

The Rise of the New White Nationalism in America.

A Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Graduation
Undergraduate History Program of University of Washington Tacoma

By

Megan Padgett

University of Washington Tacoma

Winter Quarter 2019

Advisor: Dr. Julie Nicoletta

Acknowledgements

I would like to show my gratitude to the entirety of the University of Washington Tacoma history faculty for helping prepare me to write this paper, as well as for preparing me for the next stage in my life and education. A special thanks to William Burghart, my history research professor, for his patience and guidance throughout, and after his class as I navigated this paper and its topic. Another special thanks to Julie Nicoletta, my thesis advisor for her assistance in making this paper the best it can be. Of course, I must mention my U.S. history professor Michael Honey, and my Pacific Northwest history professor Michael Kucher and my appreciation to them for providing me with a few excellent sources that I may not have spotted without their help. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their emotional support during this crucial time in my education.

Abstract:

White nationalism has been a part of United States history since the dawn of the nation but remained a secondary issue in comparison to white supremacy. Within the last thirty years however, white nationalism has been on the rise in the United States, and is slowly becoming mainstream rhetoric within politics, as well as in social and economic discussions. What has caused this rise in white nationalism? Has the popularity of social media and the internet since the 1990s influenced its growth?

With the use of primary sources such as speeches, books written by white nationalists, and insider internet sources, one can see that the motivations behind white nationalism have shifted away from the oppression of other races, with underlying ideas of white superiority, to a view of victimhood, with racial protection cited as a primary justification. Using academic journals and scholarly books analyzing the history and development of white nationalism, it is apparent that white nationalism has risen and fallen through American history, with the most recent development being a result of social media and meme culture that has brought it out of the fringes of society and into mainstream society and discussion. The importance of this topic is reflected in the fact that what was once considered dangerous and inflammatory rhetoric has become something more accepted and embraced in a society that used to be labeled as post-racial and color-blind.

Introduction

As children, we all learn that America is the land of the free and the world's melting pot. We hear the story of the Statue of Liberty and how, at her base, a sign reads, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..." to show the openness of America to all people, no matter their race, gender, or country of origin.¹ However, as adults, we learn how America was built upon the backs of slaves, and that even our founding fathers had underlying prejudices about race, religion, and gender that were seen as normal, a product of their time.

Almost one hundred years after the birth of this nation, America finally rid itself of slavery with the end of the Civil War and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. Despite these momentous advances, there were still glaring disparities between the lives of whites and the lives of minorities including African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and other minority groups. Sharecropping, Jim Crow laws, lynching, and racial segregation riddled the United States during the Reconstruction Era and into the mid-twentieth century.

With the success of the Civil Rights Movement and the end of segregation, many Americans believed that the United States had become a color blind and post-racial society. They believed that with the leaps and bounds of leaders who helped end segregation and create more opportunities for African-Americans like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and even our first African American president Barack Obama, America had finally become the land of the free and the home of the brave for all that lived within its borders. However, underneath all of that, with ideologies still rooted in from Jim Crowe and even that of the black separatist

¹ This is an inscription at the base of the Statue of Liberty that takes an excerpt from the poem "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus in 1883.

Marcus Garvey, lay white nationalists, a group of people that believe there can be no such thing as racial harmony, let alone multiculturalism.

With white nationalism being presented by the media as a hot button topic in contemporary America, questions arise about the ideology and its followers, “What caused the resurgence in white nationalism starting in the 1990s? How did the growing popularity of the internet and social media influence its growth? How have the motivations of these white nationalists, both on a societal and individual level changed at the turn of the twentieth century?” This research will provide insight about this controversial ideology that was, at one time hidden, or at least on the fringes of society but is now starting to come out of the woodwork as a mainstream political, social, and economic ideology in a time of national divide.

Methodology

When exploring the insider perspective of anything, the best place to get information is from the insiders themselves. With this in mind, books and speeches written by white nationalists, social media posts, YouTube videos, and the official websites of white nationalist groups make for excellent sources. With such a contemporary topic, internet work and research, instead of archival research are crucial, as most current primary sources regarding white nationalism are exclusively online.

Books, such as Greg Johnson’s *Truth, Justice, and a Nice White Country*, and speeches written by white nationalists, while often revised and presented in ways that try to attract as much of the population as possible, have telling qualities that point towards their personal motivations, as well as the big picture behind the movement. When writing, white nationalists often connect historical and contemporary issues, while also citing personal struggles that are relatable to many white citizens who feel marginalized by modern politics and “political

correctness.” With these sources, personal and historical motivations are abundant and easy to find.

Social media posts, specifically Twitter and Gab feeds and YouTube videos, provide a more uncensored look inside the minds and lives of white nationalists, including those that are not leaders or part of any specific organized nationalist group. Despite the fact that they are often explicit and insulting in nature, the underlying content of the posts shows the frustrations and yearnings of those who follow the white nationalist rhetoric, and more importantly *why* they follow it.

Finally, the official websites of the leading American white nationalist groups like the American Nazi Party (ANP) and the National Socialist Movement (NSM) provide insight as to what type of future white nationalists strive for, what it would look like, and how they would ideally get to that point. With these websites, one can see not only their motivations and goals but also their development with several different documents posted to spread their history and ideology to the general public.

Literature Review

White nationalism has become a hot button topic, especially with the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the summer of 2017, generating plenty of books and analytical sources coming out at a fast and, seemingly endless pace. With sources being accessible to the point of excessive for this research, one must focus on the most important or helpful sources for each subtopic.

To get a good understanding of the development in the numbers of white nationalists and white nationalist groups in America, as well as the economic justifications behind the new white nationalist movement, Carol Swain’s 2002 book *The New White Nationalism and Its Challenge*

to Integration is quite comprehensive. When it comes to the numbers and development of white nationalism in the 1990s and early 2000s, Swain argues that white supremacy has repackaged itself to be more appealing and seem “less racist” to white people in the United States who feel threatened by the idea that whites may soon become a minority in the United States due to immigration and higher rates of “race-mixing.”² She also points to the internet as a way to spread the philosophy and market various books, blogs, and forums to increase the number of whites subscribing to this ideology.³

For economic reasoning, Swain points to a policy that has been in the limelight for some time, especially when discussing race and discrimination: affirmative action. Swain asserts that white nationalists, and even many white Americans that don’t follow white nationalist rhetoric, find affirmative action, at least as used today, to focus less on giving equal opportunities to all Americans, and more on blind racial quotas that have to be met, even if the GPA, experience, or skills of the nonwhite person is less than that of his white counterpart.⁴ She also wrestles with the issue of whether affirmative action and its recent usage follow the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, color, religion, or national origin, is legal. According to white nationalist elites, affirmative action is illegally discriminatory and places Caucasians at the bottom of the food chain for historically having the most privilege.⁵ The answers to this question, as we see in contemporary politics, have yet to be uncovered.

The line between white nationalism and white supremacy can often seem transparent, especially with how much both are discussed in media together. *The Columbia Journalism*

² Carol Swain, *The New White Nationalism: Its Challenge to Integration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 135

Review offers a clear and precise definition of both, and how, while they can be one and the same for some people, the definitions of both have stark differences. In the article, “The Key Difference Between ‘Nationalist’ and ‘Supremacist’,” Merrill Perman argues that the main difference between a white nationalist and a white supremacist is whether or not they believe white people are superior, and whether complete racial separations are necessary.⁶

The history of white nationalism in America prior to the creation and implementation of the internet and social media is incredibly vast, ranging from the Reconstruction Era to the Civil Rights Movement, and continuing from there. Leonard Zeskind’s 2009 publication, *Blood and Politics* gives a look at the development of white nationalism in the twentieth century, starting in 1955 and continuing until the post-9/11 era, ending in about 2004. While Zeskind’s book does not cover the entire, immense history of white nationalism in America, he does focus on the crucial times of the Cold War with the Anti-Communist Movement, the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement, 9/11, and the post 9/11 era, when anti-Islamic sentiment began to sprout in the hearts of white nationalists and even the average American. More than anything, Zeskind argues that the history written in his book not only tracks how the white nationalist movement came to be in several eras but also how the movement’s development helped it become a mainstream topic to which more and more white Americans are beginning to subscribe.⁷

Most motivations within the white nationalist movement, minus a few, are expressed by the nationalists themselves rather than outside sources. However, there are some researchers out there who are interested in gathering information regarding what else may be behind the alt-right ideology besides the typical motivations to join such as economics, ethnic pride, and the lack of

⁶ Merrill Perman, “The Key Difference Between ‘Nationalist’ and ‘Supremacist’,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, last modified August 14, 2017, accessed January 4, 2019, https://www.cjr.org/language_corner/nationalist-supremacist.php.

⁷ Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2009), 542.

faith in multiculturalism. They wish to focus on the things in a right-wing extremist's life that could have driven them to follow the ideology. Peter Byrne is one of these researchers. In his 2018 study titled "On the Origins of White Nationalism," Byrne argues that much of the early motivations in becoming a white nationalist or following right-wing doctrine have to do with exposure to violence, abuse, and shame as a child.⁸ With this research, Byrne also asserts that it is possible to draw followers out of the movement by opening up avenues to help them deal with these internal issues and teach them that hate only furthers their pain rather than curing it.

The use of the internet and social media, as mentioned before, is an incredibly important component of the new white nationalist movement in the United States and even abroad. While much of the information is on the internet itself, there have been books published to explain how the internet revitalized and changed the white nationalist movement. In the 2017 book *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, George Hawley argues that while the white nationalist movement within the past thirty years has mainly been an online phenomenon run by memes and trolls, it has slowly become something more organized that even reached the White House in 2016.⁹ With his analysis, one can see how the use of memes, trolling, and anonymity attracted people to the movement and then slowly became more open and radicalized as other movements including *#Me Too* and *#Black Lives Matter* threatened their position and influence in society. By the time Donald Trump was elected, Hawley suggests, white nationalism had become something that was acceptable to express in various communities, rather than something that needed to be hidden behind computer screens and cryptic usernames.¹⁰

⁸ Peter Byrne, "On the Origins of White Nationalism," *New Scientist* 238, no. 3181 (June 2018): 37, accessed January 4, 2019, <http://offcampus.lib.washington.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ulh&AN=129991789&site=ehost-live>.

⁹ George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (New York: Columbia University Publishing, 2017).

¹⁰ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 125.

The literature regarding white nationalism varies incredibly from source to source, covering a range of subjects, sometimes overlapping, but often asserting different points altogether. Older sources analyze more about the history, numbers, and early development of the new white nationalism movement, while newer sources look at the motivations, both inside and outside of the movement, as well as the use of social media and the internet as a means to create a snowball effect that has shifted the movement from online to mainstream politics.

What Is a “White Nationalist” and What Are Their Numbers?

The best description of a white nationalist in a general, but concise sense, comes from Greg Johnson’s 2015 book *Truth, Justice, and a Nice White Country*. Johnson describes white nationalism as “ethnonationalism: the idea that the best way to preserve and promote peace, racial and cultural diversity, and the general welfare of the world is to create racially and culturally homogeneous homelands for every distinct people.”¹¹ Basically, Johnson states that it is necessary to separate the races into different sovereign states in order to maintain peace and justice among the human race.

White nationalists have had a different development than what most people understand regarding white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. While the KKK held power in certain parts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, contemporary white nationalists, while much more organized now, were not always on the surface. Hawley argues that white-nationalist and alt-right activities have mainly been an online phenomenon driven by, but not exactly pertaining to, previous white supremacist and white nationalist movements.¹²

¹¹ Greg Johnson, *Truth, Justice, and a Nice White Country* (San Francisco, CA: Counter-Currents Publishing, 2015), 1.

¹² Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 3.

This, however, does not mean that the growth of white nationalism in the United States has gone unnoticed and without consequence. With the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville sparking violence, and the death of one woman, it is obvious that what was once on the fringe in the internet community has blossomed into something more organized that is trying to make its way into the mainstream, with some success.

Comparing charts in Carol Swain's *The New White Nationalism in America: Its Challenges to Integration* and the Southern Poverty Law Center's data on the change in the number of white nationalist groups in America, white nationalist group populations were on a steady incline between 1990 and 2011, peaking in 2011 with 146 groups nationwide, when suddenly there was a sharp decrease up until 2015 plummeting down to 95 groups. By the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the number of groups was on the rise again at about 100 groups and steadily increasing.^{13,14} The number of groups is much easier to count compared to trying to find the actual numbers of members, due to the fact that groups may often exaggerate the number of people in their chapters, or people within the chapters not wanting their identities potentially doxed if the actual numbers are released.¹⁵

The possibility of why there was a sharp downturn could have come from the feeling of futility after Barack Obama was elected for the second time; the white nationalist groups had reached an all-time high, but they were still nowhere near their goals, or even being in power in the slightest. Then, after the presidential campaign of Donald Trump began in 2015 and his

¹³ Swain, *The New White Nationalism*, 76.

¹⁴ "White Nationalism," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed January 13, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/white-nationalist>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

election in 2016, optimism sparked in the hearts of white nationalists, as they believed they had a president who was on their side.¹⁶

White Nationalism vs. White Supremacy: Where Do They Merge?

In many cases, whether in media or in everyday conversation, when the topic of white nationalism comes up, the phrase “white supremacist” is also used as a synonym. While many people who follow white nationalist rhetoric often identify with white supremacist ideology, the two terms are not interchangeable. Depending on the individual’s ideology, one can be just a white supremacist, just a white nationalist, or as mentioned before, both. While the main idea behind white supremacy is the superiority of the white race, white nationalism focuses on having a white ethnostate.¹⁷ A white ethnostate, in short, is an area or sovereign state that’s population is made up of only those of European descent, or those that are considered purely “white”. While some could argue that if someone is for a white ethnostate, they are a white supremacist, it again, relies on the individual’s ideology.

If Person A believes that white individuals are not better or worse than any other race, but also believes races cannot live together in harmony and should have separate nations to themselves, Person A would just be a white nationalist. If Person B believes that the white race is superior to all other races, but has no interest in separating the races, and instead would rather oppress the other races or minimize what they feel is oppression towards the white race, Person B would just be a white supremacist. If Person C believes that the white race is superior to all other races, believes that races cannot live in harmony together *and* advocates for separate ethnostates, then Person C would be a white nationalist *and* a white supremacist. The subjects

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Merrill Perman, “The Key Difference Between ‘Nationalist’ and ‘Supremacist,’” Columbia Journalism Review.

and individuals discussed in this paper will fall under the ideologies of either Person A or Person C.

Pre-internet Movements and Motivations of White Nationalism

While white nationalism before the creation and mainstream use of the internet was not as widespread as it is now and the main form of hate was white supremacy, it still existed in many ways for many reasons throughout history. Three main times white supremacy and white nationalism seemed to blossom in American history were during the Reconstruction Era through the Gilded Age, continuing to the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and picking up more speed during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. All of these snapshots in history have one thing in common: minorities in the United States were getting more rights, even if they lacked full rights, but white supremacists and white nationalists felt threatened by the prospect of losing having control in the political and social realms of the country.

There have been arguments on both sides of the political spectrum since the dawn of the United States about whether or not the nation was intended to be only for free whites. According to Hawley, both white nationalists and modern progressives agree on the fact that the United States was founded on nationalistic ideals and the concept of an all-white nation.¹⁸ As it turned out, Jefferson, despite being a slave owner himself, opposed slavery being a part of the new democratic nation, but wished that slaves would be freed and returned to Africa upon the abolishment of slavery after the Constitution was drafted, ratified, and signed (as well all know, this did not happen).¹⁹ After almost a hundred years, Jefferson's wish to abolish slavery came true, but his dream of having nonwhites returned to their ethnic homeland was not fulfilled.

¹⁸ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 22.

¹⁹ Jared Taylor, "What the Founding Fathers Really Thought About Race," National Policy Institute, last modified January 17, 2012, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://nationalpolicy.institute/2012/01/17/what-the-founders-really-thought-about-race/>.

However, this doesn't mean others did not have this dream as well, including those that founded and supported the American Colonization Society in 1816, whose goal was to support and send free African Americans to Africa.²⁰

After the Civil War ended, a period now labeled as the "Reconstruction Era" began as a way to try to rebuild the South, which was war-torn, and to consolidate the relationship between the North and the South as one nation again. During this time, there were great leaps and bounds (at least for that time) when it came to the rights and liberties of freed slaves and other minorities, but only for a short period of time. This did not please many white citizens, especially in the South who felt they were going to be disenfranchised by freed slaves and other minorities. The ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment granting citizenship to freed slaves and the Fifteenth Amendment granting voting rights to all male citizens further alarmed white Americans who believed people of color should not be granted equal rights.²¹ In society as a whole, freed slaves and other minorities also became a new part of the paid labor force.²² This meant that there was more competition, not only politically, but also economically. The changes in the Reconstruction Era paved the way for political backlash and various policies that not only restricted the freedoms of nonwhites in America but also restricted the number of nonwhites entering America during the Gilded Age.

While the Reconstruction Era saw many positive changes for nonwhites in America, the Gilded Age was just that: gilded. What looked to be sparkling and productive on the surface was actually filled with corruption and hatred underneath and could easily be seen if one was looking

²⁰ Mark Huddle, "Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society," *Civil War History* 53 no. 1 (2007): 65, accessed March 4, 2019, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A161502924/AONE?u=wash_main&sid=AONE&xid=ccd7a22d.

²¹ Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History. Volume 2, From 1865* (New York; London: W. W. Norton and company, 2017), 583-585.

²² *Ibid.*

beyond the surface. With the 1848 California gold rush and the 1869 completion of the first transcontinental railroad, and a general demand for more workers between the late 1800s and the early 1900s, the number of Chinese immigrants entering the United States to seek mining opportunities and other forms of employment jumped. Between 1870 and 1880, the number of people of Chinese descent went from a handful of Chinese men brought by labor contractors, all the way to over 100,000 men, women, and children trying to seek a new prosperous life.²³

This influx of Chinese laborers became an issue to many white workers, as they saw the Chinese as “scabs” undermining their efforts to gain better pay and working conditions, as well as nuisances flooding the job market with cheap labor, making white citizens less appealing to employers. Because of this, the Chinese Exclusion Act began in 1882 as a means of stopping Chinese labor immigration into the United States.²⁴ The act was meant to last for only ten years, but with continual pressure and the increasing (Caucasian) nationalistic governmental mindset, Congress renewed the act in 1892 and made it permanent in 1902. It was not repealed completely until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.²⁵ While this is only one example of the white nationalistic tendencies in the early history of the United States, it is one that had significant influence in politics, economics, and in the demographics of the United States. If anything, it set a precedent for what could happen in the future.

The Ku Klux Klan, while it started right after the Civil War, did not gain as much traction as it wanted to until the 1910s to the 1920s when the Klan became a part of everyday life. By the 1920s, the Klan had an estimated four million members with about one in every 20 white citizens being a member.²⁶ While before the KKK’s goals were to oppress freed slaves to keep whites

²³ Ibid., 620.

²⁴ Ibid., 670

²⁵ Ibid., 672

²⁶ Ibid., 802.

societally superior, the later KKK resurgence focused more on what it meant to be American: white, native-born, and Protestant.²⁷ This was one of the first movements to focus less on race as a superiority and inferiority issue and more on the idea of who belongs in the nation. In short, in the 1920s, the KKK was less focused on white supremacy and more focused on white nationalism.

After World War I, with much of Europe recovering from war and struggling to rebuild economies, immigration in the United States began to skyrocket with people coming from both Eastern Europe, and certain parts of Asia, in addition to the large number of eastern and southern European immigrants that had been entering the country since the 1880s. With the large influx of new immigrants came demographic changes, which the Klan feared would cause cultural changes, and eventual culture and race wars. In addition, the United States was starting to shift towards becoming an industrial nation over the agricultural one it was before, so more citizens, including African Americans, began to migrate to northern cities in search of paying industrial jobs. Unemployment and competition for housing began to increase, upsetting the lives of many American whites who were used to the United States being mainly white, minus the segregated African Americans and a few select minorities, which encouraged the growth in the Klan's membership and influence.

Like anti-immigration arguments today, the Klan in the 1920s argued that immigrants were coming into the United States and stealing jobs from "racially pure" white Americans. The goal of the Second Klan was to make sure that whites stayed in America, acted as the sole leaders of the nation, and to keep nonwhites from coming into the United States. Of the nonwhites in the United States, the Klan planned to make sure that they had no say, or as little as

²⁷ Ibid., 803

possible role in government and societal matters by using intimidation tactics like cross-burning, lynching, and threatening violence.²⁸

The organization of the Ku Klux Klan in the roaring twenties was revolutionary to what it had been before. With the 1920s being a time of new sexual freedoms, heavy immigration, and the beginning of prohibition, the Klan and many other white Americans began to feel the stress of a changing America, and the Klan specifically felt that it was time to put an end to what they called “moral threats.” Thus, the Second Klan founder William J. Simmons took charge of making the Ku Klux Klan an everyday name and transforming it into a serious political organization, rather than just clusters of chapters bent on violence and bigotry.²⁹ Simmons established a central headquarters for the Klan on Stone Mountain in Georgia, that all chapters would communicate with and handed over the duties of that office to two hired professional publicists.

Outside of the office, he enlisted several organizers from twelve different chapters to become recruiters. The incentive to recruit more members was that the recruiter was able to keep some of the dues that new members had to pay in exchange for membership and a Klan uniform. These changes gave a new face to the Klan that made it look like a patriotic, nationalist, and fraternal organization. White men membership skyrocketed in the 1920s to the point that the Ku Klux Klan population was between four and six million members.^{30,31} Some white Americans felt that they had a political group that had their safety and welfare in mind, especially with the focus on nativism and whiteness. White nationalism had become the face of the Ku Klux Klan,

²⁸ British Broadcasting Corporation, “Organization and Methods of the Ku Klux Klan,” BBC, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/guides/z8srd2p/revision/6>.

²⁹ Patricia Bauer, “Ku Klux Klan,” Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified January 31, 2019, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ku-Klux-Klan>.

³⁰ Stephen Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clío, 2011), 84.

³¹ The number of actual members in the KKK during this time is often disputed between different sources.

and a mainstream part of life and politics within the United States, especially in the South, the Midwest, and in New England.³²

By the end of the 1920s, the influence of the Ku Klux Klan began to dwindle again, mainly because of growing public disdain towards the organization as people outside of the organization began to investigate and release information about the various intimidation and assault tactics used on opponents of the group. A specific event that led to distrust and division within the organization itself was the murder trial of D.C. Stephenson (Grand Dragon of the 23 state chapters), who was convicted on a second-degree murder charge against a white schoolteacher in 1925.³³ The loss of a leader, as well as the fact the leader murdered a person that the Klan strove to protect (white fertile women) led to many people leaving the Klan, and by 1930, membership nationally had dropped to under 50,000 people.³⁴ The Klan's second reign was over. However, the sentiment they had spread did not end when the Second Klan did. The Civil Rights Movement was another snapshot in American history where white nationalism came into the mainstream again.

While the Civil Rights Movement is often associated with leaps and bounds made by various civil rights activists. This was also a time where those who believed in white nationalism and white supremacy pushed back even harder than before to try and make sure that their goals were met, and that the civil right leaders' goals and ambitions were extinguished.

Just prior to the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, there were many changes to US laws regarding race and segregation. With *Brown vs Board of Education* passing in 1954, and its implementation in 1955, there was a lot of pushback; white nationalist and

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 90.

³⁴ Ibid.

supremacist leaders wanted high-quality public education and the tax dollars that went towards them going only to white children.³⁵ Since this was a Supreme Court ruling, the federal government forced desegregation in the South, including its schools. Many of these schools to shut down rather than integrate.³⁶

Strangely enough, around this time there was a movement on the other side of the spectrum that had some equal ground with white nationalists, black nationalists. Inspired by grassroots advocates like Marcus Garvey, who advocated for freed African Americans to return to the homeland of Africa, black nationalists believed that it was important that African Americans as a community resist assimilation into white Judeo-Christian culture and create their own communities to govern under their own political, social, and economic structures. Malcolm X was a major part of this movement during the Civil Rights Movement, as he believed (as do many previous and contemporary white nationalists) that the races, with the painful history and different cultures they have, could not get along or live in harmony.

After the Civil Rights Movement, most Americans believed that the United States had become a post-racial and color-blind society. Future events, however, proved this assertion incorrect. By the beginning of the 1990s, the first white nationalist website and forum, Stormfront was created and published. After 9/11, anti-Islamic rhetoric and fear became a normality among white nationalists and even among ordinary Americans. About ten years later, with the momentous feat of electing the first African-American president Barack Obama, came backlash with white supremacists and nationalists claiming burning effigies of Obama and labelling him as a terrorist and non-American. Now, in recent history, America has seen a rise in white nationalism as well as the acceptance of white nationalism as seen in the Unite the Right

³⁵ Zeskind, *Blood and Politics*, 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

rally, and the response from various politicians, including President Trump, that did not condemn the actions of the white nationalists, even after the murder of a counter-protester.

Personal Motivations and Justifications of White Nationalists

The motivations behind white nationalists around the country vary from person to person and group to group. There are no specific motivations in white nationalists that are the same across the board; each person has their own justifications and motivations for joining or agreeing with the movement. However, there are some common themes seen among a large majority of white nationalists, including ethnic pride and preservation, economics, and the mindset of perpetual victimhood.

When reading speeches of well-known white nationalists, or just talking to people about what makes them feel that white ethnostates and racial separation are necessary, the phrases “white extinction” and “white genocide” are brought up frequently. Much of this ideology comes from the fact that, while Europeans were not the first to set foot on the North American continent, they were the ones who conquered and created the democratic nation of the United States.

In his book, *Truth, Justice, and a Nice White Country*, Greg Johnson uses both “white extinction” and “white genocide” to say that both are actively going on and if they are not stopped, they will eradicate the white race as we know it. Johnson argues that the white race is going extinct due to habitat loss, invasive species, hybridization, and predation.³⁷ His justifications are that habitat loss comes from a wave of free non-whites being integrated into the country, leading to whites being uncomfortable with trying to find breeding grounds in the integrated space, leading to suburbanization, which Johnson claims was again “taken over” by

³⁷ Greg Johnson, *Nice White Country*, 9.

non-whites.³⁸ For invasive species, the justification is pretty much the same as for habitat loss, but furthering the claim by stating whites now face demographic competition.³⁹ When explaining hybridization, Johnson claims that miscegenation, or race-mixing dilutes the blood of both whites and non-whites, to the point that eventually there will be no purely European whites left.⁴⁰ Finally, Johnson argues that non-whites are violent predators to whites contributing to white extinction by murdering white children and fertile adults, and restricting fertility because of the unsafe environments non-whites created.⁴¹ In the end, Johnson contends that these are not just accidental symptoms leading to the extinction of the white race, but purposeful, planned out strategies to eradicate the white race in what he calls “white genocide”.^{42,43}

Other white nationalist leaders are less worried about the eradication of the white race, and more concerned about maintaining white culture and heritage in society. In the book *Contemporary Voices of White Nationalism in America*, Carol Swain and Russ Neili find that this view is more common within the KKK and elitist white nationalism groups. In an interview with David Duke, former KKK Grand Wizard, Neili asks him to visualize what his ideal ethnostate would be like, and how it would be created. Duke responds that his fear was whites becoming a minority in America, and that the nation would fall to third-world status, and that European heritage and values would be defaced. Duke’s main concern with creating that vision of a white-only ethnostate begins with enforcing border laws and only allowing for white immigration.⁴⁴

³⁸ Ibid., 10

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 22.

⁴³ Johnson does not cite any scientific evidence for these points in his book.

⁴⁴ Carol Swain and Russ Neili, *Contemporary Voices of White Nationalism in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 170-171.

In the same book, Michael H. Hart, a Jewish astrophysicist turned white nationalist, furthers Duke's claims by proposing a four, possibly five-part partition to separate the country into a white-only state, a black-only state, a Hispanic-only state, and an integrated state (for those who wish to keep the races integrated). The possible fifth state, Hart proposes, could develop if Native American tribes wanted to join together to make their own sovereign state.⁴⁵

The concept of a white ethnostate as a means of race preservation is not a radical one within the white nationalist movement. One could argue that the "nationalist" part literally means "to make a nation" specifically for whites, as both Duke and Hart propose. However, the justifications for this ethnostate do not just stop at what Greg Johnson calls "White Extinction;" there is also the economic factor.

Whether an elite leader or everyday person that subscribes to the white nationalist ideology, economic influences control many aspects of one's life, especially political affiliation. Affirmative action, according to many prominent white nationalists like Richard Spencer, is the main reason behind job and industry loss for white Americans. Promoting minority workers or outsourcing jobs to developing nations are elements that white nationalists claim play into the issue of white discrimination in the United States.

Affirmative action is one of the main economic enemies of white nationalists, as they believe that affirmative action means jobs and educational opportunities are taken away from whites and given to non-whites based on race rather than merit, so it becomes discriminatory towards whites.

Affirmative action is a policy that came into existence during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement as a way to try to lessen the systemic oppression that had been put on minorities,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 193.

specifically those of color, for generations in America. The phrase was first used in an executive order in 1961 by President Kennedy as a means to say that employers were to use affirmative action to make sure that qualified candidates were hired onto jobs regardless of their race, color, creed, or national origin.⁴⁶ By 1965, the phrase was used once again in an executive order signed by Lyndon Johnson to require government contractors to increase the number of minority workers.⁴⁷ These orders eventually began to focus on educational opportunities for minorities, in addition to the employment opportunities.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, affirmative action, in the years after Johnson's executive order, helped minority college applicants get into colleges and get their advanced degrees. However, the statistics say there are still some disparities, as 70 percent of white high school graduates immediately enroll in college, while only 56 percent of African Americans and 61 percent of Hispanic Americans have the same opportunity.⁴⁸

To white nationalists, the idea that affirmative action policies are antidiscrimination policies is oxymoronic, as they claim the laws are, as Don Black quotes, "prodiscrimination laws, in which white people are the people who are discriminated against..."⁴⁹ Ryan Faulk, known on YouTube as "Alternative Hypothesis" published a video on July 20th, 2017 regarding affirmative action. In the title of his video, Faulk calls affirmative action "institutional racism."⁵⁰ In his video, he points to research published in the journal, *International Education Research*. The article titled "Who Gets in and Why? An Examination of Admissions to America's Most

⁴⁶ Joe Messerli, "Affirmative Action Overview," NCSL, last modified February 7, 2014, accessed February 5, 2019, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/affirmative-action-overview.aspx>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 158.

⁵⁰ Alternative Hypothesis [Ryan Faulk], "Affirmative Action, Institutional Racism," YouTube video, posted July 20, 2017, accessed February 8, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtXjAaxpI2I&list=PLrM1NN3VMsRlSfAaNTBip2uOQzbKUJK4I>.

Selective Colleges and Universities,” looks at the admissions process in the selection of students admitted.

The article focuses in many aspects of college admission, including how important grades are for admission, what universities look for in potential students, and how test scores play into admission decisions. From this study, Faulk refers to two tables specifically: figure 5 and figure 7. Figure five shows what schools find most important when it comes to selecting students for admission. Seventy-six percent of schools said that academic merit was most important, while twenty-one percent said that institutional fit was most important.⁵¹ This is where Faulk homes in on figure 7, looking at what determines “fitness” for an institution. According to the survey, of that twenty-one percent of institutions that look at intuitional fitness first, forty-two percent say that being a member of an under-represented group, which Faulk labels as minorities, is the most important aspect in selection for whether or not someone is fit for the institution.⁵² A matching forty-two percent say exceptional talent was more important.⁵³ Using this data, Faulk argues that as affirmative action is exercised in the United States now, it is systemic oppression against whites, and in some cases, Asians as well.

Affirmative action, in some ways, matches up with the final motivation that is often presented by those outside of the movement: a feeling of perpetual victimhood. In his sociological study of white nationalism, Peter Byrne explores the origins of what makes a far-right extremist. As it turns out, many people, especially men, who face some sort of unresolved trauma in their childhood or adolescence often subscribe to far-right, white supremacist, or white

⁵¹ Rachel Rubin, “Who Gets In and Why? An Examination of Admissions to America’s Most Selective Colleges and Universities,” *International Education Research* 2 no. 2 (2014): 8, accessed February 8, 2019, <http://www.todayscience.org/IER/article/ier.v2i2p01.pdf>.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 10

⁵³ *Ibid.*

nationalist rhetoric as a means of trying to find community and acceptance that they never had before.⁵⁴

Byrne conducted several informal interviews with those both active in and exiting the white nationalist movement to gain their trust before doing formal interviews to gather his data. For this research he interviewed 103 men and women who were either questioning their place in the movement or were trying to get out of the movement but were struggling with the transition and change in mindset. Within these interviews, common themes came up in the quotations from the interviewees. Many of them mentioned that the movement was much more like a gang of family and a “fashion” than an actual political movement.⁵⁵ A member of Blood and Honor (a neo-Nazi music promotion group and fledgling political group in the U.K.) listed by the name “Kevin” stated, “It wasn’t about racism...I knew the whole time that it wasn’t right...but to be accepted, to feel like I belong....”⁵⁶

In the conclusion of his research synthesis, Byrne reveals the statistics of what percentage of the group was exposed to violence and criminal activity from a young age. With regards to the mindset of perpetual victimhood and the need to feel accepted and loved, Byrne first presents the data on how many people had things done to them that caused them to have unresolved pain and resentment. Of the 103 people interviewed, half of them witnessed violence from a young age and were physically abused, a quarter were sexually assaulted as children or adolescents, two-thirds currently had or were recovering from substance abuse, and two-thirds had attempted suicide at least once.⁵⁷ Their track record following their experiences as children but before joining the white power and white nationalist movement followed a pattern of trouble and

⁵⁴ Bryne, “On the Origins of White Nationalism,” 35.

⁵⁵ Bryne, “On the Origins of White Nationalism,” 37.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

violence. Half of the respondents were expelled or dropped out of school, half of them ran away from home in their childhood or adolescence, three-quarters of them had a history of violence prior to joining the movement, and half of them were shoplifters or petty criminals.⁵⁸ Byrne's focus in this study is to show that extremism and hate often stems from pain from an unrelated source; no one wakes up and wants to be a white nationalist. The mindset can often stem from trauma and unresolved issues, leading a person to attach themselves to anything that allows them to feel loved and accepted, or that allows them to express their angers, frustrations, and pain.

Trying to pin down the motivations of those in the white nationalist movement can be a daunting task, as they often differ from person to person, and the justifications and stories behind the motivations also vary. Ask ten people questions and you get eleven answers. It is important to note that these are just commonly stated motivations and justifications within the movement examined from outside the movement. The motivations discussed here represent only a fraction of those in the vast movement that has begun to flourish in the United States and in the rest of the world.

Internet and Social Media Influence

The use of social media and the internet to spread ideology and propaganda is probably the most prominent quality of white nationalism since the 1990s with the number of white supremacy and white nationalist websites jumping from just one in 1995 (Don Black's Stormfront) to over 1800 in 1999.⁵⁹ Social media, whether open and public like Facebook and YouTube, or anonymous and uncensored like Reddit and 4chan have been utilized by many white nationalists from the top elites, like Richard Spencer, Don Black, and Jeff Schoep, to everyday followers. Along with these social media sites, most recognized white-nationalist

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Swain, *The New White Nationalism*, 327.

groups have websites that they use to post their propaganda, recruit new members, and take donations, either from contributors, or from dues required from party members. The interesting thing about the newest version of white nationalism is that until recently, it was a strictly online phenomenon, that began to branch out to the physical world due to the fact that it was so easily spread nationally and globally via the internet.

According to Lifewire, the top three most popular websites utilized in the United States in 2018 were Google, Facebook, and YouTube.⁶⁰ The latter two have had recent controversy regarding their stance on white nationalism, as they separate white supremacy (rhetoric that claims white are superior and should oppress other races), white nationalism (rhetoric that calls for the creation of separate states for every race), and white separatism (rhetoric that calls for “separate but equal” segregation within the nation). While white supremacy is prohibited on both platforms, white nationalism and separatism are considered acceptable. The main reasoning behind this is that technically, for both websites, the idea of “white supremacy” conveys hate, where one race is greatest and everyone else is inferior and hated. This type of rhetoric is considered “hate speech” according to the community guidelines of these sites.⁶¹ However, ideas of white nationalism and white separatism are less about hate and more about pride, as they speak more about how to alleviate racial and cultural tension via ethnostates, rather than calling for oppression of other races.⁶²

The use of these websites by white supremacists is mainly to spread their ideology to people who would normally not see it via niche-based social media sites like Gab. They also

⁶⁰ Jerry Collins, “The Comprehensive List of the 10 Most Popular Websites in the US,” Lifewire, last modified October 24, 2018, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://www.lifewire.com/most-popular-websites-3483135>.

⁶¹ Joseph Cox, “Facebook Is Reviewing its Policy on White Nationalism After Motherboard Investigation, Civil Rights Backlash,” Vice, last modified September 20, 2018, accessed February 4, 2019, https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/yw4pbj/facebook-white-supremacy-white-nationalism-hate-speech-policy.

⁶² Ibid.

present their ideas on these networks incredibly carefully so that they do not break the community guidelines. More popular white nationalist channels have to be even more careful because channels that reach the 100,000, one million, and ten million subscriber marks are automatically reviewed to make sure they are following the rules.⁶³ This is how Alex Jones got his channel removed and banned from YouTube, with the help of other viewers pushing YouTube to not allow his hate speech and spread of conspiracy theories resulting in threats of violence towards members of the public, the media, and politicians.⁶⁴ Basically, as his YouTube channel became more popular, his videos were reviewed by YouTube because he reached a certain subscriber milestone and because his videos were reported and flagged by people that watched his videos and became alarmed. With this, YouTube realized that his content did not support the community guidelines and rules that they put in place, so his channel was deleted, and he was banned from posting any more videos.

With the Alt-Right and white nationalism becoming more mainstream ideas, these platforms have become more popular places to post speeches and videos of public appearances many leaders of the white nationalism movement have made, something that was very uncommon until around the 2016 election.⁶⁵ Many prominent figures like Jeff Schoep, Richard Spencer, and even former Trump Chief Strategist Steve Bannon all played parts in the online community that pushed white nationalism, anti-immigration, and anti-liberal agendas before they came into the spotlight on news channels, Netflix documentaries, and even in the White House. All three of them began their white nationalist journeys online, with Jeff Schoep taking the reins

⁶³ Olivia Solon, "YouTube's 'Alternative Influence Network' Breeds Rightwing Radicalisation, Report Finds," *The Guardian*, last modified September 18, 2018, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/sep/18/report-youtubes-alternative-influence-network-breeds-rightwing-radicalisation>.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Mike Wendling, *Alt-Right From 4chan to the White House* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 5.

of the National Socialist Movement and revamping its online presence in 1994. In 2010, Richard Spencer founded AlternativeRight.com where he coined the now-famous term “alt-right.” Steve Bannon came to prominence as the on-again off-again executive chairman of Breitbart News before and after his stint in the White House during the Trump Administration. Bannon was executive chairman from 2012 to early 2018.⁶⁶ In short, white nationalists have used social media and video streaming sites to spread white nationalist rhetoric to the average American, as well as to boost the reputation and publicity of those in charge of the movement.

Social media sites that are more anonymous and ambiguous, such as Gab, Reddit, and 4Chan have become breeding grounds and safe places for white nationalists and their ideologies, as it is much harder to have one’s identity revealed on these sites than it is for those using Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube. Most people on these sites are often frustrated members of society that want a place to express their anger in a seemingly uncensored way without consequences, especially through 4Chan and Reddit, since they are completely anonymous.

The odd thing about the new white nationalist movement, especially with the use of anonymous websites like Reddit, 4Chan, and Gab, is the fact that white nationalism looks much different on these sites than it did in the past. Former white supremacy and white nationalist campaigns, even in the early internet days with Stormfront were much more serious and threatening, while now, they seem to engage exclusively in “trolling” and posting inflammatory memes to get a reaction. The content, while often explicit and insulting, is seen by the community as much more humorous and light-hearted, more focused towards getting a laugh or making someone upset than to really be taken seriously.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 105.

However, the movement should not be taken lightly. The fact that the movement relies on memes and trolling is what makes it appealing to more people. Children as young as thirteen years old, like Emily (she asked that her last name not be used) are following the movement, even if they are not completely on board with the ideology. When asked why she posts the things she does, including threats towards minorities, racial slurs, and inflammatory memes, her response was, “I don’t think there’s anyone that really believes this Nazi or white nationalist stuff. Aren’t we all on here just to troll liberals? Have you ever met an actual Nazi?”⁶⁷ Even though this child did not follow the rhetoric, and just wanted to raise eyebrows and garner attention, it is easy to see how a impressionable child could follow the path when presented propaganda at such a young age in such large quantities.

The lack of understanding of how the movement is growing, with big names like Jeff Schoep and George Rockwell openly subscribing to the Nazi rhetoric that riddled Europe during World War II, is what brings young people to these sites. The main use for these sites is to be able to post without consequence and have others around you that sympathize and agree with you, rather than challenge that notion. Confirmation bias and anonymity are how these sites attract so many people, young and old, and how the movement continues to be spurred.⁶⁸

The use of these sites to spread rhetoric driven entertainment has also developed. Computer games have been created and published by various white power and white nationalist groups because, as stated before, up until recently, white nationalism has been an online phenomenon. The first video game published by a known white nationalist source was *Ethnic Cleansing* in 2002, created and published by National Alliance, a Virginia based white

⁶⁷ Emily, Gab direct message, January 17, 2019.

⁶⁸ Wendling, *Achan to the White House*, 13.

supremacy and Holocaust Revisionist group, using their record label Resistance Records.⁶⁹ In this game you choose to play as either a Neo-Nazi or a Klansman with the mission of shooting and killing all of the African Americans, Jews, and Mexicans in your neighborhood. The most recent game that was released under a white power and white nationalist publisher is *Angry Goy 2* released November 2018 by Wheel Maker Studios, with the premise of either playing as Richard Spencer or Christopher Cantwell on a mission to save President Trump from the “liberal enemies” including LGBT members, minorities, and journalists.⁷⁰ Like the previous game, the objective is to kill them.

The use of social media has been a tactic used by white nationalists since the 1990s and has been their main means of recruiting and spreading their rhetoric. Whether using public site or anonymous ones, the goal is and has always been the same: to bring in as many people as possible, and to make white nationalism seem beneficial to whites that feel disenfranchised and threatened by growing diversity around the world. In the United States, various figures have used social media to bring themselves into the limelight and under the eyes of mainstream media, while other members of society choose to lay low in anonymous social media sites and forums where they can vent their frustrations, spread their ideas, and promote white nationalistic goals without consequence.

Conclusion

White nationalism in America is nothing new. Its roots have been embedded deep in American society since the end of the Civil War over 150 years ago. It has continued to exist

⁶⁹ Ham Bacon, “Ethnic Cleansing: The Video Game,” YouTube video, posted September 29, 2012, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbBHNeK3Wus>.

⁷⁰ Alan Ryland, “Angry Goy 2 Released by Wheel Maker Studios Allows Users to Kill LGBTQ People, Minorities and Journalists in Mission to Save Donald Trump,” Second Nexus, last modified November 15, 2018, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://secondnexus.com/news/angry-goy-2-video-game/>.

through the Reconstruction Era and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan to the resurgence of the KKK in the 1920s, to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, to now. However, white nationalism was always overshadowed by white supremacy and never made it into the limelight as it has now. It has been argued that white nationalism is just white supremacy that has been repackaged to seem “less racist” and therefore an easier pill for white Americans to swallow and accept.^{71,72}

With motivations, such as economic conditions and race preservation and pride, extending to the average white American rather than just the elites of the movement, more and more white Americans are beginning to subscribe to the ideology. When a segment of the population of white Americans begins to feel threatened by the possibility of becoming a minority, they begin to fear being treated as minority groups were treated in the past. Freedom, to many is seen like a pie; if one person has more, you have less. This thinking helps drive the growth of movement. With white nationalism, the only way to be able to get the whole pie is to abandon those or even kick out those that have more, and to give them the ingredients to make their own pie, rather than acknowledging that freedom is a concept, not a finite, tangible object.

The use of the internet and social media has allowed for the rhetoric of white nationalism to reach people internationally, and currently within the United States. The use of public forums and platforms, as well as those that are anonymous have created an environment where the rhetoric can flourish, with the use of memes, video games, and relatable characters. The use of social media attracts the young generation and future of this country, of which some are still very young, very impressionable, and at times feel very threatened by what they hear or believe is going on.

⁷¹ *Alt-Right: Age of Rage*, directed by Adam Bhala Lough (Alldayeveryday, 2018), accessed February 8, 2019, <http://movies.netflix.com>.

⁷² Swain, *The New White Nationalism*, 17.

As the United States seems increasingly divided over politics, culture, and racial identity, where is our future going to take us? White nationalists feel threatened by refugee immigration and globalization to the point that bans, and walls are being proposed not only by white nationalists, but also by the president of the United States. However, as more white nationalists rise, more anti-fascist and pro-diversity protestors, activists, and organizers rise as well. Tensions are at an all-time high and neither side seems willing to back down. As it is now, our future is undetermined.

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