challenged the rally, a conversation Adams had with a passerby about the purpose of the rally, and a later altercation in which the large, powerful attendee in the newsboy cap threatened to hurt a masked member of Antifa who did their best to diffuse the situation.³⁸⁶ The Street Preacher video has 51 views, including my own. The other two videos have fewer than 800 views apiece.

³⁸⁴ farnsworth farrengas, *Street Preacher vs Jezebels and Demoncrats*. My dog, Luna, appears in the first five seconds of this video.

³⁸⁵ Jedeed, Field Notes: IWW Protest.

³⁸⁶ farnsworth farrengas, *Street Preacher vs Jezebels and Demoncrats*; farnsworth farrengas, *Haley Adams Confronts Jezebel*; farnsworth farrengas, *Grandpa VS Antifa*.

This low view count represents a lost opportunity for people who might wish to disrupt the fabling process and thus derail the Patriot Prayer rally cycle.

How to Derail the Rally Cycle

As postulated in the previous chapter, successful fabling at rallies produces group solidarity that encourages attendees to engage further with the group and seek membership status. It also creates the fable videos that recruit new rally participants. If this theory is correct, a breakdown in the fabling process will eventually break down both group sustainment mechanisms. Without a recruitment pipeline or group solidarity, the group will eventually cease to exist.

This theory suggests that, if counterprotesters wish to shut down Patriot Prayer and eliminate these rallies, they must act to consciously disrupt either the sanctification process by which the Patriot Prayer portrays itself as righteous and reasonable or push back against the demonization process by which the group portrays the counterprotesters as immoral and unreasonable.

As discussed in Chapter 1, theories of social construction of reality holds that, in the case of two competing symbolic universes, the only path to victory aside from genocide involves victory in the court of popular opinion. As such, this “defabling” must be public and appeal to the public, including members of the public that currently occupy different symbolic universes.

Some counterprotesters believe that the mass public will never support their ideology or goals.³⁸⁷ However, if the true goal of antifascist counterprotesters is to eliminate fascism at any cost, the mass public need not support the ideology of the counterprotesters but merely find far-right protesters distasteful and unsympathetic. As an added bonus, group solidarity within a heterogenous group can stem from a common enemy (as discussed in the introduction).³⁸⁸

As suggested by the Burnside rally failure, it is possible to construct a fable in which Patriot Prayer members can appear disingenuous in their professed desire for

³⁸⁷ Lyons, Bromma, and Down, *Ctrl-Alt-Delete*, 51, 74.

³⁸⁸ Aho, *This Thing of Darkness*, 85–86.

civility and dialogue. Attempts to engage in dialogue may serve to reveal this insincerity. Counterprotesters often dismiss this tactic, since they don't believe Patriot Prayer members can be reached by dialogue. This dismissal misses the point. The dialogue is not for Patriot Prayer, but to create a fable for the third-party audience of the Internet. Counterprotesters should film efforts at dialogue and post the disastrous results to social media.

Counterprotesters can also disrupt the demonization process through nonviolent, silent counterprotest. An example of this occurred at the Free Billy Wilson rally in Vancouver, Washington on March 2nd, 2019. This event supported Billy Wilson, a rally attendee at a previous event who had attempted to get away from counterprotesters surrounding his vehicle by reversing the vehicle and backing through a crowd of counterprotesters. Luckily, no one was injured. The incident conjured memories of Charlottesville and the vehicular murder of Heather Heyer.³⁸⁹ Patriot Prayer rallied in front of the Clark County courthouse to protest his arrest and urge the county to drop all charges.³⁹⁰

Two counterprotesters showed up to this event. One wore a Black Lives Matter T-shirt. The other held a sign that said something like "Nazis go home." When confronted by a group of aggressive Patriot Prayer members, the counterprotester with the sign turned the sign around to reveal a message regarding Billy Wilson specifically. It stated that driving through a crowd was dangerous and that, if left unpunished, Wilson would eventually kill someone. The message was succinct and clear. Neither protester reacted to the aggressive body language or raised voices of rally attendees. Eventually the attendees gave up and crossed the street to rejoin the rally in progress. This moment likely did not convince any rally attendees to abandon their opinion of Black Lives Matter or reconsider their stance on Billy Wilson's actions. If the counterprotesters had filmed this moment, however, they could have created a compelling fable for an undecided Internet audience. The resulting video would have shown self-proclaimed free speech advocates as they attempted to intimidate people exercising their first amendment right to criticize Patriot

³⁸⁹ Bailey, "Pickup Driver Who Drove through Crowd of Vancouver Protesters in 2017 Faces Charges."

³⁹⁰ Jedeed, Field Notes: Free Billy Wilson.

Prayer. Such a video would have demonized the protesters as both hypocritical and unrighteous. It would also have revealed the counterprotesters to be level-headed and peaceful, thus providing sanctification. Fables like this are powerful and easy to create. As demonstrated at the Burnside rally of March 3rd, events dedicated to enemy creation often find an enemy, even if the enemy is inappropriate. Counterprotesters can exploit this.

Victory fables constructed around righteous violence can be powerful persuasive tools, as demonstrated in Chapter 4. However, this type of fable requires the victory of a fighter who appears to be either the underdog or the defender in a fair fight. As Chapter 3 explains, the far right has a significant paramilitary component and actively recruits military veterans. This demographic component suggests that the far right will almost always be better and more experienced at fighting on average. As such, counterprotesters are unlikely to generate videos of impressive martial victories without resort to tactics perceived by third-party audiences as unfair.

Because the far right holds the force advantage, and because any efforts to improve martial capacity will take time to bear fruit, counterprotesters should avoid fighting and create victory fables through other means. A video of counterprotesters maintaining their cool in the face of provocation and threats of violence, as with the hypothetical video at the Billy Wilson rally described above, contains elements of the victory fable. Not only does such a video sanctify and demonize, it demonstrates strength of will and courage in the face of threat. As demonstrated by Martin Luther King's nonviolent protests during the Civil Rights movement, victory fables like this one can be extremely powerful tools of persuasion.

Counterprotesters who adopt these tactics should not expect immediate results. The far right has worked to create conceptions of the "Liberal" enemy since McCarthyism.³⁹¹ I clearly recall reading about Liberals and their efforts to destroy America in the Limbaugh Letters of the late 1990s. Mainstream conservatives and denizens of the far right likely have similarly entrenched memories of this constructed enemy. The rise of the alt-right and revival of the far right in the last few years has

³⁹¹ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 5–36.

accelerated and reinforced this construction. It will take concerted, long-term effort to undermine these ideas. The left must be patient.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer three questions: the ideological content of Patriot Prayer, recruitment methods for rally participation, and the political effect of Patriot Prayer rallies. My ethnography of Patriot Prayer suggests highly-interrelated answers to these questions.

Ideologically, Patriot Prayer is primarily a descendent of the Patriot movement of the Pacific Northwest. The group is not ethnonationalist and is, therefore, not alt-right. It is incorrect to call this group Nazis.

It is correct, however, to call this group dangerous. Rallies serve as mechanisms to construct an enemy in the form of “Liberals”—a term that encompasses many different elements of the Left and Center within American politics. They accomplish this task through the fabling process, which requires both the sanctification of self as righteous and just, and the demonization of an oppositional Other as dangerous and unreasonable.

Ultimately, these rallies produce three public goods: protection from violence, justification for violence, and fables of violence. The first two public goods create group solidarity that encourages repeat participation and membership commitments. The third public good—video fables of violence—enable Patriot Prayer to reach a far wider audience than rally attendees. These video fables create sympathy for far-right groups and encourage fear of Liberals, and thus leave their audience more receptive to far-right ideas. Although the primary audience for these fables consists of far-right Patriots and mainstream conservatives, centrists and even some Democrats are sometimes influenced by especially compelling fables.

Some of the people who watch these videos become so outraged at the Antifa menace that they decide they “have to do something” and attend their first rally. In this way, video fables also serve as the primary recruiting method for Patriot Prayer.

Further Research

These conclusions have limits. More interviews could help determine whether the preliminary conclusions reached in this thesis are accurate. Additionally, a wider sample of participants could shed further light on the motivations and beliefs of rally attendees. My inability to interview committed Proud Boys stands as an enormous gap within this research. Further research by a male ethnographer is likely necessary for any understanding of this fraternal organization.

Although I believe this thesis accurately describes the structure and function of Patriot Prayer rallies, my research does not establish whether these conclusions have wider applicability to other far-right groups. Studies of other right-wing groups could help establish whether the fabling process occupies a central place in modern far-right groups or whether Patriot Prayer is a unique organization.

Video view counts and mainstream media coverage of Patriot Prayer rallies suggests a wider audience but do not establish how much impact rally fables have on the American public at large. An analysis of popular videos, social media “share” patterns, and so on could provide more information on exactly how many people come across these video fables. Polls and surveys could establish with more certainty how much these fables influence perceptions of the public at large.

Finally, this ethnography suggests a parallel project that explores the counterprotesters on the other side of the police barricades. How do these counterprotesters make their monsters? Why do people attend counter-protests, and what do most counterprotesters believe? Further researchers should consider a similar ethnography of Antifa and other groups that attempt to combat far-right activity.

Final Thoughts

As discussed in the preface, phenomenological methodology focuses exclusively on perception and explicitly discards questions of objective truth or morality. Ideally, this approach allows the ethnographer to get beyond their own biases and achieve an understanding of the subject, their worldview, and their motivations. If successful, this

thesis has communicated this type of understanding. It does not depict incomprehensible monsters, but instead features people who believe they are doing the right thing based on their understanding of the world.

As human beings who must live in this world, however, we have a duty to consider the morality of a given symbolic universe and the impact that universe can have on the people who live on this planet. Despite good intentions, I believe the Patriot movement is extremely dangerous. Its symbolic universe is not identical with the alt-right symbolic universe, but the two constructions of reality are extremely compatible. This thesis, along with most other works on the subject, suggests blurred lines between Tea Party and Patriot, Patriot and alt-lite, alt-lite and alt-right. These ideologies are not as incompatible as many within that spectrum would like to believe. It takes just a step to the right to move from “the globalists want to install a world government” to “the Jews want to install a world government,” or from “Immigrants are changing American culture” to “Non-white people are polluting American culture.”

Throughout this thesis, I have avoided using the word “fascism” whenever possible. Nonetheless, the specter of fascism looms large over the entirety of this thesis. Umberto Eco and Hannah Arendt have both observed the centrality of the friend/enemy dichotomy to the fascist worldview.³⁹² The Patriot movement intensifies and radicalizes the concept of the American under siege by the violent and consciously malicious Liberal globalist. This way of thinking can logically lead to only one conclusion: the enemy must be eliminated. If someone, someday, suggests this sort of final solution to the problem of the enemy, those who conceive of the enemy in terms of malicious and deliberate evil are more likely to get on board.

The left is not immune to this trap. It remains tempting to think of the people on the far right as malicious in their attempts to tear down the progressive symbolic universe and install their own. I do not believe this is the case. This thesis demonstrates that many of those who are drawn to the far-right symbolic universe gravitate in that direction not because they wish to make the world an ugly place, but because they believe they are doing the right thing.

³⁹² Eco, “Ur-Fascism”; Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 181–82.

Despite these beliefs, the far right is not, in my opinion, doing the right thing. Those who agree with this assessment have a duty and an obligation to resist its ascendance and advance a symbolic universe that holds all people as intrinsically valuable and fundamentally equal. This resistance must go beyond anything outlined or suggested in this thesis. It must involve solutions that address the very real problems of our society, including the problems of rural Americans. It must offer an appealing and feasible alternative to far-right conceptions of nationalist and ethnonationalist community. Whatever these solutions and alternatives, those who would resist the far right must be careful to fight in a way that does not facilitate the creation of propaganda with the potential to clear a path for genocidal ideologies.

Appendix A: Interview Methodology

To find out about rally attendees' beliefs and reasons for participation in Patriot Prayer rallies, I recruited interviewees at rallies, then met at a time and place of their choosing for a semi-structured interview for approximately one hour.

I tried several different recruitment strategies. Initially, I handed out a business card with a website explaining the project and an email address.³⁹³ This strategy resulted in two interviews out of perhaps fifty people solicited. I then switched to asking people at rallies for their email address or phone number, which was a more effective strategy. However, the majority of people I asked for contact information either declined outright or failed to respond to my efforts at contact.

This recruitment difficulty likely resulted at least in part from worries about possible malicious intent. Antifa has a history of doxxing Patriot Prayer rally attendees,³⁹⁴ which has led to consequences such as slashed tires and job loss.³⁹⁵ They also tend to distrust academic institutions, which most conservatives perceive as left-wing.³⁹⁶ This mistrust of inquisitive strangers from small liberal-arts colleges likely explains why many of the people I spoke to reacted with suspicion, then avoided me for the rest of that event.

My most helpful recruiting tool was my German Shepherd dog, Luna, who came with me to events where I expected minimal counterprotest activity. The dog made it easier to start conversations with rally attendees, many of whom approached me to pat Luna and make small talk.

³⁹³ Understanding Rising Conservative Movements Through Conversation, "The New Right Research Project – Understanding Rising Conservative Movements Through Conversation."

³⁹⁴ For example: Weill, "Website Promised Free Anti-Antifa Shirts. Alt-Right Signed Up. It Was a Trap."; "Pacific Northwest Proud Boys - Robert Zerfing, Travis Nugent, Caleb Stevens, Ethan Nordean · Rose City Antifa."

³⁹⁵ Gibson, "Click Here to Support Joey Gibson's Family"; Jedeed, Interview: Chris.

³⁹⁶ NW, Suite 800 Washington, and Inquiries, "Most See Higher Ed Going the Wrong Direction. Partisans Split on Why."



Figure 8: Luna: my most potent interviewee recruitment tool

After the establishment of email or text communication with a perspective interviewee, I asked to meet them at a time and place of their choosing. Usually this consisted of a coffee shop, a bar, or a Skype conversation. On one notable occasion, I conducted an interview on an I-84 overpass during morning rush hour. I wanted my interviewees to be as comfortable as possible and to feel that they were on home turf.

Once we met up and purchased appropriate beverages and made small talk, I started my audio recorder and began the interview. I utilized a semi-structured interview format, in which I had a list of questions, but allowed the conversation to take an organic shape.³⁹⁷ I did not ask the questions in a specific order, nor did I ask every question of each interviewee. Instead, I attempted to work them into the conversation as organically as possible. If interviewees went on a tangent, I did not seek to redirect them, but instead

³⁹⁷ Online, “Chapter 2. Semi-Structured Interviews - Interview Techniques for UX Practitioners,” 2.

allowed them to say whatever was important to them. This approach allowed me to gain answers to central questions surrounding recruitment and beliefs and also allowed for unexpected insights into the worldview and motivations of my interviewees. These insights allowed me to modify my question list as this project progressed.

My final list of questions was as follows:

- How do you identify politically?
- Has that identification changed over the years? What changed it?
- Where did you first hear about (group/issue/rally/whatever connection led to recruitment)?
- What made you attend your first rally?
 - If video: how did you come across the video?
- Have you convinced other people to attend rallies?
- A lot of people lump activists like yours into what they call the “alt-right.” What are your feelings on the alt-right?
- Are there people associated with your movement—either because they claim to be associated or because the media claims it—that make you uncomfortable?
- Do you/does your group feel connected to other groups? Ally with other groups?
- Where do you get your news?
- What group poses the biggest threat to America right now?
- What effect do these rallies have? What do you hope to accomplish with these rallies?
- What does your ideal America look like?
- Is there any public figure out there that you feel exemplifies what this movement is all about?
- Are there different groups that show up to these rallies? What are those different groups?
- The media often describes these rallies as racist. What are your thoughts on that?

As our interview drew to a natural close, I asked the interviewee if there was anything else they thought I should know. I also asked if there was anyone else they thought I should talk to. I had several interviewees promise to pass my contact information along to people who might be interested, but never heard from any of those people.

I then thanked the interviewee for their time and turned off my audio recorder. Some interviewees made small talk after the recorder was turned off. After the interview concluded, I went to my car and immediately recorded my thoughts, impressions, and any relevant small talk from before or after the recorded interview.

Appendix B: A Brief History of 4Chan

Chris Poole did not set out to change the face of politics. All he wanted was a news-board style website on which anime fans like himself could share and discuss Japanese cartoons. The website he created in 2003, 4Chan, quickly became a creative and cultural juggernaut. In *Kill All Normies*, journalist Angela Nagle explains how the website became a “meme factory” that provided the public with hugely popular memes such as LOLcats and the rickroll. The lack of usernames on the website also provided a space for the exploration of extreme and dark ideas from the beginning, ranging from gore and incest to racism and extreme misogyny.³⁹⁸

The user base’s size, puckish sense of humor, and technical knowledge led to elaborate Internet pranks. At first, many of them were harmless or even heartwarming. In 2008, the users manipulated a *Time* online poll and made founder Chris Poole Person of the Year. When an elderly man posted an ad looking for birthday party guests, the website launched “Operation Birthday Boy” and flooded his home with cards, presents, cake, and strippers. Yet the dark potential of 4Chan was on display early on. In 2010, the website’s denizens engaged in cyberbullying of 11-year-old Jessie Slaughter, who committed the crime of posting a stupid video of herself to the Internet. They found and published her name and address (a process known as “doxxing”), then bombarded her with harassment and encouragement to commit suicide.³⁹⁹

Until the early 2010s, the 4Chan mob was decidedly libertarian, but not yet exclusively right-wing. Left leaning “moralfags” created effective hacktivist movements such as Anonymous and AnonOps. From 2010 to 2012, the United States government cracked down on these movements and severely weakened the libertarian left on 4Chan. Their absence “created a vacuum in the image boards that the rightist side of the culture was able to fill.”⁴⁰⁰ As time went on, 4Chan swung farther and farther right. The “Manosphere”—a masculinist and misogynous collection of pick-up artists and male

³⁹⁸ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 14–15.

³⁹⁹ Nagle, 15.

⁴⁰⁰ Nagle, 13–14.

separatists—found its own place on the website.⁴⁰¹ The tone of 4Chan’s pranks began to subtly change. In 2012, 4Chan repeated their online poll manipulation trick in a Mountain Dew naming contest. Winning entries included “Gushing Granny” and “Diabeetus.” The first-place winner, however, was “Hitler Did Nothing Wrong.” As a cherry on top, someone hacked the Mountain Dew website and added both a pop-up rickroll and a banner that read “Mtn Dew salutes the Israeli Mossad for demolishing 3 towers on 9/11!”⁴⁰² Nagle details a growing pattern of doxxing and harassment around this time, especially against feminists.⁴⁰³

The Gamergate movement was first to use these harassment techniques as a tactical weapon against political enemies. Gamergate was a movement from approximately 2014 to 2016 surrounding video games, feminism, and ethics in games journalism that spiraled into a cultural battleground and brought together many elements of the far right into an alliance that largely endured through the 2016 election.⁴⁰⁴ Although Gamergate itself was not an alt-right movement, its outsized influence makes it impossible to discuss the alt-right without an understanding of what seems on the surface to be an absurd footnote in pop culture history.⁴⁰⁵

The minutiae of Gamergate are both too extensive and too tedious for a thorough treatment here, but a succinct summary is in order. In 2014, Zoe Quinn created an independent game called *Depression Quest*, which received positive reviews from “politically sympathetic indie games journalists” despite not being a very good game. Around the same time, Quinn’s ex-boyfriend Eron Gioni began to spread accusations of Quinn’s infidelity with multiple people inside the games industry during their relationship. Angry gamers speculated that Quinn had slept with people for those good reviews. This kicked off “possibly the biggest flame war of the Internet so far” in which Quinn’s enemies sent revenge porn, attempted to hack her accounts, doxxed her, and threatened her with sexual violence. Women who came to her defense, such as Brianna

⁴⁰¹ Nagle, 18; Anglin, “A Normie’s Guide to the Alt-Right.”

⁴⁰² Rosenfeld, “Mountain Dew’s ‘Dub the Dew’ Online Poll Goes Horribly Wrong.”

⁴⁰³ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 16–18.

⁴⁰⁴ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 65–66; Neiwert, *In God’s Country*, 213–62; Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 24; “Timeline of Gamergate - RationalWiki.”

⁴⁰⁵ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 48.

Wu and Felicia Day, received the same treatment. The vitriol spilled over onto other targets, such as feminist game critic Anita Sarkeesian, who created videos that criticized video games from a feminist perspective. For this crime, she too was doxxed and threatened. Her websites became targets of DDoS attacks designed to shut down her servers. Someone made a game in which players could batter and beat a pixelated version of Sarkeesian. Specific and detailed death threats forced the video game vlogger to leave her house and go into hiding. The abuse was relentless, ongoing, and far more extensive than a paragraph-long summary could possibly convey.⁴⁰⁶ Eventually, the heat became too much even for 4Chan, and commentary on the subject was banned. Gamergaters migrated to 8Chan, a message board that quickly became even more extreme than its predecessor.⁴⁰⁷

The subject of video games unexpectedly proved a powerful point of convergence for many elements of the right. Video gamers genuinely concerned about ethics in games journalism⁴⁰⁸ found common cause with the misogynistic manosphere who resented feminism. White nationalists saw an opportunity to both put women in their proper gender roles and to fight a Gramscian culture war against liberal feminism. Online trolls saw an opportunity for lulz.⁴⁰⁹

Together, these disparate groups refined and popularized many of the troll tactics we have seen ever since. Death threats and doxxing are powerful tools for silencing enemies. Gamergate also perfected “script-flipping”: gamers, not women, were the oppressed minority; feminists were not calling out oppression but were rather the powerful oppressors. Twitter proved to be an excellent dissemination network for Gamergate memes and ideas.⁴¹⁰

Gamergate also illustrated the potential real-world impact of online trolling. The movement helped shut down popular gossip blog Gawker and catapulted pundits like

⁴⁰⁶ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 19–22; “Timeline of Gamergate - RationalWiki”; McDonald, “Gaming Vlogger Anita Sarkeesian Is Forced from Home after Receiving Harrowing Death Threats.”

⁴⁰⁷ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 66.

⁴⁰⁸ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 48–49 cites a survey that suggests many Gamergate supporters were progressives.

⁴⁰⁹ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 236.

⁴¹⁰ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 66–67.

Mike Cernovich and Milo Yiannopoulos onto a broad platform that they subsequently used to spread other ideas.⁴¹¹ The movement also served as a fertile recruiting ground for the alt-right. An anonymous commenter described the fiasco as an event that “[redpilled] a bunch of video game playing losers about how the media works to control narratives. How Jews and feminists and blacks use the same tactics to be victims that can only be helped through more shekels, etc.”⁴¹²

Andrew Anglin of *The Daily Stormer* is one of many on the far right who continues to use these tactics to great effect. Anglin begins by singling out a target and criticizing them online. He explicitly tells his followers not to enact violence against the target, which grants him plausible deniability. His “troll army” then bombards the target with terrifying messages, doxxing campaigns, and so on. Because the trolls are anonymous and legion, authorities cannot effectively prosecute individual harassers. Yet if they crack down on Anglin for his role as ringleader, supporters rise up in arms against this violation of free speech. After all, Anglin explicitly discouraged his supporters from violence, and it isn’t illegal to denounce someone online. Attempts to silence people like Anglin can kick off a far-right backlash from a group far larger than the Daily Stormer readership.⁴¹³

In addition to the effect of this type of trolling on its targets, these troll tactics have a strongly performative aspect. As discussed in Chapter 1, performative trolling occurs with a third-party audience in mind. Large-scale harassment campaigns, often conducted through bot networks and sock puppet accounts, give the illusion of an enormous troll army. This mirage encourages news coverage of the group, which helps recruitment. The campaigns themselves project an image of edgy fun that attracts younger people to the movement.⁴¹⁴ At the same time, decentralized, crowdsourced aspect of the harassment makes it difficult to convey the extent of the damage done to those who have not researched or experienced the phenomenon, in the same way that it is difficult to describe an ocean to someone who has only seen raindrops.

⁴¹¹ Hawley, *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 48; Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 67–70.

⁴¹² Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 72.

⁴¹³ Wendling, 138–39; Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 249.

⁴¹⁴ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 20, 83.

This decentralized aspect also makes it difficult to respond to the troll army in a non-draconian way. Efforts to mitigate the damage done by the troll campaign often involve removing social media accounts or banning media personalities. The far right can then use script-flipping techniques to claim themselves victims of censorship. Centrists find these claims especially sympathetic. Troll campaigns can serve both to silence opposition and recruit new followers

No one has yet developed an effective way to counter these troll campaigns.⁴¹⁵ The campaigns remain highly effective and resist attempts at a solution. It is strange to think that a message board for cartoon enthusiasts has given birth to one of the thorniest problems of the twenty-first century.

⁴¹⁵ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 138–39; Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 249.

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