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Race, Popular Culture, and Far-right Extremism in the United States

Priya Dixit

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Far-Right Extremism in the United States and the World

In Summer 2020, tens of thousands of people marched in support of racial justice around the world. The marches began as protest against the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, United States but they spread across the world as people took to the streets to call for racial justice and to protest systemic racism. Like many others, I was outside of the United States and watched the marches growing and spreading across US cities and globally. Surely, this would be the catalyst for change, I thought. Surely, the state cannot just ignore these calls for racial justice, calls that came from a multiracial group of people of all ages (PBS, 2020). And, yet, by Spring 2022, it is not just racial equity that appears elusive in the United States but, instead, there have been reactionary moves toward codifying and strengthening anti-Black, anti-LGBTQA+ and anti-women's rights laws and policies. The racists, it seems, have won.

The issue that began the anti-racist protests of Summer 2020—that of police brutality in the United States—has also not changed much in the two years since then. In the United States, police budgets remain disproportionately high as compared to budgets for social services. Police killings are at similar levels. Gun violence has not declined. Indeed, recent studies have shown the police attacked civilians and journalists repeatedly ("nearly 1,000" cases of police brutality, according to one study) during Summer 2020 while treating far-right protesters far more

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leniently (Thomas et al., 2020). This is despite the fact that the anti-racist Black Lives Matter protests were overwhelmingly peaceful. As the authors of a study on protests state: "the Black Lives Matter uprisings were remarkably nonviolent. When there was violence, very often police or counterprotesters were reportedly directing it *at* the protesters" (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2020).

The hopes of 2020's racial justice protests and, especially, the possibilities for institutional changes have not been met. However, it can be argued the multiracial protest movement itself is a sign of the existence of an anti-racist present. That being said, the institutional and systemic inertia is best exemplified by how the mainstream right in the United States is acting in multiple arenas to consolidate its minority hold on power by enacting policies and laws restricting voting access, banning books, legislating against the LGBTQA + community, and overturning women's rights. In the twelve months prior to April 2022, Republican-led politicians and right-wing Conservative media also worked to erase the memory of their supporters' attack on the United States government on January 6, 2020 (Chapter 7 has more on this). In that time, they also successfully stoked fears that teachers were influencing students about "critical race theory" (without defining what this meant), linked Democrats and non-Conservatives with pedophilia, and introduced and ratified laws that discriminated against gay and transgender people. In many states, Republicans made it more difficult to vote. In states like Florida and Texas, Republicans also passed laws banning books from public schools—the majority of these banned books were written by authors of color and were on topics related to race, gender, and sexuality (Brownworth, 2022).

All these policies did not appear out of nowhere. There were signals that the mainstream right would be taking anti-democratic actions—making it harder to vote, banning books, codifying anti-LGBTQA+ laws, restricting access to reproductive choices, appointing Conservative-supporting judges to the legal system—prior to 2022. But, the two main aspects of the so-called "culture war" that occurred since January 6, 2020—the right's use of "critical race theory" (CRT) to generate fear among a subset of the US population and thus gain votes for Republicans and the ongoing anti-LGBTQA+, and anti-choice policies and laws—bear further scrutiny in terms of how narratives of the far-right have become part of the mainstream right.

The issue of how anti-LGBTQA+ laws and book bans are increasing is connected with the increasing mainstreaming of far-right ideas and actions in US society and politics. This is, of course, exacerbated by a political system that rewards minority decision-making and resists change. While the question of mainstreaming of the far-right is not new (Belew, 2018; Blee, 2003; Miller-Idriss, 2018) and nor is my observation of it here, I suggest there is utility in studying *how* precisely this mainstreaming occurs in order to recognize, resist, and counter it in everyday spaces. There has been complacency about the far-right's mainstreaming practices with mainstream media often reporting on far-right actors without critiquing their ideas and goals. This is also the case in research as far-right violence has received less attention in security studies, as compared with violence associated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (Schuurman, 2019). Of course, Black and brown communities in the United States and globally have been warning against the far-right (Ara, 2022; Hampton, 2019; Trivedi, 2022); their voices, however, have not been listened to by policymakers and journalists who continue to ignore the hate spread by far-right actors while also continuing to platform their views. This lack of attention to the far-right from mainstream media, scholarship, and government, despite warnings from those who experienced the dangers of the far-right at the everyday level, indicates a need to learn more about how and why far-right extremists justify their calls for violence. It also indicates how whiteness—and almost all far-right extremists in the United States fall under this category—conceals hate.

This leads back to the issue of "how" mainstreaming of far-right ideas occurs as a useful question to focus on. For this project, studying this "how" is based on analyzing ways through which the US far-right, especially the extremist right, produces and utilizes popular culture in order to justify violence against those considered "others." For this book, the focus is on popular culture as I examine archetypes of far-right popular culture that are used to communicate far-right extremists' identities and interests. While there are multiple meanings of popular culture, I am working here with the understanding that popular culture is about the vernacular: texts, visuals, and audio that are meant for the public and consumed by the public. It is interactive—people speak, watch, wear clothes, write books,

and make music (Brummett, 2004).[1] This interactivity is central to both the production and consumption of popular culture in world politics.

Far-Right Violence in the United States and the World

Far-right violence is global and overt acts of violence are on the rise. Since 2015, far-right extremists were involved in 257 plots or attacks in the United States (O'Harrow et al., 2021) and white supremacists and other far-right extremists conducted two-thirds of the total number of terrorist plots and attacks in the United States in 2020 (CSIS, 2020). It is useful to keep in mind that far-right terrorism and extremism in the United States are likely undercounted as there is no unified definition of "far-right terrorism." Additionally, many acts of far-right violence are categorized as hate crimes, not as "terrorism" or "extremism." This means the number of far-right violence-influenced attacks is likely to be higher. This rise in far-right violent extremism is not just a United States issue. More than 50 people were killed by a white supremacist attacker in New Zealand in 2021, 77 were killed in Norway in 2011, and 11 were killed in Canada in 2018. Apart from killings, far-right extremists have been part of the military in Germany and the United States, and there is a rise in far-right-related referrals to the United Kingdom's preventing radicalization program Prevent (Belew, 2018; Dodd, 2022; Koehler, 2016; Lüdecke, 2021; O'Harrow et al., 2021; Schuetze, 2022). In some countries like India, Brazil, and Hungary and in a number of US states, the government itself is based on far-right ideas, meaning state authority is captured and wielded by the far-right who then promote policies based on far-right ideals, especially that of ethnonationalism and anti-minority policies (Iamamoto et al., 2021; Leidig, 2020; Worth, 2019). The past two decades of a "global war on terror" concentrated the attention of research and scholarship on Al Qaeda and Islamic State-related violence. This had the effect of sidelining research and policies about the far-right as warnings went unheeded (Johnson, 2012). In the past few years, the ongoing global pandemic offered far-right actors the opportunity to spread their ideologies by connecting them to Covid-19 conspiracies (PBS, 2021). As

[1] For a more detailed definition of popular culture, including ways to categorize it, please see Storey (2006).

McNeill-Wilson (2022) illustrates through an analysis of far-right Twitter sources, far-right actors framed Covid-19 in ways that questioned its reality while also arguing the pandemic was deliberately planned. This indicates how far-right actors are able to connect their xenophobic, anti-semitic, and misogynistic representations of others to everyday contexts and situations. This is partly what this book focuses upon—the narrative strategies that the far-right uses and which are familiar to us as they are part of how mainstream communication (and establishment of legitimacy) occurs.

The global far-right is anti-democratic, financially supported by wealthy donors, and works to deliberately constitute its identity as under threat from racial, religious, and sexual minorities. Indeed, Halperin argues far-right nationalists became popular in the post-World War Two period because of established conservative parties' reluctance to suppress populist pressures (Halperin, 2021). In countries ranging from Brazil, India, the United States, and elsewhere, a global far-right is consolidating itself and spreading its ideologies. Jafri and Barton (2022) offer examples of how the US "alt-right" movement inspired India's "trad" wing. This "trad" wing represents itself as "civilizational warriors" and promotes right-wing Hindu nationalism. Bal (2022) points out how Indian politicians are tacitly and overtly supporting Hindu nationalism, indicating a porous boundary between far-right extremists (who often support/call for violence) and far-right politicians (who usually deny responsibility for violence). It is a similar case in Brazil where Jair Bolsonario, the current president of Brazil's ideology has been described as "far-right neoliberal nationalism" (Iamamoto et al., 2021). While in India, an authoritarian atmosphere is connected with defending a particular version of Hinduism, in Brazil, authoritarianism and defense of neoliberalism are linked. Of course, there is the example of the rise of the Tea Party, the popularity of the "alt-right" and the related election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States. Describing Trump's election victory and Brexit, Brown et al., write, "While not far-right victories in and of themselves, these events helped to legitimize and operationalize a number of its ideas about race, culture, immigration and national identity" (Brown et al., 2021, p. 2). Thus, regular politics (e.g., US elections, UK's Brexit) helps justify far-right ideas and narratives.

In this book my focus is not on the broader far-right though, of course, far-right extremists and far-right politics are connected. I focus specifically on far-right *extremists*' identity constitution and legitimation

of violence. I suggest that analyzing far-right violent extremists' popular culture is useful to note strategies of mainstreaming and how they play out in different contexts. It is also useful to note how appeals to whiteness are made, especially in terms of the narrative strategies adopted. The formation of a whites-only or mainly white community is central to this communication but, depending on the type of popular culture source, this appeal is more or less overt. Historically, too, US far-right violent extremists have strategically operated to publicize their acts of violence and terror (e.g., lynching, Stormfront's online presence, etc.) while, at the same time, working to become part of mainstream US society (e.g., KKK participation in elections, the role of white women in upholding white supremacy, and so on). There is a common theme of dehumanizing others in both far-right extremists and the broader far-right's discourses about politics. This dehumanization is connected with power and domination as a central goal of the far-right is to seize and maintain power. This explains their resistance to any challenges or disruptions of the sociopolitical hierarchies that have underpinned societies in the United States (and globally).

Even small moves toward racial and social, political, and economic equality for historically marginalized communities in the United States and around the world are taken to be challenges to the status of whiteness and white superiority that is foundational to much of the far-right identity formation. There is, then, a deliberate attempt to resist democratic transformations and moves, with extensive funding provided to oppose policies and legislations that might provide equal rights for all communities (Waring, 2020). In the United States, this resistance to democracy can be seen in Republicans' and other right-wing extremists' prohibiting teaching of histories about historically marginalized peoples and events, laws curtailing civil rights for Black and brown communities, and voting restrictions.

Globally, there is a growing far-right network funded by wealthy donors who support these anti-democratic policies This is connected to the vast right-wing media ecosystem (Kotch, 2020; Waring, 2020) which helps spread far-right extremist ideas. This well-funded right-wing global network also connects ideas and people from India, Brazil, the United States, and Europe. Far-right extremism manifests itself in different yet related ways around the world but with shared goals of ethnonationalist domination and encouragement of violence against those deemed "others." While the United States is the main focus of this project, its

experiences with white supremacy and its history of enslaving Black people have similarities with other similar societies like Brazil. These similarities can be noted not just in a similar history of enslavement and related development of a racialized hierarchy in society but also in how far-right extremists have deliberately worked to become part of everyday life. Events in the United States do not happen in isolation; they are part of a broader network of right-wing politics and influence right-wing politics globally (Ruediger, 2021). Two main global patterns can be emphasized: one, there are systemic similarities in the growth and place of far-right extremism in various societies around the world, especially their emergence in and continuation of colonial and imperial modes of domination and hierarchy. For the United States, its identity as a society that enslaved other humans is connected with how racial and sexual minorities are conceptualized in politics and in the everyday. Two, far-right extremists are mimicking and copying each other, as noted above. There is a global spread of ideas and also a copying of violent attacks, with previous far-right attackers held up as models to emulate and learn from (Baele et al., 2020; Macklin, 2022). Both these aspects of the global far-right mean it is useful to identify the discursive practices by which far-right extremists constitute theirs and others' identities and, especially, how they legitimate the use of violence against others.

As other scholars have discussed in more detail, the US far-right exists as part of a broader far-right global network. There is increasing globalization of far-right ideas, such as the spread of QAnon and sovereign citizen ideas from the United States to abroad (Hermansson et al., 2020; Miller-Idriss, 2020; Mudde, 2019; Wodak, 2020). There is also a growing global network of far-right activists. The man who shot dead 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019 was influenced by ideas circulating within the US (and global) far-right and had traveled to Europe. His actions and his manifesto continue to inspire others to commit similar attacks (Noack, 2019; Stanley-Becker & Harwell, 2022). In terms of both ideas and actions, the far-right is already global. As Campion and Poynting write, "a profound distrust of democracy" characterizes the far-right (2021, p. 2) and this distrust is constructed, communicated, and legitimate in different contexts, including in and through far-right popular culture.

In the United States, the far-right context is also interconnected with its legacy of slavery and its long history of enslaving people of African background. This is especially true with regard to formations of whiteness

and how whiteness has been constructed and continued in the United States in relation to people who were enslaved. One important event is the interpretations of the US Civil War in US culture—for scholarship on far-right extremism, the legacy of the civil war and, especially, its outcomes including continued discrimination faced by Black Americans are yet to be reckoned with as the backlash to the 1619 project indicate (Hannah-Jones, 2021; Serwer, 2019). From an International Relations (IR) perspective, as this book is from, the US Civil War plays an important role in the self-identity formation of white supremacists and white nationalists in the United States and also in the community formation of the broader US far-right. As Berger states regarding how extremists are formed, the emphasis is on the legitimacy of "in groups." In-groups have legitimacy, out-groups do not (Berger, 2018, p. 53). In-groups require a continued out-group to relate to. As Berger states:

> Members of an in-group directly experience their personal beliefs and their current practices (although those experiences may be selective and incomplete). In contrast, information about outgroup beliefs and practices usually includes a mix of truth, interpretation, and fiction. As a movement shifts toward extremism, this mix may shift toward fiction and become more toxic, aggressively highlighting negative data points and ignoring or rebutting positive data points (Berger, 2018, p. 57).

For the US far-right, the US Civil War and the Lost Cause narrative play important roles that many IR extremism and terrorism scholars tend to ignore (Dixit & Miller, 2022). These events contribute to the establishment and continued re-affirmation of a US far-right extremist identity that both invisibilizes whiteness (because being a racist remains relatively taboo) while utilizing falsehoods (the Lost Cause narrative is an inaccurate representation about the origins of the US Civil War) as truth.

Defining Terms

In terms of language use, "right-wing extremism" and "far-right extremism" are used interchangeably in this book. There is no one agreed-upon definition for "far-right" and "right-wing" extremism. Norris argues far-right and right-wing political parties are a cluster. Mudde suggests the different ideological commitments of far-right extremists mean clear conceptual criteria are difficult to produce. Both

Norris and Mudde are cited in Gaston (2017). The Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right defines "right-wing extremism" as:

> … those who regard social inequality as inevitable, natural or even desirable. Most perpetrators of right-wing violence adhere to a far-right mix of anti-egalitarianism, nativism, and authoritarianism. These ideological constructs and the beliefs that are strongly associated with them—such as racism and conspiratorial thinking—produce a set of political and social groups considered as enemies of and legitimate targets for the far right. (Assoudeh & Weinberg, 2021)

Similarly, the Center for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo discusses the relationship between right-wing extremism and right-wing violent extremism as:

> One of the defining characteristics of extremism in general and right-wing extremism in particular is that it justifies the use of violence—now or in the future.
>
> Right-wing extremist movements tend to point out two main categories of enemies toward whom violence, threats and harassment may be justified: the external enemy (e.g. Jews, Islam/Muslims, Communism), and the internal enemy (e.g. national or racial "traitors", political opponents, the Establishment, multiculturalists, or the mainstream media). Sometimes such ideas materialize into actual violent attacks but harassment, threats and hate speech is far more common (C-Rex, www).

This book's understanding of far-right extremism and far-right violent extremism is in line with these definitions. The far-right and right-wing are terms that shift over time. Cas Mudde writes there is "no academic consensus…" and the "dominant term" has been changing throughout after World War Two (Mudde, 2019, p. 6). On a related note, there is an overview of definitions of right-wing extremism in Carter (2018), with a description of groups in the US context in Ford (2017). Caiani et al., quote Mudde who found at least twenty-six definitions in scholarship about right-wing extremism (Mudde in Caiani et al., 2012). Ford (2017) has a taxonomy of the US far-right and Perliger (2020, pp. 17–28) provides another typology based on ideological categorization. For this book, "far-right extremism" is used to describe individuals and groups that support and promote racist, xenophobic, ethnonationalist, anti-LGBTQA, antisemitic, and misogynist ideas. "Far-right extremist"

sources then are texts, films, images, and audio that promote such ideas. Similarly, it is my understanding that "white supremacy" is both structurally embedded norms and laws in societies such as the United States and also the invocation to use violence to maintain whiteness and white racial domination.

Regarding the question of how to study far-right violent extremism, a key concern of this book is how far-right extremists in the United States have legitimated their calls for violence. It is, therefore, useful to analyze their public discourses. Discourse analysis is appropriate for this project as I seek to illustrate how particular resources (a journal, a meme, an autobiography) are used to constitute legitimacy for the far-right extremist identity and goals. As Ruth Wodak writes, discursive strategies of justification and legitimation and of "victim/perpetrator reversal" are commonly noted in how the broader far-right (in her case) communicates (Wodak, 2015). In this book, I note similar strategies among far-right extremists as well, indicating a blurred boundary between far-right extremism and far-right politics. The sources studied in Chapters 4 to 6 are chosen as exemplary of a particular type of popular culture—Chapter 4 analyzes a journal, Chapter 5 studies memes, and Chapter 6 manifestoes as well as a well-known book that is connected to far-right violence. These chapters incorporate textual and visual culture as sources and are specifically chosen as illustrative cases of how white power is both visible (these are all popular culture texts of and related to the far-right) and invisible (the discursive strategies analyzed through these archetypes of popular culture are not new and nor are they unfamiliar). These artefacts are also ways through which far-right extremist ideas have become popular; so, they are both products of the far-right in that they were produced by people identified as the far-right. They are also ways through which the far-right has spread their messages and become popular.

Methodologically, the book draws upon critical terrorism studies and poststructural discourse analysis as well as on discursive psychology to analyze these popular culture archetypes. Chapter 2 expands upon this methodology and offers an outline of the research method used for this project. In short, following discourse analytical scholarship in IR and security studies, this book takes discourses—language and practices as they are used by various actors—as constitutive of identities and interests in global politics. Analyzing language and practices is a useful methodological approach for studying how far-right extremists publicly communicate and spread their ideas (Wodak, 2015). The method of discourse analysis in

this book is drawn from IR but also from discursive psychology. Discursive psychology states that discourse is the main site for human action and it is "action-oriented" and "situated" (Potter, 2012). This means language *does* things as it is used—like shape popular perceptions, invisibilize hate and white supremacy, and legitimate violence as in the case of far-right extremists.

While there are, of course, multiple avenues for analyzing far-right extremists' popular culture narratives, this book situates itself in terrorism/security studies in International Relations (IR). Specifically, I see this research as part of a broad move in critical terrorism studies (CTS) toward analyzing the role played by whiteness and white supremacy in constructing meanings of terrorism and counterterrorism (Abu-Bakare, 2020; Groothuis, 2020; Dixit and Miller, 2022). As such, it contributes to moving CTS forward in two main directions. One, recent research on terrorism journals have shown there remains a lack of research on and about the far-right within terrorism studies (Schuurman, 2019). When there is increasing research on far-right extremism, historical cases and the long histories of white supremacist terrorism are often underdiscussed (Dixit & Miller, 2022; Meier, 2022). As will be detailed further in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, while there is increasing amount of scholarship on right-wing populism and right-wing politics, research on far-right violence remains less popular as compared to other forms of violent extremism. This is especially the case regarding popular culture of and by the far-right, an area that remains relatively underexplored. Popular culture analysis contributes to our understanding of narrative strategies of normalization adopted by far-right extremists. It illustrates how authority—of their identities and goals—is constructed and communicated. This book is a small attempt to address the intersection of far-right extremist studies and popular culture research in critical terrorism studies.

The second main contribution this book hopes to make to the study of "terrorism" and political violence is related to the first. This book argues that connections between far-right terrorism and whiteness/white supremacy need to be further studied, especially the discursive-rhetorical-strategies adopted by the far-right which do the work of invisibilizing whiteness in public discourses. Studying these connections can illustrate how, precisely, race and whiteness play a central role in processes of legitimation of far-right violence in that, even when calls for violence are explicit, such calls are often ignored and deemed less serious by mainstream politics and media (Castle, 2020). At the same time, examining

race and whiteness in historical cases of far-right violence (e.g., lynching, the actions of the Ku Klux Klan, and the active online presence of Stormfront even in the days before the ubiquity of social media) directs our attention to *how* far-right violence has not necessarily been hidden in United States history. On the contrary, it is often extremely public and visible and, yet, it remains relatively under-examined in terrorism studies, as a whole (see Chapter 3).

There have been recent moves toward increasing research on far-right extremism in security studies and an increasing focus on white supremacy's connections to political violence. Recent work on far-right terrorism from within IR's security studies subfield includes Byman (2022) which examines the development of a global white power movement. In it, Byman traces connections between different far-right actors and ideologies, while reminding readers there is a lack of cohesion and leadership in this transnational movement (Byman, 2022). While Byman's emphasis on the transnational dimensions of the white power movement is useful in a subfield that tends to limit scholarship on white supremacy and the far-right to national or regional level analyses, Byman also does not discuss state violence and nor does he engage deeply with the long-term impacts of colonialism (globally) and US events such as the US Civil War. These gaps mean global white power appears to have emerged only recently, instead of being part of the histories and social conditions of many countries. Another recent book from the security studies standpoint examines the far-right in the United States. Arie Perliger's *American Zealots* is subtitled "inside right-wing domestic terrorism" (Perliger, 2020). Perliger discusses the challenges of analyzing a topic where there is no consensus on what terms like "far-right" mean and goes on to outline historical examples before moving on to describe tactics, perpetrators, current discourses, and the future of the "American far-right" (2020). The book is an overview of various far-right movements in the United States, drawing upon extensive data to analyze ideological patterns, rise and fall, and the current status of far-right violence in the United States.

While security studies is increasing research on far-right extremism as distinct from and yet related to far-right populism and politics, the topic is not new in related disciplines. Related disciplines such as criminology, sociology, and history have extensively researched far-right violence. There is also a long history of scholars from the Black feminist and Black radical traditions theorizing and explaining white violence in the United

States. Recent scholarship on far-right extremism from outside of IR include Miller-Idriss' study on how ideologies connected to the far-right have become part of everyday contexts, especially among young people (Miller-Idriss, 2019), Hermansson et al.'s work on the globalization of the so-called "alt-right" (2020), and Lavin (2020)'s narrative of how they entered into white supremacist spaces online. On the issue of normalization and mainstreaming of the far-right, sociologists Wodak (2020) and Mondon and Winters (2020) study the broad far-right (Wodak) and the far-right in the United States and France (Mondon and Winters). With regard to the US, historians Belew (2018), Blee (2003) and Cox (2003) are among those who have studied the historical actions of the far-right in the United States and how those impact how we know about the far-right today. Black feminist scholars take a broader view of violence, critiquing the state and its violence, the violence perpetrated by law enforcement, and the impacts of long-term structural violence on Black (and other minority) communities (e.g. Alexander, 2020; Lorde, 2012; Ritchie, 2017). They, thus, interrogate definitions of "far-right" and "non-state," emphasizing that violence against Black communities has historically been part of the state and its agents' (e.g. law enforcement) interactions with Black communities, especially Black women. Taking the perspective of minority communities, then, far-right violence would not be confined to specific events or groups; instead, far-right violence is understood as part of how the state and society often function in relation to their uses of violence against Black and other historically-marginalized communities. This changes the definition of "violence." Examining violence from the perspective of the historically marginalized, the margin becomes a space of "radical openness" (hooks, 1989) from which a different viewpoint and a different understanding of violence and its effects are possible.

On Reflexivity

After explaining in the previous paragraph how a hooks-inspired analysis would be located in and from the margins, it would seem odd and antithetical to that spirit of radical openness to then focus on far-right discourses for this book. I have thought about this, myself—is it the case that I am giving more—and unneeded—publicity to far-right violent actors by analyzing their popular culture artefacts? Is this partly what they would want? Perhaps. But, I hope Chapters 4, 5, and 6 do not glorify far-right discourses or personalities. Instead, they outline how strategies of

normalization-similar strategies as used in various mainstream contexts—are common in far-right circles as well. Recognizing them and how they are used partly explains the rapid back and forth moves between the mainstream and the far-right of ideas and issues that used to remain within far-right circles.

I was—like many in the United States—horrified by the events of Charlottesville in 2017 when far-right extremists openly walked through the streets of the city, shouting racist slogans and committing violence. Yet, police responses were minimal and we now know there were warnings provided to the police and to the local government, which were ignored (Augenstein, 2017; Castle, 2020; Hunton & Williams, LLP, 2017). A year before the events of Charlottesville, the United States had elected Donald Trump who had received strong support from the "alt-right" a loosely aligned group that promoted hate and white nationalism. When I first started thinking about this book, I wanted to understand the ways in which those supposed to make policies and safeguard public safety were ignoring warnings about the far-right threats as in Charlottesville. But that was not all. I live about two hours (by car) south of Charlottesville and teach at a large public university in the region. It was disturbing and, if I might put it plainly, terrifying to watch groups of far-right extremists shouting "You will not replace us!" as they walked through the grounds of the University of Virginia. But, for many Black people in Charlottesville, the rage and racism evidenced that day in 2017 was not new and nor has much changed since (Shapira, 2020). Hopes that the events of 2017 would lead to a reckoning on race and to policies to reduce racial inequities were fading.

In this book, I wanted to explore these two dimensions: one, how far-right extremists in the United States were mainstreaming their views with what seemed to be very little pushback from the majority of media, politicians, and population. How was it that the mainstream public and the state apparently did not see the far-right as a major threat to democracy and to society all the while historically marginalized communities were warning them? Second, how there seems to be a lack of organized efforts to reduce racial inequalities, with the majority of white people either ignoring far-right threats or avoiding discussing them altogether. When there was a multiracial large-scale protest movement (after the police killing of George Floyd in 2020), the movement's goals were seemed to be eventually ignored and discounted. In my research, I study the interconnections of language use and power. How are particular ideologies

publicly legitimated? What interests are produced? What are the identities of the speaker and the "spoken of"? These are the questions that motivated this project as well even as the context where I began thinking of them has changed.

In the process of writing this book—especially as the process encompassed the beginning and continuation of the global pandemic—the mainstreaming of far-right views into US society became more widespread (Primack & Contreras, 2021; Mondon & Vaughan, 2021). In 2022, does it make sense to produce a book that discusses far-right extremist ideas and communication? One that analyzes far-right popular culture? I have wrestled with these questions. I see this book as a starting point to note how far-right extremists' narratives utilize discursive practices that are part of the mainstream in order to communicate hate and violence. This allows them to be both public and to conceal hate. From a scholarly perspective, it is, of course, true scholars from US history and politics, Black radical thought, sociology, and gender studies have examined the effects of white supremacist violence in the United States. Yet, as described in Chapters 2 and 3 especially, there remains a lack of research about the far-right in security studies and terrorism studies and in International Relations (IR) more broadly. This book hopes to continue discussions about far-right violence in these subfields while acknowledging the research that already exists in disciplines outside of security and terrorism studies.

A review of books with "history of terrorism" or "terrorism reader" in their titles indicates an absence of discussion of white supremacist violence in the present or the past (see Chapter 2). Examining the US government's response to violence indicates a lack of focus on white supremacist violence and on far-right violence. This can be seen in both the lack of emphasis on white supremacist violence in the government's "countering violent extremism" programs and in the silence about far-right violence in Congressional hearings and discussions (Dixit & Miller, 2022). US mainstream media, too, has not taken the threat of far-right violence seriously. Instead, there have been admiring profiles of "alt-right" figures like Milo Yiannopoulos and Richard Spencer, and of people like Renaud Camus (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6) that often elide their racism. Furthermore, there is an increasingly global network of far-right actors including those who openly promote hate and bigotry. However, there is not a similarly-strong global anti-fascist or anti-white supremacist network. Part of the explanation for this absence could be that the rise of the far-right is not

taken as a serious threat by many. It is definitely taken as a threat by those it affects most.

For these reasons, I think examining *how* far-right extremists legitimate hate and, often, promote violence is useful. In this book, I focus on the how—how do far-right extremists legitimate violence and hate? What are the ways in which they produce and use various popular culture artefacts—journals, comics, autobiographies—to do so? The argument here is that illustrating the discursive practices or strategies by which the legitimation of far-right violence occurs means it is possible to recognize similar strategies outside of far-right extremist narratives. It is possible to dismantle far-right discourses by pointing out how they are put together. Thus, while the book examines far-right extremist popular culture, it does so to systematically outline the ways through which far-right extremists construct and communicate identities and interests. It is my hope that, by making these discursive strategies visible, it is possible to recognize and dismantle the far-right's ongoing presence in society.

Organization of Chapters

Following this introductory chapter, the next chapter, Chapter 2, gives an overview of some of the relevant research on race in IR, focusing specifically on security studies and terrorism studies. Some key themes and sources are analyzed to note how race is understood in IR but, more specifically, how it remains underacknowledged in research on security and terrorism. The chapter includes the outcomes of a brief survey of books about terrorism and notes how white supremacist violence and racist violence more generally is rarely included in such books. Furthermore, a methodological plan for studying far-right extremist discourses is outlined, drawing upon existing scholarship on whiteness and on the discourse/narrative analytical approaches from discursive psychology.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the United States and draws upon literature outside of IR and security studies to provide an overview of how far-right extremism in the United States has been studied. It discusses the role played by whiteness in how violence, especially far-right violence, is understood in the United States. Three examples—the practice of lynching, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and the presence of Stormfront online—are provided as examples of how whiteness has worked to "invisibilize" far-right violence. In other words, despite lynching being common in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, it is rarely mentioned in books about terrorism in the United States. Similarly, the rise and fall (and rise and fall) of the Klan often occupies a small part of broader discussions on terrorism and extremism in the United States. Similarly, the active presence of Stormfront—a neo-Nazi organization—online since the early days of the Internet is often not connected to discussions about online extremism and terrorism. All these actions, thus, invisibilize public far-right violence—lynching, the presence of the Klan, and Stormfront all occurred in the public sphere—and thus erase its systemic and historic presence in US society and politics. By reviewing far-right extremism through the lens of race and, specifically, whiteness, Chapter 3 considers how our understandings of terrorism in the United States would be affected once we take seriously these far-right violences that have been part of the United States. The chapter ends with an overview of the popular culture archetypes that will be analyzed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Chapters 4 to 6 illustrate the work done by far-right extremists' discursive practices to justify racism and legitimate of violence. Each of the chapters analyzes a specific type of popular culture artifact of the US far-right: Chapter 4 reviews the *American Renaissance* magazine, Chapter 5 images and the Pepe the Frog meme specifically, and Chapter 6 analyzes manifestoes or self-narratives along with a well-known text that is often referred to by the far-right. Chapter 7 is the conclusion of the book, offering some pathways for future research on preventing and countering far-right extremism.

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CHAPTER 2

Race, International Relations, White Supremacy, and Methodology

Introduction: Race and/in the Study of International Relations

As Robbie Shilliam's discussions of International Relations (IR) scholars who have engaged with issues of race and world politics indicates, there have always been ongoing conversations about race in IR (Shilliam, 2020). Despite this, however, mainstream IR scholarship on the international system has historically been relatively silent on race. Some scholars who have discussed racialization and the structuring of world order include Vucetic (2011), Hobson (2012), Darby (2000), Ling (2013), Chowdhry and Nair (2003). Other IR scholars have theorized how race impacts the identity of IR and how IR excludes Global South and Subaltern perspectives (Aneivas et al., 2014; Henderson, 2013; Krishna, 2001; Ling, 2014; Rutazibwa, 2020b; Rutazibwa & Shilliam, 2020; Sabaratnam, 2020; Vitalis, 2017). A number of these scholars concentrate on understanding "the international" and how that has often ignored and silenced imperial processes that produce and sustain racial hierarchies in the international system (e.g., Darby, 2015; Rutazibwa, 2020a; Vitalis, 2017). On the subject of race and the international, Sajed (2013) discusses how racial hierarchies and colonial differences have constituted global politics, with an ongoing question being about how to theorize and engage with difference. Other scholars, such as Jones (2013) study

P. Dixit, *Race, Popular Culture, and Far-right Extremism in the United States*, Global Political Sociology,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10820-4_2

how terms such as "state failure" and "good governance" have an imperial history and are not neutral. Discussing the place of Native Americans in IR, Crawford suggests their absence from IR theorizing indicates how their politics and experiences are taken to be marginal to global politics "because Indigenous people don't count as agents in our disciplinary scheme of agents and structures" (Crawford, 2017, p. 102). She adds that taking Native American politics and history seriously would mean we would have to rethink the structures that have excluded them. Furthermore, she asks whether it is possible to integrate Native Americans into the current (oppressive, exclusionary) structures of IR (Crawford, 2017, p. 103). Part of these exclusionary structures is the construction of whiteness or of a white-centric way of understanding global politics. This has had the effect of normalizing whiteness or normalizing a Eurocentric standpoint of doing research in IR.

While the discussion of and on race is increasing and ongoing, a few IR scholars have focused exclusively on whiteness and white supremacy and their connections to knowledge production, including histories of international relations and political science. Henderson (2013) outlines how racism in the form of white supremacy is "hidden in plain view" in IR theory and how this has been perpetuated in IR theories and practices. An aspect of scholarship on race and/in IR is that many scholars who theorize and write about race remain embedded in Global North institutions, many of which perpetuate similar dynamics as are criticized by these scholars. This embeddedness in Global North institutions means many of us are part of processes that have hidden white supremacist foundations of our own institutions and the disciplines we research and teach in/about. It is a similar case with security and terrorism studies.

Race and/in Security and Terrorism Studies

If the scholarship on race in/and IR is growing but sparse, the situation in security studies is even more so (Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3). Recent scholarship has explored racism in Foucauldian security studies (Howell & Richter-Montpetit, 2018) and asked whether securitization theory is racist, giving the answer as "yes" (Howell & Richter-Montpetit, 2019). This view of securitization theory as racist was contested by many,

including by its founders (Wæver & Buzan, 2020).[1] Lene Hansen, whose work was also criticized in the original article, responded in (Hansen, 2020). It is beyond the scope of this review to decide whether or not securitization theory is racist. Instead, as Coleman (2021) outlines, attention to race and racialization indicates how colonialism and racism are fundamental to the origins of security studies, especially in shaping ontological assumptions about what counts as important (Coleman, 2021, p. 69). In other words, as Coleman points out, what is considered liberal, "normal" politics is interconnected with and built upon violence (Coleman, 2021, p. 72). Thus, the issue in security studies is not just whether or not a particular approach is racist; it is that the entire field is built upon particular assumptions about who is deemed important and which topics matter for study.

Continuing with a review of how race has been studied in/as part of security studies, Persaud (2019) relates questions of race and racialization to US foreign policy. Khalid (2020) discusses the question of gender as interconnected with race and how that has been central (if unacknowledged) in understandings of security. Adamson (2019) asks whether we can decolonize security studies. She draws on imperial legacies and global inequalities to illustrate how they affect both the conditions of the global political and security order and knowledge production about security. She ends with a brief discussion of what "decolonized" security studies could be like, pointing out "decolonization" means the transformation of structures and not just diversifying (2019, pp. 132–133). While Adamson's is a useful start to the discussion about decolonizing security studies, there is a gap regarding discussions about how a specific understanding of security is centered in these discussions—whether mainstream or critical (Coleman, 2021, p. 73). A related aspect in all these is the limited discussion of white supremacy as a methodological framing and as a reality that shapes knowledge of security issues though there was a Special Issue of the journal *Security Dialogue* that centered "race and racism in critical security studies" (Salter, et al, 2021) On the whole, however, even when discussing North–South inequities and the legacies of colonialism, many race-related scholarships in security studies tend to talk of race abstractly rather than name white supremacy and the elevation

[1] Thanks to a reviewer for their suggestions to provide additional context.

Table 2.1 Selection of books on terrorism and their mentions (or otherwise) of "racial terrorism", the Ku Klux Klan, and lynching

Book or journal article	*Discussion of "racial terrorism"—Y/N?*	*Ku Klux Klan mentioned?*	*Discussion of lynching?*
Berger, J. M. (2018). *Extremism*. MIT Press (https://books.google.com/books?id=M5hnDwAAQBAJ)	No	1 mention, page 140	No
Brainard, J. (2019). *The Global Threat of Terrorism*. Greenhaven Publishing LLC (https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Global_Threat_of_Terrorism/w7nXDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)	No	Mentioned once on page 24	No
Chaliand, G. and Blin, A. (2016). *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to ISIS*. University of California Press (https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_History_of_Terrorism/U6swDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)	No	Yes, mentioned in the introduction, page 9. Also mentioned on page 407 under a section on "The New Terrorists"	Mentioned on pages 9 and 253
Combs, C. C. (2017). *Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis (https://www.academia.edu/download/66617694/5cca2dbfd4fe963f65b29bb0753f2c8b9e7c.pdf)	No	Mentioned, but no section or chapter	Mentioned once

Book or journal article	*Discussion of "racial terrorism"—Y/N?*	*Ku Klux Klan mentioned?*	*Discussion of lynching?*
Crenshaw, M. (2011). *Explaining Terrorism: Causes, Processes, and Consequences.* Routledge, Taylor & Francis (https://www.google.com/books/edition/Explaining_Terrorism/GRQEQgAACAAJ?hl=en)	No	No	No
Crenshaw, M. and Pimlott, J. (2015). *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism.* Taylor & Francis (https://www.google.com/books/edition/International_Encyclopedia_of_Terrorism/j4p4CAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)	Mentions terrorism linked to racism but does not specifically say "racial terrorism"	Mentioned 5 times, pages are not specifically indicated	Mentioned 5 times, pages are not specifically indicated
Crenshaw, M. and Pimlott, J. (2019). Encyclopedia of World Terrorism. Taylor & Francis (https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=IuOgDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT14&dq=books+on+terrorism&ots=44xwG70zi8&sig=9JIFqEv5iNF9LXbQmWag5H93ocA#v=onepage&q=books%20on%20terrorism&f=false)	Mentions terrorism related to racism but does not specifically say "racial terrorism"	Mentioned once, page not specified	Mentioned twice, pages not specified

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Book or journal article	*Discussion of "racial terrorism"—Y/N?*	*Ku Klux Klan mentioned?*	*Discussion of lynching?*
Dietze, C. and Verhoeven, C. (2021). *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism*. Oxford University Press (https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Oxford_Handbook_of_the_History_of_Te/FfNQEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)	No	Mentioned 3 times throughout the text on pages 5, 23, and 204	No
English, R. (2021). *The Cambridge History of Terrorism*. Cambridge University Press (https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Cambridge_History_of_Terrorism/vzorEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=the+cambridge+history+of+terrorism&printsec=frontcover)	Mentioned 5 times, pages 362, 365, 375, 378, and 680	Mentioned 12 times throughout text	Mentioned 5 times throughout text, pages 368, 369, 420, 451, and 682
Erlenbusch-Anderson, V. 2018. *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Violence, Empire*. Columbia University Press (https://books.google.com/books?id=B0tBDwAAQBAJ)	No	No	A citation, but not discussed in the main text

Book or journal article	*Discussion of "racial terrorism"—Y/N?*	*Ku Klux Klan mentioned?*	*Discussion of lynching?*
Gaibulloev, K. and Sandler, T. (2019). What We Have Learned About Terrorism Since 9/11. *Journal of Economic Literature, 57*(2), 275–328 (https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.20181444)	No	No	No
Hoffman, B. (2021). *Inside Terrorism Revised & Enlarged Edition by Hoffman, Bruce (2006) Paperback* (Revised & enlarged edition). Columbia University Press, 2006 (https://www.google.com/books/edition/Inside_Terrorism/r8I0DwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)	No	2–3 citations in index No separate chapter or section	No
LaFree, G. and Freilich, J. D. (2016). *The Handbook of the Criminology of Terrorism.* Wiley (https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Handbook_of_the_Criminology_of_Terro/KRyfDQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)	Racial terrorism is not specifically mentioned but terrorism motivated by racist intentions is mentioned several times	Mentioned 3 times on pages 142, 297, and 414	Mentioned twice, pages 386 and 414
Laqueur, W. and Wall, C. (2018). *The Future of Terrorism: ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Alt-Right*. St. Martin's Press (https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315083483)	No	Mentioned 4 times, pages 33, 34, 90, and 174	Mentioned once on page 174

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Book or journal article	*Discussion of "racial terrorism"—Y/N?*	*Ku Klux Klan mentioned?*	*Discussion of lynching?*
Law, R. D. (2016). *Terrorism: A History*. Wiley (https://books.google.com/books?id=gyP3DAAAQBAJ)	Yes	Yes, has a section within the "White Supremacy and American Racial Terrorism" chapter (Chapter 8)	Yes (14 results when searched)
Martin, G. (2016). *Essentials of Terrorism: Concepts and Controversies*. Sage (https://books.google.com/books?id=ZDlwCgAAQBAJ)	Some discussions of the connection between race and terrorism, especially regarding orientation, but no specific discussion of "racial terrorism"	Yes, is mentioned as "white racial supremacist organization" and "longstanding racist movement" in the main text	Yes, once
Martin, G. (2020). *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues*. Sage (https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=UBk0DwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=books+on+terrorism&ots=skB0sW14oU&sig=FiS3yk7jiCX6W_ZhUXXzy6O7XYM#v=onepage&q=books%20on%20terrorism&f=false)	No	Yes, mentioned 12 times, pages numbers were not specifically indicated	Yes, mentioned 4 times, pages were not specifically indicated
Nacos, Brigitte L. (2019). *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. Routledge, Taylor, and Francis (https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315641270/terrorism-counterterrorism-brigitte-nacos)	No	Has a small section	Mentioned twice

Book or journal article	*Discussion of "racial terrorism"—Y/N?*	*Ku Klux Klan mentioned?*	*Discussion of lynching?*
Sandler, T. (2018). *Terrorism: What Everyone Needs to Know®*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press (https://www.google.com/books/edition/Terrorism/529oDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&bsq=ku%20klux%20klan)	No	Briefly mentioned once in the main text as an "example of right-wing terrorist group" and once in the index	No
Shapiro, Jacob N. 2013. *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations.* Princeton University Press (https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Terrorist_s_Dilemma/qWyYDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)	No	Mentioned in the glossary	No
Spindlove, J. R. and Simonsen, C. E. (2017). *Terrorism Today: The Past, The Players, The Future*. Pearson (https://www.google.com/books/edition/Terrorism_Today/LUo_vgAACAAJ?hl=en)	No	Mentioned in the table of contents. Page 53 in Chapter Three "The United States of America"	Could not search but most likely mentioned it

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Book or journal article	*Discussion of "racial terrorism"—Y/N?*	*Ku Klux Klan mentioned?*	*Discussion of lynching?*
Stohl, M. (2020). *The Politics of Terrorism*. CRC Press (https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Y4r1DwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT12&dq=books+on+terrorism&ots=JJgUm5qRaz&sig=u2Oju_OQYC8UK2_ytUdLXrOLfTY#v=onepage&q=books%20on%20terrorism&f=false)	Yes, uses the term "racial terrorism and racial terrorists" 4 times	Mentioned 6 times. pages are not specified	Mentioned once, page not specified
Stern, J. (2009). *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*. United States: HarperCollins e-books (https://www.google.com/books/edition/Terror_in_the_Name_of_God/13iAVXvu6jQC?hl=en&gbpv=0)	No	No	No
Richards, A. (2015). *Conceptualizing Terrorism*. Oxford University Press (https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=2pOFCgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=books+on+terrorism&ots=aWl9D3Lif-&sig=VILWFus8Wsp_iBSoXNPijRbhtFE#v=onepage&q=books%20on%20terrorism&f=false)	No	No	Mentioned once on page 123

Book or journal article	*Discussion of "racial terrorism"—Y/N?*	*Ku Klux Klan mentioned?*	*Discussion of lynching?*
Townshend, C. (2018). *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press (https://books.google.com/books?id=TVZYDwAAQBAJ)	No	Mentioned twice	Mentioned twice
White, J. R. (2016). *Terrorism and Homeland Security*. Cengage Learning (https://books.google.com/books?id=XL8aCgAAQBAJ)	Yes, including the definition as "a dominant group using violence to intimidate a racial minority" (p. 411)	Yes. Mentions the KKK has "a long history of domestic terrorism" (p. 299) and that the KKK "historically has practiced racial terrorism" (p. 411)	used in a definition in the glossary
Wilkinson, P. (2016). *Political Terrorism*. Macmillan Education (https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=zjxdDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA8&dq=books+on+terrorism&ots=J8IEjpZBcq&sig=Cp_VTI6y9E6JyCEfW9yj3O_e-_E#v=onepage&q=books%20on%20terrorism&f=false)	No	Mentioned once on page 120	Mentioned once on page 17

Table 2.2 With selected terms (race, racism, racialization, whiteness, white supremacy, empire, imperial, colonial, colonialism) in the title of articles, from December 2000 to December 2021

Journal name	*Race*	*Racialization*	*Racism*	*Whiteness*	*White supremacy*	*Colonial/colonialism*	*Empire/imperial*
International Security	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	1(0)	1(1)	3(3)
Security Studies	2(2)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	1(1)	3(3)
Journal of Global Security Studies	1(1)	0(1)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	4(1)
Journal of Conflict Resolution	0(0)	1(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	2(2)	0(0)
Journal of Peace Research	6(2)	2(0)	1(1)	0(0)	0(0)	4(3)	2(2)
Security Dialogue	27(5)	2(0)	19(2)	6(0)	1(0)	9(3)	10(8)

*Same article

*Refers to the one article published in the Journal of Global Security Studies during the period 2016–2020 with both the terms ("race" and "empire/imperial") in its title

Note The figures inside brackets indicate results for December 2000–December 2020, indicating the majority of the results are from 2021. *The Journal of Global Security Studies* published its first issue in 2016

Table 2.3 With selected terms (race, racism, racialization, whiteness, white supremacy) in the expanded keyword search, from December 2000 to December 2021

Journal Name	*Race*	*Racialization*	*Racism*	*Whiteness*	*White Supremacy*
International Security	0	0	0	0	0
Security Studies	0	0	0	0	0
Journal of Global Security Studies	2 (1)	0	0	0	0
Journal of Conflict Resolution	2(0)	0	0	0	0
Journal of Peace Research	2(0)	0	0	0	0
Security Dialogue	12(6)	3(0)	4(2)	1(0)	0

Journals searched:
a. *International Security*,
b. *Security Studies*,
c. *Journal of Global Security Studies*,
d. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*,
e. *Journal of Peace Research*,
f. *Security Dialogue*
Note The figures in brackets are from December 2000–December 2020 if there have been changes

of whiteness as structural contexts within which global orders and knowledge production operate. It is worth asking then: how is this discussion of the absence of race-based analysis of security related to the topic of this book, which is about US far-right extremist discourses? A similar process regarding the absence of race, specifically whiteness and white supremacy as a framework for analysis, can be noted in scholarship on terrorism and extremism as well.

Critical scholars on terrorism have acknowledged race is undertheorized in terrorism research, and have called for postcolonial and decolonial analyses of terrorism (Ali, 2020; Groothuis, 2020; Jackson et al., 2017, p. 199, *Critical Studies on Terrorism Special Issue*, 2022). References to race and racialization in terrorism studies are connected with studies of marginalization of particular communities, unequal impacts of counterterrorism and counterextremism policies, and how US foreign policies utilized Orientalist messaging to legitimate post-9/11 actions. This also includes illustrating connections between counterterrorism practices in

the global "war on terror" and historical colonial policies and practices (e.g., Dunlap, 2016; McQuade, 2020). Colonial powers labeled anti-colonial violence as "terrorist" and established repressive laws and legislation in the name of countering "terrorism," thus curtailing the actions of civil societies (Ghosh, 2017). A major concern of decolonial and anti-colonial scholarship on terrorism is to study ways in which imperial and colonial processes have structured how the "terrorist" subject is understood today. Such processes have also shaped how "terrorism" is researched and how counter-radicalization and counterterrorism practices discriminate against minorities (Abu-Bakare, 2020; Kundnani, 2015). Interconnections to historical examples and to other discriminatory policies are thus central to recent Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) scholarship. For example, Meier's work illustrates how US counterterrorism policies draw upon and reproduce the anti-Black racism of US society (Meier, 2022). Overall, post/de/anti-colonial studies of terrorism centralize race and examine the racialized production of identities and interests. Relatedly, they also concentrate on how it is Black and brown communities around the world who are targeted by terrorism and, often, by counterterrorism practices.

While there has been scholarship on the racialized construction of the terrorist subject, and raced and gendered aspects of counterterrorism and counterextremism policies, especially from the CTS subfield, the terms "race" and "racialization" themselves remain rarely used in security studies (Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3). Groothuis (2020) analyzes race in terrorism studies and urges conceptual clarity when using "race," "racism," and "racialisation" to research and analyze terrorism. She points out these terms are often taken for granted or left undefined when they are used. Groothuis writes,

> …[T]his article proposes as core attributes of race, racialisation, and racism that they: (A) are socially constructed; (B) categorise people as "other"; (C) naturalise features thought to belong to the group of people regarded as race; and (D) are concerned with presumed community-like groups. (2020, p. 696)

Overall, Groothuis defines "race," "racialization," and "racism" as such: "Whereas race denotes the presumed group, racialisation refers to the process or logic underlying the construction of a race, and racism signifies unjust and negative discrimination on the basis of ideas

regarding a race" (Groothuis, 2020, p. 696). Groothuis' definitions of "race," "racism," and "racialisation" can be connected with definitions of whiteness and white supremacy outlined later in this chapter.

On a similar note, Abu-Bakare (2020) reviews some texts that have connected race and counterterrorism. Abu-Bakare argues a race-centric approach to counterterrorism opens up the field to questions and analytical frameworks that are otherwise ignored in research on counterterrorism. There is ground for caution, however, as calls to view terrorism or violent extremism through a racialization approach can erase state complicity in creating and maintaining oppressive systems, Abu-Bakare argues. After a review of counterterrorism and race-related research, Abu-Bakare states,

> Suggesting that state actors should care about racial violence because it continues the cycle of terroristic violence does not account for the imperial foundation of epidemics of state violence nor does it ensure accountability on behalf of government entities for how their counterterrorism practices, past and present, perpetuate racial hierarchies. (Abu-Bakare, 2020, p. 94)

Consideration of race also means an emphasis on viewing and researching counterterrorism from the perspective of the oppressed, instead of from the perspective of the state. From a research methods perspective, Stump and Dixit (2013) include a chapter on postcolonial and feminist methods to research terrorism. In it, discussions of the types of questions that can be asked, some ways of analyzing data, and examples of postcolonial scholarship on terrorism are included. However, in much of this scholarship on race and/in terrorism studies, discussions of whiteness and white supremacy in the constitution of terrorism and justifications of counterterrorism remain undertheorized.

Islamophobia and the Racialized Constitution of Danger

Research on Islamophobia, especially in the context of the global "war on terror," has emphasized the racialized nature of counterterrorism policies and practices. Regarding Islamophobia, there have been extensive discussions about how it can be understood (Abbas, 2019; Allen, 2010; Beydoun, 2019; Kumar, 2012; Sayyid & Vakil, 2011), how it is experienced, and felt by the targeted populations (Garner & Selod, 2014; Zempi & Awan, 2016), and how counterterrorism policies that

target Muslims and Arabs are continuations of historical surveillance and policing strategies (Kumar, 2012; Renton, 2021; Sharma & Nijjar, 2018). Research has also analyzed how Islamophobia is manifested in various counterterrorism policies, including programs on preventing and countering violent extremism and in constituting "suspect communities" (Abbas, 2018; Gilks, 2019; Hickman et al., 2012; Van Meeteren & Van Oostendorp, 2018). Critical terrorism scholarship has discussed how Islamophobia is a product of historical practices that have continued in the "war on terror" context (Beydoun, 2019; Hafez, 2018; Kundnani, 2015). The scholarship on Islamophobia connects with broader global "war on terror" scholarship and also with historical practices of racialized othering (Selod & Embrick, 2013; Tyrer, 2013). Research on the interconnections of concepts like Orientalism and the practices of criminalizing Muslims and Arabs and constituting them as "terrorists" has been a central part of much of critical terrorism scholarship in the post 9/11 era (Abu-Lughod, 2015; Khalid, 2011; Kumar, 2012).

Research on Islamophobia thus brings in an explicit normative focus on examining how seemingly neutral policies affect historically marginalized populations and draws out the interconnectedness of foreign policies and domestic policies. It also explains ways in which countering extremism and countering terrorism policies have framed Muslims as "others," as outside of the political and social orders of Global North countries, thus constituting a divide between "in-groups" (presented as white) and "out-groups" (presented as Black and brown communities). Manzoor-Khan (2022) makes this explicit as she lays out how Islamophobia is both a global political project that fosters divisions, while also part of everyday life and experiences of many Muslims around the world. The dehumanization and scapegoating of Muslims and the right-wing ecosystem—media, conservative commentators, politicians, etc.—who facilitate this dehumanization is the focus of Lean (2017). While Lean (2017) outlines the right-wing racist networks that demonize Muslims, Tyrer (2013) shifts to "liberal" Islamophobia, wherein self-identified liberals promote policies and narratives that also further marginalize Muslims. While these authors study Islamophobia in the everyday and in state and media practices, Sabir (2022) shifts the focus to their personal narrative—what are the experiences of being a Muslim in Britain during times when counterterrorism and countering violent extremism policies target Muslims? They emphasize the trauma and the toll on mental health that discriminatory counterterrorism practices take. While this book's main focus is not on

the reactions to racism and white supremacist violence, Sabir's book is invaluable in explaining how policies that the state deems as "neutral" have traumatizing effects on communities that become targeted.

Overall, far-right extremists' framing of others as dangerous—Black and brown communities—parallel how racialization operates in mainstream contexts. Ali (2020) writes how the racialized borders of the UK's Prevent strategy exemplify this interconnectedness and the multiple impacts on racialized minorities. On a similar note, research on suspect communities has indicated how official and popular views on who is considered a "terrorist" can and have shaped popular perceptions of minorities. While early scholarship on "suspect communities" concentrated on the Irish population in the UK (Breen-Smyth, 2013; Hillyard, 1993), subsequent research has extended that to Muslims in the United Kingdom and then also to Muslims and Arabs in the United States and around the world (Beydoun, 2019; Hickman et al., 2012; Lajevardi, 2020; Nguyen, 2019; Nickels et al., 2012). In the policies that construct Black and brown communities as "suspect," particular ways of establishing authority that are similar to how far-right extremists' justify their actions and goals are noticeable. For example, the post-9/11 justification of surveillance against Muslim communities in the name of "security" in areas like the United States and the United Kingdom construct these communities as outside of the realm of state rights and citizenship. They become excluded from civil rights that an individual has in a democracy.

A common theme in this scholarship about "suspect communities" is the construction of minorities as dangerous and potentially terrorist. In the United States, despite there being no comparable domestic counterterrorism strategy similar to the UK's Prevent, US Muslims and Arabs have faced prejudices and discrimination as they are surveilled by the state and face state and societal violence (Al-Faham, 2021; Alimahomed-Wilson, 2018; Beydoun, 2019; Mansson McGinty, 2018; Nguyen, 2019). Indeed, Islamophobia has moved from the margins to the center, especially in terms of articulations, as it has become more acceptable to the mainstream (Mondon & Winter, 2017). of rhetorical strategies .

This set of scholarship on Islam and Muslims in the Global North in the post-9/11 period offers two possibilities for the study of far-right violent extremists' narratives. One, it can be argued it would not have been as easy to constitute Muslims in the United States (and Europe) as dangerous "others" without similar framings regarding racialized minorities that have been part of far-right extremists' narratives and far-right

media. The mainstream and the far-right share affinities, in this regard. Second, Islamophobia and Islamophobic policies and practices were easier to justify and harder to challenge because they use(d) discursive strategies that concealed white supremacy, even as whiteness was centered as the main subject under threat.

Defining White Supremacy

At the simplest level, white supremacy is exactly what it says: a belief that white people are superior to other races and, thus, deserve to be in power in society. But, white supremacy is not just an ideology or a belief; it is a structure that has shaped US (and global) societies and is foundational to core liberal democratic practices. As philosopher Charles Mills stated, there is a continuing system of white domination in which liberalism is complicit (Steinmetz-Jenkins, 2021). Mills distinguishes between white supremacy as a belief and as a *political* structure of domination:

> I think, as earlier mentioned, that there's a pivotal ambiguity in how the term is understood: white supremacy as a racist ideology supporting white racial domination and white supremacy as a system of white racial domination. It's easy for mainstream liberals to condemn the former, and to criticize President Trump for failing to do so unequivocally. But the sense of the term I've focused on in my work is really the latter. And that's far more controversial, because my argument in *The Racial Contract* and throughout my work is that you can have an ongoing system of white domination in the absence of an overtly white-supremacist ideology and overt rules of de jure subordination. (Steinmetz-Jenkins, 2021)

Mills emphasizes the systemic and the invisibilized nature of white supremacy here and in his other writings (Mills, 1998, 2011). White supremacy thus manifests itself as a belief system or an ideology that is embedded in sociopolitical life in various historical and contemporary time periods and geographical locations. Practices of European colonialism, for example, are interconnected with white supremacy, with a foundational belief being that colonialism was essential in order to "civilize" Black and brown peoples. This was then used to justify colonial settlement and expansion. The political and economic expansion of white Europeans across the world interconnected with the religious expansion of Christian missionaries who also worked to expand and cement white supremacist practices globally. Economically, too, there was continued

exploitation of labor in settler-colonial societies and in the Global South all the while their resources and skills were exploited to benefit colonial powers. White supremacist ideology views whiteness and white people as superior among races, and thus entitled to goods and services. White supremacy, then, is about establishing and maintaining racialized hierarchies for socioeconomic and political control. It is connected to systems of oppression wherein people of color are socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged in favor of persons racialized as white (Applebaum, 2011).

Whiteness, in this understanding, is not just about skin tone; instead, it refers to culturally, politically, economically, and institutionally produced systems that connect individual and institutional processes and practices (Applebaum, 2011, 9; see also Ignatiev, 1995). Among her wide-ranging work on feminism, gender, race, emotions, and power, Ahmed's arguments regarding whiteness is helpful here as she states how the invisibility of whiteness is a sign of its privilege (Ahmed, 2002, 2007). Ahmed engages with Fanon to argue how a white body "fits" into a context where it is taken for granted. Such a taken for granted-ness means the white body is not questioned and its actions and views are often unchallenged (Ahmed, 2007, p. 153). For the purposes of this book, this view of whiteness as embodied and invisible can help explain how the dangers of far-right extremism, especially far-right popular culture artifacts, have been consistently and often deliberately ignored especially in US government policymaking (Chapter 3 outlines some examples).

Whiteness is connected with racialization. Writing about racialized bodies, Ahmed points out,

> The term 'racialized bodies' invites us to think of the multiple processes whereby bodies come to be seen as 'having' a racial identity. One's 'racial identity' is not simply determined, for example, by the 'fact' of one's skin colour. Racialization is a process that takes place in time and space: 'race' is an effect of this process, rather than its origin or cause. So, in the case of skin colour, racialization involves a process of investing skin colour with meaning, such that 'black' and 'white' come to function, not as descriptions of skin colour, but as racial identities. (Ahmed, 2002, p. 46)

Instead of viewing whiteness as inevitable and the default in societies such as the United States, an emphasis on race opens up considerations of how white ignorance and white innocence are produced and

communicated. People who are categorized as white or who are made sense of as "white," therefore, benefit most from a system that prioritizes their needs and goals. In other words, it is this systemic element that is constitutive of many settler-colonial societies including the United States and it is this systemic element that is often missing in discussions about white supremacy and whiteness in IR and security studies. Going beyond discussing white supremacy only in relation to violent extremism, Ansley claims,

> [By] 'white supremacy' I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley, 1997, p. 59 quoted in Gillborn, 2006)

Similar to Mills' discussion of how an "intrawhite racial contract" underpins the development of the liberal world order (Steinmetz-Jenkins, 2021), Gilborn highlights how white supremacy is related to everyday practices and policies and, indeed, is foundational to them:

> In these analyses, white supremacy is not only, nor indeed primarily, associated with relatively small and extreme political movements that openly mobilize on the basis of race hatred (important and dangerous though such groups are): rather, supremacy is seen to relate to the operation of forces that saturate the everyday, mundane actions and policies that shape the world in the interests of white people (see Bush, 2004; Delgado and Stefancic, 1997). (Gilborn, 2006, p. 320)

Two further aspects can be drawn upon here: one, that white supremacy is not always overt but has worked to invisibilize itself and become part of everyday life. Part of this, as shall be discussed in Chapter 3, included how overt white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan strategically planned to legitimate themselves by taking part in elections and being involved in the daily life of many towns and cities across the United States. Second, white supremacy is not just limited to direct, physical violence, but has informed related policies in the United States such as eugenics, school segregation, policing, redlining, access to

land and farming, and immigration. As such, white supremacist ideologies have affected and shaped policies that continually marginalized Black and brown communities in the United States and globally. Drawing upon Mills, again, his understanding of global white supremacy as a political system of domination is one that is relevant here (Mills, 1998, pp. 98–99). When white supremacy is understood as a systemic process that remains "taboo" to discuss for many (Steinmetz-Jenkins, 2021), this could partly explain the lack of attention paid by security and terrorism researchers to researching far-right violence as compared to other forms of political violence far-right extremist.

On Methodology: The Methodological Whiteness of Researching Terrorism

As noted above, much of the scholarship on terrorism avoids discussing race and whiteness. This avoidance shapes the study of violent extremism and terrorism, wherein white supremacy's role in the formulation of legislation and policies is generally avoided in scholarship. This is especially the case in the United States (Dixit & Miller, 2022). If one accepts that the social ontology of whiteness characterizes the United States and other similar societies (Roberts, 2017), then it can be argued such whiteness has structured how and what is taken to be important in the scholarship on terrorism and violent extremism. Recognizing this and taking Gurminder Bhambra's concept of "methodological whiteness" seriously, it is possible to ask how the study of far-right violent extremism has occurred and what its methodological gaps are.[2] The framework of methodological whiteness focuses not just on how whiteness and coloniality are evident but also on how they are often invisible and hidden. Quoting Mills once more, "The content and boundaries of whiteness will be shifting, politicized, the subject of negotiation and conflict" (Mills, 1998, p. 135). This book examines the modes by which far-right violent extremists utilize a series of discursive practices to construct identities and interests and to justify violence. It claims one of the reasons why US policies regarding far-right extremism has lagged despite far-right extremists spreading hate through various sources (journals, online, manifestos) is

[2] My gratitude to a reviewer for Palgrave for their suggestion to engage with Bhambra's work.

because there is a lack of "seeing" race in research on far-right extremism and terrorism in the United States. By this, I mean IR and security studies have been reluctant to engage with other disciplines where extensive and thought-provoking research on whiteness and white supremacy has occurred and is occurring. I also mean, until very recently, there has been disinterest in examining the effects of far-right violence—physical and threats—upon historically marginalized communities. Methodological whiteness offers an opportunity to reflect on why this absence has been normalized, all the while Black and brown communities have faced extensive surveillance and targeting from the US state, even as they are unengaged in violence.

Regarding methodological whiteness, Bhambra writes,

> 'Methodological whiteness', I suggest, is a way of reflecting on the world that fails to acknowledge the role played by race in the very structuring of that world, and of the ways in which knowledge is constructed and legitimated within it. It fails to recognise the dominance of 'whiteness' as anything other than the standard state of affairs and treats a limited perspective – that deriving from white experience – as a universal perspective. At the same time, it treats other perspectives as forms of identity politics explicable within its own universal (but parochial and lesser than its own supposedly universal) understandings.
>
> In effect, 'methodological whiteness' entails a denial of its own politics of identity and constitutes the standard social scientific discussion of race – which tends to understand it primarily in terms of issues of identity or inequality applying to the situation of non-white others. In contrast, I want us to understand both the ways in which race, as a structural process, has organised the modern world and the impact that this has had on our ways of knowing the world. (Bhambra, 2017b)

This framework about the world argues whiteness is also a "politics of identity" and is based on a specific historical and socioeconomic context. There is work done—rhetorical and in practice—to constitute and maintain white domination (Mills, 1998, 2011). This context and the specificity of whiteness tend to get left out in much of IR and security studies' analyses, wherein experiences of people racialized as white are taken to be universal. In this, whiteness is taken to be the default position, which then ignores alternative experiences or even critical scrutiny of whiteness and its histories. Taking whiteness as default also means the ways by which whiteness is constituted and especially how white

supremacist extremism is constructed and concealed is often left out of analysis.

At first glance, analyzing discourses of far-right extremists in the United States also suggests a centering of whiteness. Indeed, it suggests the centering of whiteness in the extreme. But, in the rest of this book, I hope to illustrate how US far-right extremist discourses utilize similar discursive strategies as that of mainstream ways of knowledge production. In doing so, extremist discourses and ways of communicating about "self" and "others" is mainstreamed as extremists use similar discursive practices as are used every day. In this way, the hate and bigotry of far-right popular culture interconnects with the mainstream as the discursive strategies used are similar and the actors utilizing them are racially coded as "white." Far-right discourses then permeate the mainstream, including official government and elite discourses. Thus, this book illustrates how, by utilizing a range of discursive strategies to invisibilize and hide hate, far-right extremist ways of relating to others have become part of the mainstream. Whiteness and how it is produced, communicated, and organized in the production of mainstream sources such as journals, comic images, and self-narratives of far-right killers is interrogated in the later chapters of this book.

What methodological whiteness also does is that it invisibilizes activities of whiteness including its hierarchical position in societies. Grievances of white communities are framed as universal and needing to be explained, while other racialized communities do not receive similar attention about their concerns. For example, Bhambra's work illustrates how the responsibility for Trump's victory and for Brexit have been linked to the "white working class," even though it was middle-class white people who voted overwhelmingly in favor of Trump and Brexit (Bhambra, 2017a). She asks how is it that minoritized racial communities do not receive similar attention as white communities in the post-Trump and Brexit era. Furthermore, this emphasis on white communities is portrayed as normal and natural: because they are "left behind" by globalization, we are told, their concerns matter (more). As Bhambra shows, this understanding only works if one is to prioritize the experiences of people considered white over Black and brown populations, who often live in more precarious conditions than those who are identified as white (Bhambra, 2017a). In other words, a series of discursive moves has to occur to center communities that are considered "white working class" and their problems in analysis. This includes erasing white middle-class complicity in voting

for Trump and Brexit, ignoring concerns of minoritized communities, and then universalizing experiences of whiteness as normal and natural while arguing concerns of Black and brown communities are based on their identities and are, thus, "identity politics." These moves occur in language as well, with the use of "working class" often used to mean *white* working class but without specifying this whiteness. As such, the use of "working class" when analyzing issues like Trump's victory over Brexit often excludes the histories and experiences of Black and brown working-class communities. Similar discursive moves can be noted in how far-right extremists portray their situations in life and describe (in this case) US society's changes due to immigration, changing race relations, economic shifts, and so on. Chapters 4–6 consider this in more detail.

Before going further, it is worth emphasizing again that "white" here is not phenotype or skin color but is understood as an identity that is structured by historical and economic processes and whose borders are semi-porous. Some groups may move deeper into whiteness (e.g., Irish and Eastern Europeans in the United States) while others may not be fully included (e.g. Arab Christians). As Crenshaw (1997, p. 255) explains, "There is nothing essential, 'natural,' or biological about whiteness…It is the historically located rhetorical meaning of whiteness that assigns it social worth." She adds, "Whiteness functions ideologically when people employ it, consciously or unconsciously, as a framework to categorize people and understand their social locations" (1997, p. 255). It is helpful to turn to Crenshaw again to illustrate the relationship between whiteness, white privilege, and white understandings of racism:

> The term "white privilege" denotes a host of material advantages white people enjoy as a result of being socially and rhetorically located as a white person. Even though many white people sense that privilege accompanies whiteness, they do not overtly acknowledge their white privilege because they think of themselves as average, morally neutral non-racists. They do not see racism as an ideology that protects the interests of all white people; rather, they envision racism in the form of white hooded Klansmen engaged in acts of racial hatred. (Crenshaw, 1997, p. 255)

Far-right violent actors are aware of this and have strategically taken advantage by presenting themselves in ways that parallel mainstream modes of communication while constituting white people as victims. There is, of course, a moralized dimension here as well with white and

whiteness associated with innocence in US politics, while people of color have not received a similar association. As Smiley and Fakunle (2016) detail, historically and even today, Black men have been stereotyped as "dangerous" and "threatening" in the United States even when they are unarmed and unengaged in violence, while similar racist framings are not the case for white men.

In terms of how methodological whiteness relates to this book's central concerns, then, there are two main aspects I want to emphasize. One, analyzing discourses of far-right extremists centers them and their experiences, which is accurate. However, one of the goals of this book is to illustrate *how* far-right violent extremists utilize discursive strategies of normalization, that is ways in which hate and violence are seemingly made part of everyday discussions. This is what a close analysis of far-right extremist discourses in Chapters 4–6 will do. By illustrating how this normalization occurs—noting the discursive practices that are used—will make it easier to recognize the mainstreaming of such practices in other contexts that are outside of far-right extremist discourses. By illustrating how far-right extremists are using similar discursive strategies to communicate, describe "out-groups" and to maintain their "in-groups," it is possible to interrogate the broader and unspoken whiteness of mainstream society and how that has led to a lack of acknowledgment of the impacts of racist hate and violent speech and narratives. This book, however, does not focus on the impact on wider society except to note the ongoing mainstreaming of white supremacist ideas in US society and culture. Second, it is useful to consider methodological whiteness with regard to knowledge production about terrorism and extremism, especially about countering far-right extremism.

Analyzing Language-In-Use: Discourses, Discursive Practices, and Strategies of Legitimation

A brief discussion on research methods is useful to situate the rest of this book and to introduce the type of analysis that will be undertaken. Methodologically, this book adopts a social constructionist understanding of the world, wherein language use, in the form of texts, speeches, and visuals, constitutes identities and interests. Regarding rhetoric and the legitimation of right-wing populism, Ruth Wodak writes, "[R]ight-wing populism does not only relate to the form of rhetoric but to its specific contents: such parties successfully construct fear and – related to the

various real or imagined dangers – propose scapegoats" (Wodak, 2015, p. 1). It is these imagined dangers that this book focuses upon—noting, especially, the rhetorical strategies that have allowed extreme right or far-right violent actors' ways of making sense of the world to migrate to and become part of the mainstream. On the whole, this methodological approach takes language as connected with practices and especially with practices of legitimation and justification. This is related to how whiteness and white supremacy is concealed. Thus, it is a broad view of language—one that includes texts and speeches—that this book adopts. This is akin to Crenshaw's (1997) understanding of what "ideological rhetorical criticism" does. Such rhetorical criticism "reveals how the public political rhetoric of whiteness relies upon a silent denial of white privilege to rationalize judicial, legislative, and executive decisions that protect the material interests of white people at the expense of people of color" (1997, p. 256). Discourse analysis then can be used to illustrate the workings of discursive practices or rhetorical strategies used by white nationalists and far-right extremists to construct their worldviews and to justify violence against historically marginalized communities such that similar strategies can be recognized and challenged when they are used in other—more mainstream—settings as well.

I draw upon and develop an understanding of discourse analysis from discursive psychology. Jonathan Potter describes discursive psychology as:

> The nature and scope of "psychology" is understood very differently in discourse analytic work compared to other approaches such as social cognition. Instead of starting with inner mental or cognitive processes, with behavioural regularities, or with neural events that are happening below and behind interaction, *it starts with the public displays, constructions and orientations of participants*. Discursive psychology starts with discourse because discourse is the primary arena for human action, understanding and intersubjectivity. (Potter, 2012; emphasis added)[3]

As Potter makes clear here, definitions of both psychology and discourse in this understanding are based on "public displays, constructions and orientations of participants." For this project, this includes popular culture artifacts such as far-right magazines and journals, books

[3] For additional discussions of various types of discursive psychology and ways to do research therein, please see Billig (2009, 2017).

and books reviewed in those journals, manifestos and self-explanations of far-right violent killers, and images and comics that are circulated on social media and are connected to US far-right violent extremism.

Regarding meanings of discourse, as Potter (2012) explains, the discursive psychology approach defines "discourse" as having four characteristics:

a. Discourse is "action-oriented," meaning discourse is the mode through which action occurs, is justified, and is countered and challenged. For this project, this means there is an emphasis on the active nature of language use i.e., language is meaningful as it is used and thus it is the main object of analysis regarding how far-right violent extremists construct their and others' identities and interests.
b. Discourse is "situated" in time and context, meaning it is part of unfolding interactions. This centers the interactional and dialogical nature of language as it is used in different contexts in society. For this project, the situatedness is on the United States and on far-right violent extremism in the United States. Relatedly, thinking of discourse as situated means examining key statements and texts as part of an ongoing dialogue in which far-right activists constitute identities and interests in relation to other identities, issues, and interests. In the process they attempt to legitimate their actions also in relation to other competing and collaborative narratives present in society.
c. Discourse is both "constructed and constructive." Potter describes *constructed* as meaning discourses are produced out of words and grammars, but also from broader networks that include rhetorical commonplaces and interpretive repertoires or conversation analysis (see, too, Billig, 2017, p. 2). Relatedly, discourse is *constructive* because it builds identities and meanings for actions and interests. It makes sense of historical structures and practices. In other words, discourses are themselves products of particular environments and actions, but also produce and reproduce such. For this project, this means a focus on white supremacy and the construction, reproduction, and maintenance of white supremacy in seemingly "normalized" settings (e.g. comics and visuals online) as well as in contexts where far-right actors are attempting to normalize and legitimate their actions (e.g. production and dissemination of journals). I will also focus on the use of specific discursive strategies by

far-right extremists that work to invisibilize and normalize hate and white supremacy.

d. Discourse is produced as "psychological," meaning participants are concerned with producing self and others' dispositions and assessments as subjective or objective. For the purposes of this project, this means far-right violent extremists' self-making and their descriptions of others is part of what the analysis will analyze and critique.

If this is what discourse means for this project, it is discursive strategies or rhetorical strategies that are useful to analyze the processes by which far-right discourses legitimate particular ideas, identities, and interests. These strategies or "discursive devices" are "analytical tools that can help us to 'unpack' interaction" (Wiggins, 2017, pp. 175–176). Wiggins identifies a range of discursive devices at three levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced. Within these,[4]

- basic discursive devices include
  - minimization (where actions, identities, behavior are minimized as less than serious)
  - extreme case formulations (where extreme cases of particular issues and behaviors are presented)
  - shifts in footing (how self-making occurs in relation to one's speaking)
- intermediate discursive devices include
  - consensus and corroboration (e.g. statements like "anyone can say that" and identification of individual statements with a general whole)
  - disclaimers (e.g. "I'm not racist, but…")
  - metaphors (used to produce categories and for comparisons)
- advanced discursive devices include
  - agent-subject distinction (how is the agency of the speaker or the spoken about is managed in talk)

[4] The discursive devices' list here is adapted from Wiggins (2017). I have provided additional information and included examples and explanations in relation to this book's subject matter, especially in the part within parentheses.

- emotion categories (speaker makes emotions relevant in talk)
- category entitlements (how identities are managed in interactions; can overlap with "normalizing devices"). In addition, category entitlements are used to construct and maintain authoritative status and, thus, the factuality of claims. On a relational basis, belonging in a particular category is connected with authority to make claims while also negating/undermining the credibility of those who are viewed as not having this category entitlement. Potter and Hepburn explain category entitlements "are associated with particular kinds of knowledge-ability" (2008, p. 281), thus constituting the speaker/writer as authoritative
- stake inoculation (can cover a range of devices with the overall goal to note how discursive practices are put together to resist counter-claims. Stake inoculation takes on the form of rhetorical defense against accusations of being less than factual)

At times in this book, the terms rhetorical strategies and discursive strategies are used interchangeably with discursive devices. A key point here is that these are analytical tools to make sense of the interactions and identities that emerge from the discourses of US far-right violent extremists.

Discourse analysis is an analytical method and tool to identify and analyze discursive practices and social interaction (Wiggins, 2017). "Discursive practices" has a range of meanings but, here, the definition used is similar to that of "discursive practices" as used by critical discourse theorists such as Norman Fairclough. He defines "discursive practices" as "the production, distribution and consumption of texts" (1993, pp. 5, 73). Others, including Michel Foucault, have taken a more expansive understanding of what discursive practices mean. For Foucault, discourses produce "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, pp. 49, 135–140). Bacchi and Bonham (2014) counter Fairclough's understanding of discursive practices as they state Foucault meant more than (just) language in his understanding of discourse. For Foucault, discourse was a system of knowledge (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014, p. 174). This book draws on both Fairclough and Foucault to note that discourse means a system of knowledge, but *how* it is produced and the subjects and identities that populate it can be noted and analyzed through studying texts, speeches, and visual

images—defined as analyzing "language use" within a broad definition of "language'. Discourses also organize knowledge and produce certain types of meanings as authoritative or otherwise.

In this understanding of discourse, language is to be studied and analyzed as/when it is used; it is argumentative and persuasive—actors use language to do things with it and, in the process, make and remake (and, thus, legitimate and delegitimate) their and others' interests and identities; and language has a relatively broad meaning of texts, speeches, visuals, that are interconnected with practices (Stump & Dixit, 2013). By analyzing how particular discursive strategies are used to develop identities and interests, it is possible to destabilize and question the legitimacy of far-right violent extremists' narratives while also noting how and when such strategies are reused in more mainstream settings. Finally, such discourse analysis is useful to outline various strategies of legitimation, strategies that far-right violent extremists use to invisibilize and normalize hate and white supremacy. This means it is possible to subvert and dismantle such strategies of normalization and mainstreaming.

The methodology of focusing on rhetorical strategies and analyzing narratives linked with terrorism and extremism is not new. Wiggins, when discussing discursive psychology, defines "narrative" as "the production of an account with a coherent, sequential order" (2017, p. 175). In line with this, analyzing language has been central to critical scholarship on identities and interests in world politics, including in security studies and research on terrorism and counterterrorism. In terrorism studies, critical terrorism scholars have studied terrorism as discourse with an emphasis on analyzing language and practices together. For narrative-based analysis, there have been studies analyzing narratives of survivors and victims of terrorism and counterterrorism practices, of states and government officials, of media, and terrorists and extremists themselves (Dixit, 2021).

For this book, far-right popular culture artifacts are centered in analysis.[5] A key goal for the book is to note far-right violent extremists' practices of concealment of hate, specifically practices of normalization in popular culture artifacts and, thus, how those can be subverted, delegitimated, and dismantled.

[5] I have tried to limit direct quoting large amounts of texts from far-right sources. However, because of the nature of discourse analysis, some amount of primary source texts and images are included in the analyses in Chapters 4–6.

It can be said then that discourse analysis is useful to outline how far-right violent extremists produce, reproduce, and legitimate white supremacy and white domination. On a related note, legitimation here means establishing a narrative for whiteness and for far-right identity while, at the same time, invisibilizing hate and (potential and actual) violence against minoritized populations. In other words, discourse analysis of illustrative far-right popular culture artifacts—a well-known journal, a comic/visual image, and manifestos that were shared online—helps make transparent the strategies by which far-right violent extremists hide their views on violence and white supremacy. These strategies also work to normalize and mainstream far-right extremists' goals. Discourse analysis also allows for comparing with similar strategies that are used by more mainstream actors in US politics and society, even though this latter is mostly outside the scope of this particular book.

I will end this section on methods with a brief discussion of some of the goals of this discourse analytical project. As noted above, there are many ways of doing discourse analysis (Gill, 2000). For this project, poststructural discourse analysis from the IR perspective is connected with discourse analysis (rhetorical analysis) from discursive psychology with an emphasis to analyze FRVEs' strategies of justification and legitimation. In doing so, a central goal is to make transparent the strategies and tactics used by far-right extremists especially those that are public. Of importance is to note how the rhetoric of whiteness functions: what are the discursive practices that can be noted in far-right extremist sources that do the work of legitimating their worldviews and their calls for violence?

Overall, this project analyzes discourses of far-right extremists to, hopefully, work toward "the critical ideological work necessary to make whiteness visible and overturn its silences for the purpose of resisting racism" (Crenshaw, 1997, p. 254). A part of this project's goal is, thus, to illustrate the rhetoric and constitution of white innocence within various far-right archetypal sources. This includes related subjectivities of white victimhood and white fragility that are produced in and through far-right extremist discourses. While this book focuses on the discourses of far-right extremists in the United States, the rhetoric of white innocence is common in broader mainstream right-wing politics as well. As Mondon and Winter clarify here when discussing far-right violent actors,

> …[I]t is essential to acknowledge that the apparently individualistic nature of extreme-right attackers is often central to their framing as mere happenstance, rather than as a more widespread ideology representing a systemic or coordinated threat. This strengthens the polarised distinction between extreme, far and mainstream right; violent actions are represented as aberrations, thus affirming post-racial narratives, while whiteness is represented as innocent in a context where Muslims are automatically labelled 'terrorists'. (Mondon & Winter, 2020, p. 20)

As I, too, illustrate throughout this book, part of this formation of white exceptionalism and innocence includes discursive practices of evasion and deflection as well as an overall process that invisibilizes white violence.

Racialization processes and the constitution of whiteness are socially constructed and historically and socio-politically situated. However, as Chapter 4 illustrates, far-right extremists have utilized narratives of pseudoscience and eugenics to argue races are biological and thus natural, with associated traits and characters. For this project, whiteness is understood as socially constructed and it is this construction—the categorization and formation of a hierarchical system of power, the maintenance of domination by those categorized as "white," and the invisibilization and thus normalization of such processes and identities—that Chapters 4–6 will detail further.

Associated with whiteness are practices of white fragility and white victimhood. Both are connected to gender as well as race and can be especially noted when studying the role of white women in far-right extremist movements. White women in such movements are both simultaneously prized as bearers of the next (white) generation and, thus, to be protected, while many white women also play a key role in normalization and perpetuating white supremacy (Blee, 2003, 2009; Darby, 2020; McRae, 2020). Both these roles—the vulnerable subject in need of protection and the active participant in white supremacy who works to normalize and, thus, invisibilize hate—that are ascribed to white women draw upon themes of white fragility. There is a weaponization of weakness, as Robin DiAngelo puts it (DiAngelo, 2018).[6] White fragility also refers to how white people claim it is difficult to talk of racism and often become silent and defensive

[6] It should be pointed out that DiAngelo's book and its arguments have been critiqued for various gaps in how it views communities of color. E.g. Lozada (2020) critiques DiAngelo for categorizing white people as a monolith while people of color are constituted

when asked to do so. During all this, there is a centering of whiteness with whiteness seen as raceless and as the default setting of US society.

Overall, these practices of white fragility and white victimhood are part of a broad process of maintaining white innocence. This, as Gloria Wekker writes in her book on white innocence, includes denials of colonial violence as in her case study of The Netherlands (Wekker, 2016). Part of the process of establishing white innocence also includes a denial of the systemic effects of racism and the subsequent racially disparate outcomes in society. One key point of examining processes of extremism (or other related issues) through a lens of white innocence is to note how systemic processes such as racism and the outcomes of racialized practices are individualized, such that hate and racism are seen as an individual problem, rather than a systemic one. On a related note, discussions of the color-blindness of (US) society in matters of race and statements like "I don't see race" are also discursive moves toward white innocence (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Such moves are noticeable in far-right actors' narratives about themselves and their goals, as well as in mainstream society.

As an example of how whiteness is constituted and perpetuated in and through white innocence, King (2015) examines the case of the moral panic that emerged in the United States about the "knockout game" in Fall 2013. King writes that, during a one-week period in November 2013, the "knockout game"-defined as stories about young Black men attacking random white strangers—dominated the media (2015, p. 86). Despite there being no measurable increase in such attacks or any other evidence of such attacks, the idea of there being an ongoing "knockout game" where Black men targeted white strangers was amplified by *Fox News* and spread across US media (2015, p. 86). As King states,

> Moral panics like the 'knockout game' have historically been a core part of the reproduction of white supremacist ideas, practices and structures in the US. The course of development of the 'knockout game' moral panic evidences many elements of white racism, fear and violence against African Americans that stretch back to the days of slavery. (2015, p. 87)

During this period, mainstream media like *The New York Times* and *CNN* fell back upon framing the issue as a question (is there a "knockout

as powerless. The constitution and maintenance of what DiAngelo (and others) have labelled "white fragility," however, are what this book draws upon from DiAngelo's work.

game" occurring?) and then discussing various responses to it, instead of relying on crime statistics which would have clearly shown there was no rise in such events (King, 2015, p. 87). What this framing as a question did was perpetuate the notion of white people as vulnerable and at risk of sudden attacks from Black youths, which, as King states, is a notion that has historically been central to racism in the United States (King, 2015). This is an example wherein white victimhood and white fragility are combined to produce a particular understanding of whiteness and white identity as under threat, with the related constructions of Blackness and Black identity as threatening. As we shall see later in this book, it is a similar intersection that far-right violent extremists draw on in their narratives, utilizing similar discursive strategies of white innocence while categorizing Black people and other historically marginalized communities as dangerous and threatening.

Archetypes of Far-Right Extremist Popular Culture Sources: Journals, Images, and Manifesto/Self-Writings

Chapters 4–6 of this book analyze different popular culture archetypes wherein far-right violent extremists utilize a series of discursive strategies to construct and legitimate their and others' identities and interests. In the process, it is possible to note how the constitution and defense of whiteness is central to these accounts. The first source analyzed, in Chapter 4, is one of the longest-running journals connected with white nationalism and white supremacy, *American Renaissance*. It was selected as an example of a document—a written journal that was distributed in print for much of its existence before moving online. It is taken to be an archetype of far-right extremists—white supremacists—who utilize discursive strategies like pseudoscience and the use of quantitative data (what I refer to as "scientification") to constitute whiteness while also hiding white supremacy. Chapter 5 focuses on the image of Pepe the frog and its uses by the so-called "alt-right." The online circulation and multiple meanings of the image of Pepe the Frog is taken as illustrative of how discursive strategies of irony and humor work to constitute and maintain whiteness and white domination in and through visuals. Here, the form itself—an image that becomes a meme—is part of how justifications

Table 2.4 Archetypes of far-right extremist sources that are analyzed in Chapters 4–6

Source	*Who*	*Form*
American Renaissance magazine	Extremists such as Jared Taylor, who have been active since the pre-Internet period	Print/published: text
Memes, especially the Pepe the frog meme	Online actors, far-right trolls. The "Alt-right" and alt-lite	Online: visual images
Selected US far-right killers and text that has influenced many	Selected far-right violent killers: – 2014 Isla Vista killings – 2015 Charleston church killings – 2019 El Paso killings – influential text/idea: *The Great Replacement* by Renaud Camus	Print and online: manifestos, book

of violence are produced and defended. Finally, Chapter 6 analyzes self-writings and "manifestos" of some recent far-right attackers in the United States, as well as Renaud Camus' *The Great Replacement*. The manifesto is taken as the archetype of single actor attackers and the chapter elaborates upon discursive strategies of establishing white male victimhood through constituting women and immigrants as threatening to white male self-identity (see Table 2.4). In all these chapters, various discursive practices work to mainstream and invisibilize white supremacy.

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CHAPTER 3

Whiteness, White Supremacy, and Far-Right Extremism in the United States

Introduction

On April 9, 2019, the US House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee held a hearing on Hate Crimes and the Rise of White Nationalism (C-SPAN, 2019; US Government, 2019). This devolved into what an NPR report later described as "partisan discord over who or what is responsible" (NPR, 2019). Indeed, the same report described the hearing as such:

> Every time Democrats talked about President Trump's anti-immigrant remarks, or how government agencies should do more to fight the spread of white nationalism, Republicans pivoted to criticism of identity politics, anti-Semitism on the left and off-topic foreign policy issues. (NPR, 2019)

It is worth delving further into representations of white nationalism during this hearing to briefly outline how Republicans—who were in power at the time—used rhetorical strategies of deflection when discussing white nationalism and white supremacy. During a US government hearing, political parties are allowed to invite a number of experts to discuss the topic. Democrats' invitations for the April 9, 2019 hearing went to people who had knowledge about hate crimes (e.g., a senior staff member of the Anti Defamation League, which records hate crimes) and who had suffered from such crimes (e.g., Dr. Mohammad Abu-Salha,

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the father of two university students who were killed by a white man in North Carolina in 2015). The Republicans invited, among others, Candace Owens, a right-wing talk show host. Another Republican invitation went to Morton Klein, the President of the right-wing Zionist Organization of America. Owens spent her allotted time criticizing the hearing itself, claiming hate crimes and white nationalism were Democrat inventions and that "the myth of things like the Southern switch, the Southern strategy... never happened" (Itkowitz, 2019). The hearing then became more about who was speaking than about the serious issue of hate crimes and the rise of white nationalism in the United States. Republicans had deflected attention away from the issue onto different, unrelated topics.[1]

This Republican strategy to avoid discussing whiteness and white nationalism was evident throughout the hearing. Even though the hearing was unrelated to Islam, Republicans asked Dr. Abu-Salha about Islam and what Islam says about hate. They also insisted that the discussion should be about *all* hate speech, and not just white nationalism, despite it being a hearing specifically about white nationalism. In the end, the discussion about the hearing became more about who was present (Owens) and about whether white nationalism even existed (Republicans disputed its existence) despite the increase in hate crimes and far-right extremist violence in the United States. It was not just Republicans at the hearing who did not take it seriously. Online trolling also rose as *YouTube* had to shut down comments on the hearing's live feed as it was receiving high volumes of hate and racist comments (Feiner, 2019).

In a subsequent series of hearings (see Table 3.1), on the topic of "Confronting violent white supremacy" (Confronting I, 2019; Confronting II, 2019; Confronting III, 2019; Confronting IV, 2020), Democrat speakers claimed white nationalism and white supremacism were ongoing problems, provided information about increasing hate crimes, and called for further discussion and policies. Democrat Ayanna Pressley said, "This administration has emboldened White nationalism, White supremacy, and far-right extremism, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, all while suggesting these groups do not present a growing threat to our communities and national security." (Confronting I, 2019) There was a long discussion about the drawbacks of the FBI's hate

[1] For more on the hearings, please see Willis (2019).

crimes reporting system, where police departments are supposed to self-report hate crimes in their jurisdiction and yet over 85% of them do not do so (Confronting I, 2019; Hernandez, 2021). Republicans spent the majority of the hearings questioning whether hate crimes and white nationalism existed or were serious threats (Confronting I, 2019; Confronting II, 2019; Confronting III, 2019). Subsequent hearings had similar discrepancies between Democrats calling for further research and policies and Republicans denying the existence of white nationalism and white supremacist extremism altogether.

There are a number of rhetorical strategies of deflection that could be noted in the hearings: Republicans denied the existence of the problem of far-right violence and, when acknowledging it, claimed Democrats or "far-left" or "Islam" are equally if not more connected with violence. Democrats, while acknowledging that white nationalism and white supremacist violence are of concern, continued to focus on the overt and obvious instances of white supremacist violence while downplaying how white supremacist violence has historically been embedded in United States society. While this embeddedness of white supremacy is not directly part of this book—the focus here is on how far-right violent extremists justify and maintain their support for violence-it is useful to consider how both Democrats and Republicans deny white supremacy in different ways in these hearings about the issue. Thus, in the case of Republicans, they deny the existence of white supremacist violence. In the case of the Democrats, they present such violence as exceptional and rare to liberal societies, as something that is "not us" (United States) and thus not part of the mainstream. Both ways of relating to white supremacist violence emerge from US histories of far-right violent extremism and that is what the next few sections will discuss. I will start with outlining how terrorism studies scholarship on terrorism and violent extremism in the United States has excluded discussing white supremacist violence, including overt instances such as racial terror lynching. It has also minimized the role of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and their presence in mainstream US society.

Table 3.1 US government hearings on "confronting violent white supremacy" held in 2019–2020

Title of hearing	*Date*	*Key witnesses*	*Affiliations of witnesses*	*Link to hearing/information*
Confronting White Supremacy (Part I): The Consequences of Inaction	May 15, 2019	1. Susan Bro 2. George Selim 3. Omar Ricci 4. Michael German 5. Roy Austin	1. Co-Founder President/Board Chair Heather Heyer Foundation 2. Senior Vice President of Programs Anti-Defamation League 3. Chairman Islamic Center of Southern California 4. Fellow Brennan Center for Justice 5. Partner Harris, Wiltshire & Grannis, LLP	https://www.congress.gov/event/116th-congress/house-event/LC63928/text?s=1&r=24

Title of hearing	*Date*	*Key witnesses*	*Affiliations of witnesses*	*Link to hearing/information*
Confronting White Supremacy (Part II): Adequacy of the Federal Response	June 4, 2019	1. Michael McGarrity 2. Calvin Shivers 3. Elizabeth Neumann 4. Tony McAleer 5. Lecia Brooks 6. Brette Steele 7. Todd Bensman	1. Assistant Director Counterterrorism Division Federal Bureau of Investigation 2. Deputy Assistant Director Criminal Investigation Division Federal Bureau of Investigation 3. Assistant Secretary Threat Prevention and Security Policy Department of Homeland Security 4. Co-Founder Life After Hate 5. Outreach Director Southern Poverty Law Center 6. Director of Prevention and National Security McCain Institute for International Leadership Arizona State University 7. Former Manager Counterterrorism Unit Intelligence and Counterterrorism Division Texas Department of Public Safety	https://oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings/confronting-white-supremacy-part-ii-adequacy-of-the-federal-response

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Title of hearing	*Date*	*Key witnesses*	*Affiliations of witnesses*	*Link to hearing/information*
Confronting White Supremacy (Part III): Addressing the Transnational Terrorist Threat	September 20, 2019	1. Dr. Kathleen Belew 2. Dr. Joshua Geltzer 3. Katrina Mulligan 4. Candace Owens	1. Assistant Professor of U.S. History and the College The University of Chicago 2. Director Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection Georgetown Law 3. Managing Director for National Security and International Policy 4. Founder, Blexit Host, Candace Owens Show	https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-116hhrg37975/html/CHRG-116hhrg37975.htm
Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part IV): White Supremacy in Blue—The Infiltration of Local Police Departments	September 29, 2020	1. Michael German 2. Vida B. Johnson 3. Frank Meeink 4. Mark Napier	1. Fellow Brennan Center for Justice 2. Associate Professor of Law Georgetown University 3. Author and Activist 4. Sheriff Prima County of Arizona	https://oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings/confronting-violent-white-supremacy-part-iv-white-supremacy-in-blue-the

Rendering White Supremacist Violence Invisible in Terrorism Studies: Racial Terrorism, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Advent of the Internet

As can be seen in Table 2.1 (Chapter 2) in terrorism studies, books that provide overviews of terrorism generally tend to exclude discussion of racial terrorism. This includes a lack of attention to the Ku Klux Klan, despite its central place in terms of violence and longevity, in US history of violence. At various periods of US history, the Klan was widespread throughout the country (Chalmers, 1987; MacLean, 1995). Relatedly, these books on terrorism also ignore the history of lynching in the United States and the related connections between those who facilitated and conducted lynching and law enforcement. Indeed, Table 2.1 notes, lynching is briefly mentioned in a few terrorism books but the majority do not include it in their discussions of histories and overviews of terrorism.

This erasure shapes the meanings of terrorism and violent extremism. In the United States, then, the KKK is discussed in mainstream terrorism scholarship—if it is discussed—as an organization that was active in the past but which has been defeated and ended. That its goals and worldviews are still present in various other groups and in ongoing practices of discrimination against racialized minorities is not something that many terrorism books discuss. Similarly, the invisibility of lynching in books about terrorism and violent extremism including in texts on and about US history of terrorism means state complicity and the role played by law enforcement in overtly or covertly supporting those who conducted the lynchings remain unacknowledged and are not reckoned with.

If we shift our standpoint from which one views violence in the United States to a perspective of those who were targeted and suffered, this brings up the centrality of white supremacist terrorism and extremism to the formation and subsequent history of the US state. Such a standpoint illustrates how the establishment of the US state as well as subsequent key policies have been interconnected with promoting interests of whiteness (Allen & Perry, 2012; Baird, 2022; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Roediger, 2018) While it is, of course, impossible to illustrate "US history" as a whole here (even if such a unitary understanding of national history were possible), this section focuses on how white power terror operated and instantiated in different contexts in the United States and how it was part of mainstream politics and society. As such, it examines three key issues:

the white power terror of lynching in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the origin and development of the KKK, and the start of the far-right violent extremists' migration to the Internet in the 1990s. An argument here is that centering these violences as terrorism and violent extremism shifts our understanding of terrorism in the United States. At the same time, we can also note how far-right extremists have historically operated to become part of the mainstream, often utilizing the power of the state on their side.

Returning to the past, it is well known that, historically, the state dehumanized Black and Brown communities and these communities did not receive full rights in the formation of the US nation-state. For example, according to the 1790 Naturalization Act, only a "free white person" who had been living in the United States for at least two years could become a citizen (HR 40, 1790). By this one line, tens of thousands of Black and brown people were denied their rights and, more broadly, excluded from the nation-state. During the majority of the US nation-state's history, only white people could own and sell property, run for elections, and vote. Enslaved persons did not have rights, Asian and Hispanic peoples faced multiple immigration and other restrictions, and even original inhabitants of the land—Native Americans—were denied citizenship for the majority of the US nation-state's history. The state could and did deny Black and brown populations rights and privileges that were accorded to white Americans. As Nick Estes points out, the history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism. Indigenous peoples were excluded from the realm of humanity as described by European law (Estes, 2019, p. 85, pp. 195–196). In this history, the original inhabitants of this land were violently dispossessed and murdered if they resisted. They were then disallowed from the rights of citizenship in the new nation-state that would be established. For example, it was not until 1924 that Native Americans were legally named citizens and, even then, there were discrepancies among the various US states regarding what rights Native Americans had.[2] They did not get the right to vote until 1948 and this was not universal in all the states until 1962 (Voting rights, n.d.; Dunphy, 2019).

[2] Thanks to a reviewer who made the point that not all Native American tribes were—or are—in favor of US citizenship. The claim here, however, is that the US state did not provide Indigenous peoples with full civil rights, even as these rights were given to white US persons and, eventually, to US persons of other ethnicities.

Official policies shaped a "United States of America" where white persons (though the definition of "white" shifted over time) maintained power all the while Black and brown persons lived in insecurity. Furthermore, Black persons were deemed as property and were bought and sold by whites. This was not the case for immigrants who, despite facing challenges, were not considered property in this sense. The harm to Black populations in the United States has not yet been fully reckoned with and part of this is because the horrors of enslavement are often minimized in discussions about the US' past.

There were exclusionary policies for immigrants, especially for immigrants of color, that were codified in US legislation. These policies increased in number in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with various immigration acts targeting Chinese, Japanese, and Asians in general (Jones, 2021). Even those already part of the US population were deemed dangerous threats during times of external crises. A well-known example of this is the establishment of internment camps during World War Two when around 117,000 Japanese Americans, mostly US citizens, were interned (Chander, 2001). The racial trauma of this event continued in the subsequent generations (Nagata et al, 2019). In addition to the internment of thousands of US citizens of Japanese descent in WWII, other policies such as the actions of the House Un-American Actions Committee and Operation Wetback often targeted immigrants from Central and South America and portrayed them as undesirables and as threats to state and society. Considered the largest mass deportation in US history, Operation Wetback involved the deportation of tens of thousands of people of Mexican background from the United States in the 1950s. Many of these were US citizens or had families in the United States (Astor, 2009). Being a US citizen was not a guarantee of safety. What this meant was, throughout US history, policies have discriminated against and dehumanized Black, Indigenous, and other persons of color. Yet, the majority of these events—despite being examples of the use of violence against civilians—do not form part of the discussion on terrorism within terrorism studies and IR.

Visible Acts of White Supremacist Terrorism: Lynching in the United States

The example of lynching can be used to illustrate main themes regarding white power and white supremacy and their embeddedness in US society,

along with their absence from discussions of terrorism in terrorism scholarship. Lynching shows how acts of racial terror were commonplace and supported by many white Americans but are mostly left out of discussions of "terrorism" today. Lynching also forms a textual and visual symbol that is still commonly used by white supremacists in the twenty-first century. As could be seen in the January 6, 2021 attacks on the US Capitol, there were calls then to "hang Mike Pence" (Rodriguez & Shabad, 2021). The attackers also built a noose on the grounds of the Capitol, illustrating the prevalence of lynching as a symbol of white power and white domination.

That lynching is not a central part of scholarship about far-right violence in the United States is an issue that needs to be addressed if we are to conceptualize "far-right violence" appropriately. On the whole, like most other settler-colonial states, the United States has not reckoned with its history concerning enslaved peoples. A horrific civil war was fought, leading to tens of thousands killed as the country divided over whether enslavement should continue. In its aftermath, while slavery was formally ended, its effects continued with whiteness and white supremacy shaping geographical spaces, legislation and politics. African Americans did not receive full civil rights until the twentieth century. Even now, in 2022, there remain continued inequalities in policing, economic opportunities, access to healthcare, and voting rights. The period after the Civil War was characterized by increased racial oppression by whites as they saw attempts at equality as threats to their status.

The example of lynching illustrates how white supremacy has historically been part of the fabric of US society and is, yet, often left out of discussions of violent extremism and terrorism in the United States. Lynching was not just a few isolated events but was a broad, widespread national practice. As Rushdy (2012) states, "lynching itself was a national practice, and a practice that helped define the boundaries of the nation" (2012, p. ix). Rushdy adds,

> [L]ynching is not an aberration in American history…but a result of the fundamental contradictions that faced the nation at its origins. That is what makes lynching distinctively American-that the earliest American legislators solved a set of intractable problems by legislating bills that promoted an act of collective violence, directed in certain ways at specific groups of people, that was originally, and later, meant to exhibit a particular kind of social power and exercise a particular kind of social control. (2012, p. ix)

This social control was white domination. During the period of 1877–1950, more than 4,000 African Americans were lynched in twenty states, with the majority of lynching occurring in the South (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.). While many of these occurred after the Civil War, there were instances of lynching until well into the twentieth century. Lynching was a tool of racial control as, for Black people, even just looking at white people, especially at white women could lead to mob arrest and lynching. Many cases involved alleged crimes against white women, illustrating the connections between white women and continued maintenance of white supremacy (Armstrong, 2021; Wiegman, 1993; Wikipedia, 2022).[3] Lynching was not a hidden phenomenon; it occurred in public squares, outside jails, and in front of courthouses. Specific sites often had multiple lynchings there and, yet, remain often unacknowledged by the broader US public (Ward, 2016).[4] As noted above, IR scholarship on terrorism and extremism in the United States also tend to ignore lynching and the perpetrators of such acts of violence.

Lynching played a key part in forming white subjectivity and in asserting dominance and authority of whites—it helped create and solidify white identity. The lynchings also made clear Black Americans often had no recourse to law or justice. Their bodies were subject to evaluation and, ultimately, destruction at the hands of white Americans. As Jennie Lightweis-Goff explains her work,

> I examine privileged legal and psychological constructions of white subjectivity while investigating the oppression of black subjects forced to relinquish personhood in the American public sphere, where the privileges of citizenship were preserved by extending exclusively to white men the power to touch, observe, and torture the body of the Other with curiosity and violence. The public squares, court houses, and churches that served as settings for lynching are now valorized by American exceptionalism, but for African Americans they were stages of suffering, as Saidiya V. Hartman has called them, as well as places of political lack. (2009, pp. 40–41)

[3] With apologies for the Wikipedia source! But, this is a fairly comprehensive list of lynching events in the United States since the nineteenth century and it provides an overview of the comprehensive and widespread nature of the killings.

[4] Ward (2016) has an example of a "hanging bridge" in Mississippi where many of the local killings were conducted.

Who could lynch and who could be lynched separated the populace along racial lines, with the majority of lynchers white and those lynched Black persons. This was connected to questions of subject-hood and human-ness. White Americans had power. They could and, often, did decide who deserved to be part of the population and thus considered "human." Those deemed unacceptable could be excised by lynching, thus removing them from society altogether.

An aspect of lynching with respect to racial terrorism is its public nature. Lynching was an act designed to intimidate and, thus, it occurred in public spaces: courthouses, main squares, and outside official buildings like jails and banks. Lynching was about asserting white control over Black persons and it was also about creating a climate of fear for everyone who was not white. This was done through spectacle as a series of popular culture artifacts existed to record and communicate about cases of lynching. The actual event combined with its representations served to communicate white power and white domination, even as Black Americans were, on paper, granted more rights. As Wood explains,

> Lynchings, of all kinds, were ritualistic, drawing from longstanding cultural traditions, and they were performed to convey powerful messages about white domination and black inferiority. These messages were circulated through stories that spread from house to house, town to town, through accounts reported in local newspapers, through photographs that were sold in local stores, rendered into postcards and sent to friends and relatives, and through film that fictionalized mob executions in sensationalistic form. (Wood, 2018, p. 759)

Lynching was thus a public act that bound white communities together and created an in-group dynamic across classes for white Americans. Indeed, lynching formed these in-groups of whites by binding together whites of different classes who might otherwise not have encountered each other or viewed each other as part of the same community. Here is Wood again,

> Lynching rituals provided another means through which white supremacy was reconstructed. Rituals of mob violence did more than simply reflect or represent white supremacy; rather, the performance of a lynching, and its subsequent reproduction in news reports, pamphlets, photographs, and postcards, *helped to forge a sense of white superiority and unity across class, generational, and geographic divisions*. The violent dehumanization of black

> men reenacted the core beliefs of white supremacy by producing lasting images of black bestiality and white dominance. The spectacle of gathering white mobs and crowds also created a vision of a united white community…. (Wood, 2018, p. 768, emphasis added)

In other words, lynching events were reflective of white supremacy and a product of white supremacy. At the same time, they helped form notions of "whiteness" and of a united community of people who were racialized as white.

The actual act of lynching was part of a public spectacle, meant to terrorize and to serve as a warning to Black Americans. Lynchings often proceeded thus: after being arrested for alleged crimes, the individual would be broken out of jail or captured by a gang of people. Those doing the breaking out or capturing were usually gangs of white people who were often allied with law enforcement. There was no question of a fair trial or, often, any trial at all, and the individual was killed in public. Usually, thousands of people came to watch these lynching events. The death of Black persons thus became a spectacle for the (mostly) white audience (Ohl & Potter, 2013). It was also a way to spread fear among Black communities, where enslavement had only recently ended when the first wave of lynchings began. During these public killings, tens of thousands of white people attended and viewed them. Indeed, people even travelled hundreds of miles to attend lynchings. In many events, there was an atmosphere of celebration among the spectators, who were almost all white. By killing publicly, the white perpetrators of the lynching were asserting their power over the Black persons who had been, often unjustly, accused of a crime. In many cases, it was often just a matter of a white person's—often a white woman's—word against the person lynched.

As the Equal Justice Initiative's report on lynching makes clear,

> Lynching profoundly impacted race relations in this country and shaped the geographic, political, social, and economic conditions of African Americans in ways that are still evident today. Terror lynchings fueled the mass migration of millions of black people from the South into urban ghettos in the North and West throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Lynching created a fearful environment where racial subordination and segregation was maintained with limited resistance for decades. Most critically, lynching reinforced a legacy of racial inequality that has never been adequately addressed in America. (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.)

Lynching is terrorism as it is violence that was used as a tool to spread fear among civilians—the entire Black community—and to assert white power. Despite this, however, the role played by white communities and, often, supported by the state in creating this climate of fear is not often discussed in scholarship about terrorism and extremism in the United States. The legacy of lynching for contemporary US policing, especially with regard to US police killings (Lyons, et al, 2022) is also understudied.

Once again, it is clear to see the interconnections of power and formations of whiteness. In being part of the event and in viewing the event, white Americans could consider themselves part of a larger "imagined community" of white people. They could see whiteness as dominant and triumphant. Lynching was not a pretty death and nor was it quick—the body was contorted and swollen, often the person would struggle for some time before ceasing movement. Yet, thousands of spectators would come to watch this act of violence and to shout obscenities at the person being killed (Wood, 2009). Many lynchings were announced in newspapers and widely publicized—they were not a secret activity. Photographers took pictures of the event and, later, sold these and even turned the photographs into postcards which were sent to friends and family (Kane, 2000). Attending a lynching was something many white people deemed worthy of recording and sharing with friends and family. It was something they took pride in. Young (2005) has multiple accounts of the pleasure and joy white spectators took in attending lynchings with one (partial) quote from a person stating, "Well John-this is the token of a great day we had in Dallas…" (Young, 2005, p. 645). On the whole, lynchings were a mode of building community and identity across class, geographical, and immigration status lines for white Americans.

For Black persons, lynchings were a form of terrorism they faced and were powerless to prevent. Law enforcement often looked the other way when lynchings were planned and executed. In many cases, law enforcement assisted in the mob-instigated lynchings and refused to penalize anyone for their involvement, despite lynching being extrajudicial. Looking at the photographs and postcards of lynchings, we can see the assertations of white power in plain view—white folks, often well-dressed, in a crowd; Black person hanging (Allen, ed., 2000; Apel, 2004; Wood, 2009). The photographs, which were often mass produced and shared, were about enforcing this racial sense of superiority.

Lynching illustrates two key aspects of white supremacy as foundational to far-right violent extremism in the United States: one, the formation of

an "imagined community" wherein white people across class, gender, and occupational divides gathered for the act of lynching and to assert white domination. Lynching was partly about spreading fear in Black communities that this could happen to anyone there. Two, lynching and how it has been made invisible in the scholarship on terrorism in IR illustrates the effects of the mainstreaming of white supremacist extremism in American society. As Ifill (2018) writes, the majority of white persons involved in lynching were not just the KKK and violent extremists but were mainstream white communities who were involved in and benefited from the practice. Thus, in the early twentieth-century United States, while lynchings were getting fewer in number, organizational support for white supremacy continued. Moving from an "imagined community" wherein many whites saw connections to each other through consuming print and postcards of lynching, there was a move toward real-life community-building with the KKK setting up branches across the country and being part of everyday life of many US towns.

The KKK: Formations of Whiteness and Spreading and Legitimizing White Supremacy Through Everydayness

While the overt aspects of the KKK's white supremacy are well known, it is useful to recall that they also deliberately worked to become part of mainstream politics and society by running in elections, recruiting from a wide range of classes, and tempering language to attract a broad audience. The KKK, especially in the twentieth century, worked to ensure they became a part of daily life of many white communities. Founded in 1865, the KKK remains active in the twenty-first century, though its numbers have increased and decreased over time. It has had three waves of popularity: in the 1860s, after the civil war; in the 1920s; and in the civil rights era of the mid-twentieth century (Chow, 2018; SPLC, 2011). Describing the popularity of the Klan in the 1920s, Blee states:

> That is probably the biggest organized outburst of white supremacy in American history, encompassing millions of members or more. … And that's not in the South, [it's] primarily in the North. It's not marginal. It runs people for office. It has a middle-class base. They have an electoral campaign. They are very active in the communities. (Blee quoted in Chow, 2018)

KKK groups pursued their goals of mainstreaming their actions among white people through a variety of means, one of which was developing and spreading the "Lost Cause" narrative about the Civil War. This Lost Cause narrative details the so-called heroism of Confederate soldiers and reworks the narrative of the Civil War as being about "states' rights" and away from the Confederate goal of maintaining slavery. Another feature of the Lost Cause is portraying slavery as benevolent. The Confederate defeat is explained as due to the United States' superior military manpower and resources, with little reflection upon what caused the Confederates to take up arms in the first place (Domby, 2020, p. 13). The Lost Cause narrative thus whitewashes the horrors of enslavement and promotes conspiracies such as that of Black Confederate soldiers who willingly fought in the Confederate army (they did not) (Levin, 2019). Overall, the Lost Cause myth is one that was carefully crafted and promoted by multiple levels of actors, including scholars, politicians, and organizations such as the Southern Historical Society (SHS), the United Sons of the Confederacy (USC), and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) (Gallagher & Nolan, 2010; Steele, 2020). It was during the first few decades of the twentieth century that many of the memorials and markers about the civil war were built. It was thus during times when Black people were calling for increased civil rights that many of these memorials were constructed, long after the end of the Civil War (Parks, 2017). The majority of these memorials are not about commemorating the war dead or about victims and survivors of the Civil War. Instead, they are often statues of and memorials to Confederate generals and leaders, who took up arms in support of slavery.

Another way for the KKK to mainstream white supremacy was by pushing for legislation that discriminated against Black Americans. Similar to twenty-first-century far-right extremists, the Klan remained a relatively decentralized organization, even at the height of its popularity. It is useful to consider how the Klan succeeded in supporting and establishing legislation and practices that promoted racial hatred and discrimination against Black Americans and other minorities as parallels between the Klan of the 1920s and the contemporary far-right resurgence can be noted (McVeigh & Estep, 2020). Historically, similarities between the Klan's viewpoints and that of similarly-inclined legislators meant white supremacy was practiced not just in everyday life but in and through institutions and legislation as through the Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws enforced racist policies upholding a racial hierarchy:

> The segregation and disenfranchisement laws known as "Jim Crow" represented a formal, codified system of racial apartheid that dominated the American South for three quarters of a century beginning in the 1890s. The laws affected almost every aspect of daily life, mandating segregation of schools, parks, libraries, drinking fountains, restrooms, buses, trains, and restaurants. "Whites Only" and "Colored" signs were constant reminders of the enforced racial order. (American Experience, 2011)

These laws and policies were about maintaining white power domination. The effects of these laws are still experienced in the twenty-first century, as Black Americans continue to face health, economic, and housing discriminations (see, e.g., Rothstein, 2018; Gilmore, 1999).

Additionally, another of the KKK's policies, also similar to that of many far-right extremists today, was to connect the KKK with local-level activities in order to make them part of the daily life of towns and cities (Fox, 2011). For many white Americans, the attraction of joining the KKK, was the Klan's promotion of a whites-only or mainly white space for interaction and socializing. David Cunningham, author of *Klansville USA*, points this out:

> [D]uring the periods of peak KKK successes in both the 1920s and 1960s, when Klan organizations were often significant presences in many communities, their appeal was predicated on connecting the KKK to varied aspects of members' and supporters' lives. Such efforts meant that, in the 1920s, alongside the KKK's political campaigns, members also marched in parades with Klan floats, pursued civic campaigns to support temperance, public education, and child welfare, and hosted a range of social events alongside women's and youth Klan auxiliary groups. Similarly, during the civil rights era, many were drawn to the KKK's militance, but also to leaders' promises to offer members "racially pure" weekend fish frys, turkey shoots, dances, and life insurance plans. In this sense, the Klan served as an "authentically white" social and civic outlet, seeking to insulate members from a changing broader world. (Cunningham, 2013)

These actions of supporting "everyday" activities embedded the Klan into daily lives of many white communities.

As white supremacists became part of everyday life and discrimination was institutionalized in laws and legislation, there was also a related move toward utilizing science and scientific methods to claim white superiority. Here, the nineteenth-century rise of eugenics and race science was key

to how white communities in the United States (and globally) justified domination and oppression. Race science became more popular as Europeans expanded colonialism into Asia and Africa. The United States, too, used scientific terms and procedures such as experimentations to justify white supremacy. Physical characteristics were used to construct and justify racial hierarchy (Catte, 2021). Since the advent of "race science" in the late nineteenth–early twentieth century, the KKK and associated white nationalist groups drew upon it to claim racial superiority.

Race science is about using physical and visual characteristics to justify racial hierarchy and violence against historically marginalized communities. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, scientific racism or "race science" was popular in both white supremacist and mainstream Western society (Saini, 2019). The foundation of race science was that techniques such as measurement of body parts (especially heads) could be used to categorize human populations and to posit a hierarchy of races. For example, craniometry or the measurement of skulls was used to justify a racial hierarchy wherein white people were at the top. Indeed, much of race science depended on various measurement techniques and newly popular scientific language to justify discriminatory and violent practices in the name of "science," "civilization," and "progress" (Saini, 2019). Questions of who is human dominated what passed for intellectual discussion, with scientists and experts claiming Indigenous inhabitants of areas like Australia, Africa, Asia, and the Americas were not fully human and that white persons were naturally superior (Horsman, 1981). This then connected to practices of dispossession and discrimination against these communities and to the "scientific" legitimation of racist policies. The tenets of race science were used to authorize large-scale practices of eugenics wherein minorities were sterilized without their permission (Catte, 2021). Race science has continued in the late twentieth century with the 1994 publication of Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve* and subsequent adoption of race science ideologies by the "alt-right" as well as by other far-right extremists (Evans, 2018; Saini, 2019; Chapter 4).

These policies and programs were similar to attempts by twenty-first-century far-right extremists to justify white supremacy. First, white supremacist groups like the KKK did not just promote racial hatred and spread racial terror; instead, they became part of local communities, thus embedding into the social fabric of towns and cities across the United States. This meant their actions were often dismissed or viewed as less

threatening by the (mainly white) policymakers and legislators. Second, politicians, educators, and law enforcement used statistics and experimental methods to claim that whites were naturally superior to Black persons and other minorities. In this, physical differences were translated into negatives, and whiteness prioritized with people defined as white then positioning themselves at the top of a racialized hierarchy. Finally, the mainstreaming of white supremacist policies and actions meant white supremacists came from local communities and were part of such. They could then shape laws and policies in favor of segregation and discrimination.

All these—the use of science and quantification, attempts to become parts of everydayness of local American communities, and use of laws and policies to solidify race-based discrimination—are hallmarks of the twenty-first-century US far-right extremists as well. As the US far-right attempts to make white supremacy invisible while folding it into the everydayness of US life, many Americans have taken for granted the inequities produced by discriminatory legislation and unequal access to employment, housing, and healthcare. Whiteness, thus, is able to hide while also perpetuating itself in seemingly neutral legislation and policies. This has led to the invisibilization of systemic racism and of our part in continuing and sustaining structural injustices in discussions about terrorist and extremist violence. These mechanisms of hiding and normalizing white supremacy were simplified by the advent of the Internet and the rise of social media. Far-right violent extremists were keen to take advantage of the Internet, and have been active online since its early days.

The Advent of the Internet and the Evasion of White Supremacy: The Case of Stormfront

By the early 1990s, the US far-right realized that, while in-person groups and communication could be disrupted and destroyed by law enforcement, the online world offered plenty of opportunities for networking and communicating their views away from surveillance. This was another example of white supremacists using ordinary tools (Internet) and spaces (online) to share their messages and to further their goals. The Internet allows for rapid communication, the formation of communities outside of physical ties, and anonymity. This has meant a rapidly growing far-right extremist communities have formed online, sharing memes, "owning the libs," and generally "shitposting" (see Chapter 5).

But, it is not just building a community that the online world facilitates; the Internet offers space for sharing information and also, especially, for learning and planning. Far-right extremists learn from each other and those who engage in violence are inspired by others online. This was the case with the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooter who killed eleven people at the Tree of Life synagogue. We know that he was inspired by anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, popular on the Internet (Lind, 2018).

Even before the 2018 shootings in Pittsburgh, Dylann Roof killed nine Black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015. Inspired by white nationalist and Confederate nostalgia, Roof praised the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and wanted to emulate him. Before Roof, Norway's Anders Breivik was also inspired by McVeigh and, now, Breivik himself has become an inspiration for other far-right killers, including the man who killed 51 people and injured 40 more at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019 (AFP, 2019; Gumbel, 2019; Trifunov, 2012). In 2020, a US Coast Guard officer accused of planning to kill Democrat politicians and journalists, also cited Breivik as an inspiration (Stanley-Becker, 2019). All these individuals encountered ideas of previous far-right extremist killers via the Internet; none of them met each other in person. In this way, the Internet has provided space for interaction and engagement, for sharing (mis)information and conspiracies, and also for inspiring other far-right violence. Stormfront was one of the original sites where information about white domination was spread, white victimhood and grievance stoked, and violent imaginaries against others praised.

Formed in 1996, Stormfront went through a period of popularity in the 1990s. It declined in the 2000s, with claims that the site was going broke (Weill, 2018). However, its founder claimed there were more than 300,000 registered users for its forums and that traffic to the site grew after 2017's violent Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville (Reeves, 2017). It remained active as of April 2022. Stormfront's forum includes threads with links to various articles, discussion questions, and a calendar of events. There is also a linked radio show. Stormfront was the outcome of far-right extremists' realization that the Internet had the potential for anonymous communication, planning, and recruitment that they would otherwise not have offline.

Extremists on Stormfront have been able to use the Internet for a range of purposes, including building a community that would be exclusively for

white people. At the same time, the Internet facilitated the rapid proliferation of white supremacist messages, such as the view that the white race was under threat. On Stormfront, posters spread misrepresentations of history, again presenting whites as under threat from a growing population of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. The overwhelming message was that white people were under threat and were the real victims of government policies.

Stormfront has been a prototype for how subsequent far-right extremists would come to use the Internet: sharing ideas and goals, promoting white supremacy, maintaining forums for discussions, sharing grievances, and constituting white victimhood. There is also a forum thread where one can "meet white nationalists for romance and friendship," and other threads for careers and life advice (Stormfront, n.d.). Regarding the role played by the Internet to help far-right extremists maintain and communicate white supremacy, Thompson discusses how the Internet became a site where communities across traditional borders could be formed and would proliferate. He points out that the Internet provided space for sharing of viewpoints and stories that would otherwise be considered outside of the norm in mainstream society. Burris, et al.'s analysis supports this and indicates how there is a burgeoning cyber-community of white supremacists online, even if the various networks are decentralized (Thompson, 2001). What this shows is how extreme ideas—ideas that would be considered outside of the mainstream in most circumstances—proliferate online. This facilitates the normalization of far-right views as they are easy to access and consume.

Analyzing almost seven million posts on Stormfront from September 2001 to August 2010, Caren, et al. support Thompson's claim, illustrating how Stormfront users utilized the Internet to constitute their social identity and to build networks that fostered hate speech and promoted racist goals (Caren, et al, 2012). In general, white supremacists used early online forums to build community and to create and maintain networks outside the gaze of the state and law enforcement. Furthermore, as Amster explains, the ubiquity of the internet gave far-right extremists "direct access to impressionable young people" (2009, p. 221). There are plenty of potential recruits online and they can gather and communicate outside of physical spaces.

Similar to how postcards and the action of watching lynching created a sense of white community, the Internet facilitates this process today. Far-right extremists disseminate visual and related textual information

to communicate and recruit on Stormfront. Indeed, for many potential recruits, Stormfront provided a more "palatable" option that was considered less than outright hate speech (Meddaugh & Kay, 2009). As will be discussed in Chapter 4, much of this normalization is an aspect that other white nationalists, such as Jared Taylor and the *American Renaissance* magazine, also promoted. There has been an ongoing strategy on the part of the far-right to move toward mainstream politics and society. How they use language is part of this strategy.

After this brief discussion of how far-right violent extremists have constructed their identities and interests while strategically becoming part of mainstream society and politics, the next section provides an outline of how the issue of US far-right violence has been studied, drawing from scholarship in IR and related disciplines. As noted earlier, terrorism studies has historically downplayed research on the far-right in favor of an overwhelming focus on Jihadist-inspired terrorism (Schuurman, 2019). However, related disciplines have examined the causes and consequences of the presence of far-right extremism in the United States and the next few sections will draw upon those as well.

A Brief Review of the Literature on US Far-Right Extremism

Scholarship on far-right extremism in the United States is located within a range of different fields and not just political science and IR. Historically, as outlined in Chapter 2, terrorism studies has focused almost overwhelmingly on Jihadist/Islamist terrorism and neglected the far-right. This has been the case, too, with regard to the United States as the majority of research on terrorism in relation to the United States has focused on US counterterrorism and its effects domestically and abroad, especially in the post-September 11 era. The exception when bringing in race to the study of terrorism is that of critical scholarship on Islamophobia, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, outside of political science and IR, there is a long tradition of research on far-right violence in the United States from sociology, criminology, history, and related disciplines. There are three key areas of research about the US far-right that I want to discuss further: historical overviews and research on causes and types of far-right violent extremism, race and white supremacy-related scholarship, and discussion of methods.

Historical Overviews and Research on Causes and Types of Far-Right Violent Extremism in the United States

Historical overviews of US far-right violent extremism have focused on tracing the lineage of contemporary far-right movements and ideas. In this, they have studied the Confederacy, the long history of anti-Blackness in the United States, and earlier forms of far-right violent extremism such as the KKK. Chalmers provides an overview of the growth of the KKK and especially its persistence in the United States (1987). In her scholarship on the second Klan in the 1920s, MacLean (1995) draws upon archival records to trace how the Klan deliberately organized to become part of everyday life of US towns and cities. She notes how, contrary to mainstream understandings of the Klan as racist men in hoods, the Klan and overall white supremacist extremism was part of everyday life in the United States and involved the participation of many middle-class, prosperous Americans (MacLean, 1995). These Americans considered Black and brown communities winning political and civil rights as threatening white people's perceived status in society. Focusing on a similar period, Gordon (2017) illustrates how the 1920s KKK combined anti-immigration narratives with existing anti-Black ones. In this way, they gained support in mainstream US politics of the time, gaining between four to six million members (Gordon, 2017). In all these, the authors examine how the Klan recruited and its messaging practices, something that is central to McVeigh (2009) as well. Similar to Gordon, McVeigh notes how the KKK of the early twentieth century spread anti-immigrant sentiments while downplaying explicit white supremacy such that it could become more acceptable in white communities (McVeigh, 2009). This blurring of boundaries between "extremist" and "mainstream" is also noted in Madison's research on the Klan in the Midwest (Madison, 2020). Similarly, Baker describes how the KKK is connected with religion (Baker, 2017), a connection that Christian Identity movement researchers have also identified.

Running through many of these overviews of far-right violence in the United States is a concern with the question: how do far-right violent extremists continue to remain relevant? Pete Simi and Robert Futrell analyze cases, conduct interviews, and engage in fieldwork with white power groups in order to understand how they are formed, how they justify violence, and what their ideological goals are (Simi & Futrell, 2015). As with the more historical analyses covered earlier, Simi and

Futrell also note the continuities between historical white power movements and their ideologies and active white power groups. Similarly, Vegas Tenold draws upon their own participation in various white power groups to reflect upon what makes individuals join such groups, how white power groups communicate and legitimize their hate, and the structural conditions that give rise to such groups (Tenold, 2018). They caution against seeing such groups as disorganized and out of touch with society; instead, as Tenold's research shows, white power groups are keenly aware of the messaging aspects of their actions and have detailed plans and strategies, especially plans to mainstream their ideas and goals. This, of course, is similar to the Klan's operations in the past wherein they repackaged their hate and white power, connecting those to various more mainstream narratives like anti-Blackness and anti-immigration. It is a similar process that current white power groups are doing, as Tenold notes (2018).

The question of how far-right extremism has become part of the mainstream exercises Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Katherine Belew in different but related ways. Miller-Idriss concentrates on the spaces where far-right recruitment occurs and, again, illustrates the everyday nature of such recruitment (2020). In this way, far-right extremism is not something that is outside of mainstream society or unusual but is and has always been part of the mainstream and of the everyday. On a similar vein, Belew also traces the places where far-right violent extremists have become part of the everyday but she focuses on the military (2019). In *Bring the War Home*, Belew draws upon historical archives to illustrate how former members of the US military perceived themselves to be abandoned by the state after the Vietnam War. They then turned to violence and engaged in paramilitary violence against minority communities and also against the government (2019). Militia movements of the post-Vietnam period have included former US military and law enforcement as members.

From a political science perspective, Arie Perliger's *American Zealots* provides an overview of far-right violence in the United States, including an ideological typology as well as his predictions for the future (Perliger, 2020). Also an overview but with more of a focus on neo-Nazis, Christian extremists ("theocrats"), and the "alt-right", Matthew Lyons examines what he calls "neglected themes" of the US far-right. He identifies these "neglected themes" as "gender and sexuality," "anti-imperialism," and "decentralism" (Lyons, 2018). Covering the years from around 1974 to 2004, Zeskind's history of the white nationalist movement traces different periods and cases of white nationalism in the United States while

making a similar argument to that of this book—that the white nationalist movement has moved toward the mainstream of US society and culture and that their usage of specific discursive practices is important to research and understand in order to counter them (Zeskind, 2009). Daryl Johnson, a former US Department of Homeland Security official who warned about ongoing white nationalist extremism, makes a similar argument regarding the presence of violent extremism in US society (Johnson, 2019). Johnson's case is illustrative of how far-right violence continued to be sidelined in US government circles as he is the author of a 2009 Department of Homeland Security report that warned of future violence by right-wing extremists. Instead, as he writes, "a political backlash ensued because of an objection to the label 'right-wing extremism'" as Republicans objected (Johnson, 2017; Strasser, 2012). The Report was eventually withdrawn from circulation amid Republican outcry.

There are also individual case studies of various far-right movements, identifying their emergence, causes for their success, their goals, and their tactics for gaining and maintaining support. Gallaher studied the militia (Gallaher, 2002), as did Levitas (2004), Mulloy (2008), and Crothers (2019). Neiwert wrote about the Patriot movement as a whole (2003) while Temple analyzed how the Bundys and their armed occupations of federal lands have shaped the development of the Patriot movement (2019). There has also been research by Stern on the Proud Boys (2019), Hawley (2018) on the "alt-right", Jackson on the Oath Keepers (Jackson, 2020), and Rothschild (2021) on QAnon. Case studies of individual events of far-right violence are less common, despite the long history of KKK attacks and lynching in the United States. Oklahoma City is an exception with Wright (2007) providing an overview of the processes that led to the bombing. A journalism-based analysis of errors and misses by the FBI is provided by Gumbel and Charles who point out there are many questions about the bombing that remain unanswered (Gumbel & Charles, 2013). There is also research on the 2017 Unite the Right violence in Charlottesville (e.g., Blout & Burkart, 2021).

Scholarship on White Supremacist Extremism in the United States

While whiteness and how it relates to the mainstreaming of violent extremism often remains underexplored in some of the existing scholarship on the US far-right, there has been a focus on this connection in research on gender and the far-right. Kathleen Blee studies how white

women participate in violent far-right movements, what attracts them to the far-right, and how they live dual lives of participating in mainstream society while also advocating for hate and white supremacy (Blee, 2003, 2009). Conducting life history analysis, Darby examines similar questions regarding what attracts women to far-right groups (2020). Taking a broader look at white supremacy and how that shapes individual motivations, McRae provides a historical analysis of how women on the ground promoted, maintained, and legitimated practices of segregation throughout the 1920s to 1970s. In this, she moves away from asking how and why women join particular groups to illustrating how women's daily tasks and actions did the work of maintaining white supremacy and justifying continued inequalities through practices of segregation (McRae, 2020). Moving from grassroots women to the elite, Jones-Rogers provides a historical overview of how white women slave-owners benefited from slavery and were complicit in the slave economy (Jones-Rogers, 2020). Ferber, too, focuses on whiteness and gender but concentrates on how white supremacists have promoted a narrative wherein white men are the ones who are actually oppressed. Such an identity then leads to an assertion of white male domination (Ferber, 1999). This, then, fuels perceptions of white victimhood and engages in white grievance politics.

In the majority of these works on gender and far-right violence, there is an underlying thread of white anger and white victimhood. This anger is used as justification for claiming non-white persons are gaining power at the expense of whites, whether historically or in the present day. Carol Anderson's *White Rage* provides a framework to analyze this reactionary politics of whiteness. She writes how each move toward increased equality by Black Americans has been met with resentment and opposition from the white populace and institutions (Anderson, 2016). Shapiro also examines white violence and how it has historically been excused by the state and its legal and law enforcement arms (Shapiro, 1988). On the whole, these scholars and others who have connected whiteness to far-right violence have concentrated on how the perceived loss of white power and status can and has led to violence.

While the effects of whiteness with regard to violent extremism is relatively understudied in terrorism studies and IR, there is research on white supremacy and its effects on US society from other disciplines. An example is the research on Confederate memorials and how the majority of these were established long after the end of the Civil War and how that

indicates a strategy to maintain white supremacy on the part of those who planned and built them (Cox, 2021; Domby, 2020). These memorials, thousands of which are still present today, are a visible symbol of white supremacy dotted around the US landscape—they symbolize the racist goals of the Confederates. Yet, similar to how much of far-right violent extremism's white supremacist goals are often hidden and normalized, the Confederate memorials are taken for granted by many white Americans (Dixit & Miller, 2022). From 2020–2021, there have been laws enacted at the state level in some US states that ban even debating the future of Confederate memorials (SPLC, 2019; WYFF4, 2020). Organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) fundraised and helped build many of these memorials. Even now, they fight to prevent them from being taken down or even having their histories contextualized.

One area where the concealment of structural effects of counterterrorism practices can be noted is in research on the rise in Islamophobia. Conceptually, Islamophobia is useful to analyze the development of the United States countering violent extremism (CVE) policies, especially to explain how and why far-right perpetrators, especially those promoting white supremacy, are excluded from definitions and policies regarding extremism and the implications thereof (Breen-Smyth, 2020; Dixit, 2020). Structural processes connected to counterterrorism which racialize the terrorist subject in the West are often ignored in discussions and policymaking (Beydoun, 2019). Beydoun's definition of Islamophobia as having multiple dimensions of private, structural, and dialectical (2019, p. 29) is critical to thinking about how racialization of counterterrorism policies impacts minority communities. Beydoun notes that Islamophobia is presented as a private problem, a few bad apples as it were when it actually has structural dimensions (2019, pp. 29–30). This means concerns regarding raced and gendered practices like the surveillance of Muslim-Americans or the psychological and security impacts of CVE on those targeted are not part of official CVE policymaking as they are seen as not directly linked to the policymaking itself. Relevant to this book, however, is the point that state responses' targeting of Muslims and other minorities means the worldviews promoted by the far-right are being accepted more broadly. Far-right extremists' strategies of legitimation are working-that they are not viewed as threats is partly because of their rhetorical strategies.

Returning to an issue raised in Chapter 2, the nation-state often considers dissent by minority groups as "suspicious." The current lack of definitions of extremism and radicalization in the United States actually allows the US state to claim it *is* including all forms of extremism in its discussions and policies. However, in practice (Dixit, 2020), it is mainly Muslim/Arab-Americans and Islam itself that were linked with extremism in US CVE programs. This is problematic as it constructs Muslims and Arabs as a suspect community while also ignoring similar or even more violent actions committed by right-wing perpetrators. In other words, by preemptively producing Muslim and Arab-Americans as potential threats but also as vulnerable to extremism, the state is able to authorize practices of surveillance and detention against them. Such practices are not authorized in relation to far-right extremists, who are almost always white. In this case, the whiteness of militia and far-right extremists inoculates against being considered "extremist" and being produced as a "suspect community," even as they engage in violence.

The interconnection of racism in the United States with institutions such as government agencies and law enforcement is another aspect of white supremacy about which there is ongoing research, though not directly in terrorism studies. In orthodox terrorism studies, as noted earlier, the state and its security forces are placed in a counterterrorist role such that state violence is often not included in definitions of terrorism. However, scholars such as Alex Vitale and Elizabeth Hinton have examined how the history of the police as an institution in the United States has been interconnected with white supremacist goals (Hinton, 2021; Vitale, 2017). Related research shows how the police have often used violence against minorities, constituting minorities as dangerous, both within the United States and overseas (Schrader, 2019). This fits in with the "suspect communities" scholarship and has connections to critical research on state violence against racialized communities. The effects of white supremacist institutions and policies in leading to high incarceration rates for historically-marginalized communities, unequal access to education and housing and jobs, and health disparities are all part of research on the effects of racism and white supremacy (Davis, 2011; Wilson Gilmore, 2007). This framework of constituting racialized minorities as dangerous others in policymaking utilizes similar rhetorical strategies as that used by white supremacist violent extremists.

There is an interconnection of white supremacy with religion as well and scholars of religion have explored these historical and contemporary

relations. Butler connects Christianity with the promotion of whiteness as she provides an explanation for why and how Christians—white evangelical Christians in this case—have historically engaged in racist practices in order to defend and promote a white supremacist future (Butler, 2021). In doing so, they have consistently opposed equality and civil rights for all. Similarly, Du Mez outlines how the figure of Jesus has changed in the white evangelical worldview and shifted from a compassionate Jesus to one of extreme masculinity and Christian nationalism (2020). Jones provides an overview of how white Christians have not just defended or been complicit in racist practices, but have actively promoted such practices (2020). So, it is not just the case that a few individuals become part of the violent Christian identity movement but, rather, that white supremacy and white Christianity in the United States have had a historically symbiotic relationship (Jones, 2020).

These brief glimpses into white supremacy's interconnections with policing, CVE, and Christianity indicate a vast range of scholarship on white supremacy in the United States, especially in relation to the promotion and maintenance of systemic hierarchies of whiteness, defending whiteness through promotion of white innocence, and legitimating violent practices against those considered as threats to whiteness. Much of this remains under-discussed in IR and terrorism studies' scholarship regarding violent extremism and terrorism in the United States. I next turn to the question of research, following on from the discussion in Chapter 2 on discourse analysis and discursive practices, to note some common methods that have been used to research far-right violent extremism in the United States.

A Brief Comment on Methods Used to Study US Far-Right Violence

In the literature about far-right violence in IR and terrorism studies, there is a focus on statistical analysis using existing databases as well as some fieldwork-based research. Within this, white supremacy and whiteness are often viewed as one in a number of categories of far-right violence. The systemic nature of white supremacy and the historical constitution of whiteness in the United States is given less prominence. Outside of these disciplines, however, much of the research on the far-right utilizes ethnography and discourse analysis and focuses on historical and contemporary narratives. For example, much of the research on the KKK draws on oral histories and on archives. There is also a growing trend of

research on online discourses of hate. This utilizes computer-assisted qualitative or quantitative analyses. Another prominent form of research is life history analysis wherein the life histories of current or former far-right violent extremists are outlined and analyzed to note motivations and goals (e.g. Picciolini, 2017; Saslow, 2018).

Regarding causes of far-right violent extremism in the United States, factors including the election of Barack Obama, a steep economic downturn, and increasing anti-immigration sentiments contributed to the rise of right-wing extremism in the 2000s (Simi, 2013). Yet there was no corresponding political or government-level intervention of the kind paralleling post 9/11 CVE programs that targeted Muslim and Arab Americans. Instead, as Simi argues, right-wing ideologies are often delinked from violence even when the perpetrator has been part of white supremacist or neo-Nazi movements (Simi, 2013, pp. 145–146). He gives the example of Timothy McVeigh who was inspired by *The Turner Diaries* and connected to white supremacist communities. Yet, an early FBI profile of him called him a "lone wolf" attacker (Simi, 2013, p. 145). Indeed, Simi argues that one of the implications of seeing right-wing violence as individualized and not connected to a larger strategy of right-wing extremism is that this then constitutes right-wing extremism as of no great concern (Simi, 2013, p. 146). Right-wing extremism is then disconnected from the broader community. Breen Smyth, in her discussion of "lone wolf" terrorism makes a similar argument (2020). As Chapters 4 to 6 will outline further, far-right extremists actively present their views in ways that conform to mainstream ways of acting and talking. In other words, far-right extremists' discursive practices produce particular meanings and worldviews that are familiar to many in the mainstream and, thus, are deemed less dangerous. Whiteness plays a key role here in this acceptance.

It is then useful to note how far-right extremists employ various discursive practices to legitimate their identities and goals, especially how they use similar strategies as are used in mainstream discourses. In this, this project aligns with research by, among others, Mondon and Winter (2020) and Miller-Idriss (2020) which examine the normalization and mainstreaming of far-right extremism. While their work draws on policy documents (Mondon and Winter) and ethnographies (Miller-Idriss), this draws on discourses of self-identified far-right violent extremists in the United States.

A caution is worth repeating here: it can be said that the focus on far-right extremists and their self-making in and through various archetypical narratives provides them with more publicity and centers their actions to the exclusion of those who experience their hate and violence. This is an aspect of this study I have been wrestling with throughout. It is my hope that critically analyzing narratives of far-right extremists in order to note main themes and discursive practices through which they attempt to (and, often, succeed) normalize their ideologies and worldviews is helpful to recognize similar strategies at work in other contexts. In other words, this book's focus is on *how* far-right extremists utilize various rhetorical strategies to legitimate their calls to violence and to link themselves with contemporary, mainstream goals and concerns. By illustrating these strategies and recognizing them, it will be easier to challenge and delegitimate them.

Overall, this book fits within critical scholarship that centers race in analysis of far-right extremism. The US CVE programs borrowed from other de-radicalization and CVE models, rather than developing local versions best suited for the US context (Coolsaet, 2016, p. 35). The United States is different from many other industrialized countries, especially in its easy access to guns, large-scale police militarization, and an active armed militia movement. There is also the mythmaking over the Confederacy. Many of the policies put in place for counterterrorism abroad and CVE domestically target Muslim-Americans and minority communities while leaving the majority white population alone. In this way, the meanings of "terrorism" and "extremism" and the related policies to manage them are racialized. These practices of racialization occur through a range of discursive strategies including misuse of "science" and numerical data. Similar tactics have been used by the US far-right and it is on an archetype of far-right popular culture—the magazine (*American Renaissance*)—that the next chapter will focus upon.

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CHAPTER 4

American Renaissance and Far-Right Extremists' Use of Numbers and Pseudoscience for Legitimation of Violence

Introduction

> What we call race realism is what was considered common sense until perhaps the 1950s. It is a body of views that was so taken for granted it had no name, but it can be summarized as follows: That race is an important aspect of individual and group identity, that different races build different societies that reflect their natures, and that it is entirely normal for whites (or for people of any other race) to want to be the majority race in their own homeland. If whites permit themselves to become a minority population, they will lose their civilization, their heritage, and even their existence as a distinct people.
>
> All other groups take it for granted that they have a right to speak out in their own interests. Only whites have lost this conviction.
>
> (*American Renaissance*, 2020, www)

The quote above from the "Our Issues" section of the far-right magazine *American Renaissance* illustrates how it uses the rhetoric of "common sense" to establish authority for what is clearly an untruth. There is no scientific connection between racial differences and intelligence; the United States is not and never has been a whites-only

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"homeland." But, these do not matter for *American Renaissance* and its founder and biggest promotor, Jared Taylor. They use "science" or, rather, pseudoscience in order to advance racist views and constitute white victimhood. This chapter outlines key discursive practices that Taylor and other far-right extremists like him have used to constitute and promote white supremacy while constituting Black and brown communities as un-American. I argue that by using discursive strategies that mimic mainstream, especially mainstream academic argument-making style, Taylor and others like him continue to make their racist claims visibly and publicly while claiming their views are supported by "science" and numbers.

In order to outline and critique the far-right's uses of pseudoscience and numbers-centric discursive practices to justify calls for violent action, this chapter analyzes the Conservative magazine *American Renaissance* (AR). It illustrates how American Renaissance utilizes narrative strategies of "scientification" to communicate white supremacist goals while, at the same time, attempting to evade responsibility for promoting violence. Crises narratives the out-groups . American Renaissance's articles, book reviews, and commentaries promote xenophobic, racist, and misogynistic narratives, thus constituting the United States where white people are allegedly oppressed by people of color. Connected to this is a broader narrative of weak governments, and laws and practices that allegedly favor persons of color over the white population. Table 4.1 shows the main narrative strategies and related outcomes from AR.

Table 4.1 Analyzing narrative strategies of pseudoscience and quantification in American Renaissance

	Source	*Narrative strategies*	*Outcomes*
This chapter	All issues of *American Renaissance*, 255 print issues from 1990–2012; 2012–2020: online	Pseudoscience and use of quantitative data ("scientification") —Choice of books for review (Appendix A)	Establishing authority of whiteness • Constructing an imagined white United States Normalizing white supremacy (connections with mainstream Conservatives)

These strategies or discursive devices draw on and promote pseudo-science and quantitative data to create white identity as under threat from a changing group of "others." Discursive devices such as minimization of Black and brown peoples' experiences, drawing conclusions from extreme cases, and the use of metaphors to securitize Black and Muslim Americans is how *American Renaissance* creates white victimhood. Additionally, AR's articles and other essays draw on emotions while using unverified and unsourced numbers and data to support their racist claims. *American Renaissance* and US far-right extremists more generally establish authority through utilizing similar strategies-that of "science" and "data"-as that often used in mainstream academia and society. These strategies allow for a shift to normalization as the format that the information is presented—that of a seemingly academic journal that uses "science" and numbers to support claims—is familiar to many.

Jared Taylor began publishing *American Renaissance* in November 1990. AR calls itself "the leading Conservative magazine" that is "founded on race realism." The "About us" page of AmRen.com states,

> We also believe that whites, like all racial groups, have legitimate interests that must be defended. The defense of those interests is white advocacy. We seek to advance only those interests that we recognize and would defend for all other racial groups. We seek no advantages as whites—only the expression of preferences for our own people and culture that are taken for granted by people of other races but denied to us. (*American Renaissance*, 2020, www)

Of course, "white interests" have not been under threat in the United States but acknowledging that reality would not suit AR's white power goals. Articles in AR include discussions of current events, along with longer form stories about specific issues such as race and crime, immigration, demographics, and so on. *American Renaissance* ended its print run in January 2012 but has been published online since then. In the period from 1990 to 2012, there were 255 issues published with 3–4 longer articles, and 1–2 additional sections with shorter stories in each issue. The format of the magazine is the same throughout the years—long essays, book reviews, a section titled 'O Tempora! O Mores!', and a Letters from Readers section. The online version allows comments on its posts, providing higher public interaction with the published story. Well-known Conservative commentators such as Ann Coulter, Pat Buchanan,

and Michelle Malkin have regularly contributed to *American Renaissance*. While exact readership figures are hard to get, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) claimed *American Renaissance* was widely read with "The [New Century] foundation's website [which hosts *American Renaissance*], featuring stories on black crime and the like, had risen by 2008 to one of the top 20,000 in the world after a makeover that added a daily feature posting news articles of interest to racists." (SPLC, www).[1]

This chapter's sources are all the AR articles from the initial volume in November 1990 to December 2020. The magazine moved to an online-only format in 2012 and I reviewed articles, reviews, and commentaries from then on online. AR added videos after its online move and those, too, have been examined. The goal here is not a content analysis—though I read all issues and watched many of the videos—but to provide a general outline of *how* discursive practices of pseudoscience and quantification are deployed to create negative meanings about marginalized communities and to promote whiteness. The rest of this chapter outlines how the white identity is formed and a racial hierarchy constituted, maintained, and justified through the use of pseudoscience and numbers as data. Overall, this chapter illustrates how far-right popular culture, as can be seen in *American Renaissance*, uses pseudoscience and numerical data to normalize and mainstream white nationalism and white supremacy. AR does this by utilizing a range of discursive devices, such as the use of pseudoscience and numerical data, who is cited in the essays and stories, and the selection of books reviewed. Questions that guided this analysis include: how is whiteness constituted? How are actions and behavior, specifically, behavior justifying violence, legitimated? How are marginalized communities represented? As noted above, the goal of this chapter is to illustrate how key strategies of identity construction are deployed in *American Renaissance*. Relatedly, there is the use of narrative strategies to invisibilize racism by presenting racist information as "just" science and numbers, removed from emotions and standpoints.

American Renaissance illustrates one of the main legitimation strategies for whiteness and white supremacy, that of scientification. This means using similar types of evidence as would be found in legitimate

[1] The SPLC figures here are based on print copies of *American Renaissance*. The numbers are most likely higher since the magazine moved online making it more easily accessible.

academic journals to support racist claims. For *American Renaissance*, this scientification occurs in two main ways:

1. Using surveys, statistics, and databases—numbers—to support the overarching claim that a plural democracy or multiculturalism and diversity are bad for the United States.
2. Selecting who is authorized to speak and is cited. This can further be disaggregated into:
   a. Book reviews: selection of books and how they are presented in the reviews (Please see Appendix for a list of all the books that were reviewed in AR)
   b. Scholars, politicians, well-known conservatives, everyday people, and especially members of the minority communities who are cited in AR articles. These sources are used to support AR's anti-diversity and anti-plural democracy claims. AR also publishes opinions and articles by scholars who are affiliated with think tanks or universities but who have promoted racist policies and practices. A number of these are non-US scholars who claim they are astounded by the US culture and society. At this individual level, establishing authority also manifests in the form of individual observers who are described as having seen and experienced anti-white behavior in the United States.

I will elaborate upon each of these in turn in the following sections.

"Scientification," or AR's Use of Surveys, Statistics, and Databases—Numbers—To Support the Overarching Claim that a Plural Democracy or Multiculturalism and Diversity Are Bad for the United States

It is not a surprise to say that one of the major themes in AR over the years has been the alleged ills of multiculturalism and of immigration. However, what might be useful to discuss further is the *how*—how are these "ills of multiculturalism" defined and communicated. In this, the use of pseudoscience, especially scientifically discredited theories of eugenics and the use of quantitative data to support racist claims are of note. In both these approaches, the modes of argument and convincing

are something people are familiar with in academic contexts. Related to this is the use of anecdotes and the "this is how things are" narrative style. There are articles about how immigrants are the cause of societal ills and these are connected with false or incomplete statistics about changes in demographics and decline in white birthrate, along with anecdotes and stories regarding changes in US society due to influx of immigrants.

In its articles and even in its opinion pieces, *American Renaissance* continually cites numerical data and statistics, including surveys and references to various databases. This is to construct authority where AR's claims seem legitimate. For example, in the inaugural issue in November 1990, a story titled, "Race, crime, and numbers" by Marian Evans includes numbers and statistics about one of the most widespread lies about race in the United States—she claims that Black people in New York City are engaged in crime in higher proportions than whites (Evans, 1990). She lies that Black and Hispanic communities are disproportionately more likely to be involved in crimes. She also gives examples of other races having a higher likelihood of being arrested for murder as compared to whites and that race-based crimes have increased over time (Evans, 1990).

To the casual AR reader, this increase and the numbers might seem staggering at first glance, especially the growth in crime is expressed in percentages. But, there is no actual evidence any of Evans' claims are accurate. There is no information regarding the source of the data cited in the essay. Where are the numbers from? Evans (and most other AR authors) does not tell us. There is also no information about what the base starting level is regarding the change in percentages. Finally, the measurement of crime by measuring who gets arrested is obviously flawed as it does not take into account police discrimination about who is arrested (and who is not). Of course, one cannot expect a far-right extremist popular culture source to provide this context. Instead, by including large quantities of numbers, showing changes in percentages, and claiming crime was lower in New York City before increased multiculturalism, Evans and AR stoke fear of minorities based on made-up numbers and statistics. Such use of crime statistics was not limited only to far-right publications of the time, however. As Lowry et al. (2003) write, a similar exaggeration of the crime rates could be noted in mainstream media as well, indicating shared discursive practices of quantification.

Similarly, in November 1992's edition of AR, "Race and Intelligence: The Evidence" (the feature article) by Jared Taylor says: "Scientific data

show that the races differ in intelligence—dogma holds otherwise." This framing helps establish authority as the view "races differ in intelligence" is said to be supported by "scientific data." Those that argue otherwise are repeating "dogma." The essay starts with:

> There is probably no greater intellectual crime than to point out that the average intelligence of blacks is significantly lower than that of other races. American society punishes those who publicly state this view almost as vigorously as Islamic republics punish anyone who defames the Prophet. (Taylor, 1992)

The essay then includes a graphic that is simply titled "IQ" and appears to show Black and white people cluster differently along the IQ axis (Taylor, 1992). However, no additional information is provided about this graphic. There is no information on where the data is from or what exactly is being compared in the two axes. Yet the start of the essay establishes that those who agree with Taylor as the iconoclasts-as the people who think for themselves. This positions the AR reader—and those who agree with Taylor's essay—as going against the norm. They are the only ones who have access to the truth—this framing of having inside (true) knowledge is one that is repeated in other far-right popular culture constitutions of the self, as will also be seen in Chapter 6. On the other hand, those who challenge Taylor and AR are following "dogma" and are unaware of the so-called truth (Fig. 4.1).

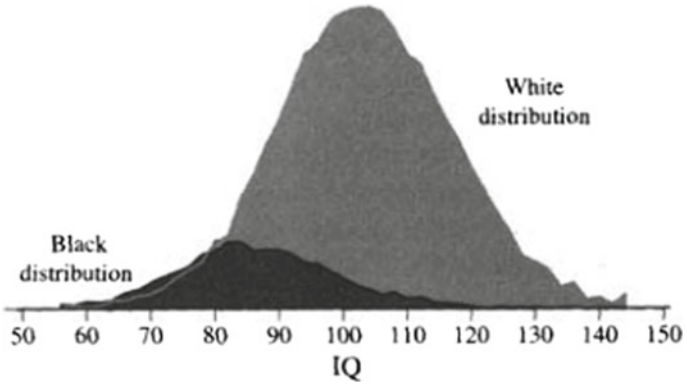

Fig. 4.1 The figure with no title from Taylor, 1992

A particularly egregious example of this use of numerical data and graphs and charts to spread fear of minorities can be found in March 2004's issue "The myth of Hispanic family values." The main story—with the same title—by Taylor Scott claims the notion Hispanic people have "strong family values" is a myth. It proceeds to argue that, instead, "By virtually every significant social measure, Hispanics rank below whites and even, on occasion, below blacks. Strong Hispanic 'family values' are a myth." (Scott, 2004) It then includes a series of charts with titles such as "Illegitimacy rate, 1999," where "illegitimacy" is defined as children who were born to parents who are not formally married, "Birth to girls ages 14 and under, per 100,000 (1999)" and "Marital status of women (%) ages 15–44 (1995)." There are 18 charts included in this one story. Despite the prevalence of charts, once again, there is no information provided about where the data is from. There are no citations on any of the charts. Yet the use of numbers and percentages mimic academic journal conventions and does the work of establishing authority about the racist claims that are being made. In this, we can note how far-right extremists' construct footing, wherein a particular way of speaking and acting (i.e., that "Hispanic family values" are not accurate, backed by spurious data) is promoted.

The same article also illustrates another practice of normalization of white victimhood and grievance—that of using legitimate sources in connection with these unsourced data to support racist claims. The article states "One minimal measure of success [of having strong family values] is keeping one's children from being killed." It then lists data that indicate Hispanic children are dying at young ages. It adds,

> A University of Colorado study found that the death rate in accidents was 75 percent higher for Hispanics than whites. For children the figures are almost as bad. A study in 1998 by Johns Hopkins University found that Hispanic children are 72 percent more likely to die in traffic accidents than white children. (Scott, 2004)

Once again, neither study is cited anywhere in the text. However, both universities are well-known universities with extensive research histories. A casual reader may well find the invocation of their authority here persuadable. Thus, *American Renaissance* is utilizing similar tools as would be found in a legitimate academic journal to advance its racist claims.

The use of unverified statistics and datasets is foundational to *American Renaissance*'s flagship publications, the Color of Crime reports. First published in 1999, it has been expanded and updated twice, in 2005 and 2016. Since then, more localized versions: e.g., *The Color of Knife Crime in Britain* (August 2019) and *The Color of Crime in Missouri* (September 2019) have been published online. The main Color of Crime report depends on citing a large number of numerical data to support key white supremacist claims. Unlike articles that have data from unnamed sources, *The Color of Crime* reports include data from the US government. The majority of "major findings" for the 2016 report use numbers and proportions (e.g., framing style of "x times more likely than (other race) to") to connect Black Americans to crimes (Rubenstein, 2016). Once again, there is no verified research that shows a connection between race and crime; yet, AR uses numbers and statistics to make these connections and to position itself as the truth-telling authority.

In the *Color of Crime* reports, charts and graphs are included with data credited to, among others, the FBI, the National Crime Victimization Survey, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics. However, an issue here and left unstated in the reports, is that the data depicted are selective and partial. There is little information provided about the context or the broader picture that the data is depicting. The racist claim that Black people are more likely to engage in crime ignores existing scholarship that shows race is not predictive of criminality and that there is no connection between race and intelligence (Jackson & Winston, 2020). One would not expect any different from a white supremacist magazine; but, by utilizing numerical data to "support" its racist claims, AR mimics similar narrative strategies as used by mainstream magazines and journals to establish authority.[2]

Additionally, interracial crime-the type of crime the AR reports focus on-are a small percentage of overall crimes. The majority of crimes are, occurring with the victims and perpetrators from the same racial background. An SPLC analysis criticizing the original version of AR's report

[2] As an SPLC critique about the original 1999 report indicates, socioeconomic factors are more likely to explain criminal behavior than race. The SPLC's critique regarding selection bias in the original report also holds true for the 2016 edition of the report. Discussing the selection bias of *American Renaissance*'s data selection, SPLC states: … by concentrating only on interracial crime, Jared Taylor paints a severely distorted picture of crime and victimization patterns in the United States today (SPLC, 2000).

further states how AR's definition of crime is partial as it only refers to "crimes of violence," a partial list of all crimes; "For crimes of violence—the crimes Taylor focuses on—that data covers just 16 percent of the crimes committed in 1994. The result is a skewed view of the impact of race on crime…" (SPLC, 2000). While it may seem irrelevant to focus so much on what a white supremacist journal says about Blackness and crime, this perceived connection has shaped white Americans' views about Black communities (e.g. Devine & Elliot, 1995; Oliver et al., 2004) and influenced US law enforcement views regarding Black Americans (Vitale, 2021). As Zimring notes, US police use lethal force at a higher proportion than police in other industrialized countries and this lethal force disproportionately targets Black communities (Zimring, 2018).

As noted, along with using numbers without references or citations to support their claims, *American Renaissance* also uses legitimate data and references to actual institutions to make unsupported claims. An example of this is seen in June 1996's main article "If we do nothing" by Jared Taylor. The article has a tagline, "the nation we are building is one in which we would not wish to live" (Taylor, 1996). It begins by discussing the Census Bureau's projection of the ethnic makeup of the United States for the upcoming decades. It then goes on to elaborate upon how whites being a minority is likely to lead to "Third world conditions" in the United States and how whites are not interested in living among or alongside other ethnic and racial groups (Taylor, 1996). There is, of course, no mention of why and how these "Third world conditions" will emerge or even what they are. The assumption, of course, is that an increase in racial diversity will lead to such conditions and, once again, there is an attack on racial pluralism.

AR combines its long-standing anti-Blackness with anti-immigration, though the particular group of immigrants who are considered as the "out" group has changed over time. Themes of the great replacement conspiracy, common in 2022's US cable news channels and even espoused by Republican politicians, were present in AR from its early days. The main article of January 1991, titled "Why nations fight" claims,

> Ironically, the most powerful nation in the world is now losing a war of occupation and control—and without fighting even a minor skirmish. Slowly, many parts of the United States are being occupied and controlled by aliens who are doing what conquerors always do: They are imposing their culture, language, and way of life. (Boggs, 1991)

This use of immigration data to claim there is an "occupation" and the United States is "losing a war" is common in AR. This quote also indicates how notions of "replacement" of whites by immigrants has been a common theme in AR since its beginning, earlier than Renaud Camus' book which popularized the concept (see Chapter 6 for analysis of Camus' book). Discursive strategies that would become increasingly common in the magazine and in white nationalist/far-right circles in the upcoming years can be noticed here and these are strategies that are now part of mainstream conservative media and politics in the United States. People of color are always outsiders and, indeed, they are "aliens" who are allegedly "controlling" and "occupying" the United States. There is no acknowledgment that, instead, those who *American Renaissance* considers "white" were the ones who occupied and controlled land and killed Indigenous residents in what would become the United States.

Another example of AR's use of numbers to establish authority is an August 1991 book review which considers the United States as being "on the path to national suicide" (Richards, 1991). By August 1994, this fear-mongering had moved to how the United States would be "Balkanized" with "multiculturalism" posited as the evil that would do this "Balkanizing" (Auster, 1994). Demographic statistics are part of the argument again in subsequent issues that continue to complain against multiculturalism and warn of a plural society as harmful to whites. Intertwined with this narrative of multiculturalism and a plural society is the view that (white) people in the United States are doing nothing to stop this change.

In 1996, Taylor writes,

> The demographic future of the United States is perhaps the most important question we face, yet it receives no attention. Most whites simply refuse to think about what is happening to their country or about the third-world future they are ensuring for their children and grandchildren. Those who do think about demographic change have been browbeaten into believing that it is inevitable and that resistance would, somehow, be immoral. (Taylor, 1996)

Once again, "demographic future" is provided as evidence that the white race—and thus the US nation-state in the far-right framing—is in danger. There is, of course, a connection made between whites and the United States in the far-right argument that if the white race ends, then the nation-state will end. In the same year, AR claims it is writing on

behalf of white people to clarify what many feel but cannot say: "That multi-racialism is failing because of fundamental group incompatibilities; that the present multi-racial experiment poses a grave threat to our people and culture." This is followed by discussions on how diversity is bad and its effects are a "myth":

> The idea that status diversity is a strength is not merely a myth, but a particularly transparent one. Explaining why diversity is bad for a country is a little like explaining why cholera is bad for it; the trick is to understand how anyone could possibly think it was good. (Taylor, 1997)

Related to this is an ongoing narrative that the "nature" and "natural" tendencies of society are toward homogeneity in terms of races. In this, and in its overall anti-diversity, anti-immigration formulations, AR draws upon "nature" and "natural" (and, thus, broadly "science") to claim it is unnatural and against nature for a society to be multicultural. This is noted in November 1999's article "Multiculturalism and Marxism" which claims: "No successful society shows a spontaneous tendency toward multiculturalism or multiracialism. Successful and enduring societies show a high degree of homogeneity" (Ellis, 1999).

AR changes who or what is supposedly threatening the United States over time. Since the mid-1990s, there is a focus on Islam and Muslims as "invaders," something AR pioneered earlier than the Great Replacement narratives of the 2010s. November 1996's "The rise of Islam in America" claims, "Islam, in its various forms, lies at the intersection of America's two most dogma-laden and self-destructive policies: immigration and race relations" (Boggs, 1993). Boggs links Islam and Muslim immigrants with Black Americans and constructs a broader "out-group" that, in his view, shares the same religion (Boggs, 1993).

This anti-Muslim narrative is exacerbated after the events of September 11, 2001, as Taylor writes in November 2001's "Will America Learn the Lessons of Sept. 11? Paying the price for foolish policies":

> The events of Sept. 11 are the most spectacular consequence to date of two of the most self-destructive policies the United States has ever pursued: open immigration and the refusal to acknowledge group traits. Those five men should never have been let into the country, and they should have been profiled immediately as potential terrorists. With more than 6,000 Americans dead, billions in property damage, trillions in lost stock values, an airline industry on the brink of collapse, and the economy entering a

> recession, is there any chance our rulers have learned anything? (Taylor, 2001)

Here, too, there is the use of false numerical data—"more than 6,000 Americans" did not die from the attack. Taylor also uses similar numerical data (billions, trillions) to state September 11's alleged impact on the US economy, with no information on how these figures were calculated. The US also did not have an "open immigration" policy.

A decade later, this fearmongering continues with Muslims and Arabs now described as "colonizing" Europe. In this and in other articles, AR claims there is a rise in crime, in immigration, and in unemployment and "school failure" but fails to provide references for any of these claims. A 2011 AR article states (content warning for anti-Muslim and anti-immigration language),

> The Western World is being invaded—not by armed men, but by *millions* of penniless immigrants. The result is *rising* crime rates, overburdened social services, unemployment, school failure, immigrant riots, a white exodus from areas dominated by immigrants, and the arrival of such barbaric practices as forced marriages, honor killings, ritual slaughter of animals, and female genital mutilation… Our continent has lost its identity, its confidence, its culture, and is becoming an economic giant with feet of clay. Thanks to the transformation of communism into anti-racism and multiculturalism, Europe is afraid to defend the norms and values of its own civilization. Just as AIDS weakens the physical resistance of human beings, multiculturalism weakens the identity and demographic resistance of a people and a civilization. Islam takes advantage of this weakness. It is like a cuckoo that lays its egg in the warm European nest. We, Europeans, are unsuspectingly hatching this cuckoo egg and will eventually be cast out!...Europe needs to resurrect its fighting spirit. A European Renaissance is possible only if we tear off the multicultural straitjacket, renounce cultural nihilism, resume our identity and cultural uniqueness, and dare to proclaim the superiority of our own civilization. (DeWinter, 2011, italics added)

Thus, multiculturalism and diversity are invoked as evils that will destroy Europe (and the United States) and there is the use of numbers—immigration numbers, numbers of Muslims, and number of other racial and ethnic groups—to support these racist claims. Here, quantification is in the form of vagueness. That is, there are no specific numbers or

data provided, but readers are told immigration is "rising" and is in the "millions," giving the impression this is an ongoing increase of vast numbers.

In all these, then, there are attempts made to make the xenophobia and calls for anti-minority violence seem "scientific". This is done, as described above, by the inclusion of statistics and charts, and by using a partial view of history to promote anti-Black and anti-Muslim (and anti-minorities) ideas and actions. Numbers are continuously invoked to support racist claims, while the sources for those numbers are not provided. Along with numbers and other related charts and graphs—pseudoscience—images and visuals taken out of context are also used to evoke emotion, especially anger, among white people. This, along with selective use of historical information, is how scientification works to constitute authority and to build legitimacy for far-right calls to violence. This is especially noticeable in AR's discussions of "race science" or eugenics.

Eugenics or "Race Science"

AR's mode of presentation of information regarding eugenics or "race science" is worth unpacking further as it indicates how direct calls to violence are evaded via scientification. Instead of directly calling for a whites-only society, AR draws on the rhetoric of science, nature, and natural dispensation to argue it is natural to want for a whites-only society or one with whites at the top of a racial hierarchy. Additionally, AR advances the argument that well-known scientists and biologists supported and still support eugenics but are afraid to speak out because their views are censored in the move toward multiculturalism. For example, February 1997's main story is "Ending a historical taboo: Restoring the respectability of eugenics" (Crittendon, 1997). In it, Crittendon argues eugenics was supported by a diverse range of scientists, politicians, and intellectuals from all parts of the political spectrum. Therefore, its current negative status is open to criticism, he claims. Ordinary Americans, too, supported it, claims the author and, while the association with Nazism is unfortunate, "The *principles* of eugenics are, of course, racially neutral and all groups can benefit from them" (Crittendon, 1997; emphasis in original). With this formulation, AR can argue that it is depending on science by urging "all groups" to benefit from eugenics. But, the goal remains "homogenous" societies and eugenics is a means to achieve that goal (Crittendon, 1997). AR uses nature and

science as reasons for promoting eugenics while claiming, at the same time, that these racist eugenicist ideas have been sidelined by those who promote a pluralist society.

"Race science" is repeatedly invoked through the years to legitimate a racial hierarchy with white people at the top. In 2001, a book review of *Eugenics: A Reassessment* by Richard Lynn summarizes the book as laying out the "clear choice science now sets before all developed nations" of "whether to let the genetic quality of their populations continue to deteriorate, or use a combination of old and new techniques to improve it" (Jackson, 2001). Here, too, we see AR's use of scientific methods and language used to support eugenics so AR can claim it is not itself that is making these claims, but it is "science." The invocation of science to support (racist) claims and to be the adjudicator against what is considered failed policies of multiculturalism and promoting equality can be noted here. Science's status in society is utilized to establish authority for racist policies.

But, it is not just science that is invoked. "Science," "nature," and "natural" are linked with the language of common sense or "this is just how it is" to legitimize racist eugenic arguments. In July 2006's "The genetics of race," a long discussion about how race and racial characteristics are genetic, Stowe uses actual scientific terms common to genetics such as genetic variation, gene sequence, and related discussions about DNA and human genomes to narrate a false story wherein genetic differences between populations correspond to racial differences (Stowe, 2006). In other words, similar to discussions of the negative effects of multiculturalism, the promotion of a racial hierarchy is explained not by individual prejudice or structural policies, but by pseudoscience that is presented as real science. Stowe even includes an in-text box that claims to explain how to "calculate variation" (Stowe, 2006). Here, the conventions of an academic article are seen: there is a thesis, data is provided, a box with definitions/methods are included, and there is a conclusion. However, as is usual for AR, there is no mention of where the numbers cited are from or any reference to actual scientific sources. Similar techniques of pseudoscience can also be noted in other articles such as February 1997's main story: "Ending a Historical Taboo: Restoring the respectability of eugenics" by Peter Crittendon. In it, Crittendon discusses Alexis Carrel, who was a Nobel Prize-winning surgeon who was also "a champion of eugenics" (Crittendon, 1997). The article states:

> In fact, the currently promoted view of eugenics as a malevolent ideology or crackpot "pseudoscience," is a gross caricature. In its heyday, eugenics was pioneered and promoted by leading biologists, including the founders of modern genetics. Their scientific authority was often transformed into public policy by some of the most eminent statesmen and intellects of the time. (Crittendon, 1997)

It goes on to outline how eugenics has had a negative reputation, despite being supported by scientists and policymakers. Unlike many *American Renaissance* articles, this one has a bibliography, one that includes university press books. However, none of the books or ideas from them are actually cited in the article—they are there to provide legitimacy to AR's pro-eugenist arguments

None of these articles, of course, refer to the extensive research that has shown there is no connection between race and intelligence. Indeed, in a thorough evaluation and critique of "hereditarians'" (scholars who argue there is a connection between race and intelligence) arguments, their scholarship has been dismissed and targeted, Jackson and Winston name a long list of scholars whose research has shown there is no connection between race and intelligence:

> For the past century, careful critiques have repeatedly examined the myriad conceptual and methodological issues and deficiencies of these studies [studies that purport there is a link between race and intelligence], including the persistent use of biologically meaningless racial categories (see below), inappropriate sampling, ignoring contradictory findings, ignoring secular intelligence quotient (IQ) gains, misrepresentation of data, neglect of the role of culture, language, socioeconomic status (SES), and differences in school funding, unjustified speculation, and consistent minimization of the history of racial oppression (e.g., Block & Dworkin, 1976; Fischer, 1996; Fish, 2002; Garth, 1931; Gould, 1981; Klineberg, 1935; Lieberman, 1997; Montagu, 1942; Nisbett, 2009; Pettigrew, 1964; Staub, 2019; Tumin, 1963; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1951). Black scholars (e.g., Bond, 1924; Du Bois, 1920; Franklin & Jones, 1980) were early contributors to the growing body of criticism from psychologists, educators, anthropologists, biologists, and geneticists. (Jackson & Winston, 2020, p. 4)

Reading *American Renaissance* one would not know this as AR continues to use pseudoscience (about eugenics and immigration) and quantitative information (numbers without reference to sources) to

construct the white population as under threat from Black and brown communities. This is supported by the individuals who are cited in the AR stories, as well as by the choice of books that are reviewed in each issue of AR.

Who is Authorized to Speak?: Constituting Authority Through Books Reviewed and Individuals Cited

In the print issues of *American Renaissance*, there are book reviews in almost every issue (see Appendix A for the list of all the books reviewed from 1990 to January 2019). Many of these books are published by university presses. Early issues of AR specifically focus on books that connect race and intelligence, and race and crime. For instance, the first book review is of *The IQ Controversy* by Mark Snyderman and Stanley Rothman (AR, 1990). Reviewed by Thomas Jackson, a pseudonym for a frequent contributor, the review titled "On the trail of the great taboo, Part I" (Part II is in the next issue) claims,

> As Mark Snyderman and Stanley Rothman show in their book, *The IQ Controversy, Public Policy and the Media*, what the press and television tell us about IQ is different from what specialists in the field say about it. The media refuse to accept the scientific consensus and instead promote positions that are considered eccentric in the expert community. Mr. Snyderman and Mr. Rothman base their conclusions on a careful study of the scholarly literature, an analysis of mass media reports on IQ, and a questionnaire survey of 661 recognized authorities in education and psychological testing. (Jackson, 1990)

The review goes on to state there is a link between IQ and genetics (which they connect to race) and, furthermore, this link is silenced because experts are afraid to take on a so-called liberal media and society (Jackson, 1990). This review shows the format of a book review in AR. Usually, the book of choice is discussed within a racist and xenophobic frame, even if the book in question is not directly related to issues of race or immigration. Race and IQ is a common theme in the AR book review archive, with later reviews discussing Roger Pearson's *Race, Intelligence, and Bias in Academe* (June 1992), Stanley Burnham's *America's Bimodal Crisis: Black Intelligence in White Society* (April 1993),

Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve* (February 1995, republished online in September 2017), and Michael Levin's *Why Race Matters: Race Differences and What They Mean* (October 1997). More recently, Jared Taylor's own edited volume, *Face to Face with Race* (December 2014) and William H. Tucker's *The Cattell Controversy: Race, Science and Ideology* (June 2017) are all reviewed. The majority of these reviews claim there is a link between intelligence and race, with those considered white at the top of the hierarchy, and that this is supported by science. They further claim this link is silenced and discounted by mainstream politics and society in the United States and that this leads to whites being discriminated against. None of this is, of course, true. But, by using published books and, often, reframing them within a broader racist framework, AR is able to claim its racist and xenophobic arguments are supported by scholarship.

In line with its articles, eugenics is also central in *American Renaissance*'s selection of books to review, with a number of books on eugenics reviewed over the years. This continued emphasis on eugenics and "race science" construct and legitimate a racial hierarchy. January 1993's AR has a review about "William Shockley in his own words" (Jackson, 1993). Without any scientific evidence, Shockley claimed a link between race and intelligence and suggested the possibility of the end of civilization if people of allegedly lower intelligence had children. In this way, Shockley actively promoted eugenics and claimed there was a scientific basis for preventing people from specific racial and economic backgrounds from having children. He wrote extensively and advocated for sterilization of people with lower IQs (Glaudell, 2021). Despite this, however, Shockley's name is linked with certain scientific experiments and schemes and he was the joint winner of the 1956 Nobel Prize for physics.

For AR, Shockley serves to legitimate racist views on race and IQ *because* of who he is—a well-known scientist who also used pseudoscience and data to support his own (racist) claims. However, the term "racist" is not used by AR as it describes Shockley as "a warrior against dogma" and someone who was unfairly reviled by a "relentlessly hostile press" for "[h]is crime was not merely to have publicized unacceptable views on race, intelligence, and genetics, but to have lent them the prestige of a Nobel laureate in physics" (Jackson, 1993). The discursive practice of category entitlement is evident here—Shockley acquires legitimacy through his belonging in the categories of "scientist" and "Nobel prize winner." Shockley's position as a scientist is used as explanation for why his (racist) views are accurate, with little or no attention paid to the actual

analysis in terms of data or sources. We can also note AR's footing as it uses scientists, scholars to establish its own position as a seemingly objective and iconoclastic source. There is also stake inoculation in the sense that being a scientist is invoked in order to position Shockley (and others like him) as objective and neutral.

These same discursive practices can be observed in other reviews, including that of the book *Eugenics: A Reassessment by Richard Lynn*, published November 2001 (Jackson, 2001). Lynn, a frequent contributor to *American Renaissance* and a prolific writer on eugenics and dysgenics, is described by *American Renaissance* as "Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland, is one of those rare social scientists who not only understand genetics but are willing to draw conclusions about how biology affects society" (Jackson, 2001). Science is said to provide a "clear choice" to "all developed nations" about whether "to let the genetic quality of their populations continue to deteriorate …." The review states Lynn's "careful analysis," "exhaustive treatment" (of history of eugenics), and "bold prediction" (of how eugenics will "dictate the balance of world power in the twenty-first century") (Jackson, 2001). As with many other reviews in *American Renaissance*, the article is less of a straightforward book review about a particular book but more a series of statements about an issue the reviewer connects the book to.

Some authors have their books reviewed more than once. One such author is Paul Kersey, whose books are reviewed four times since 2012. As with discussions on statistics and eugenics, there is usually a message regarding nationalism (good) and diversity (bad) in these reviews. Reviewing Kersey's book *Escape From Detroit: The Collapse of America's Black Metropolis*, the reviewer segues into how diversity inevitably leads to divisions and discord. The May 2012 review of Kersey's *Escape From Detroit* also has another common far-right extremist narrative strategy, that the messages they are relaying are "radical" and brave:

> When the Founding Fathers of the United States wrote about freedom of speech, this was the kind of book they had in mind. Speech that is universally praised or is inoffensive does not need protection; radical theses that undermine the wrong but popular ways in which we construct our society, on the other hand, not only need protection but require us to be extra-vigilant in promoting and analyzing theme. (Stevens, 2012)

This claim of bringing the "real" information to its readers permeates AR articles and reviews through the years (Kersey, 2013). Oftentimes, a straw man argument is crafted which the book under review is said to refute. This formulation is seen in January 1998's review of *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage* by Lawrence Keeley. The review starts by outlining an argument—again, without any citations—, that "part of the anti-white mentality prevailing in academic circles is the view that war and its attendant horrors are recent, largely European inventions …." (Jackson, 1998) and proceeds to describe how Keeley's book pushes back against this notion (Jackson, 1998).

Regarding this, two aspects are key to how AR utilizes pseudoscience to communicate racist claims and to legitimate its call for violent action against perceived threats to whiteness: one, the choice of books selected indicates how AR draws on the legitimacy of university presses and other established presses and authors to advance its racist claims; two, AR's formatting of these reviews is such that, even if the book reviewed is one that AR does not agree with, AR frames the review by utilizing pseudoscientific justifications and thus advancing its own anti-Black, anti-immigrant, and pro-white nationalism and pro-white supremacy narratives. With these two narrative strategies, AR then avoids its own responsibility for promoting racism. Instead, AR claims it is the books themselves and their authors who are making these arguments or that authors do not understand "reality" (thus permitting AR to repeat its own racist calls to action).

This selection of books that are reviewed—on race and IQ, on white Americans as unfairly treated by society and government, reviews about an upcoming race war, and promotion of eugenics—all help shape a specific identity of white Americans. They constitute white Americans as either victims of government and of global socioeconomic forces, as duped by media and "liberals," or challenged by Black and brown communities. In all these formulations, there is the constitution of fear against the outgroup, while the in-groups (white Americans) are constituted as being in danger. The publication of these book reviews and, especially, the re-publication of selected reviews online after the magazine moved to an entirely online platform all serve to legitimate these identity formations that constitute white Americans as victimized and oppressed while minorities are said to be favored at white Americans' expense.

In addition to book reviews, AR also strategically utilizes academics, conservative personalities, and international people to constitute a specific

vision of whiteness. These individuals are presented as "experts," utilizing category entitlements (their positions as academics, conservatives, and from outside of the US) to construct white America(ns) as under threat. These "experts" for AR include scientific experts but also politicians, religious figures, public intellectuals, and even individual members of ethnic communities that AR is demonizing. First-hand accounts that support AR's racist claims are presented as expertise. There are a series of rhetorical moves here:

a. first, the academic credentials of those who support eugenics or "race science" or those who are against immigration and are anti-Black are cited;
b. then, US conservative commentators and activists who make claims that support the white supremacist worldview of AR are centered;
c. third, international experts-whether academics or politicians—are quoted and their words and experiences are presented to show how an external—and ostensibly neutral—observer notes US politics and culture;
d. fourth, AR uses first-person accounts from "everyday people," both in the United States and from overseas. In these, accounts by minorities who support AR's goals and aims are also provided, with the argument they are the authentic speakers and experts for their race/ethnicity on these issues.

AR itself claims it is speaking for all white people, especially those who are unaware that whites are under threat (according to AR). The main article in the first issue of AR asked "Who speaks for us?" and presented AR as going against the prevailing norms of society. It also claimed it was going to speak for white people because no one else was doing so. In this way, AR positioned itself as a lone voice speaking for white Americans:

> White people have all but lost their public voice…Today in America, there are hundreds of organizations that speak for blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians, but virtually no one speaks for us. (AR, 1990)

In the same article, there is also a call to action, one that has been taken up by white supremacists and the broader far-right since:

> We at *American Renaissance* love our nation and cherish its heritage. We will not be silent accomplices to dispossession [of white people]. Ours is the culture of Galileo, Newton, Beethoven, Jefferson, and Edison. We are heirs to the spirit of Valley Forge, and the Alamo. It is our duty and privilege to carry forward as best we can the greatness of this legacy. (AR, 1990)

In articles and opinion pieces discussing connections between race and intelligence as noted above, AR draws upon quantitative data and on texts and books published in various journals to support its claims. The cover story for 1992's "Race and Intelligence: The Evidence" starts with "Scientific data show that the races differ in intelligence-dogma holds otherwise" (Taylor, 1992). The author—Jared Taylor—then uses a chart with IQ as the X-axis and purports to show white distribution and Black distribution. As discussed earlier, however, the image itself is expected to do the work of legitimating this claim. By placing it at the start of his article, Taylor draws upon his readers' acceptance of data's role as an adjudicator and as speaking for itself, as it were. There is no other source provided.

AR also draws upon other sources—journals, magazines, and scholarly texts—and reworks their claims in order to advance its own. December 2015's "Are there genes for intelligence and is it racist to ask?" is an edited version of an article initially published in the *National Geographic* magazine (Henig, 2015). In reposting the *National Geographic* article, AR crops parts of it and makes it seem as though the article answers "yes" to the question in the title, even though the actual article does not do so.

Beyond citing numbers and data, however, the question of who speaks in *American Renaissance* is worth expanding further. For many of the articles where individuals are cited, their scholarly background—if they have one—is also included. Discussions of genetics and race and intelligence almost always refer to the credentials of the person being cited as, for example, "Professor Richard Lynn of the University of Ulster in Ireland" (Jackson, 2001; Taylor, 1992). Indeed, Lynn is a frequent writer for AR, commenting on science, genetics, and intelligence issues. His articles connect race with behavior as "Race and psychopathic personality" (August 29, 2008, a reprint of the same article from July 2002), and "Racial differences in intelligence, personality, and behavior" (July 27, 2019).

Thus, academic credentials are drawn upon to provide authority—similar to what a mainstream journal article would do. This establishes entitlement to authority based on category ("academic," "journalist," etc.). Along with books, academics also provide self-narratives as evidence for observations. For example, this writer, in the 1996 February issue, draws upon what he claims is his own experience to contradict what the AR author wrote (content warning for anti-Black language):

> The article in the January issue, "In the Academic Jungle," brought back memories of Temple University, where I taught for 22 years. The author, Kristina Saxon, mentioned the university's dangerous North Philadelphia location but, if anything, things are worse than she says.
>
> Temple is in the heart of a black ghetto, so university people are murdered, raped, and robbed. On one occasion a man got into the psychology building and raped one of the secretaries. There was supposed to be a guard downstairs, but he was away. (Eisenman, 1996)

He continues that Black persons also killed a white graduate student "right on campus" (Eisenman, 1996). Here, the author provides what he claims is a first-person account as evidence that AR's article is understating the problem while using what he says is his own experience to claim authenticity. It is this person's experiences and their role as a teacher (establishing category entitlement and footing) that readers are supposed to take as authoritative, despite there being no other evidence that these events ever occurred.

Along with academics, religious leaders, politicians, and conservative commentators are also sources for racist statements and their positions (as religious leaders, politicians, and conservatives) are drawn upon to establish authority. For example, a rabbi is the writer of February 1995's "Separation: Is There an Alternative? What must be done to preserve Western Civilization" where he states "larger parts of the country will be essentially off limits to whites" (as demographics shift) (Schiller, 1995).

Another common discursive practice is using first-person accounts from "everyday people," both in the United States and from overseas. Accounts by minorities who support AR's goals and aims are often quoted with the argument it is they who are the authentic speakers and experts on this issue (e.g., AR, 1995, www). AR's use of personal accounts to support its racist claims are not limited only to the United States. July 1998's main

story is an account of someone who has "personal account of the transition" on the subject of "South Africa Under Black Rule" and October 2005's main story describes white British and Australian tourists who claimed they were in danger from Black persons in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. AR writes, "no American newspaper wrote about what these white tourists went through" (Braun, 1998). Thus, it is not just academics, conservative politicians, and activists but everyday people—especially those of minority ethnic backgrounds or from overseas—who are cited in support of AR's racist and xenophobic claims.

Pseudoscience and Constituting Authority: From *American Renaissance* to the Mainstream

There is a quote by Jared Taylor after Dylann Roof shot and killed nine people and injured many others in South Carolina in 2015 that sums up how AR's weaponization of science and numbers continues, spreads, and influences violence. Taylor denied responsibility for the attack, even as Roof claimed he had decided to kill people partly because of false information found through the Council of Conservative Citizens organization, a white supremacist organization. The SPLC describes the connection between the CCC and Taylor as follows:

> Roof's manifesto cited the CCC's propaganda on supposed black-on-white hate crimes as the motivation for his murders. After Roof's manifesto came to light days after the crime, the CCC came under harsh attack. Taylor stepped up to the plate and served as the group's spokesman, condemning the killings and stating: "Our site educated him. Our site told him the truth about interracial crime. What he then decided to do with that truth is absolutely not our responsibility." (SPLC, *Jared Taylor*)

Two aspects of how pseudoscience is now part of the mainstream can be noted here: one, even after his report and (false) data were used to motivate a killer, Taylor continued to insist the false numbers are "the truth about interracial crime." Numbers are provided as evidence of truth, even though they are not. Second, there is a disavowal of responsibility. Taylor's argument is that Roof acted on his own volition and it is not his (Taylor's) responsibility that his false statistics influenced Roof.

With respect to book reviews as well, discursive strategies of agreeing with an author or a book published by a scholarly press or critiquing other

scholarly books for not understanding reality are similar to mainstream modes of communicating. US Conservative politicians and right-wing media personalities utilize similar discursive practices of scientification to spread fear of immigration, and promote anti-Jewish and antiBlack viewpoints. In doing so, they mainstream conspiracies like the great replacement. For example, by April 2022, *Fox News*' primetime host Tucker Carlson, who has one of the most popular cable shows in the United States, openly discussed the great replacement conspiracy (more on the Great Replacement in Chapter 6) and, indeed, repeatedly spread racist and xenophobic views on his TV show (Baragona, 2021; Confessore, 2022). Republican politicians have been doing the same and calling migrants to the US–Mexico border "invaders" (Bump, 2021). Pseudoscience and numbers are central to this anti-immigration narrative as the number of migrants arriving at the border is often invoked when Conservatives are constituting these migrants and migration as threats. Donald Trump, as President in November 2018, said, "At this very moment, large, well-organized caravans of migrants are marching towards our southern border. Some people call it an 'invasion.' It's like an invasion. They have violently overrun the Mexican border" (Trump, 2018). In other words, this view that there is an "invasion" of immigrants of color who are "replacing" current white Americans has moved from the fringes of white supremacist magazines like *American Renaissance* to the mainstream of US society and culture with one of the two major parties openly sharing it. Alongside, this, race science and eugenics are also making a revival with eugenic ideas becoming more popular as individuals and organizations continue to develop networks to spread eugenicist ideas (Evans, 2020; Shapiro, 2020; Unwin, 2022).

On the whole, *American Renaissance*, as the SPLC notes, "regularly feature proponents of eugenics and blatant anti-black racists" (SPLC, *American Renaissance*). So, it is not surprising that there are racist and anti-Black, anti-immigrant articles published there. It is a white nationalist magazine, after all. That being said, its white nationalist identity has not led to extensive censure or opposition to its proprietor, Taylor; he continues to be invited to speak at university events and for media interviews. Taylor was invited to be a speaker at an event at the University of Alabama as recently as in 2022 (Schwenk, 2022) and has given multiple interviews in the United States and overseas in 2022. He was interviewed by mainstream media such as NPR and CNN (and many

other media) as recently as 2019 (CNN, 2019; Rose, 2019).[3] Stephen Miller, who was Donald Trump's senior policy advisor and confidante during Trump's presidency, approvingly cited the *American Renaissance* website when discussing immigration and related issues with Conservative media (Rogers & DeParle, 2019). Taylor's The New Century Foundation, which publishes *American Renaissance*, held its annual meeting in Tennessee in November 2021 (Pfleger, 2021) and is expected to hold another conference-with speakers from the US and Europe-in November 2022. The conference has been held at the same place for almost a decade. Taylor and his ideas, thus, have always been present and public in US society. However, now, there is even more of a shift of such racist and xenophobic ideas further into the mainstream. Thus, it is useful to illustrate *how* AR uses recognizable narrative strategies of establishing authority—e.g., use of numbers and data charts, self-narratives, drawing on alleged experiences of individuals—in order to constitute and communicate the notion that white people are victims and a multiracial democracy is the cause. In doing so, AR draws on similar modes of legitimation that are present in mainstream academic publishing and it is this mode of constituting authority that has helped facilitate many of these racist and white supremacist meanings moving to the mainstream of US politics and society.

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[3] Taylor's list of media appearances can be found here https://www.amren.com/archives/interviews-appearances/. It can be noted that Taylor continues to receive attention from a range of media outlets.

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CHAPTER 5

Memeing the Far-Right: Pepe and the Deplorables

Introduction

The image is slightly ridiculous: a green cartoon frog with the signature yellow slicked-back hair of Donald Trump is standing in front of a US flag (Table 5.1). Another image—with the same frog—has just its head with the frog saying "feels good man." In yet another version, the frog is crying with tears running down its face. This frog, as most of us know by now, is Pepe. It was created by author Matt Furie in 2005 for his comic *Boy's Club* but then was turned into a meme. During the run-up to the 2016 US presidential elections, Pepe's popularity as a meme grew. Instead of just an amusing frog, the meme became connected with far-right extremism (Ifeanyi, 2020). Images of Pepe as Hitler or saying and participating in racist, misogynistic, and xenophobic actions became common. People would attend Donald Trump's rallies carrying placards with Pepe on them. Various anti-hate groups categorized Pepe as a hate symbol (Morlin, 2016). Pepe became one of the most recognizable symbols of the "alt-right" and was a common image in one of the most active pro-Trump sites on the internet, Reddit's r/The_Donald (banned in 2020).

This chapter moves on from the broader, self-described "Conservative" movement of Chapter 4 to study the visual popular culture discourses of one specific part of the far-right—the "alt-right" movement in the United

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Table 5.1 Analyzing narrative strategies of irony and humor (trolling) in online memes

	Source	*Narrative strategies*	*Outcomes*
This chapter	Pepe the frog meme and other related memes popular during and after the 2016 US presidential elections	Irony and humor ("trolling")	Deflect responsibility by claiming calls for violence are "just" jokes

States. It focuses on visual politics of pop culture, specifically the use of memes, to illustrate how the "alt-right" used images and social media to spread racist and white supremacist ideas, while deflecting responsibility with claims they were "just joking." At issue here is how memes have been "weaponized" in the sense they are used against perceived "enemies" of the "alt-right" and of a broader "us." This "us," for the "alt-right" and its supporters, is racialized as white. An understanding of this process as "mimetic weaponization," drawn from Peters and Allan (2021), centers on agency and directs attention to both the modes by which memes are spread, and the tactics used to deflect responsibility by those spreading racist, xenophobic memes. In this chapter, the "alt-right's" use of a popular image—that of Pepe the frog—is analyzed to note how they describe threats, what (and who) is supposedly being threatened, and the measures thus promoted. The "alt-right's" invocations of the term "white people" or "Western civilization" are used to support their xenophobic, racist, and misogynistic portrayals of immigrants and people of color. Connected to this is a broader "alt-right" narrative that states a weak government is favoring people of color and thus injuring the white population.

In this way, certain memes like that of Pepe have shifted from what Tuters and Hagen describe as "vehicles for expressing progressive dissent" to an association with the reactionary right or the "alt-right" (Tuters & Hagen, 2020, p. 2218). The "alt-right" adopted and shared visual imagery or "memes" and utilized the practices of "shitposting" and "trolling" to communicate hate, misogyny, and xenophobia. Many of these memes are seen by the general public as ironic and playful even when they convey messages of divisiveness and hate. At the same time,

the use of memes allows the "alt-right" and the broader far-right to plausibly deny spreading hate by claiming these are just comics and humor. Thus, humor is used to deflect responsibility and also to constitute opponents of the far-right as humorless and unable to read a joke. Tuters and Hagen's (2020) discussion of Sean Hannity's use of an anti-Semitic Internet meme and their broader discussion of memes on 4Chan illustrates that these strategies help normalize reactionary and racist ideas. They do so by presenting such ideas in the form of a comic or an image (meme) with associated claims these are merely ironic or a form of humor.

Chapter 4 discussed how long-time purveyors of extremism deployed strategies of scientification to promote and communicate hate. They used formats that paralleled academic norms and utilized numbers and pseudoscience to establish authority for their racist worldviews. This chapter shifts to a different group and strategy—the so-called "alt-right" and their rhetorical strategies. These played out online in various parts of the Internet before moving offline and eventually culminating in the election of a President in 2016. While Jared Taylor and the contributors of *American Renaissance* used false numbers and data to constitute white victimhood, the "alt-right" used the norms of online social media sites like Reddit and 4chan to spread hate while claiming it is merely being funny. They did so by utilizing the potential of images—memes—that were constructed and spread on social media and on social messaging boards like Reddit and 4Chan. Memes, often originating in the fringes of the Internet, became part of everyday political conversations and meaning-making as Trump and his allies as well as well-known right-wing media figures like Sean Hannity and Tucker Carlson utilized them to present a specific image of themselves ("real Americans," anti-immigration, anti-"Libs," and so on) (Hayden, 2017). This was especially the case with Pepe and its many incarnations.

The focus of this chapter is on visual narratives, specifically photographs and images as the chapter concentrates on the visual spread of information through memes. The first part of this chapter introduces some useful terms for analyzing visual images. The second part provides a brief outline of the "alt-right" movement in the United States. It describes the emergence of the "alt-right" and its subsequent popularity both online and offline. This is a movement that moved from relative obscurity to the mainstream, with one of its main proponents, Steve Bannon, playing a key part in the 2016 US presidential election. After the election, Bannon held a top position as Chief Strategist to the US president Donald Trump.

The section after this delves into the popular image of Pepe and how it provided an opportunity for the "alt-right" for "mimetic weaponization," i.e., to spread racist and misogynistic messages while, at the same time, claiming these were just jokes. This section also includes a discussion of visual images and visual culture in the propagation of hate online. The conclusion outlines how trolling as rhetorical strategy has been useful to the "alt-right" for hiding white supremacy.

Overall, this chapter analyzes how US far-right extremists use memes and "trolling" to deflect responsibility while dehumanizing persons of color online and promoting violence against them. It argues that visual representations of "self" and "others" in "alt-right" and, broader far-right, extremist narratives use comics and humor to sidetrack critics. In doing so, far-right extremists securitize Black and brown communities and present them as dangerous threats to the state and society. Relatedly, those who question these "alt-right" interpretations are depicted as humorless and unable to appreciate irony. By using these two strategies, "alt-right" narratives constitute marginalized communities as threats while closing off avenues for criticism.

Three interrelated arguments are drawn out in this chapter: first, the linking of danger with people of color erases historical complicities of white supremacy; second, by depicting violence as connected with persons of color, "alt-right" narratives excuse white Americans from their involvement in violence and, instead, present them as at risk from violence; finally, by using comics and memes to communicate, "alt-right" visuals claim this is irreverent mocking, and not inciting violence despite the use of racist caricatures, stereotypes, and dehumanizing language in their messaging. Memes thus work as "discursive weapons" (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017, pp. 495–497). But, as they are in the format of an image or a comic—a popular culture artifact—memes are more resistant to criticism and censure and, often, become taken for granted by mainstream media and the public. All these work to invisibilize hate and white supremacy while, at the same time, making these formulations about whiteness and its others more visible especially on social media. In other words, there is a two-way process occurring: white supremacy is made invisible, while the characterizations of whiteness and its others are made more visible through the use of images and visuals. A particular kind of audience is assumed as part of this visualizing process—an unquestioning, uncritical, unaware of history, homogenized block of spectators—who consume "alt-right" visuals and can be persuaded to align

with views espoused. Overall, "alt-right" visual narratives use seemingly innocent modes of visualization in the form of comic images and memes to promote and ultimately normalize and mainstream white supremacy.

What Is the "Alt-Right"? A Brief History of the Movement in the United States

The "alt-right" emerged during the Obama presidency but became well-known after the events of 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville when an "alt-right" supporter drove his car into a crowd of protesters, killing one person and injuring many others. Despite claims toward non-violence, members of the "alt-right" were central to organizing and participating in this rally (Blout & Burkart, 2021). The main goal of the rally was to protect the monument of Robert E. Lee, a Confederate officer and defender of slavery (Spencer & Levenson, 2021).

The ""alt-right"" is a relatively new and loosely connected group of individuals who considered themselves a modern alternative to traditional conservatives. Emerging from around 2015 and recruiting mostly online, the "alt-right" has been adept at using memes and social media to recruit, communicate, and form a community. The "alt-right" is a subset of the far-right that rebranded itself as "alternative" or "alt" and promoted white nationalist ideas and goals, even as its most prominent members claimed they were not racist (Atkinson, 2018; Florido, 2016). There is no unified "alt-right" group nor is there a single leader. The "alt-right" is a collection of individuals with right-wing extremist ideas, promoting white nationalism and discrimination against women, LGBTQIA people, immigrants, and Black and Jewish people (Atkinson, 2018; Hawley, 2019). While there are debates about who originated the term, its popularity owes much to "alt-right" figureheads such as Richard Spencer, Milo Yiannopoulos, and media sites such as *Breitbart* news, *Infowars*, and *the Daily Stormer*. As head of the National Policy Institute, Spencer communicated about the "alt-right" and served as its public face. Spencer has claimed it was he who labeled this community the "alt-right" and uses it to refer to himself and his followers as people who promote their white identity (Bar-on, 2019). As the public figurehead of the "alt-right," Spencer became somewhat of a media celebrity and was interviewed by multiple US and international mainstream media, including National Public Radio—(All Things Considered, 2016). This, of course, helped spread the racist ideas that motivated the "alt-right"

and indicated how the "alt-right" was successful in both invisibilizing and mainstreaming white supremacist talking points.

One approach the "alt-right" took to conceal their white nationalist goals was the use of the term "identitarian" to describe themselves while claiming they were advocating for "white identity." As Fording and Schram (2020) note in their wide-ranging coverage of how racism has been mainstreamed in US politics, the "alt-right" "predated Trump's 2016 presidential campaign but was a relatively new effort to mainstream white nationalist extremism into conventional politics. Its political mobilization increased dramatically in reaction to Obama's presidency" (Fording & Schram, 2020, p. 4). The "alt-right" emphasized in-group solidarity and community formation for white persons or white identity politics (Fording & Schram, 2020, p. 72). First popularized in Europe (Mudde, 2019) and used to claim white identity was under threat from plural societies and from brown immigrants, the "alt-right" in the United States commonly used "identitarian" to describe themselves and their actions. In doing so, they stated their goals and actions were not racist or white supremacist; instead, they were about maintaining and promoting white identity. This identitarian framing is meant to conceal the racist and xenophobic narratives that are part of "alt-right" discourses and identity formation. Atkinson (2018) identifies eight white supremacist concepts that are present in "alt-right" discourses, clearly illustrating the white supremacist foundations of the "alt-right". Furthermore, in Spencer's own words, the "alt-right" calls for a white ethnostate: "The, the [sic] ideal of a white ethnostate, and it is an ideal, is something that I think we should think about in the sense of what could come after America" (Harris, 2016). Thus, the "alt-right" is a movement of people with the goal of "defending white civilization" and creating a white ethnostate. Despite this, however, their communication and white nationalist goals were not taken seriously in mainstream US politics and media. Part of that was due to the "alt-right's" visual culture, especially their use of memes, to communicate.

The "alt-right's" visibility in media and popular culture peaked around the 2016 US elections. Indeed, in November 2016, reports emerged about a meeting of Spencer's National Policy Institute (NPI) where its members cheered the then newly elected President Trump by performing Nazi salutes. *The Atlantic* described Spencer as leading the crowd in chants of "Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory" (Lombroso & Applebaum, 2016). The National Policy Institute claimed its goals are to

advance the "heritage, identity and future of people of European descent" around the world (Lombroso & Applebaum, 2016). Its meetings gathered like-minded individuals and were held in public places—this one was at the Ronald Reagan building in Washington DC, a building that also houses the main offices of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was one of the many signs that white nationalism—white supremacy even—was increasingly becoming public and mainstream and, yet, faced little to no challenges from mainstream politicians and media. Indeed, the rise of Donald Trump and his subsequent success in mainstream politics owed much to his alignment with the white nationalist goals of the "alt-right" movement (Fording & Schram, 2020).

A 2016 BBC report on the "alt-right" defined it as:

> … a disparate, mostly online phenomenon that lacks a cohesive structure or any sort of central organisation, it's tough to pin down. But observers of the movement—both critics and supporters—agree on a few things.
>
> The alt-right is against political correctness and feminism. It's nationalist, tribalist and anti-establishment. Its followers are fond of internet pranks and using provocative, often grossly offensive messages to goad their enemies on both the right and the left. And many of them are huge supporters of Donald Trump. (Wendling, 2016)

This mainstreaming of white supremacy was something even hardcore white supremacists noticed; after all, it was something they had been trying to do for some time. Extremism researchers Robert Futrell and Pete Simi note,

> Long before election night, White supremacists had become savvy at outwardly masking their real beliefs and intentions while most wrote them off as politically innocuous wackos. Having bided their time, they are reemerging to try to capitalize on a racially recharged political climate. (Futrell & Simi, 2017, p. 76)

Figure 5.1 indicates interest in the terms "alt-right" and alt right, as noted by Google trends. Many of these stories referred to ways in which the "alt-right" was becoming part of the mainstream political and sociocultural environment in the United States.

The "alt-right" movement in the United States is thus a movement that specifically restricts its appeals to a segment of the population—the

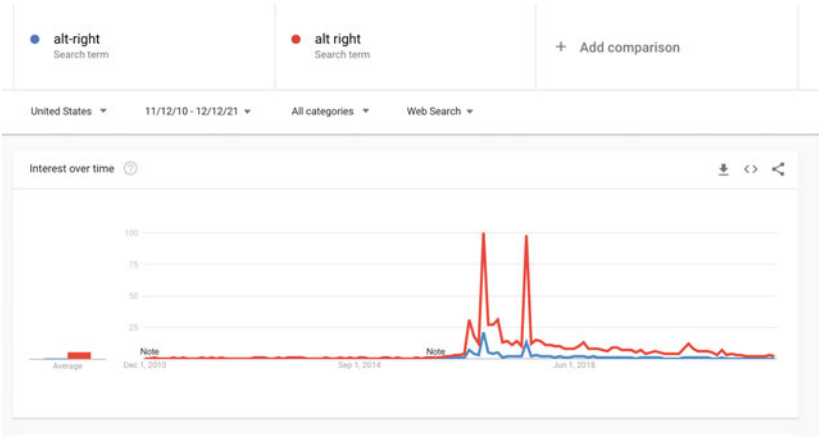

Fig. 5.1 Trend in interest in "alt-right" (*blue*) and "alt right" (*red*) from November 12, 2010 to December 12, 2021

white population in the United States. Key US "alt-right" leaders appeal specifically to white people and claim their interests are being ignored by the political elites in Washington DC (Fording & Schram, 2020; Hawley, 2019). They use "shocking language" in the form of racialized and sexualized imagery and speech to refer to those they consider weak and un-masculine. They continually claim the white population is under siege, utilizing similar language and framings of "invasion" by immigrants and of "white genocide" as discussed in Chapters 4 and 6. In the far-right definition, "white genocide" refers to how the white population of the United States is supposedly being "replaced" by immigrants and people of color (Wilson, 2020). White genocide is a conspiracy theory and the actions it describes are not real. This has not stopped it from taking hold in "alt-right" and broader far-right and Conservative circles. "Alt-right" views were (and continue to be) spread through an extensive network of "alt-right" supporters on social media but also via relatively mainstream media sources such as Alex Jones' *Infowars, Breitbart News, the Daily Stormer*, various right-wing talk shows and *Fox News*. Newer media sources such as *NewsMax* and *One America News Network* (OANN) also spread white supremacist, and anti-immigrant messages. Thus, identifying the discursive practices by which such spread occurs, especially in and through public sources such as comics and memes,

is useful to recognize and counter them. After the 2016 presidential elections, alt-righters and their ideologies became part of government policymaking. It is also important to study the "alt-right" and its self-representations as their prominence means their views and ideologies have shaped US government policy and public opinion.

Analyzing Visual Images: Visual Culture and Visual Politics in International Relations

"Visual culture" signifies the relationship between the viewer or the seer and the vision or the visual artifact itself. As Nicholas Mirzoeff describes it,

> Visual culture is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology. By visual technology, I mean any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil painting to television and the Internet. (1999, p. 3)

Systems of visualization operate to position subjects and objects and establish meanings of "the gaze" between these. There are two ways we can think of visual culture—one, in terms of (textual and visual) representations; another, in terms of the processes of physically visualizing or "envisioning." Representations are key to visualization and form the "stuff" of which visual culture is understood. It is visual representations—images in the form of memes—that the rest of this chapter will examine. Memes are popular culture artifacts that are commonly used in online communication.

As discussed in Chapter 3, visualizing and visual power formation was a key part of the popular culture of lynching—both in the actual act of looking (overwhelmingly performed by white people) and the postcards and photographs about the event that were shared afterward. Thus, visuality and visualization by whites of minorities, especially within the context of the United States, have always been connected with racialized relations and with the constitution and maintenance of white power hierarchy (Mills, 1999; Mirzoeff, 2011). On a related note, the establishment and maintenance of white power and control in the United States have been connected with the tracking and surveillance of Black communities (Browne, 2015). These dynamics of white power and control are

related to the types of visual imagery that the "alt-right" produced and spread, and the audience such images are directed toward. Memes like Pepe as Trump or Pepe smiling at immigrants at the US–Mexico border, then, are not neutral but are expressions of racialized power dynamics which have a long history.

Visual culture has been central to how far-right extremists promote their racist views while claiming their actions are in jest. Practices of labeling and representation—both visually and textually—are tied to systems of looking and being seen which categorize "us" and "them" into particular subject positions. As indicated earlier, this is central to the practice of meme-making and sharing in far-right circles. Visual images form part of the language that "alt-right" groups and their supporters refer to each other and also exclude everyone they consider to be outside of the "alt-right" community. Memes and visual images more generally have been used by the "alt-right" to "document" examples of alleged attacks on white persons, thus "reinforcing the sense of a loss of status" (Ganesh, 2020). Images are interactional and it is partly in their sharing and reworking that social actors make sense of the world around them. This interactionality draws attention to the possibility of new meanings emerging from new interactions. Sharing of images is connected to viewing and resharing them—it is a dialogical process that gets the viewer involved. It is this interaction process that allows for specific meanings to be produced during various episodes and, also, for identities to emerge and become replicated. Image sharing, if examined as a form of language, thus performs specific tasks such as maintaining interests, responding to past debates, and creating a space for further argumentation and debate. It also builds a community—an "alt-right" community that prioritizes whiteness while evading responsibility for spreading hate.

Regarding visual artifacts such as the Pepe meme, Hansen discusses the concept of "international icons" as "freestanding images that are widely circulated, recognized, and emotionally responded to. International icons come in the form of foreign policy icons familiar to a specific domestic audience, regional icons, and global icons" (Hansen, 2015, p. 263). She writes about how particular images are appropriated, reused, and circulated in the process making specific meanings possible (Hansen, 2015). Iconic images do not just represent what happens/ed but intervene in conversations on identity—formation. Iconic images or viral memes, thus, can be weaponized in this sense as they become—and are made—part of ongoing conversations about identities, interests, and goals. Iconic images

constitute meanings of events and actors in world politics. This is also the case for memes produced and circulated by the "alt-right." Images then are data that can be studied in order to note identities formed and interests promoted.

Memes: Participatory Engagement and Community Formation

Internet memes can be defined as pictures or words that are used to express a concept (Dafaure, 2020). Dafaure categorizes a range of "alt-right" memes with their common feature being they constitute white people and "Western civilization" as under threat from racialized "outsiders" (Dafaure, 2020). Regarding memes and how they work, two key points stand out: that memes are participatory, including both creator and sharer (Phillips, 2015). Memes are also a "common language" for many. Phillips sums up memes as thus:

> Limor Shifman, who describes memes as '(a) a *group of digital items sharing common characteristics* of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created *with awareness of each other*; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and transformed *via the Internet by many users*,' as well as participatory media scholar Ryan Milner, who theorizes that memes are a 'lingua franca' (i.e., a bridge language) uniting participatory online collectives. (Philips, 2015, p. 22; italics in original Shifman)

It is useful to remember that the popularity of meme-making and sharing are relatively recent. Ryan Milner, the author of *The World Made Meme,* who has described memes as a common language for online group formation, writes how his research topic of Internet memes was relatively unknown in 2010. By 2015, however, memes and the practice of making and sharing memes were popular (Milner, 2016, p. 7). A 2018 study on the spread of memes across "Twitter, Reddit, 4chan's Politically Incorrect board (/pol/), and Gab" yielded a dataset of 1.6 million images from 2.6 billion meme-related posts (Zannettou et al., 2018). Because of social media technologies, images can spread rapidly and can be modified by social actors with access to basic image editing software. There is an immediacy and evocation of emotions through these rapidly spreading images that are unlike those from art in a museum or a film or TV show. The combination of social media technologies and the ability to create

and manipulate visual images produces ways of responding to events and creating self-identities and meanings immediately and rapidly.

Memes also help build social ties between different users who are often geographically dispersed by providing them with a form of private language. Even if meme-making is an individual action, meanings of memes are produced and reproduced in a collective context as users amend and transform images and short texts while sharing them. Memes depend on an audience for their very existence—by definition, memes are social communication as, for an image and/text to become a meme, it has to have been shared multiple times. As Milner explains,

> through memetic media, hashtags populated by millions of users, jokes spawned in a single 4chan thread, and even GIFs shared between friends via text message are woven from and into collective fabric. (Milner, 2016, p. 24)

In this way, memes are about online community-building—it is just that the community thus built is not always a hospitable one.

For technology and social media more generally, research has shown that the operation of algorithms has inbuilt biases that discriminate against Black and brown communities. Safiya Noble's research shows how technology design is complicit in constituting and spreading racism and bigotry (Noble, 2018). Similarly, Ruha Benjamin has written about "the new Jim Code," in which she explores how racism and racist hierarchies are part of the design of technological systems and coding practices (Benjamin, 2019). The lack of neutrality of technology and technological systems is something that Eubanks has also focused upon, as she describes how technology-enabled decisions discriminate (Eubanks, 2018). In all these, whiteness is prioritized and centered and a hierarchy is produced and reproduced, assisted and enabled by the uses of technology. On the user side, research has indicated how social media and online sites provide spaces for people with racist and sexist views, including those that promote violence against others, to gather and proliferate. Indeed, research has indicated there is often a mainstreaming of violent extremism occurring in media sites. For example, Ribeiro et al. (2020) study YouTube videos and comments related to the far-right. They conclude:

> We analyze 330,925 videos posted on 349 channels, which we broadly classified into four types: Media, the Alt-lite, the Intellectual Dark Web (I.D.W.), and the Alt-right. According to the aforementioned radicalization hypothesis, channels in the I.D.W. and the Alt-lite serve as gateways to fringe far-right ideology, here represented by Alt-right channels. Processing 72M+ comments, we show that the three channel types indeed increasingly share the same user base; that users consistently migrate from milder to more extreme content; and that a large percentage of users who consume Alt-right content now consumed Alt-lite and I.D.W. content in the past. (Ribeiro et al., 2020)

As can be noted in Ribeiro et al.'s research, there is an ongoing fluid movement of users from less "extreme" channels to more "extreme" ones, including ones that are directly associated with the "alt-right". These users are both consumers and participants in these far-right communities. Memes facilitate this movement and the communication across fringe and mainstream sites as they are used to "both to project a favorable position in the social field and to justify judgment, condemnation, and exclusion of others" (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017, p. 495).

Unlike YouTube or Twitter where there may be fewer barriers to entry and participation, memes usually require some form of "insider knowledge" to understand their messaging and, especially, to rework them while sharing. In other words, memes bring in both the participatory aspect of community engagement as well as the private knowledge/access to secret information aspect that many users find attractive. Meme-making and "meme magic" can be exclusionary and even racist, with the underlying view that one has to have access to specific information in order to engage in meme-making (Milner, 2016). Indeed, participating in online debates about which language and images are acceptable helps build a community for the "alt-right" (Hodge & Hallgrimsdottir, 2020).

Memes spread quickly and can create social meaning within a short period of time. Technology—including social media technology and mobile phones—facilitates this swift transmission of memes. The majority of memes are meant to push back against what is considered mainstream ways of thinking and doing (Milner, 2016). In the case of "alt-right" memes, "dog whistles" or "covert hate speech" are often used to denigrate others, mainly "liberals" but also mainstream conservatives (Bhat & Klein, 2020).

Memes are relevant when discussing how far-right extremism becomes mainstream because a significant part of this far-right identity construction is based on the internet, especially in online spaces such as Reddit and 4Chan. Recent research suggests Chan culture—or participation in those spaces—contributes where "memes and visual culture were used to target out-groups including (but not limited to) Black and ethnic minorities, Jewish people, women, and the LGBTQ community" (Keen et al., 2020). Meme usage among the broader far-right is common and is often a way for them to evade responsibility for spreading hate (Bhat & Klein, 2020). The "alt-right's" Richard Spencer, for example, had Pepe the Frog as part of his Twitter identity for a while. Milo Yiannopoulos, another well-known alt right figure and a frequent contributor to *Breitbart* news before his popularity declined, shared links to memes of "Little Marco," visual images used to portray then-Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio as small and weak. Donald Trump, as president, regularly shared memes, including those of Pepe, on Twitter. As such, memes are an appropriate source of data for analyzing how far-right extremists communicate. At the same time, analyzing memes connects the method—spread through social media—with visual politics in general. We move from discussing images to discussing their circulation and repurposing and the effects upon audiences.

Memes retain a history of their use but also gain new meanings as they get reused in different times and places. In order for actors to make sense of events and of each other, they need to create descriptions of the events under discussion. These descriptions are usually arguments along the lines that the self (the "alt-right" in this case) had a reason for doing what they did during the event in question. These descriptions also construct "self" and "other" identities. This chapter focuses on a specific meme-the Pepe figure—that the "alt-right" adopted and used to create self and other identities and to communicate often hateful messages targeting so-called "liberals" and marginalized communities.

Examining "alt-right" communication through memes is especially useful to note how stake is established and inoculated. For example, anti-immigration memes such as Fig. 5.2 establish footing as the person sharing the meme links themselves and their views with the smirking

Fig. 5.2 Trump/Pepe smirking on one side of a fence labeled as "US border" while a family stand on the other side. The woman carries a baby in her arms

Pepe/Trump. Such meme-sharing also inoculates stake by allowing sharers to claim this is not overt racism as it is "humor" and thus permitted, while an anti-immigrant statement with similar sentiment could be disallowed by Twitter and other social media. An overtly racist statement could also be less popular, as compared to a comic image. Discursive devices like footing and stake inoculation then work together to establish the identity of the white population as under threat and as victims of the government, globalization, and, of course, immigrants and people of color. Visual images—memes—are circulated to support and spread these understandings about white population as victims.

The question of appropriation and circulation of visual images is then tied to intervening in particular discussions. As Nussbaum and Shifman write, memes are often used to derail regular arguments, with the meme-user then establishing their social status while using memes as discursive weapons to judge and condemn (2017, p. 495). Here, the audience is also central. Keeping attention to audience and to spectatorship serves two useful purposes: one, it centralizes agency in the process of visualization and looking; then, it allows us to note how alt right memes presume a specific audience—white, xenophobic, and supportive of their ideologies or spectators/viewers who are unable to or unwilling to engage with the meme-user. This leads to a final point that there is a connection between visualizing and affect. A key goal of these memes is to ensure those who are looking at them and sharing them recognize themselves as part of a larger "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006). This is similar to the work done by lynching postcards in the past (Ch 3). Except, the twenty-first century "alt-right" community is "imagined" not just in Anderson's sense of it being a community where many of the members would not just see or know each other, but it is also imagined in the sense that it draws on tropes and narratives of a past that never existed, a past in which "white people" (undefined) were powerful and central in the history of the United States and the world and whose status is now under threat. The audience such memes are directed to then uses these visuals to construct subjectivity and to identify themselves as part of a larger (white nationalist) community. The following section focuses on Pepe the frog and how it was used and circulated by the "alt-right" during and after the 2016 US presidential election.

The Pepe the Frog Meme[1]

The main visual image analyzed in this chapter is that of Pepe the frog. Drawn by comic artist Matt Furie in 2005, Pepe is an anthropomorphic green frog that was transformed into a meme. The image has been used to illustrate feelings and reactions, leading to well-known incarnations of Pepe such as Sad Pepe, Feels Good Man (Pepe), and Smug Frog

[1] A documentary *Feels Good Man* (2020) describes the evolution of Pepe from a comic to a meme and then to a symbol of protest around the world. Information on the documentary can be found here: https://www.fastcompany.com/90565190/feels-good-man-twisted-history-pepe-frog-cartoon-"alt-right"-mascot.

(Know your meme, www). Pepe became popular in 4Chan and Reddit and entered the mainstream in the US during the run-up to the 2016 US presidential elections. In that period, Donald Trump tweeted an image of himself with Pepe/Trump (Pepe as Trump) in a reworked image of a movie poster for the film *The Expendables*. Titled, "the Deplorables," this meme was a reference to Hillary Clinton's September 2016 remarks calling some Trump's supporters "deplorables." In remarks made at a private fundraiser, she said,

> You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right? … The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic— you name it. And unfortunately there are people like that. And he has lifted them up. (Reilly, 2016)

Trump himself strongly denounced Clinton for this statement—which Clinton later apologized for—by claiming it showed her "bigotry and hatred for millions of Americans" and were her "true feelings" about them (Mark, 2016). The hashtag #basketofdeplorables trended on Twitter and Trump's supporters took up the term "deplorables" and memed it—using various images from popular culture to claim they were "proud deplorables." Of these, a popular one used a scene from the film *The Great Gatsby*, with actor Leonardo di Caprio holding out a drink. This image was altered and shared with the new texts promoting the deplorable—ness of those spreading it: "Here's to all us deplorables" said one, while another claimed "Cheers to all of us who have filled 'the basket of deplorables'." This specific Deplorables meme made Pepe a public figure as it was shared by the Trump campaign and received extensive media attention.

By 2016, Pepe was also part of the online community spreading out into assorted Reddit sites and in 4Chan. There was an affective community formation among the online "alt-right" as they used Pepe to express their emotions and to communicate information about their reactions to events. These reactions were usually racist, anti-immigrant, and misogynistic and, thus, shaped the meaning of Pepe during this time. By December 2016, *Time Magazine* listed Pepe as the most influential fictional character of the year (D'addario, 2016). In its reworkings, Pepe became a symbol for various pro-Trump groups to coalesce around and to engage with. As with memes in general, the maker and the audience were

blurred. Philips writes, "the fact that both Pepe and the 'deplorables'" label appeared to be somewhat ironic attracted participants with a variety of motivations, including the impulse to embrace offensive messages in order to undermine 'political correctness'" (Philips, 2018). The Pepe meme then is useful to study how US far-right extremists used images and visual culture to communicate and share racist and sexist messages all the while claiming that the form (an image) was ironic and humorous (Milligan, 2019).

"Alt-Right" Memes: Frogs, Films, and Fantasies

As noted earlier, the "alt-right" movement gained prominence during a series of events before entering the mainstream popular discourse in 2016. These events included the Gamergate incident. The 2014 "Gamergate" incident involved harassment against women in the game development and video game industry. As part of a broad harassment campaign, women video game creators, developers, and critics were targeted with doxing and sexual assault threats. Those doing the targeting used tactics—use of memes, claims that racist/misogynistic speeches were "ironic," and doxing—that eventually became the hallmark of the "alt-right's" interactions online (CBC, 2016; Lees, 2016). For example, Milo Yiannopoulos urged his Twitter followers to send racist and sexist messages to the *Ghostbusters* actress Leslie Jones. Jones' Twitter timeline became filled with extremely graphic sexual and racist images (Altman, 2016). Images–memes were weaponized against Jones. Scholars have argued the infrastructure of social media, especially Twitter, facilitated harassment by making it difficult to remove or pre-empt racist and sexist abuse (Salter, 2016).

It was during the lead up to the 2016 presidential elections, however, that the alt right moved even further into the mainstream discourse. Individuals associated with the "alt-right" used tactics that were common during the Gamergate period to attack people online. Mimetic weaponization or "the purposeful deployment of memetic imagery to disrupt, undermine, attack, resist or reappropriate discursive positions…" (Peters & Allan, 2021, p. 218) became part of a broader "alt-right" strategy to cohere around specific racist and xenophobic standpoints. During the Republican primaries and, later, during the Clinton versus Trump campaigns, far-right memes utilized sexist, xenophobic, and racist labels and images to describe those who did not support Trump. Two key

memes were instrumental in spreading these messages: Pepe the Frog and the Deplorables.

The Pepe the frog meme was one of the most widespread on social media.[2] A green frog, often with a grin on its face, Pepe became a symbol used by many in the "alt-right." The Anti-Defamation League labeled Pepe a hate symbol. The evolution of the meme itself is a fascinating study in internet usage and social media practices, with users trying to reduce the value of Pepe images while also selling "rare" Pepes at auction. However, tracing the internet economy of Pepe is not the goal of this chapter except to note this spread—and the subsequent reworkings of Pepe—-indicate its centrality in far-right extremist identity formation and communication. I focus here on Pepe's incarnation as a white supremacist symbol, tweeted and re-tweeted by "alt-right" figures.

While Pepe had been enjoying some level of popularity among the message boards of 4chan and Reddit prior to 2016, it was during the US Presidential election that Pepe's popularity soared. During this period, the regular Pepe figure—with smiles or sad frowns—proliferated but so did a newer version in which Pepe was drawn as Donald Trump. Knowyourmeme.com traces the beginnings of Pepe-as-Trump to July 2015 and to a cartoon where Pepe/Trump is stood on one side of the "US Border" with a man and a woman—the man in a sombrero and poncho and the woman carrying a baby—on the other side of a chain link fence (Know your meme, 2022; Anonymous, 2015). Pepe/Trump is holding a pin with "Make America Great Again" written on it. He is smiling as the man and woman—on the other side of the fence—look on. The woman is holding a baby.

The Pepe/Trump meme spread and Trump himself tweeted a version of it in October 2016. In this version, Pepe/Trump is standing at a podium that has the presidential seal on it. Part of the US flag is in the background (Guy, 2018). Trump's tweet included the words "you can't stump the Trump," thus constructing himself as someone who could not be duped or outwitted. However, "Can't stump the Trump" also had another meaning as it was the name of a white nationalist *YouTube* channel that had posted a series of pro-Trump videos, including a mix footage of Trump speaking at a Republican debate with audio from a nature documentary about a centipede killing a tarantula (Comrade

[2] Over 1000 images of the Pepe meme can be found here: http://imgur.com/a/U2d TR#32 and there is a ten-year timeline for Pepe here: http://i imgur.com/i8NcLoH.png.

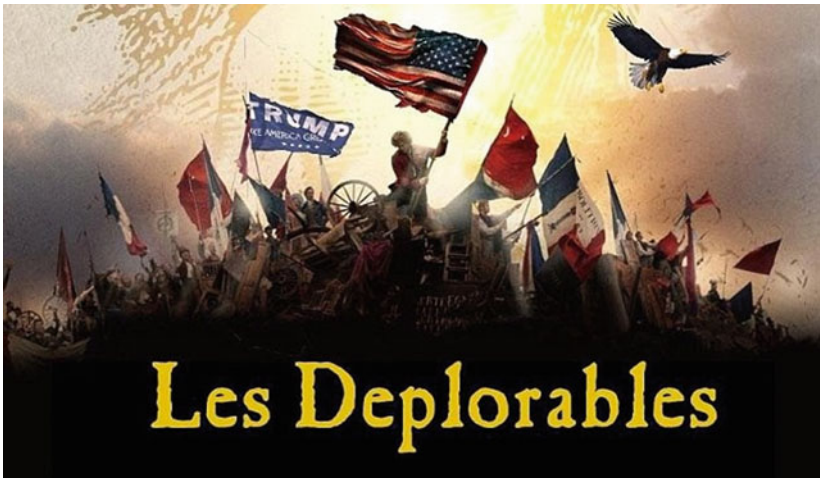

Fig. 5.3 A reworking of a film poster of *Les Miserables* into Les Deplorables, with various US and Trump-related flags added. There is also an eagle flying in the foreground

Stump, www). This was then connected to Trump supporters who referred to themselves as "centipedes." Here, we can note how communication occurred as the meme spread as it went from online circles to being tweeted by a (then) presidential nominee and then subsequently linked to a white nationalist *YouTube* channel, all the while retaining the comic image of a green cartoon frog (Figs. 5.3, 5.4). The blurred borders between online and offline identity formations can also be noted.

While there were many other versions of *The Deplorables* image, one that generated discussions and led to increased media attention was one showing the Trump family members and their advisors and key supporters photoshopped onto the poster of the film *The Expendables*. Titled, "The Deplorables," the image included Pepe/Trump and Trump himself as well as key figures who supported Trump including Rudy Giuliani, Mike Pence, Chris Christie, Ben Carson, Alex Jones (of Infowars),[3] and both of

[3] Alex Jones headed the *Infowars* site which spreads many different right-wing conspiracy narratives, including one that states the Sandy Hook school shooting, where 26 people including 20 children were shot dead, did not actually occur.

Fig. 5.4 A reworking of a film poster of The Expendables but with Trump, his allies and sons, and Pepe

Trump's adult sons. This image spread on social media and was retweeted by Donald Trump, Jr. and by members of the "alt-right".

By using comic images and reworking Pepe into film posters and stills with Trump and his family and associates, members of the "alt-right" claimed they were challenging elite norms and going against a traditional system where Presidential candidates (and, later, President) did not communicate in this way. Relatedly, alt-righters argued that they were using memes to spread ideas that were otherwise not allowed to proliferate. Indeed, scholars described the 2016 election as "the meme election" but it was a specific type of meme-ones that spread messages about anti-immigration, anti-Semitism, anti-Blackness, and misogyny-that Trump, the "alt-right", and their supporters shared:

> Trump tapped into prejudices bigger and older than the internet: hateful racial stereotypes, oppressive gender norms, sweeping anti-elitism, and good old fashioned fear of the other. By tugging at these strings, Trump ran a campaign whose platform consisted not of policy proposals or thoughtful argumentation, but almost entirely of memes […] Online or off, memes emerge when resonant ideas spread within and across social collectives. Factual, objective truth isn't a requisite if underlying idea connects and compels sharing. (Milner & Phillips, 2016, www)

Trolling and Shitposting as Rhetorical Strategies that Conceal White Supremacy

The usage of these memes—especially the Pepe meme and its reworking into various other images, including that of *The Deplorables*, exemplifies trolling. Many members of the "alt-right" were embedded in and emerged from online spaces like 4Chan and Reddit where trolling is a common activity. Examining trolling as a rhetorical strategy, we can note its potential to build communities by encouraging "in group" actions wherein trolls would infiltrate various spaces on the Internet in order to disrupt ongoing conversations. Cook et al. (2017) studied trolling from the perspective of the trollers and trolled, studying motivations for trolling, meanings of trolling, and responses. Describing trolling, they write,

> In the world of online gaming, undesirable behaviour is commonplace. Players will kill teammates, verbally abuse their peers, and misdirect new community members, spreading chaos and disorder (see Riot Games, 2015). These people are called 'trolls' and their behaviour 'trolling.' (Cook et al., 2017, pp. 3323–3324)

The point of trolling is "chaos and disorder" (Cook et al., 2017). This provides plausible deniability when "alt-right" posters are called out for spreading sexist and racist messages. However, as Whitney Phillips points out, trolls were not always engaged in spreading and justifying hate, especially in the early years of the Internet. Then, they often used and reused images and texts in humorous ways; even as those ways were often disruptive, they were not always racist. Over time, trolling became connected with more extreme ideas and behavior online (Phillips, 2015).

While trolling is often defined as humor-based or linked with use of ironic messages and memes, Ortiz shows how online users actually define it as "identity-based harassment" and not just as harmless fun (2020). The connection of Pepe with Trump and his associates and the negative images of Black and brown persons in these memes are connected to far-right identity formation and identity-based harassment. There is also a difference in terms of how academic scholarship views trolling and how those who are trolled experience it and understand it. Ortiz's survey of 120 online users showed their understandings of trolling was that it included harassment based on race and/or gender (Ortiz, 2020). Thus,

Ortiz's research shows there is a gap between academic definitions of online behavior-trolling in this case—and its experiences. On a related note, Fichman and Sanfilippo's research outlines the differing impacts of trolling as related to gender and context (2014). They find out that men and women (their terms) react differently to trolling and their perceptions of trolling differ (Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2014, 2016). So, not only is trolling harmful and a form of harassment, but women are targeted more often and in greater numbers than men. Pepe, then, is not just an image or a comic expression, but the "alt-right" deployed the meme specifically to target and harass Black and brown people and to create in-group solidarity of white identity.

A form of trolling that is more directly linked with hate and is "shitposting." In the above examples, many of the usages of Pepe can be considered shitposting. Shitposting can be thought of as a form of trolling that is specifically for the purpose of detracting and derailing discussions. It is thus connected with mimetic weaponization as it is a mode by which such weaponization occurs. Wendling, author of *Alt right: From 4Chan to the White House* defines shitposting as: "A sort of heavy-duty brand of trolling—posting extreme content (or extreme amounts of it) in an attempt to derail a discussion or make a message board unusable." (Wendling, 2018, p. 94). This shifts the conversation but also makes other posters less likely to engage as they are wary of being attacked by online trolls. In addition, as Wendling makes clear, shitposting is not just about communicating but about disrupting and destroying (Wendling, 2018). The goal for shitposters is to interrupt or end discussions altogether by shifting the discussion to conversations and objections about the shitpost(ing) rather than the initial subject of the discussion. This was obvious in the usage of Pepe as the "alt-right" claimed Pepe was "just" a comic and, thus, was not connected with hate. These interruptions of ongoing conversations can strengthen in-group bonds among the trolls while ensuring criticism of their behavior and actions are deflected.

Trolling thus has goals of disruption and division. Extremism researcher Robert Evans, who analyzed the manifesto of the 2019 Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant, states how that manifesto itself is a form of shitposting (Evans, 2019). The shooter used multiple examples of online forms of communication while describing his motives for the shootings, making it difficult to separate what were his actual views from his shitposting. Evans points out that, at various points in the manifesto, such as a reference to US conservative Candace Owens, Tarrant's aim is to

attract social media attention and "sow political division" (Evans, 2019, www).

Regarding shitposting and trolling more generally, then, the actions themselves create a community that coalesces around those doing the trolling while engaging in trolling themselves. So, the practice of meme-making is itself community-building for the "alt-right". Au et al.'s study on what they identify as "Facebook's largest shitposting group" uses interviews with individual shitposters as well as content analysis of the posts to conclude:

> Shitposts tend to have a recognisable form and are created with varying intentions, such as for humour, self-expression, or to offend others. Findings also gave insight to shitposting's role in forming a community: shared interest for creating and enjoying shitposts encourages member participation, while shared symbols in shitposting foster bonds among members. (Au et al., 2019)

Thus, at the most basic level, trolling and shitposting strengthens bonds among people in a network. They build solidarity. At the same time, the action of shitposting and trolling constitute trolls' targets and anyone who opposes trolls as outsiders. Users weaponize images as they flood online sites with images and short texts that then get used and reused as other uses engage, modify, and re-post. This connects to another goal for trolling—to elicit responses from so-called "normies"—who are defined as "other"—about the outrageousness of trolling itself. Once this attention is received—horror or shock or disgust—the troll can then claim these "normie" others have no sense of humor as the troll(s) were just joking. Therefore, trolling does not only constitute a community (in group) and its others, but it lays out actions to take against those who criticize or question the trolling ("normies"). It performs boundary defining and boundary maintenance of the in-group (Graham, 2019). As Phillips and Milner explain, racism is central to many trolling actions but the format of trolling allows trolls to deny they are racist: "…trolls revel in explicitly and unapologetically racist language" while, at the same time, claiming they are not racist (Phillips & Milner, 2017, pp. 96–97). Condemnation of such behavior and criticism, that what trolls are engaged in is racist, is turned back on those doing the condemning. As such, the behavior perpetuates as trolls and shitposters continue to claim they are only doing this for fun and entertainment, and describe those

condemning such behavior as unable to enjoy themselves and, thus, uncool. This can attract more online users to troll as trolling is seen as an anti-establishment and cool activity.

As a discursive practice then, the ambivalence of meaning of trolling actions leads to a built-in mechanism for trolls for plausible deniability of trolling's worst excesses. The meanings and purpose of many online events—especially trolling actions—depend on who is observing, who is participating, what assumptions are present, and so on (Phillips & Milner, 2017, p. 10). There is also ambivalence in the sense that, on the Internet, it is difficult to determine a poster's motivations especially in spaces like 4Chan where transgressing norms is the norm. This is especially relevant for the formation of the "alt-right" and how its members would use humor and irony to deflect attention back to the interrogator, all the while suggesting critics of "alt-right" actions online were incapable of understanding humor (Dreisbach, 2021; Feilitz & Ahmed, 2021; Greene, 2019).

In order to understand these tactics of the "alt-right", it is useful to go back to 2014 and revisit actions around "Gamergate." The harassing tactics of Gamergate spread beyond the Chans and Reddit to more mainstream social media such as Twitter. It also had offline consequences with some of the women who were targeted even having to move homes due to targeted harassment (Dewey, 2014). A 2017 *Data and Society* report concluded a group of 4Chan users strategically used Gamergate to bring "a diverse array of constituents" together to troll and harass women, especially on Twitter (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). This group included men's rights activists, gamers, conservative political commentators, and journalists. The report adds,

> Although the activity around Gamergate has largely dissolved, it was nonetheless a crucial moment for the development of online subcultural tactics, strategies, and skills. In particular, three tactics used during Gamergate can help us understand the subsequent emergence of the alt-right:
>
> Organized brigades
> Networked and agile groups
> Retrograde populism. (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 8)

In other words, Gamergate popularized a series of tactics that were eventually used by the "alt-right" to deflect responsibility for racist and white nationalist content-sharing.

Gamergate also illustrated how practices that are often considered individualized and random are actually networked and involve community participation-social media (and memes) can be weaponized. It was not just "a few bad apples" who were engaged in harassment and targeting of those who questioned their homophobic, misogynistic, and racist posts, but there was an organized and coordinated approach meant to maintain the Gamergate (and, later, "alt-right") movement. Marwick and Caplan (2018) discuss how, often, harassment is viewed by mainstream reporting as an individualized activity while, in fact, it is a networked phenomenon. They use the example of how networks that are part of men's rights groups and the "manosphere" (discussed further in Chapter 6) harass women and minorities to strengthen their own in-group (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). Similarly, Bezio (2018) draws out these connections between Gamergate and the eventual emergence and popularization of the "alt-right" (Bezio, 2018). The promotion of a specific type of masculinity in and through Gamergate was then key to how the "alt-right" and subsequent far-right violent groups like the Proud Boys would self-identify as. O'Donnell's research analyzed a large volume of chatlogs from a Gamergate chatroom to conclude Gamergate's rhetorical strategy was militaristic (O'Donnell, 2019). The participants in this chatroom-almost all of whom identified as male-viewed themselves as part of a larger culture "war." They saw their actions as volleys in that warfare (O'Donnell, 2019). Once again, we can note the networked and community-oriented aspects of participating in Gamergate, as well as the formation of an exclusionary misogynistic, extreme nationalist subculture that would inform the popularity of the "alt-right".

Gamergate was thus both embedded in and emerged from cultures of trolling and shitposting. These later led to meme cultures and meme wars, as with the spread of Pepe. Proponents of Gamergate claimed their attacks on journalists and women game developers were about ethics in journalism, and not about misogyny. They falsely claimed their goals were to protect the right to free speech (CMV, 2016; Romano, 2021). In this way, two mainstreaming moves were performed that worked to conceal hate: one, that Gamergate was about research ethics, all the while coordinated attacks against women gamers were undertaken and, two, these actions were in support of free speech. These mainstreaming

moves allowed Gamergate proponents to deflect from their promotion of misogyny and their targeting of female gamers and journalists. Similar strategies were adopted in the case of Pepe and other memes that far-right actors spread online.

Implications: Humor as Strategy for Invisibilizing White Supremacy

Gamergate tactics of deflection and shifting of responsibility were both precursors to how the "alt-right" eventually mainstreamed its white nationalist and white supremacist goals. Various features of the Internet made it perfect for this as it facilitated anonymity, online community-building, swarming in attacks, and calls to recruitment. These calls mobilized narratives of masculinity and free speech as under attack while using memes for trolling.

Discussing "mimetic weaponization," Peters and Allan (2021) use the example of Pepe to outline how memes are deployed by the far-right for reasons ranging from "'sharing a joke' to promoting 'alternative facts,' rebuking 'political correctness,' or 'wokeness,' defending preferred framings of 'free speech,' or signaling cynicism, distrust or dissent with 'mainstream' media, among other drivers." (Peters & Allan, 2021, p. 219). Because of the nature of memes and the practices of producing and sharing images and texts that become memes, there is an online community that developed around Pepe. This community blended together multiple online subgroups ranging from outright overt white nationalists in the "alt-right" to men's rights activists, gamers, and government officials, including the President of the United States. As DeCook's research on the Proud Boys' use of memes has indicated, memes are essential in building community among the online far-right (DeCook, 2018). Memes are used as propaganda for recruitment. Because they can avoid charges of racism by claiming memes are about humor and irony, the white supremacist messaging is often hidden. This occurred with Pepe as the "alt-right" reworked Pepe and inserted it into various scenarios in response to critics who criticized Pepe's racism and misogyny. The "Alt-right" movement claimed their critics were unable to understand humor and irony.

But humor and irony are not neutral rhetorical strategies—they can and have been used to further racist ideas. Greene (2019) provides examples of how the "alt-right" weaponized irony to portray itself as attractive

to potential recruits and to generate sympathy for its narratives. She writes how the use of irony and satire has allowed white supremacist discourses to move from the margins to the forefront in and through the far-right's use of humor and irony:

> In the post–civil rights and subsequent ostensibly color-blind eras, white supremacy, and particularly racist humor, was thought to take a covert form in the "frontstage" (multiracial spaces whites occupy) and an overt form in the "backstage" (any space occupied only by whites); however, in our current age, toxic white supremacist discourses are moving from backstage to front stage, a transition facilitated by the alt-right's use of new media and ironic or satiric communicative styles. (Greene, 2019, p. 36)

As indicated here, the use of new media and the proliferation of online communities and activities like meme-making and meme warfare have assisted this shift of racist discourses from the margins to the mainstream of society. Windisch and Simi's ethnographic content analysis on three Stormfront forums indicates a similar discursive practice wherein white supremacist joke sharing "simultaneously fostered cohesion and contention among users" (Windisch & Simi, 2022, online). In this, Windisch and Simi outline how humor serves the function of building community and fellowship among white supremacists but, sometimes, it can also be a source of contention if the joke violates community norms (e.g., jokes that disparage white women) (Windisch & Simi, 2022).

In general, however, humor and irony through memes are used to unite the "alt-right" and broader far-right, to dehumanize and demean minorities by spreading racist and sexist images, and to create and solidify in- and out-group identities. Meme users often promote violence (Stall et al., 2022). Whiteness is relevant here. As Paul (2021) shows, there is increasing normalization of white supremacist discourse as the utilization of new forms of communication—memes, in this case—help spread racist messages especially to youth (Paul, 2021). Irony and humor in the form of memes and meme-sharing have also provided a pathway to further embeddedness into far-right extremist communities. In a 2018 *New York Times* article that asked "should we all be taking 'irony poisoning' more seriously?," the authors described a case where a German man had moved from trolling and shitposting online to attempting to set fire to a local refugee house. They described this process as an example of irony poisoning. The authors defined "irony poisoning" as "soft"

wherein an individual cultivates ironic detachment, common to many online communities, offline. They then describe the "hard form" of irony poisoning as: "extreme political ideas slide from ironic jokes into earnestly held beliefs. You show your ironic detachment by deliberately violating taboos, namely by expressing forbidden ideas—say, white supremacism" (Fisher & Taub, 2018). They, however, cautioned against connecting irony poisoning directly to social media and emphasize a focus on the outcome—a breaking down of taboos on racism and white supremacy. It is this role that Pepe played for the rise of the "alt-right" and subsequent mainstreaming of far-right narratives.

While Fisher and Taub do not directly connect irony poisoning to social media, it is clear that there are multiple instances of far-right violent extremists using social media especially using trolling and shit-posting to conceal racism while also promoting it. In a video titled, "The rise of the ironic racist," Hess and O'Neill make this point:

> Pepe was a stoner cartoon frog. Then he became an internet legend. Then he became an ironic Nazi. And then actual neo-Nazis realized that they could promote their sincere white supremacists beliefs by remixing them with ironic Nazi memes, and spread them further than they've ever spread before. (Hess & O'Neill, 2017, www)

Indeed, humor and irony played key roles in constituting white nationalist, racist communities around Pepe and also invisibilizing white nationalism and racism. They distanced the speaker—the producer and sharer of racist memes—from the audience and from the speaker's racist and sexist actions. Discussing irony, Gill states, "irony has become a way of 'having it both ways', of expressing sexist, homophobic or otherwise unpalatable sentiments in an ironized form, while claiming this was not actually 'meant'" (2007, p. 159).

That the use of humor and "lulz" is a practiced and deliberate discursive strategy is explained as such:

> Exemplified by Pepe the Frog avatars and targeted 'humour' about ethnic and religious minorities in Europe and North America, lulz provide ironic distance where necessary. In this way, the public response of 'just joking' is used as a 'frontstage' mechanism; or better, a shield to protect against charges of racism and their potential consequences, like falling foul in Europe of anti-racist legislation, including Holocaust denial. This characteristic feature is candidly described in Andrew Anglin's *Normie's Guide*

> *to the Alt-Right* for the neo-Nazi Daily Stormer online site, which has swiftly become one of the most popular Alt-Right websites today. (May & Feldman, 2019, p. 26)

It is the simplicity of memes combined with their use and widespread presence in sites like 4Chan which makes their messages easy to spread. Writing about 4Chan, Marc Tuters claims:

> The reasons why 4chan is productive of vernacular innovation have to do, in part, with the affordances of the platform. 4chan "moves" very quickly–threads are quickly purged from the website, meaning the website does not offer a way to "catch up" with the latest developments (notwithstanding external archival websites or wikis like Encyclopedia Dramatica). Furthermore, 4chan is anonymous, which means that if one wants to participate in the conversation one has to demonstrate a degree of subcultural literacy. (2018, p. 40)

The Pepe meme and its usage in "alt-right" networks indicates a confluence of factors: the rise of social media, memes as messaging, involvement of a large number of online groups in reusing and sharing memes (meme culture), and the skill to rework images online. Memes and meme-making can and often are exclusionary and racist while portraying themselves as not. In the case of Pepe, its circulation outside of Chans and Reddit meant the "alt-right's" strategy of presenting this racism as a joke and as the audience as "in" on the joke (or, otherwise, unable to know it) was accepted by many who helped shift the context of the discussion. In this new context, Pepe became further connected with racism. Well-known mainstream conservative figures like the President's son shared this repurposed meme; the President did, too (and himself became part of the meme). But, as Pepe is a cartoon frog, the "alt-right" was still able to deflect attention away from its racism by claiming its use of Pepe was ironic.

There is an additional point to be made about racialized memes, like the one depicted in Fig. 5.2—the practices of boundary-formation and maintenance done by memes. The representation of Trump/Pepe and the Mexicans on either side of a fence indicate in- and out-group formation. Some implications of this type of narrative-making, of course, is how it racializes US (and "Western") histories. What this means is that persons of color are erased from what constitutes "United States of America." Erased, too, are the histories of violence in which many white Americans

participated. Furthermore, as noted in the analysis of texts in Chapter 4, who is "white" is left vague thus erasing that "white Americans" and whiteness are also changing categories. By presenting this (white-centric) vision of the United States, "alt-right" visual narratives strive to normalize this construction of the United States as a whites-only or mainly white society. Spatially, too, white Americans are positioned as inside the US state, persons of color as outside of it. By connecting with similar narratives and framings of identity in more mainstream politics and journals, these memes work to create meanings of "this is how the USA is." In terms of stake management, these memes and videos represent white people in the United States as under threat. Racist, sexist, and xenophobic language is used to argue that the future of the United States itself is at risk (Chapter 6 follows up on this).

The "alt-right"—who are probably the most successful of all the trolls—used these tactics of disruption to call attention to itself and its white nationalist/supremacist messages. However, by utilizing memes, they then disavowed responsibility for hate and for promoting violence by claiming this is humor and jokes. Peters and Allan, studying the weaponization of Pepe, write how Pepe has been deployed by the far-right to help normalize through "humor, parody or satire" inclusion and exclusion criteria (Peters & Allan, 2021, p. 219). Similarly, drawing on their research on the German far-right's use of memes, Bogerts and Fielitz illustrate how the use of memes reworks racism and xenophobia (Bogerts & Fielitz, 2018; McSwiney et al., 2021). By utilizing images, which are easy to manipulate and spread, reactions could be quickly signaled and shared. Memeing also allows the "alt-right" to deny responsibility for much of the racist ideas spread when called out on it. Arguing that what they are doing is disrupting an entrenched establishment and fighting so-called political correctness allows the "alt-right" to spread racist, misogynistic, and anti-Semitic ideas while, at the same time, claiming they are merely being ironic.

Connections to whiteness can be made in how mainstream media and politicians have also adopted the "alt-right's" understanding that memes—even when racist, sexist, anti-Semitic messages are shared through them—are ultimately harmless. Even though the various Pepes might not always directly mention race, the visual depiction of minorities in these memes is usually racist and misogynistic. Despite this, there is a tendency among mainstream politicians and media to accept the "alt-right" message that memes are mostly harmless bits of humor. Whiteness

means the danger to persuadable youth of the messages from memes like Pepe is not taken seriously. "Alt-right" memes are often viewed as entertainment instead of as popular culture artifacts that can and have spread hate.

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CHAPTER 6

Red Pills, White Genocide, and "the Great Replacement": Rewriting History, and Constructing White Victimhood in/through Far-Right Extremist Manifestos and Texts

This chapter examines a particular mode of communication of US far-right extremists—that of manifestos or publicly shared writings about their actions. Many recent far-right violent extremists in the United States and elsewhere have written and shared their manifestoes before or after their acts of violence (Ware, 2020). This chapter illustrates how US far-right extremists' manifestoes and popular culture texts they draw upon—legitimate their calls for violence by constructing themselves as victims. Careful analysis of a number of manifestos—taken as exemplary of far-right extremist communications—indicates that, by misrepresenting historical actors and events, drawing connections to an imagined white "European" past, and by erasing and dehumanizing women and people of color, US far-right extremists narrate an imagined history of the United States where whiteness was dominant and is now under threat (Table 6.1).

In August 2017, Charlottesville, Virginia—a city about 2.5 hours drive from where I live—became a city that many in and outside of the United States would hear about. On the evening of 11 August, hundreds of people—mostly white men—marched through the grounds of the University of Virginia. Carrying flaming tiki torches and shouting slogans such

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Table 6.1 Analyzing narrative strategies of rewriting history, self-as-whole community in influential text, and manifestos

	Source	*Narrative strategy*	*Outcome*
Chapter 6	Self-narratives or public "manifestos" and influential text	Self as representing (all) white people, producing white victimhood, rewriting history	Exclusionary, whites-only vision of society where women and persons of color are erased/dehumanized

as "Blood and soil" and "White lives matter," these men ended their march at the University of Virginia's rotunda (Becket, 2017; Jaschik, 2017). The next day, more joined in the "Unite the Right" march, organized to protest the proposed removal of the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee from a local park. Organized mainly by the "alt-right", this march involved far-right extremists from different ideological backgrounds, ranging from anti-government militia to the "alt-right" to individuals associated with the KKK. During the march, a self-described white supremacist hit and killed a counter-protester with his car. Many others who were also there to protest against the far-right march were injured.

During the nighttime procession through the grounds of the University of Virginia on 11 August and in the march the next day, the marchers repeatedly shouted "you will not replace us" and "Jews will not replace us" (BBC, 2017). This chapter explores this language of "replacement" and how it has become central to much of far-right extremist calls for violence against Black and brown communities. Throughout the chapter, I refer to it as the great replacement conspiracy and not a theory. The rest of this chapter outlines how US far-right extremists draw upon anti-immigrant, anti-Black, and anti-women narratives to portray white men and white people more generally as under threat of being "replaced."

As noted in Chapter 5, the "alt-right" is a relatively new and loosely connected group of individuals who considered themselves an alternative to traditional conservatives. Emerging from around 2015 and recruiting mostly online, the "alt-right" was adept at using memes and social media to recruit, communicate, and form a sense of community (Chapter 5). Despite claiming they were not racists, their goal was the establishment of a white ethnostate (Letson, 2016). Despite this white nationalist

goal, however, key figures in the "alt-right" were aware an overtly white supremacist framing of their actions would be less popular in society and, so, they worked to mainstream their ideas and goals including but not limited to their weaponization of memes (Chapter 5).

One way the "alt-right" pursued this "badge of respectability" was by reframing white power and xenophobic language into more euphemistic terms. Thus, their rhetoric of "white genocide" changed into discussions of "replacement" and how immigrants were "replacing" and would continue to "replace" white people in the United States. Both the "white genocide" and "replacement" conspiracies share the lie that immigrants and other minorities' birth rate is a threat to whiteness, a common theme in white supremacist narratives (Belew, 2018; Darby, 2020). Within this framework, white women's role is to continue the white race. In the "replacement" conspiracy, "replacement" is usually connected to mysterious elites (often linked with Jewish people) who are said to be planning this "replacement." This concept of "replacement" or, to be more precise, "the great replacement" is a global conspiracy. Its best-known current inspiration is French writer Renaud Camus who describes it as:

> I have coined the phrase Great Replacement (in French *Grand Remplacement*) to denote the brutal change of population which has been taking place in France (and in Europe) since the beginning of the last quarter of the last century; and which has been gaining momentum ever since. (Camus, 2018, pp. 18–19)

Camus' idea of "replacement" was also noticeable in *American Renaissance* through the years (Chapter 4) and in the memes and images that circulate through far-right extremist sites online (Chapter 5). The central idea behind Camus' "the great replacement" is his view there is an ongoing "replacement" of existing (white) populations in Europe and in the West more generally. This, of course, is not something that is actually occurring—demographic changes in a plural society like the United States (and France) are normal. But, Camus and others who promote this great replacement conspiracy are utilizing everyday events—demographic changes in a plural society—and reframing them as dangerous to whites. They do so by claiming immigrants and minorities are existential threats to white people.

One such person who acted upon "great replacement" ideas was Robert Bowers. On October 27, 2018, Bowers shot dead eleven people

Fig. 6.1 Overview of Tweets by President Trump regarding "caravans" during a six-month period (*Source* Trump Twitter Archive [Brown, www])

and wounded six others during prayer services at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. This is the deadliest attack on Jews in the United States. As of April 2022, his trial was delayed due to the global pandemic (Ove, 2022). The state charged him with multiple crimes and is seeking the death penalty. Bowers plans to plead not guilty. Prior to the shooting, Bowers had posted on online social network Gab. In a post he has not claimed but that has been linked to his online identity, Bowers blamed the synagogue and the nongovernmental organization Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) for assisting so-called "migrant caravans" to enter the United States. On Gab prior to the shooting, Bowers wrote, "HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in" (Gessen, 2018; Zimmer, 2019). This view that "migrant caravans" were on their way into the United States, bringing crime and danger, was amplified by President Trump who tweeted 16 times between April 1, 2018, and October 31, 2018, about caravans entering the United States (Fig. 6.1).

A newspaper profile on Bowers stated: "A week before the attack, he reposted a message that Western civilization is 'headed toward certain extinction within the next 200 years and we're not even aware of it'" (Lord, 2018). Court papers claim Bowers told the police after the shooting that "all Jews must die." He also made anti-Semitic remarks

during the shooting (Chavez et al., 2018; Katz, 2018). A BBC profile on Bowers had this to say, "On the now-archived Gab profile that appears to be his, he called Jewish people "the children of Satan." His feed was full of anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant posts calling Jews "an infestation," "filthy," and "evil."" (BBC News, 2018). As can be noted from his language on the Gab post, Bowers' viewed immigrants from South and Central America as "invaders." This is a language that is commonly used by far-right extremists and has entered the mainstream political arena in the United States as right-leaning media like Fox News and many Republican politicians commonly use this "invasion" rhetoric in 2022 (Zimmer, 2019; America's Voice, 2022). In this narrative framing, immigrants—almost always immigrants of color—are labeled as "invaders." This language of invasion and the construction of immigration as "invasion" is central to the great replacement conspiracy.

Bowers did not leave behind a manifesto, as we would consider it but his posts on Gab and his anti-Semitic remarks during his killing spree are evidence of his motivations and goals. Other US far-right violent actors who preceded and followed Bowers have left longer justifications about why they did what they did. White supremacist narratives, especially anti-immigration, anti-Semitic rhetoric are central to how they justify violence. It is useful to review these and note the rhetorical strategies through which these far-right violent actors attempted to legitimize their goals and use of violence. The rest of this chapter will outline some key themes that emerge from an analysis of the manifestos of Dylann Roof, Elliot Rodger, and Patrick Crusius.

Each of these was selected as archetypes of certain types of ideologies with the common overarching theme of supporting the great replacement conspiracy. Elliot Rodger was part of the online "manosphere," which constituted women and supposedly more attractive men as threats to himself and to the United States. Roof constituted Black people as threats, drawing upon false history to justify violence. Crusius used ecofascist justifications combined with praise for the man who killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019. While Roof and Crusius shared some common justifications, Roof located his justification in the United States and US domestic politics, while Crusius was inspired by international events and actors. For others like Rodger, the group blamed for the "great replacement" was women; for others, such as Roof and Crusius, the "replacement" occurs due to Black and Jewish people and immigrants (Fig. 6.2).

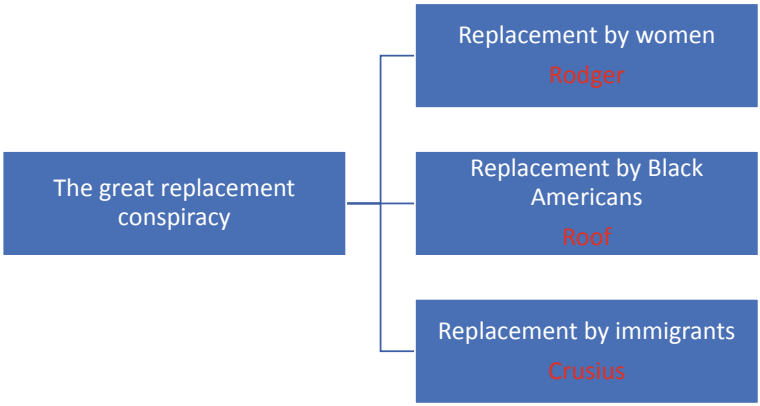

Fig. 6.2 Archetypes of three modes of the "great replacement" conspiracy

The focus of this chapter will be on the writings of these three individuals as archetypes of broader themes of misogyny, anti-Blackness, anti-immigration, and anti-Semitism with the focus on how the mode of presentation and the narrative strategies were used to conceal white supremacy while constituting white victimhood. The rest of this chapter examines, first, misogyny and gender-related justifications for FRE violence. It will examine Rodger's manifesto. It then moves on to Camus' conceptualization of the great replacement. Themes from Camus' 2018 book *You will not replace us!* will be used to illustrate how Camus conceals white supremacy by claiming his false arguments are merely observations. But, these observations are presented as objective truths ("this is the way things are/were") instead of as just his observations. In other words, Camus generalizes his personal experiences as universal. This pattern of justification is repeated in the sections afterwards as the analysis of Roof and Crusius' writings will depict. There are parallels between the manifestos of Roof and Crusius and the writings of Camus.

The following section introduces red-pilling that is connected with a narrative of individual conversion and access to truth in the online manosphere. Elliot Rodger's manifesto is analyzed to note how he constitutes himself as a victim of social forces that benefit women and other—more attractive—men. Manifestos are relevant public documents for analysis as they form part of the public communication of far-right violent extremists. They contain information about motivations and

worldviews and also about strategies and plans of attack (Ware, 2020). In addition, manifestos are easily shared online and are public, making them part of popular culture.

Misogyny and Extremism: Elliot Rodger

Within misogynistic and male supremacist violent extremism discourses, the conspiracy of the great replacement takes the form of representations of women and other men as those doing the "replacing." In these male supremacist discourses, some men are depicted as better conforming to society's "unfair" standards of beauty and attractiveness and thus a threat to other men who do not fit these perceived beauty standards. Influenced by this male supremacist ideology, in May 2014, Elliot Rodger killed six people and injured 14 others near the University of California, Santa Barbara, at Isla Vista. He used a combination of stabbing, shooting, and using his car as a weapon as his methods of killing. He eventually killed himself as well. He wrote a manifesto justifying his use of violence and also posted a video on YouTube (New York Times, 2014). In his manifesto, he shared his view that men are being "replaced" by women and by other men who are smarter, cleverer, and more handsome. He described himself as a "nice guy" who was unappreciated.

Rodger and other online extremists who are prevalent in the so-called "manosphere" see themselves as the ones who truly understand how society is changing due to women. The manosphere is a mostly online antifeminist movement that includes the "men's rights activists" (MRA) (Ging, 2019, p. 639). It consists of online spaces—blogs, forums, listservs, etc.—where the mostly male participants promote misogyny and revere a form of toxic masculinity (Ging, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). The manosphere has grown with the growth and spread of the Internet. MRAs and the manosphere in general have their own language where "alpha males" are called "chads," and their female counterparts—attractive women who engage in sexual activity— "stacys." These terms are derogatory in usage and constitute a hierarchy, based on misogyny and sexual objectification (Menzie, 2020). In the view of Rodger and others like him, attractive women are not attracted to men like Rodger. Instead, they are drawn to men who are fitter, more athletic, and more handsome.

Similar to dehumanizing strategies noted in *American Renaissance* in Chapter 4 and the ironic evasions of responsibility among Internet trollers

in Chapter 5, writings of far-right extremists active in the manosphere constitute both feminized (and thus weak) as well as hypermasculine (and thus seemingly brutal) identities for sexual and racial minorities. White men are represented as ideals of masculinity, embodying characteristics that are meant to exemplify the ideal US man (van Valkenburgh, 2018).

Red-pilling creates a world where there is a collective sense of victimhood for the white population as well a growing belief in conspiracy theories about how "Western civilization"—which is often used as a synonym for white people—is being "replaced." Red-pilling in male supremacist discourses refers to the process through which (some) men are supposed to have become aware of how women allegedly ignore and humiliate men. For many misogynistic extremists like Rodger, red-pilling is a key moment of transformation from an ordinary life to one where they see themselves as knowing the truth about the world. The term itself indicates the interconnections of popular culture and politics. Taken from the science fiction film *The Matrix*, "red-pilling" refers to waking up to a different, more "real" world. In the film, the main character Neo is offered a choice: take the red pill and learn the truth about the world or take the blue pill and remain unaware. Neo chooses the red pill. Red-pilling allows Neo to see "how deep the rabbit hole goes" (Ganesh, 2018, www). In the case of Rodger and other online misogynistic extremists, this "real world" is one where far-right views are centered (Ging, 2019). For US far-right extremists, more broadly, red-pilling is about promoting white supremacist, misogynist, xenophobic worldviews, which they consider as "learning the truth" about the world. As Ganesh explains with regard to the "alt-right",

> On the alt-right, being "red-pilled" refers to an awareness in which the entire spectrum of feminists, Marxists, socialists and liberals have conspired to destroy Western civilization and culture. Like in the manosphere, for the alt-right being red-pilled is to be awakened to the reality of "white genocide" and the ongoing "race war." (Ganesh, 2018, www)

The matter of the "red pill" becomes relevant to US far-right violent extremism in that it also offers a way to note how popular culture symbols have been used and reused by the far-right. As noted above, red-pilling has multiple meanings, all connected to see how the world truly is. This view that "taking the red pill" allows someone to see the truth about the world is connected with a framing of this as a choice. In the film *The*

Matrix, Neo is given a choice between taking the red pill or the blue pill. Morpheus, the person who is about to hand Neo the pills, explains what each pill does while also stating this is Neo's "last chance":

> This is your last chance. After this, there is no going back. You take the blue pill and the story ends. You wake in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. (*The Matrix*, 2021, www)

So, if Neo had taken the blue pill, he would not know about the real world. Moving on to the red pill, Morpheus claims, "You take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes" (*The Matrix*, 2021, www). It is Neo's decision to take the red pill that allows him to see the world as it is. Prior to then, he is being deceived. Taking the blue pill would have continued this deception and Neo would have remained in ignorance about the world. This format is one that far-right extremists who discuss being red-pilled follow.

While FRE's have thrived on misogynistic narratives regarding Black and brown people, the rise of men's rights activism online is relatively new. Men's rights activists blame feminists—women in general—for what they perceive as negative treatment of men. For them, red-pilling can open up men's minds to learn about how women are oppressing men in society (Ging, 2019). For far-right extremists more broadly, taking the red pill means learning about conspiracy theories—which they then consider to be the truth. These conspiracies range from the great replacement to the Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG) conspiracy which claims the government (and the world) is controlled by Jewish people, and so on (Evans, 2018). For men's rights activists, red-pilling also means being "awake" to the alleged (negative) role played by women in oppressing men.

Red-pilling then is a process of choice and change at an individual level. This process and choosing correctly (i.e., choosing the red pill) then shifts the individual's status in society from allegedly oppressed to powerful; the individual becomes someone with access to the Truth (capital T). Within this manosphere discourse, there are three main changes that occur to an individual after taking the red pill. First, taking the red pill means the individual becomes aware of a new world. They are now privy to secret information that makes them realize their life so far was fake. Second, this awareness leads to living in a new world, the world of reality and truth. In the case of men's rights groups online, this

new world is one where they realize society, as it is, supposedly benefits women and certain types of men. In such a world, white male identities are said to be under attack. With this new awareness, the past becomes a place they reject. Relationships, beliefs that existed prior to taking the red pill, become delegitimated as they are all part of this fake world. Finally, as can be seen in the quote from *the Matrix*, the individual only has one chance to change themselves. They do not receive multiple opportunities to become aware of this new reality. Instead, the red pill is presented as an urgent choice that has to be made immediately. This fuels the sense of existential crisis that far-right extremists thrive on.

As we have seen so far, gender plays an important role in the self-identification of the far-right, with patriarchal norms about men and masculinity foregrounded. Existing terrorism research has outlined different ways in which gender is relevant to the study of terrorism, while making it clear that its role has historically been undertheorized and understudied (Sylvester & Parashar, 2009). Recent scholarship has focused on how gender, along with race, is constitutive of how the terrorist subject is understood and studied (Banks, 2019; Gentry, 2021; Phelan, 2020). White women fall under a series of archetypes (Latif et al., 2020), one of which centers their role as mothers of white children. White women are constituted as vulnerable and needing protection in the majority of far-right discourses, and also as "vessels" for the future of the white race. They are both the reasons for which violence is committed as well as bearers of a future white global community. White women are constituted in these discourses as the building blocks of the future as it is they who can revive and restore this imagined white community that white supremacists call for. The second archetype for white women is that of "whore", where women are considered sexually promiscuous and, thus, unsuited to be the mothers of the white race. The third figure is of women as fighters, where their martial skills are centralized. This last archetype is not very common, even though women have historically always been part of white nationalist movements (Latif et al., 2020). This area of terrorism scholarship explores the interconnections of gender and terrorist violence focusing on connections between misogyny and political violence (Johnston & True, 2019). Regarding research on far-right violence and gender, Blee (2020) argues feminist scholarship of the far-right is lacking and proposes three steps for future feminist research on the far-right. These steps include doing an "intellectual genealogy" to outline the state of the field regarding feminist research on the far-right,

developing and refining concepts to theorize gender and the far-right, and build collaborative networks with other scholars, activists, and the public (Blee, 2020, p. 418).

These archetypes of white women that Latif et al. (2020) identify are found interspersed throughout Elliot Rodger's manifesto. Rodger emphasizes the mother and the whore archetypes the most. He claims he became who he is due to the negative actions of women he encountered throughout his life. From the start of his life, he connects various perceived slights and insults to his experiences with women. His mother, whom he idolizes at first, is vilified when she is perceived as supporting Rodger's sister's boyfriend over him. He criticizes almost all his female friends and acquaintances while blaming them for his alienation from society and, eventually, for his turn to violence. But the narrative presented is not about loneliness and alienation; it is about a lack of access to power, power that Rodgers feels belongs to him and is being denied to him by women and society. For instance, after he buys a handgun for the first time, Rodger writes, "After I picked up the handgun, I brought it back to my room and felt a new sense of power. I was now armed. Who's the alpha male now, bitches? I thought to myself, regarding all of the girls who've looked down on me in the past" (Rodger, 2014, p. 113; Winton et al., 2015).

There is the formation of white victimhood, too, as he blames women, other men, society for his turn to violence. This is especially noticeable not just in Rodger's manifesto but in the broader incel movement. Describing the men of the incel movement, Wilson (2020) clarifies:

> These men perceive themselves as sexual outcasts, unable to attract a girlfriend or wife because of their unattractiveness and societal norms which favor alpha males (so-called "Chads"). Ultimately, their failure to attract a mate results from decades of women's empowerment and freedom, and the decline of traditional ways of life, both caused by the rise of feminism. (2020, www)

These views on feminism and on societal norms are evident in Rodger's writings which fall within a misogynist incel framework (Kelly et al., 2021). Women in Rodger's life are framed as beyond his "reach," i.e., someone he is unable to attract and form relationships with. At one point in his manifesto, he writes, "There are so many beautiful girls in Santa Barbara, but not one of them ever wanted to be my girlfriend.

Life would have been so perfect there if only girls were attracted to me." (Rodger, 2014, p. 115) This framing serves a similar function of creating an in-group from which women are to be excluded. These women cannot be part of Rodger's brotherhood. His vision of the future only includes women who are subservient to him. This constitution of male supremacy is common in broader discourses within the manosphere and especially in the incel movement. Recent scholarships on incel subculture and the involvement of men from that subculture in violence has generated scholarship on the production of misogyny within incel narratives and related justifications of violence (Menzie, 2020; Witt, 2020), and how misogyny in online spaces is linked to offline misogynistic social practices (Chang, 2020).

Rodger's views on women parallel that of Anders Breivik who killed 77 people, mostly youth, in Utoya, Norway in 2011. Misogyny, more broadly, plays an important role in FRVEs' justifications for violence. Anders Breivik's manifesto, which ran 1,518 pages, included extensive details of his views against women and against feminism (Walton, 2012). Breivik linked multiculturalism with "political correctness" and claimed that was the root of problems in Norway and in Europe. Within "political correctness," Breivik included "feminist ideology" and saw this as feminizing and thus weakening Europe. Similar to Rodger, Breivik viewed women as weakening men and was critical of what he perceived as a changed "feminized" culture. In this formulation, women, by "feminizing" men and society, are destroying Europe and the West. In both cases, women are provided as a reason for why these men used violence, absolving the men from personal responsiblity.

Rodger blamed women for his use of violence. He described other, more attractive men as "feminized" and thus unable to see their own future destruction. Indeed, within this discursive framework, society, the nation-state, and broader political entities are all feminized, leading to their weakness and end. In misogynistic far-right extremist discourses, the nation-state's policies work to emasculate men, thus threatening this imagined white society and contributing to its downfall. Women and the characteristics attributed to them are deemed as replacing masculine, "alpha male" attributes. This notion of "replacement" has been popularized in recent years by French writer Renaud Camus.

Renaud Camus' *You Will Not Replace Us!*: The "Great Replacement" Conspiracy as a Legitimation Strategy for White Violence

Representations of immigrants and minorities as dangers to white US society have been present through US history. Chapter 3 briefly outlined the constitution of Black people and of minorities as existential threats to whiteness. Chapter 4 depicted how scientification worked to constitute normal demographic changes as threats to whiteness. In other words, narratives of "replacement" are not new; what is relatively new, however, is the popularity of the great replacement conspiracy among the far-right and its increasingly public shift into mainstream US media and culture (Primack and Contreras, 2021; Ekman, 2022). In recent years, the idea of the great replacement is most closely linked with the French author Renaud Camus who detailed it in his 2012 book *Le Grand Remplacement* (the great replacement). Despite being a promotor of this conspiracy—which has influenced numerous far-right killers in the past decade—Camus received positive media attention from mainstream media for many years. For example, a June 2019 profile of Camus in *The Nation*, a progressive and left-leaning magazine, described him as "a pioneering gay writer in the heady 1980s" who "withdrew to a 14th-century château to live among the paintings and the pictures that were the only sources of meaning he ever seemed to recognize" (McAuley, 2019). But this framing of him as an eccentric old man obscures a more disturbing theme that has been noted throughout this book—that promotors of violence and white supremacy are often active in public but their promotion of whiteness and violence is not taken seriously by government and the majority of the public.

The great replacement is, at its simplest, a conspiracy theory that considers the movement of people across political borders as indicative of an "invasion" into societies and cultures they are moving into. The term "invasion" is often used to describe the process of migration. It is also a racialized conspiracy theory as the people who are labeled "invaders" and "replacers" are migrants from Asia, South and Central America, and Africa. The following section draws from Camus' 2018 book *You Will Not Replace Us!* to outline how Camus portrays French and, by extension, "Western" society that is under threat from racialized "others." Analyzing Camus' writing gives insight into how the manifestos examined in this chapter—Rodger, Roof and Crusius' also considered US society as under

threat by "others" —women for Rodger, Black Americans in the case of Roof, and Hispanic Americans and immigrants in general for Crusius.

A central theme in much of the public writing of FREs that Camus also propagates is the notion that negative cultural and historical changes have occurred due to the arrival of migrants. Camus' case study is France and he writes about how he sees France as having changed due to the arrival of immigrants. In Camus' view, a tight-knit community in France—made up of mostly white people in his depiction—has broken apart due to immigration. Camus puts it thus:

> For about fifteen centuries, the French population has been remarkably stable at least in its ethnical composition. (2018, p. 32)

For him, "stable" means there was an unchanging demographic composition of a majority white and Christian population that continued for "about fifteen centuries." This, of course, is not true—France's colonial past meant there have been French people of Asian and African backgrounds living in France for generations. But creating this imagined white past helps Camus justify his claim that immigrants are destroying this "stability." He goes on to add there is a difference in scale (he writes that more migrants are entering the country now, in the twenty-first century) and of type (he writes that more migrants are now Muslim and Arabs) while migrants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were, in his words, "of European stock" (2018, p. 33). Camus' thus considers only *some* migrants as destroying this perceived stability of this imagined version of France.

Camus claims it is his "concern" for new immigrants that justify his calls to exclude them from French culture and society. His argument is the changes in French culture due to immigration mean migrants' expectations of life in France will not match reality. Regarding African migrants to France, Camus says Africans think they are "rushing to paradise" but what they find is they are "running into a wall of illusions" (2018, p. 41). What this framing does is it removes responsibility for "European French" (white French) people to accommodate new arrivals. Instead, Camus suggests it is for immigrants' own benefit they do not move to France—he presents racism as generosity.

Camus frames the white French population as under attack from "outsiders" —racialized migrants. To do so, he utilizes narratives of history, tradition, culture, and fake concern for migrants themselves to justify

this racist framing. Throughout his book, Camus does not acknowledge whiteness—he rarely writes that the demographic he claims to be superior is *white* and *Christian*. Instead, he discusses cultural traits in terms of "Europe" or "French," linking French-ness and European-ness with whiteness, and excluding migrants from the category of "European" or "French". Within this framing, those who are not considered white (including Arabs who might consider *themselves* white but are not viewed as such by the majority French people) can never be part of the polity. Camus makes this clear but puts the blame for a lack of integration on African migrants and not on the mainstream white French population: "…Most of them [African migrants] show no desire whatsoever to achieve any such integration, whether as individuals or communities," he writes while providing no evidence of this (2018, p. 33). In this way, the in-group community created here is one of the white and Christian French people, but also of a homogenized and monolithic African migrant population whose aims are to break apart the "stability" of French and Western society.

In Camus' view of France and European/Western societies, historical events and actors are exemplars that have been destroyed by migrants. Camus selectively describes historical demographics and cases as illustrations of what France will never again be like. In this, his approach to history—selectively picking events and prioritizing (often falsely) the role played by white people—is a similar strategy as that noted in Chapter 4 with *American Renaissance*. This strategy can be noted, for example, in a list of "historiographical myths" —his words—that Camus provides. Camus insists the government and educational institutions (who are also not part of those he considers "us") relay a series of lies about the past. These "myths" include that France is a country of immigrants, that North and Central Africans helped liberate France after Nazi occupation, and North and Central Africans reconstructed France after World War II (Camus, 2018, pp. 35–40). These are not myths but events that did occur in the past—they are real. But, by labeling them as "myths," Camus' discursive strategy serves a dual function: it counters mainstream arguments about immigrants and their roles in society. And, more importantly perhaps, it separates current events and the current context from what happened in the past, thus constituting today's migrants as "different" and "other" instead of as part of a long history of migration.

Camus blames migrants for not integrating well into society and links this to their identity (being a migrant). He compares "bad" migrants (of

today) with "good" migrants (of the past). Camus describes immigrants who *had* been integrated well into French culture in the past (in his view). These immigrants, who include Marie Curie and Emile Zola, are described as having become "excellent Frenchmen and women" (2018, p. 33). However, it is difficult to integrate new immigrants, writes Camus, as they have their own cultures and "ways of life" (2018, p. 34). There is no information provided about what made Curie, Zola, et al. successful in integrating into French society, while the current immigrants are viewed as breaking France apart. The obvious answer here is, of course, race with new immigrants arriving from former French colonies in North Africa and from the Middle East.

Camus also constructs the everyday—or normal daily activities of immigrants—as threatening to the (white) French population. In other words, the very existence of Black and brown immigrants is presented as a threat to French society and culture. How they live and their lives are dangerous to "us," Camus states (2018). Here, the seeds of danger to immigrants and to Black and brown communities can be noted. If it is the case that their very lives and how they live is dangerous to (a white) "us," then this same white "us" uses Camus' formulation of threat as justification for the use of violence against immigrants. If, as Camus states, immigrants are threats to culture and society even when just going about their daily lives, then nothing they can do can change this. Camus' formulation not only creates a community among "us" who are anxious and afraid of these new immigrants but also further places migrants in danger.

Camus links migrants with violence—both at everyday level but also at the level of committing terrorist acts. He presents this information as though it is a known fact, when there is no evidence that French migrants are any more violent than non-migrant French people. Camus' description of how everyday life and activities of and by migrants are supposedly "destabilizing" French society and culture is useful in illustrating how the great replacement conspiracy operates:

> By making life impossible or an unbearable or ordeal to the indigenous people, be it through what has been ridiculously dubbed "incivilities" by the media, aggressive gazes, overbearing posturing to force passers-by down from the sidewalk, night time racket in public places, obnoxious and abusive loitering in entrance halls or staircases of residential buildings, rumbustious car or motorcycle stunts, feet on seat in public transport,

> emphatic demonstrations of civic indifference and lack of consideration for the peace and calm and comfort of the ordinary citizen, the creation in the citizenry of a general feeling of fear, insecurity, dispossession and estrangement; or through criminal actions of more standard categories such as stealing an old lady's handbag, violent car-jacking or home-jacking, bank mugging and the like, unprecedented forms of hyper-violence up to full-blown terrorist acts and massacres, the delinquents amongst the newcomers, of which they constitute a surprisingly high proportion, trigger the aptly called *White Flight* and in the process secure under their rule additional chunks of territory for themselves, their kin and partners in crime… Every convicted terrorist, virtually without exception, started his career as a small-time delinquent, drug pusher, mugger or bank robber. The colonialist conquest of today has indeed assumed unprecedented forms, but it would be mistaken to claim this is not conquering as such and not a settler colonialist process on the misguided assumption it is not being driven by aggression. It is indeed aggressive to the extreme. (Camus, 2018, pp. 52–54)

By selecting these seemingly minor issues and connecting them to migrants' behavior, Camus constitutes migrants as dangerous to all levels of French society. The first part of this rant could describe any group of people—there is no evidence it is only migrants who engage in "night-time rackets" and related actions. For the rest of the paragraph, Camus lists a range of "criminal actions of more standard categories" but, again, no evidence is provided that these are increasing in number or are mostly committed by migrants; Camus just states that is the case. By escalating from small-scale crimes to terrorism, this paragraph gives the impression that migrants are constantly engaging in such violence. This process of constructing threats out of nothing (there is no actual evidence provided any of these actions is occurring frequently in France) is one of the modes by which Camus and far-right extremists constitute migrants as threats to "the West."

The main idea Camus promotes is, of course, that of great replacement in which immigration is framed as an existential threat to majority white cultures and societies. Camus refers to the process of migrants' arrival as "swamping." He writes, "population swamping or 'demographic invasion' is a different matter entirely. It undermines the very identity of the nation or the people targeted by the swamping. The major threat associated with it is that it might very well be irreversible." (Camus, 2018, p. 45). Rhetorically, the term "swamping" constitutes migrants as arriving

en masse. Camus repeatedly claims "replacement" is an ongoing reality. This, again, constitutes migrants as dangerous just because of who they are. Camus writes:

> I have said time and again that Great Replacement was neither a theory nor a concept. I wish to God it had been that, and nothing else, instead of being a horrible tragedy, a monstrous crime against humanity, an ecological and biodiversitarian disaster, and a name for them. The Great Replacement is not a theory, it is a ghastly fact. (2018, p. 135)

It is *this* understanding of how white people and "traditional" inhabitants are being "replaced" by migrants that has been used by numerous far-right killers around the world as justification for violence (Davey & Ebner, 2019; Jones, 2022)

Camus' use of invasion and colonization language further presents white French people as under threat and as victims. For him, "we" equates to white people who are "the indigenous crowd" (Camus, 2018, p. 29) and he considers France as the colonized country. In this view, "they" are new immigrants of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, different to historical immigrants who shared cultures and religion and were "of European stock" (Camus, 2018, p. 33). This is a clearly racist formulation, one that the flattering media profiles of Camus did not identify or point out (e.g., McAuley, 2019). Current migrants, in Camus' view,

> have almost all been African and more often than not Muslim. Their African culture and Mahometanism make it a much stronger challenge for them to become integrated into French culture and civilization, all the more so because most of them show no desire whatsoever to achieve any such integration, whether as individuals or communities. (Camus, 2018, p. 33)

This view that "they" are unwilling to integrate is one that Camus provides no evidence for but, as with *American Renaissance* and its use of scientification to make similar claims, Camus' own status (an older academic whose name is well-known in French intellectual circles) is used to construct authority for his observations. One might ask if any other elder French person with similar views would have received as much media attention.

Camus uses the term "colonization" to describe processes of immigration into France and other European/Western countries:

> When I say, and I say this very forthrightly and repeatedly, that France and Europe are much more colonized by Africa, these days, then they ever colonized it themselves… (Camus, 2018, p. 42)…My point is that African colonization of Europe is worse and more severe than European colonization of Africa as it involves *demographic change*, and because it proceeds by massive transfers of population whose aim is to settle down in the target continent—in short, *African colonialism in Europe falls within the category of "Settler Colonialism."*" (Camus, 2018, p. 43, italics in original)

Settler colonialism can be defined as the process by settlers from outside the area destroyed local, Indigenous communities, and dispossessed Indigenous peoples from the land. It is used to describe the processes of colonialism in places like Australia, Canada, and the United States. "Settler colonialism" is, thus, used to refer to a specific type of colonialism where colonizers arrived and never left (Carey & Silverstein, 2020).

By using the language of "settler colonialism" to describe migration into France and the West, Camus is using language that is commonly understood in scholarship on colonialism, migration, and related scholarly arenas. The reality of settler colonialism does not matter for Camus' claims; instead, he is drawing upon the *description* of an accepted historical process (that colonizers deliberately and violently settled in parts of the world) and utilizing this framing to describe a completely different process (that of migrants moving to France). I want to emphasize here, once more, how "colonization" and "settler colonialism" are used by far-right extremists like Camus to draw this spurious connection between today's migrants and historical colonizers. This connection discounts centuries of unequal power relations between France and its former colonies and the violence that is foundational to settler colonialism. My focus here is on how the *language* of colonialism is used to establish and maintain stake and to inoculate Camus and his far-right allies against

charges of racism.[1] Camus views this ongoing "colonization" as a two-fold process where those doing the so-called colonizing (migrants from North Africa in his example) are not the actual "colonizers" (Camus, 2018, p. 88). Thus, he falls back upon anti-Semitic tropes of a shadowy group or "the very rich" who are facilitating this "colonization" of France and the West by migrants (Camus, 2018, p. 88). This also ignores power relations as European settlers in Africa, Asia, and the Americas were—and are—in a position of power as compared to locals; today's migrants are not in a position of power in relation to locals.

On the whole, then, Camus' great replacement conspiracy constructs migrants as threats to (white) French identity and culture. Camus utilizes his personal observations and opinions (e.g., false descriptions of migrant behavior) as evidence for migrants' behavior and goals. He constructs an imagined past for France, one that does not include migrants or has only a few "good" migrants. There is no reference to scholarly sources or even media and popular sources in Camus' book. Instead, there is a series of false information presented as truth. But, it is this information that has motivated numerous far-right killings in the past decade, from Anders Breivik in Norway to the mosque shooter in Christchurch to various killers in the United States. One key factor for the spread of the great replacement conspiracy is that any group of people can be made to fit as the group doing the "replacing" of the white population. For Dylann Roof, the group "replacing" the white population was Black Americans.

Dylann Roof: Antiblackness in Action

Dylann Roof killed nine people during a Bible study meeting at a historically Black church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015. He wrote a manifesto that he posted online before the killings (Roof, 2015). He also had a website called "the Last Rhodesian" where he shared his racist views. The title of his website indicates Roof's connections with apartheid and white supremacist systems and his admiration for them. Photographs on the site depicted Roof touring Confederate memorials and plantations. In many of these photographs, Roof is carrying a gun and

[1] Settler colonialism studies points towards the complex and ongoing effects of settler colonialism on Indigenous sovereignty, relations with the state, and issues of Indigenous dispossession. These are important issues that further research can focus on but which are outside the scope of this chapter at present.

is dressed in clothing that reflected his admiration for white supremacist ideas (Murphy, 2015).

Roof's manifesto—and manifestos in general-utilize one of the main ways of communicating white supremacy while, at the same time, making it seem less threatening—that of the self-narrative or autobigraphy. In this manifesto, similar to Rodger and Camus, the main subject is "I" or Roof. A description of how Roof came to acquire his views begins the manifesto. Roof is the center of this narrative and the manifesto is from a first-person perspective. He writes that he did his own research about race and crime and this led him to an awakening. He claims he was "truly awakened" by the Trayvon Martin case. He began to "read the Wikipedia article" about it and then Googled the incident (Roof, 2015, p. 1). We do not know what the search results were but, as Safiya Noble writes in *Algorithms of Oppression* regarding Roof's experiences, he searched for "black on white crimes" and found false information. Noble writes,

> According to the manifesto, Roof allegedly typed "black on White crime" in a Google search to make sense of the news reporting on Trayvon Martin, a young African American teenager who was killed and whose killer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted of murder. What Roof found was information that confirmed a patently false notion that Black violence on White Americans is an American crisis…To verify what might be possible to find in the post– Dylann Roof murders of nine African Americans, I too conducted a search of the term "black on white crimes." In these search scenarios from August 3 and 5, 2015, in Los Angeles, California, and Madison, Wisconsin, New Nation. org was the first result, followed by a number of conservative, White nationalist websites that foster hate toward African Americans and Jewish people. (Noble, 2018, pp. 111–112)

She adds,

> A search on the phrase "black on white crimes" does not lead to any experts on race or to any universities, libraries, books, or articles about the history of race in the United States and the invention of racist myths in service of White supremacy, such as "black on white crime." It does not point to any information to dispel stereotypes trafficked by White supremacist organizations. (Noble, 2018, p. 115)

Noble's research illustrates how technologies can direct users to inaccurate information online. The role of technologies and, especially, the

dependence on online sources as authoritative is something we can note in Roof's manifesto. His idea of doing research is not to consult scholarly, peer-reviewed research or go to a library. For information regarding Martin, Roof searches online; this is what most people do these days. He takes what he finds online as authoritative information on the topic.

Anti-Blackness is central to Roof's manifesto. Women are rarely mentioned, except in a brief discussion about the role of white women. Roof is specifically concerned with white people and his perception that Black people and other persons of color were receiving advantages from the system. Compared to Rodger, this partly reflects the different places each is from. Roof is from South Carolina and the "lost cause" mythology is well-known in the US South. About women, Roof writes, "I have noticed a great disdain for race mixing White women within the White nationalists community, bordering on insanity it [sic]. These women are victims, and they can be saved. Stop" (Roof, 2015, p. 4). In this formulation, white women have limited agency. It is not their fault, in Roof's view, if they engage in "race mixing." The women are not irredeemable but "they can be saved." For Roof and other white nationalists like him, white women are rescuable and can (and should) be brought back into the white community. This is in contrast to Rodger who sees women as the causes of his problems and thus need to be eliminated.

In his narrative, Roof repeatedly uses the term "disbelief" when describing his feelings regarding what he found online. He was "in disbelief" when he found "page upon page" describing "brutal Black on white murders" (Roof, 2015, p. 1). He "found myself in disbelief" when he "researched deeper" and "I saw that the same things were happening in England and France, and in all the other Western European countries." (Roof, 2015, p. 1). He states what he found out about Europe was there were similar types of crimes occurring there (Roof, 2015, p. 1). This leads to an "awakening", as he calls, it as he becomes "completely racially aware" (Roof, 2015, p. 1). Similar to Rodger and Crusius, then, Roof becomes "red-pilled" and constitutes Black Americans as his target.

Along with this so-called racial awareness, Roof positions himself as the main character of this story. He is the savior of the white race as other white people are not doing anything or they are not doing enough. Here, there is the view that white people are (potential) victims as they face "replacement" in society but, at the same time, they are unaware of the danger they are in. This, of course, is central to Camus' understanding of the white population in the "Great Replacement" conspiracy as noted

earlier. This also connects to Rodger and Crusius's positioning of themselves as the center of their stories. Talking of his choice of Charleston, Roof writes, "We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me" (2015, p. 5).

The dehumanization of Black and brown communities also follows a familiar pattern. Roof uses racial slurs when describing Black people, considers whites naturally superior, and criticizes the school system while sharing untruths. None of this is new when describing white supremacist discourses. Roof targeted Black people, but he also expressed his hate for Hispanics and Jews. He claims that Black people "view everything through a racial lense (sic)" (Roof, 2015, p. 1). But, it is Roof who is also viewing the world through a lens of whiteness. As can be noted in Roof's manifesto, for far-right violent extremists such as Roof, Black people in the United States are *not* Americans but they are "the biggest problem *for* Americans" (Roof, 2015, p. 1). This categorizes white people as Americans and Black people as not American.

Similar to Camus' assertion that historical examples of integration and military prowess of colonized peoples are "myths," Roof also shares false information about the past to support his white nationalist aims. He lies that only a minority of whites in the South owned slaves, that he's "read hundreds of slave narratives from my state" and all of them were positive, and that segregation was "a defensive measure" to "protect" whites from Black peoples (Roof, 2015, p. 2). There is no further information about the sources of these slave narratives he claimed he had read and these are not conclusions that are supported by scholarly research. Roof draws parallels with apartheid South Africa to suggest "we" (white people) could "take it ["America or Europe"] back completely" (Roof, 2015, p. 3). In all these, there is a misuse of historical examples and events in order to justify violence against Black Americans. Again, the claims he is making are not anything new or unfamiliar with regard to white supremacist narratives. *How* he is doing so is relevant here—the use of autobiography, self as authority, doing one's own research, and the use of what is presented as real history to justify racist and xenophobic calls to violent action.

Patrick Crusius: Immigrants as "Replacing" White Americans

While Roof considered Black Americans as "replacing" whites in America, Patrick Crusius claimed it was immigrants who were destroying the West. Inspired by the great replacement conspiracy and by the Christchurch mosque shooter, Crusius shot and killed 23 people and injured dozens more in El Paso, Texas, on August 3, 2019 (Martinez & Borunda, 2021). As of April 2022, the date for his trial had not been finalized. Crusius' views on immigration were also connected to Bowers in that they both saw Hispanic communities as threats to their vision of a majority—white United States. Their choice of target differed with Bowers combining his anti-immigrant views with anti-Semitism, while Crusius deliberately chose the 80% majority Hispanic city of El Paso in Texas to commit his attack.

Similar to Roof and Rodger, Crusius' writings utilize an autobiographical standpoint to establish authority. He uses "I" when discussing his observations regarding Hispanic peoples, political parties, and anti-immigration. He also begins his manifesto by claiming the Christchurch shooter's manifesto inspired him and led to his target selection (Abutaleb, 2019; Arango et al., 2019; Crusius, 2019, p. 1). Crusius' manifesto was posted on 8Chan. In it and in an associated video on *YouTube*, Crusius invoked similar sentiments about persons of color as can be noted in Camus' writings. Titled "The Inconvenient Truth," the manifesto starts thus:

> In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto. This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas. They are the instigators, not me. I am simply defending my country from cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion. (Crusius, 2019, p. 1)

As can be noted here, Crusius constitutes white victimhood and justifies his violence by denying responsibility for the attack; he claims he was driven to violence. He writes that his attack is "a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas," (2019, p. 1) in language that echoes Camus' sentiments about immigrants and Roof's about Black communities. Indeed, the term "invasion" is repeatedly used, constituting immigrants and, specifically, Hispanic immigrants, as threats to "my country" (Crusius, 2019, p. 1). This language of "invasion" to refer to immigrants has also been used by major Republican politicians and Conservative figures such

as Tucker Carlson and *Fox News* (Peters et al., 2019). Donald Trump and his cabinet also commonly used the language of "invasion" to refer to immigrants and this usage had spread to state and local levels by 2022 (Fig. 6.2, Pérez-Moreno & Barragán, 2021).

The rhetoric of invasion and constituting immigrants as "invaders" has a long history in the United States (McCullough, 2011; Zimmer, 2019). Crusius asserted that his actions were to prevent white Americans from suffering from a similar fate as that suffered by Native Americans during the advent of European colonizers. In a similar framing as Camus' regarding colonialism, Crusius refers to Native Americans and how "[they] didn't take the invasion of Europeans seriously, and now what's left is just a shadow of what was." (Crusius, 2019, p. 1). This discursive strategy creates an existential threat for the white population and constitutes immigration and immigrants as dangerous "others." Like Camus, who states he is the one who coined the term "global replacism" (global replacement), Crusius views Hispanic immigration to the United States as part of a deliberate movement or what Camus called "global totalitarianism" (Camus, 2018, p. 163).

Crusius positions himself as the main character of this narrative where white people are facing existential danger from racialized "others." He is the one who is doing something. Crusius writes, "our European comrades don't have the gun rights needed to repel the millions of invaders that plague their country. They have no choice but to sit by and watch their countries burn." (Crusius, 2019, p. 4). So, for Crusius, the United States and its easy access to guns makes it possible to "save" it from this "invasion." Again, the discursive strategy and the related framing is clear: White people in the United States and abroad are under threat from immigrants and it is Crusius—with his easy access to guns in the US—who will fight. He ends his manifesto in this way: "Many people that think that the fight for America is already lost. They couldn't be more wrong. This is just the beginning of the fight for America and Europe. I am honored to head the fight to reclaim my country from destruction." (Crusius, 2019, p. 5).

Conclusion: Narratives of Self-Transformation as Legitimation for FREs' Violent Actions

Chapter 4 analyzed the *American Renaissance* magazine as an illustration of how FRVEs constitute whiteness and a whites—only community through seemingly authoritative modes such as citing and referring to

university press—published books, drawing on (fake) data and statistics, and through pseudoscience. These academic texts and methods (use of numbers and "science") are used to constitute a false version of "reality" about race and racism. Chapter 5 illustrated how FRVE/Alt-right calls for community and togetherness are based on online sharing of images—memes—that they consider humorous or ironic. It showed how the "alt-right" uses humor and irony to evade responsibility for violence. In Chapter 5, there was a move away from the "serious" or "academic" justifications of academic presses and (fake) statistical data to the use of humor to justify violence against minorities. In this formulation of community, it is the "lack of humor" of Black and brown people that marks them as other in white extremist discourses. This chapter supplements the analyses of Chapters 4 and 5 and shifts the focus to FRVEs' manifestoes and Camus' book about the great replacement conspiracy.

Analyzing manifestos is valuable because it provides information about how FRVEs view their own actions. In doing so, it provides useful knowledge of the language, framing, and themes they use and communicate with. Manifestos are sources of data for how FRVEs use them to make sense of their lives and goals, and to communicate these goals to the public (Berger, 2019; Ware, 2020). Unlike *American Renaissance* which claims it is a legitimate Conservative magazine, or images/memes which FREs describe as "ironic" and funny, manifestos of FRVE include explicit calls for violence and are about justifying far-right actors' use of violence. As such, a central theme in these FRVE manifestoes is explicitly about removing those considered "others" from US society. As indicated here and in Chapters 4 and 5, these "others" can be women, racial minorities, immigrants, Jewish people, or even more broadly "liberals" and "Antifa."

Manifestos such as the ones that Roof, Crusius, and Rodger wrote have become part of far-right popular culture. In this, similar to "alt-right" memes and magazines of the far-right, they are both a product of far-right extremist communities as well as an artifact that illustrates meanings and legitimation strategies of far-right extremists. While manifestos were common in other far-right killings as well—Anders Breivik, Timothy McVeigh, and Ted Kaczynski all wrote and shared their writings—they are now shared more swiftly and broadly due to their availability online.

The idea of replacement is central to the narrative of violence in these manifestos. While Rodger's killings were prior to the publication of *The Great Replacement*, they share ideas about whiteness under threat. A similar framing can be noted in Crusius and Roof's manifestos too.

This notion of replacement centers whiteness and white people—they are positioned as the "real" Americans under threat of "replacement". The view that "replacement" of whites is already occurring is one that fits in with a white victimhood narrative. Instead of viewing immigration and changing cultures as natural, far-right extremists consider Black and brown people as involved in "genocide by substitution" (Camus, 2018, p. 181). Of course, who is doing this "substitution" is different for each of these violent actors. In other words, the potential target of each violent actor is different, based on the group these far-right violent extremists conceptualize as "replacing" existing US society. This indicates a series of archetypes regarding how different minoritized groups can be made to fit within this broad framework, making it easier for FRVEs to justify violence, while also making it harder to prevent and counter these ideologies/narratives.

Overall, similar to magazines and images/comics, manifestos are public but also do the work to hide white supremacy. They do this partly by utilizing self-narratives—the telling of the story lends authority to the teller here. But, the spread of manifestos also invisibilizes white supremacy more broadly by presenting violence that drew upon systemic misinformation and upon negative readings of history as individualized violence. In addition, the sharing and spread of manifestos act as a tool for recruitment and as a strategy of legitimation. They do this by presenting the world as being in crisis, one that only the sole narrator and others like them can solve. The self-narration also becomes a strategy of legitimation for other potential violent actors who note the publicity received by the killers and their manifestos. As noted earlier, Breivik credits McVeigh, Crusius claims he changed his entire target selection based on the Christchurch shooter.

Another way in which white supremacy is made public and, yet, hidden in these manifestos is in the use of history. Roof's online searches led him to the conclusion that what he was taught in school about the US Civil War and about slavery was wrong:

> [it] isn't true. None of it is. We are told to accept what is happening to us because of ancestors wrong doing, but it is all based on historical lies, exaggerations and myths. I have tried endlessly to think of reasons we deserve this, and I have only came back more irritated because there are no reasons. (Roof, 2015, p. 2)

Roof trusts the online sources he found more than the history he learnt in school. This self-discovery is part of Roof's self-narration and identity formation. Similarly, Camus also claims he does not believe historical facts but presents a false version of French history wherein French people of Muslim and Arab backgrounds are written out. Indeed, he claims facts—for example, that African colonized people fought in the French military in WWII—are not so. What these reworkings of history do is that they reinforce the white victimhood narratives in far-right violent extremism while erasing Black and brown people's participation in historical events.

The adaptability of the great replacement conspiracy means it can and has been made to fit within different historical and sociopolitical contexts. In France, Camus constitutes racialized immigrants as "other" while recounting a false version of French history as reality. In the United States, Roof draws upon conspiracies of the Lost Cause and the US' long history of anti-Blackness to constitute Black communities as threats, while Rodgers' and Crusius' out-groups are women and immigrants, respectively. A common feature of all these far-right extremists' calls to violence is their use of self-narratives or a story of individual transformation that they use to explain their turn to violence. In terms of discursive practices, this self-narrative and the process of "red-pilling" allow these far-right extremists to evade responsibility for violence by constructing themselves and white culture, white society more broadly as under threat from these racialized and gendered "others." The individual transformation narrative also means that mainstream US media and politics can present far-right violent events such as El Paso and Charleston as individualized and rare, outside the norms of US society. This discounts and invisibilizes the systemic effects of white supremacy, misogyny, and racism. The lack of clear condemnation of the great replacement conspiracy has meant its tenets are moving mainstream and are actually supported by a significant part of the US population. A December 2021 poll indicated that nearly half of Republicans now agree with this racist great replacement conspiracy (Bump, 2022).

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: Far-Right Extremism and Strategies of Legitimation and Resistance in US Politics

On January 6, 2021, in Washington DC, a crowd of supporters of Donald Trump attacked the US Capitol building. Unable to accept the US presidential election results—which clearly showed Joe Biden won and was the next US President—they sought to overturn those results through violence. They attacked law enforcement officials, threatened politicians, and caused extensive damage. Continuing investigations show some who were there had deliberately planned to attack. These planners included members of far-right extremist organizations such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers (Broadwater & Feuer, 2022). In the months after the attack, hundreds of participants were arrested, with some facing charges of seditious conspiracy, a charge meant to signify the seriousness of the attack (Robins-Early, 2022). In the early days that followed the attack, politicians and the public on all sides of the political divide took it seriously and condemned it (Colvin, 2022).

In a statement on the day after the attack, January 7, 2021, Republican leader Mitch McConnell said:

> …[Y]esterday represented a massive failure of institutions, protocols, and planning that are supposed to protect the first branch of our federal government. A painstaking investigation and thorough review must now take place and significant changes must follow. Initial bipartisan discussions

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> have already begun among committees of oversight and Congressional Leadership.
>
> The ultimate blame for yesterday lies with the unhinged criminals who broke down doors, trampled our nation's flag, fought with law enforcement, and tried to disrupt our democracy, and with those who incited them. But this fact does not and will not preclude our addressing the shocking failures in the Capitol's security posture and protocols. (McConnell, 2021)

Here, it is clear that McConnell acknowledges the seriousness of the attack, especially its plan to "disrupt our democracy," even as he removes himself and his party and Trump from responsibility by apportioning blame on to "unhinged criminals." He also called for investigation and review while advocating "significant changes." In the months that followed, however, Republican leaders and supporters changed their narrative regarding the seriousness of the attack and constantly downplayed the violence. By January 2022, Republican officials in the public eye, such as Marjorie Taylor Greene and Matt Gaetz, were supporting the January 6 attackers and referring to them as "political prisoners" who were deprived of their freedoms in jail (Papenfuss, 2021).

This shift in meaning can be seen, too, in how the Republicans and right-wing media described Ashli Babbitt. During the attack, Ashli Babbitt, a QAnon and Trump supporter who believed Donald Trump's claims the election was "stolen," was shot by the police as she ignored warnings and broke into the main chamber of the US Capitol (Barry et al., 2021; Biesecker, 2022). Over the months since the attack, Republican politicians and the US far-right have embraced her as a martyr. Trump called her "a truly incredible person" and wished her happy birthday while suggesting the Justice Department needed to reinvestigate her death (Wagner, 2021). Indeed, by January 2022, Trump was saying he could pardon the insurrectionists if he won again in 2024 (Pengelly, 2022). Similarly, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich threatened that the members of the January 6 investigative committee could face jail time if Republicans returned to power (Lemon, 2022).

These Republican politicians' shift in views regarding the events of January 6, especially their praise of individuals who used violence to try to overturn legitimate election results, is paralleled in general Republican supporters as well. Poll outcomes show a growing number of Americans who believe violence is acceptable to change the government. As

this article in *The Hill* states: "A Washington Post-University of Maryland poll published on Saturday found that one-third of Americans believe citizens engaging in violence against the government could sometimes be justified" (Vakil, 2022). By January 2022, Trump and many other well-known Republicans were referring to the January 6 attackers as "patriots" (contrasted with "traitors" when referring to Democrats) (Shahrigian, 2021; Smith, 2022). The Republican National Committee referred to the bipartisan January 6 Commission, set up to investigate the event, as "Democrat-led persecution of ordinary citizens who engaged in legitimate political discourse," thus constituting the January 6 attackers as "ordinary citizens who engaged in legitimate political discourse" (Weisman & Epstein, 2022). There are also multiple organizations raising money for the attackers (Dreisbach, 2022) and conspiracies about the attack are spread on Fox News and other right-wing media (Carlson, 2021; Place 2021).

It is also worth recalling that law enforcement ignored initial warnings that violence would occur on January 6 (Allam, 2021; Moe et al., 2021). This is in contrast to law enforcement actions during racial justice marches in the summer of 2020 when the marchers were strictly policed. At that time, the police used force against the marchers, even though the overwhelming majority of the marches were peaceful (Beckett, 2021). As Beckett writes, the police were three times as likely to use force against the racial justice marchers than against far-right protesters (Beckett, 2021; Chenoweth & Pressman, 2020; Gabbatt et al., 2020). It was not just that warnings about far-right involvement and the possibility of violence on January 6 were ignored, but that the violence that did occur on January 6 has been downplayed and invisibilized by the Republican party and right-wing media. By 2022, the majority of Republican politicians repeated the view that a planned attack to disrupt a legitimate election was just an ordinary event. They did this partly by invisibilizing and minimizing the violence that was part of the event and by constituting the attackers—and, relatedly, themselves—as the actual victims.

Strategies of Concealment of Violence: Deflection and Construction of White Victimhood

We can ask how violence against certification of a legitimate election became normalized and legitimated—even supported—by a significant part of the US public and by key members of one of the two major US political parties. As I have argued throughout this book, this is partly because of rhetorical strategies that utilize mainstream ways of communicating to promote whiteness and white supremacy and constitute white Americans as marginalized and oppressed. These strategies are noticeable in far-right extremists' popular culture. Relatedly, of course, is the process of mainstreaming of white supremacy. This is done through *American Renaissance* and its emphasis on "science" and quantitative data to argue for white supremacy, the comics and images such as Pepe and their use of humor and irony to avoid responsibility for racism, and the use of personal narratives in public far-right manifestoes.

As the examples from Chapters 4, 5 and 6 illustrate, there are recognizable narrative strategies in each of these far-right extremists' popular culture artifacts. In *American Renaissance*, conventions similar to that of an academic journal are noticeable. Far-right extremists use scientification or numbers and fake scientific information to justify racism and advance calls for violence against minorities. By utilizing fake numerical data and the authority of scholars (including books published by academic presses) as alleged evidence for their racist claims, far-right extremists can argue the outcomes they describe are based on this "science." They also use the language of "realism" to claim their viewpoints are real—they claim they are "race realists." As noted in Chapter 4, "race realism" claims far-right extremists' views on race is the "real" situation, based on science, and that others (liberals, supporters of multiculturalism, minority communities) obscure this reality (see also Feola, 2022). This framing of racism as "race realism" with a unique access to reality is one that is shared by the broader far-right who position themselves as uniquely situated to understand the so-called "reality" of race. For far-right extremists, this "reality" is the superiority of white peoples, a distorted history wherein white peoples were the only agents of change, and a society where Black and brown communities are presented as outside of the body politic of the nation-state. They then present themselves as fearless truth-tellers about the so-called "reality" of race relations (Chapter 4).

While *American Renaissance* concealed white supremacy through claiming their views were "race realist" and "race science," the "alt-right" and their supporters concealed and promoted white supremacy through humor and irony in the form of comic images and memes. The format of these pop culture artifacts—comic images, reworked film posters, and cartoons—allowed posters to deflect responsibility for sharing violent images and texts online. Along with minimization and disclaimers for advancing violence, far-right extremists also inoculated against being called "racist" (thus providing deniability against calls for removal of such content, especially online). There is an affective element in the formation of communities while sharing and reworking images as memes (Mortensen and Neumayer, 2021). This interactive format of meme-making further facilitated development of "in-groups" and strengthened bonds of community between the people sharing and weaponizing memes (Ganesh, 2020; Peters & Allan, 2022). The "alt-right" movement has become globalized, with "alt-right" identitarians in Europe and across the world (Hawley, 2019; Hermansson et al., 2020; Zúquete, 2021).

Additionally, analyzing manifestos and personal narratives of far-right violent actors and a text that has been influential in the "great replacement" conspiracy illustrates how systemic violence of white supremacy is individualized. This is paralleled in government and mainstream discussions of white supremacist violence as individual issues, rather than as a systemic concern. On the other hand, violence by Black and brown individuals is usually connected to their communities, thus securitizing entire racial and ethnic groups as "suspect communities" (Breen Smyth, 2020; Corbin, 2017; Gilroy, 1982). In the manifestos of far-right extremists, a sense of crisis is formulated alongside the constitution of racialized (and, in the case of misogynistic extremism, gendered) "others" who are said to be "replacing" white populations. Greenberg et al.'s research concluded that a reminder to white people of their own mortality promotes more favorable reactions to white racists (2001). This could explain popular support for the "great replacement" conspiracy which plays to these white fears and constitutes normal demographic shifts as threats to white populations (Carless, 2022). Overall, then, far-right extremists use strategies that are also used in the mainstream to constitute in—and out—groups to justify racial and gender hierarchy. These strategies allow for deliberately hiding white supremacy while advancing racist and violent ideas in public through journals, images, and autobiographies. In all these, there is a series of white grievances, even if the term "white" is not always used.

The different groups and individuals studied here constitute themselves as under attack, even though no such "attack" is occurring in reality.

Far-right extremists' utilization of these narrative strategies construct themselves as victims and deliberately separate themselves from the violence that they engage in (Chapter 6) and promote (Chapters 4 and 5). In all these, discursive practices of normalization and legitimation also operate in related ways to both invisibilize hate while, at the same time, doing so publicly through popular culture. They make white supremacist violence both public (*American Renaissance*, Pepe and related memes, and manifestos are all publicly available) and hidden (in each popular culture artifact, far-right extremists make attempts to evade responsibility for violence all the while promoting it). This visibility of white supremacy and its promotion in public is not new. As noted in Chapter 3, historical white supremacist violence in the United States was also public but invisibilized in terms of mainstream reactions and policies to counter it.

To sum up then, reviewing *American Renaissance*, Pepe and related memes, and far-right manifestos illustrates how far-right violent extremist discourses minimize violent actions by white persons or "Europeans" while extrematizing everyday actions by Black and brown communities. For Rodger and others who support his ideas, everyday life of women is represented as threatening to white males. For anti-immigrant discourses, it is immigrants' daily lives that are represented as "extreme." In memes, magazines, and manifestos, far-right extremist discourses represent Black and brown communities as threatening while situating themselves on allegedly impartial or neutral footing. At the same time, however, as the examples in this book indicate, far-right discourses consistently work to conceal overt white supremacy. Even a white nationalist magazine such as *American Renaissance* uses the language of "race realism" to describe its position. As noted in the discussion on eugenics in Chapter 4, racial inequality is "natural" and is "just" what science says, far-right extremists falsely claim. The "alt-right" also uses humor as disclaimers. Such disclaimers allow far-right extremists to engage in agent-structure distinctions and absolve themselves of responsibility for inciting violence all the while promoting violence.

Potter (1996) discusses stake establishment as part of how narrators negotiate their positioning; the products of these stake negotiations are the texts, visuals, and speeches that are analyzed as part of a discourse analytical project like this one. The narrative strategies identified in earlier chapters here do the work of "stake inoculation" or

they help illustrate how far-right extremists reduce their culpability in violence by constructing their identities as uninvolved observers instead of direct participants. Stake inoculation also reduces far-right extremists' involvement and responsibility for a situation. A related far-right identity construction, then, is of themselves or, rather, of white people as potential or actual victims, instead of as perpetrators of violence. Drawing on emotions—that the white race is under threat, that men like Rodger are excluded from society by more attractive people—forms part of stake inoculation as well. Stake inoculation can also be noted in how Camus, Taylor, and the "alt-right" deny responsibility for people engaging in violence in the name of conspiracies like the great replacement, conspiracies that they promote.

Along with stake inoculation, there is also repeated usage of category entitlements, wherein individuals or a few people are taken as representative of whole racial and ethnic groups. This is a common discursive practice in all three pop culture artifacts analyzed. Stereotypical and racist images of Mexican people are provided as stand-in's for all Mexican people in memes and magazines, individual experiences about Black and brown persons are generalized to entire communities, and similar characterizations are produced for other non-white groups. For misogynistic violent extremism, this takes the form of taking actions of a few women as indicative of characteristics of women in general while calling for male supremacy. At the same time, for the far-right extremists, belonging to a certain category with a shared "whiteness" or "Western civilization" (with Jewish people and Black and brown communities excluded) or "European" is connected to their authority to make claims about the world based on this category. Thus, category entitlement works both ways: Black and brown people are denied agency because of who they are while white/"European" people's accounts receive authority based on who they are.

All these discursive practices do the work of mainstreaming or legitimating far-right extremists' ideas by constructing white victimhood and grievances and presenting those as "scientific," ironic, or based on self-experiences. The structure of digital platforms incentivizes particular types of far-right behavior of "undemocratic cognition" over others. DeCook and Forestal (2022) describe "undemocratic cognition" as a form of collective thinking that is affective and is facilitated by the structure of digital platforms (DeCook & Forestal, 2022). In other words, the ways in which information is hosted and shared online facilitate trolling and

shitposting and the formation of networked communities of far-right extremists. Weaponizing memes are one part of this. Additionally, as Wolfgang's (2022) study of online comments on news stories about the 2017 Charlottesville indicates, "the findings show broad support for white nationalism, including complaints about threats to white culture, reinterpretation of American history to support white nationalist ideas, and rejection of the idea that marginalized people face oppression" (2022, p. 117). Online commenters are commonly expressing support for white nationalism, promoting great replacement ideas, and expressing anti-immigrant and anti-minority views on public news stories. The ideas and tactics expressed in far-right extremist contexts are now part of the mainstream. The next sections will discuss some options for further research on the issue of far-right extremist narratives regarding their increasing legitimation in mainstream US society.

Shifting Standpoints: Strategies for Resistance and Looking toward the Future

Far-right extremism survives due to a politics of fear that is invoked and spread through popular culture and other narratives. As Wodak makes clear, there is no one factor that contributed to the rise and success of right-wing political parties; instead, a series of factors, including misinformation about history, ethnonationalism, anti-immigration discourses, all contributed to their popularity (Wodak, 2015, p. 14). This is similar to far-right extremist discourses as well—-there is an ongoing constitution of Black and brown communities as dangerous and threatening while justifying violence against them. In this, however, we can ask how is it that violence against minorities mainstreamed? Numbers, humor, and autobiographical experiences are all used as authoritative sources while constructing historically marginalized communities as dangerous to white populations. Stuart Hall explains in "policing the crisis" that moral panics about "Black crime" are constructed, ideologically, in numbers of crime statistics, and in and through government policies (Hall, 1978). Far-right extremism also survives due to mimicking narrative strategies that are commonly found such as academic journal conventions and meme-making. As described throughout this book, far-right extremists constitute a mainly/only whites community that is under threat from women, minorities, the government, immigrants, and so on. Far-right popular culture then utilizes discursive practices that are also used in

the mainstream to legitimate racist, xenophobic meanings and to call for violence.

One avenue for further research regarding strategies of resistance to far-right extremism is theorizing and practicing what Ruth Wodak describes as a "politics of well-being." Wodak writes,

> Instead of a politics of denial, a politics of 'well-being', an inclusive politics should be the goal, articulating a more integrative and inclusive 'We' instead of ever more strict Manichean divisions between 'Us' and 'Them.' (Wodak, 2015, p. 187)

This "politics of well-being" is contrasted with "the politics of fear," which Wodak—among others—observes is the common feature of right-wing populist discourses. This framing of society and politics in terms of "us" who need to fear "them" is something that is obvious from far-right violent extremists' discourses analyzed earlier in this book. For most US far-right extremists, "us" centers whiteness and is defined in ethnonationalist and racialized terms. A "politics of well-being"-centered research would seek to understand ways to prevent and counter the racialized threats promoted by far-right extremists.

In terms of methods, an area for future research, then, could be to examine additional rhetorical strategies and discursive practices that work to mainstream white supremacy. As noted in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, a range of discursive practices do the work of invisibilizing white supremacy while, also, deflecting and defending against criticisms. The importance of narratives is key here. Far-right violent extremists are aware of and experienced in developing narratives and in conveying racist and xenophobic messages through specific rhetorical strategies that evade responsibilty for their racism and promotion of violence. Recognizing these strategies and countering them in everyday settings is important to challenge them. Maintaining focus on processes of legitimation, then, additional research can examine the discursive practices through which legitimation occurs and how they are deployed in different global contexts. What are the modes by which "out-groups" are constructed? How is justification of violence against others authorized? How is this communicated to and in public? This is where the intersections of popular culture and world politics are helpful as they indicate how far-right extremism—especially calling for violence against minorities—are often promoted openly through various popular culture artifacts. On a related note, additional methods

including computer-assisted data analysis and ethnographies would be useful for further information regarding how far-right violent extremist messaging is constituted and how it is deployed, challenged, and resisted in diverse contexts.

Another direction for future research derives from the acknowledgment of the perpetrator-centric standpoint of much of the research on far-right extremism and calling, instead, for research that centers people who are targeted by far-right extremists, as well as people who have historically resisted far-right violence. The majority of scholarship about far-right violence is from the perspective of the perpetrators (causes, methods, and outcomes) and from government and law enforcement. That is the case with this book as well. Future research could move from discussing far-right violent extremists' perspectives, even if the goal is to decenter those, to actually center the experiences of people who have recognized the danger of far-right popular culture and have been opposing far-right violence. For example, this could mean studying and learning from historical and current day abolitionist movements regarding violence prevention and solidarity (Gilmore, 2022; Intercepted, 2020; Piepzna-Samarasinha & Dixon, 2020; Vitale, 2017; Walia, 2013) from anarchist understandings of mutual aid and solidarity in community-building (Firth, 2020; Goldman, 2017; Kropotkin, 2017), and from anti-fascist tactics and strategies (Burley & Lennard, 2021).

By focusing on the methods and tactics of individuals and communities who oppose the far-right at the everyday local levels, it is possible to understand two key aspects regarding the presence of the far-right in US society. One aspect is how far-right violence is not exceptional violence that happens only at certain events and time periods but is, instead, part of everyday life and violence for many people in the United States who face far-right threats daily (Serwer, 2020; Chapter 3). By examining the far-right as embedded in communities and, especially, the strategies and tactics far-right extremists adopt to become part of the mainstream as noted in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, it is possible to note the ways in which far-right extremists remain part of these communities. The tactics and actions that are undertaken to accommodate them or to resist them and the long-term prospects of anti-far-right organizing can also be analyzed in future research.

The second aspect of researching far-right extremism from the perspective of people who are targeted means researching methods and tactics of communities that respond and fight back against far-right extremism.

That is, it is necessary to act against the far-right, whether in terms of developing alternative narratives or actively resisting them in everyday life. Much of the existing research aims to understand how the far-right operates. But, this is just the starting point regarding research on the far-right. Focusing on the actions of those who resist the far-right would shift the research focus to note strategies of response and action against far-right extremism. As Mudde (2022) observes when discussing the United States and European far-right, historically, the far-right has dominated US civil society. But, there are pathways for building a democratic plural society with support for local grassroots groups (Mudde, 2022). Future research could examine strategies that build coalitions, identify obstacles to organizing, and develop pathways of recognizing, responding, and resisting far-right extremism. As a researcher of color who has written about political violence and terrorism, I came into this project wanting to understand why mainstream media and US government policymaking seemed to ignore the dangers of far-right extremism, especially regarding its embeddedness in US society and culture. This book illustrated far-right extremists' use of popular culture artifacts to evade responsibility for spreading hate.

Overall, for future research, instead of a top-down approach to research that prioritizes experiences of the state's countering violent extremism/counterterrorism programs or that of law enforcement or far-right extremists themselves, an approach that centers the experiences of people who are targeted by far-right extremists is needed. What are the experiences of targeted communities with violence? What are their needs and goals to deal with far-right extremism? Future research can focus on communities that have experienced and resisted far-right violence. A classic example of this is James Baldwin's essay "A report from occupied territory," where he describes the experiences of being targeted by a racist policing system in New York City in the 1960s (Baldwin, 1966). It is by writing about what is happening daily in Harlem that Baldwin calls for change to an unjust policing and surveillance system. Similarly, Madigan (2001) outlines the power dynamics and the institutional involvement during the 1921 Tulsa race massacre but maintains his focus on those who were targeted by white supremacists. A similar time period is covered by McWhirter (2012) but their method is narrative analysis, providing a narrative history of anti-Black violence and lynching during 1919. Taylor (2016) connects contemporary inequalities for Black communities with historical white supremacist processes, centering experiences of Black

Americans as they survived in racist sociopolitical systems. These examples—and there are many others—are from a range of disciplines and ways of doing research. These are just a few examples of centering experiences of communities who have faced far-right extremism and the strategies for survival developed that future research on US far-right extremism could learn from.

On Solidarity as Resistance

It bears repeating that an aspect of the far-right that is, hopefully, clear in the preceding chapters is how much of far-right extremists' ways of legitimation are part of everyday life. In other words, *American Renaissance*'s use of numbers to constitute legitimation for its racist views; Pepe the frog and related memes' engagement with humor and irony online; and, of course, the sharing of individual narratives or manifestos online all point toward how everyday practices are coopted and utilized by far-right actors to advance their views and goals. That far-right extremism has mostly been ignored by US policymakers indicates how successful the far-right's strategies of legitimation have been. Indeed, it is possible for politicians and journalists to ignore or even platform the far-right when the far-right utilizes similar strategies for communicating as do mainstream media and politics. The everyday-ness of far-right extremism is evident in that *American Renaissance* is still in publication in 2022 and Jared Taylor continues to be invited for interviews in mainstream media and even at universities; the annual *American Renaissance* conference continues to be held; racist and xenophobic memes and comics are still shared online; and manifestos of far-right killers are easily found on the Internet, where they have created a network of influence on subsequent acts of violence.

Future research on the far-right needs to take this everyday-ness of the far-right and its presence in our communities seriously and study effective tactics and strategies used in response. If the far-right is part of the everyday for many of us—and it is—then responses to prevent and counter far-right violence also needs to be at the everyday level as well. These responses have to be long-term and active, not just present when there are individual instances of far-right violence. Responses have to be part of educational systems, community protection strategies, and even community defense. Regarding online strategies, Miller-Idriss (2022) writes how "in the digital world, hate is commonplace" and people see violent material in mainstream digital sites (Miller-Idriss, 2022). What are

some ways this can be countered? What are people currently doing to prevent people being motivated by the hate they see online? For this and related questions about resisting far-right violence, there is an opportunity to learn from and engage with abolitionist and anti-racist social movements who have been responding daily to far-right violence. Describing a key feature of Black feminist thought, Patricia Hill Collins emphasizes the need to focus on historically marginalized and excluded communities. In Collins' case, she centers experiences of Black women and writes how centering their experiences means looking differently at meanings of theory and praxis. She writes,

> Very different kinds of "thought" and "theories" emerge when abstract thought is joined with pragmatic action. Denied positions as scholars and writers which allow us to emphasize purely theoretical concerns, the work of most Black women intellectuals has been influenced by the merger of action and theory. (Collins, 2000, p. 33)

Relating this to future directions for research on US far-right extremism, there are two main implications. One is the understanding of solidarity in calling for and working toward a politics of well-being. Second, is the question of how? To address this, Collins' statement about the merger of action and theory is crucial as it leads toward an understanding of solidarity as part of a broader prefigurative politics of resistance.

On solidarity, feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes,

> I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interest as the basis of relationships among diverse communities…[S]olidarity is always an active achievement, the result of active struggle to construct the universal on the basis of particulars/differences. (Mohanty, 2003, p. 7)

This understanding of solidarity then offers opportunities to think about the politics of resistance to far-right extremism. Once again, the focus is not just on reactive policies and practices that may (and have) emerged after individual acts of far-right violence. But, rather, the focus is on everyday practices of building solidarity against far-right violence. Miller-Idriss discusses one possible approach as "attitudinal inoculation" wherein people's attitudes toward disinformation are targeted to prevent them from being persuaded by hateful messages online (Miller-Idriss,

2022). Overall, however, it is useful to turn to critical scholarship on race and abolition that has theorized building community ties and alternative ways of prevention of violence outside of state-led, top-down approaches (e.g., Davis & Rodriguez, 2000; Gelderloos, 2010; Purnell, 2021; Williams, 2015). InIR and terrorism studies, there is space to engage with abolitionist research and scholarship in order to theorize and practice resistance to far-right extremism. Solidarity does not mean everyone gets along with each other; instead, it is a practice that seeks to challenge dominance, including and especially white power domination and the systems that continue to uphold it. This is what Featherstone writes as well in his definition of solidarity as "a relation forged through political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression" (Featherstone, 2012, p. 5). The emphasis here, too, is on a relational, everyday understanding of action that creates conditions where far-right extremism would be unable to take hold.

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Index

P. Dixit, *Race, Popular Culture, and Far-right Extremism in the United States*, Global Political Sociology,
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