THE SPREAD OF HATE AND EXTREMISM

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About the Author

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Ripe Conditions for Hate

Hate and extremism thrive under certain political and socioeconomic conditions. The aftermath of the Civil War, for example, diminished the power of whites in the South while increasing the status of blacks. White southerners were angry, afraid of retaliation from former slaves, and distrustful of the US government. These conditions created a perfect environment for the birth and growth of virulent hate groups like the KKK. As Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, says, "Times of change, fear and conflict offer extremists and conspiracists a chance to present themselves as an alternative to increasingly distrusted traditional mainstream choices."[26] While the conditions today are very different than they were after the Civil War, there are some similarities that are helping fuel the current rise in hate and extremism.

Immigration and Demographics

Immigration and changing demographics are reshaping many countries around the world, including the United States. The US Census Bureau projects that whites will become a minority in the United States by 2045. At that time, no single group will be a majority—the country will consist of a variety of ethnic and racial groups.

This prediction has created an anxiety among some white people who fear a loss of power and identity, resulting in a backlash against people of color, including blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and especially immigrants.

According to national surveys, immigration has replaced terrorism as a top concern in the United States. Some Americans believe that immigrants take away jobs from native workers, depress wages, increase crime, and drain the country's resources. However, the evidence does not support these beliefs. This leads some experts to consider other factors. "It is time to admit an uncomfortable truth," writes Ana Rodriguez, director of the SMU Cox Latino Leadership Initiative. "Economic concerns do not drive fear of immigration. The changing face of America's demographics drive that fear."[27]

People wait to cross the street at a busy intersection in New York City. Immigration and changing demographics are reshaping many countries around the world, including the United States.

Studies have shown that people in countries all over the world vastly exaggerate the size of their immigrant populations. They also overestimate immigrants' poverty levels and their dependence on welfare. About one in seven Americans believes that the average immigrant gets double the amount of government aid compared to native residents. In France a quarter of the population believes this. But in no country is this true. "People who are against immigration generate a sense of crisis," says economist Alberto Alesina. "They create a sense that 'This is a huge problem; we need a wall.'"[28]

Some people on the far right see immigration and changing demographics as a large-scale threat to the very existence of white

Incels

On April 23, 2018, a rented van driven by a young man jumped the curb on a busy street in Toronto, Canada, and intentionally hit dozens of pedestrians, killing ten and injuring fifteen. Most of the victims were women. Just before the attack, the driver had posted a hostile message toward women on Facebook. "The Incel Rebellion has already begun!" the posting read. "We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys!"

Incels are members of an online community who cannot find a sexual or romantic partner despite wanting one. Incels—short for "involuntarily celibates"—are misogynists (people who hate women). Some incels advocate rape and other forms of violence against women. The van driver's vow to "overthrow all the Chads and Stacys" uses coded language familiar to incels. "Chads" are men who are successful with women, while "Stacys" are women who reject incels. The "Incel Rebellion" would overthrow what incels view as the oppressive feminism of society.

According to the SPLC, incels are a relatively new, and especially virulent, form of male supremacy. "Incel forums tend to have more violent rhetoric than I'm used to seeing on even white supremacist sites," says Keegan Hankes, a senior research analyst at the SPLC.

Quoted in Niraj Chokshi, "What Is an Incel? A Term Used by the Toronto Van Attack Suspect, Explained," *New York Times*, April 24, 2018. www.nytimes.com.

Quoted in Jesselyn Cook, "A Toxic 'Brotherhood': Inside Incels' Dark Online World," HuffPost, July 27, 2018. www.huffpost.com.

people. A popular white supremacist slogan known as the "14 words" says, "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."[29] The idea that the white race is facing extinction is a key concept for many hate groups. In fact, the most popular hashtag that white supremacists use on Twitter is "white genocide." While it is true that immigration and changing demographics will create more diverse societies in many countries, the idea of white genocide is pure fantasy. According to Monica Duffy Toft, a leading scholar on ethnic and religious violence, the recent rise in white nationalism is "due to decades of demographic decline for white Americans combined with a serious decline in public education standards that leads to unwarranted nostalgia and openness to conspiracy theories."[30]

The Election of Barack Obama

On November 4, 2008, an event occurred that crystallized the fear that some white people felt about losing power and status—the election of Barack Obama, the nation's first African American president. For millions of Americans, Obama delivered a message of hope. For white supremacists, he lit a powder keg. "Obama is a visual aid for white Americans who just don't get it yet that we have lost control of our country,"[31] former KKK leader David Duke wrote shortly before Obama was elected president.

In the immediate aftermath of Obama's election, more than two hundred hate-related incidents were reported—a record in modern presidential elections. Obama's election became a potent new recruiting tool for white supremacists, and hate groups such as the KKK and the Council of Conservative Citizens experienced a flood of interest from possible new members. Levin says, "They recognize Obama as a tipping point, the perfect storm in the narrative of the hate world—the apocalypse that they've been moaning about has come true."[32]

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> —Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino

Some whites promoted a theory that alleged Obama was not born in the United States and was therefore ineligible to become president. According to the theory, Obama's birth certificate had been forged and he was really born in Kenya, not Hawaii. At the time, one in four Americans (and more than half of all Republicans) believed in this theory, indicating a broad willingness to view Obama's presidency as illegitimate. Those who promoted this theory were called "birthers." Foremost among them was Donald Trump, who would later succeed Obama as president.

Nowhere was white antipathy to Barack Obama stronger than in the Deep South, where he received only 16 percent of white votes in 2008 compared with 90 percent of black votes. The election revealed a gaping racial divide in the Deep South. Black voters felt Obama would represent their views and interests; white voters had the opposite perspective.

On November 4, 2008, Barack Obama became the first African American president of the United States. Obama's election became a potent new recruiting tool for white supremacists and hate groups.

Women's Rights

Over the past fifty years, women have made great strides toward equality, both in the workplace and in politics. As of 2020 a record number of women were serving in Congress, and women continue to speak out against sexual violence, barriers to top positions in business, the pay gap between men and women, and other forms of inequality and oppression.

For some men, however, these feminist gains represent a threat. They believe women are biologically and intellectually inferior to men and that women should play a subservient role in society. This idea is called male supremacy, and those who adhere to its beliefs often participate in loosely organized online communities that are known for directing hate, anger, and violence toward women. As one leading male supremacist writes, "As men, it is our responsibility to . . . lead [women] into their natural roles as wives and mothers. . . . We reward [women] for their willingness to please us and make us happy, and in doing so make themselves happy. No amount of phony education or career 'success' will scratch that deep itch in a girl's soul: the desire to serve a man."[33]

For the first time, the SPLC categorized male supremacy as an explicit hate ideology in 2018. SPLC analyst Keegan Hankes calls male supremacy a "fundamental foundation" of many far-right groups. "The vilification of women by these groups makes them no different than other hate groups that malign an entire class of people,"[34] he says.

According to the SPLC, male supremacist ideology represents all women as "genetically inferior, manipulative, and stupid"[35] beings who exist primarily for sex. Male supremacists blame a large feminist conspiracy for all the problems faced by (mostly white) men today. Not all male supremacists are racist, says the SPLC, and not every racist is a male supremacist, but a deep-seated hatred of women is shared by many of those on the far right.

LGBTQ Rights

The LGBTQ community is another group that has made tremendous progress recently. Gay people are more visible and accepted

Introduction: A Growing Threat

1. Quoted in Simon Romero et al., "Walmart Store Connected Cultures, Until a Killer 'Came Here for Us,'" *New York Times*, August 4, 2019. www.nytimes.com.

2. Quoted in Christal Hayes et al., "Who Is Robert Bowers? Accused Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooter Left Anti-Semitic Trail," *USA Today*, October 27, 2018. www.usatoday.com.

3. Quoted in Liam Stack, "Over 1,000 Hate Groups Are Now Active in United States, Civil Rights Group Says," *New York Times*, February 20, 2019. www.nytimes.com.

4. Southern Poverty Law Center, "Frequently Asked Questions About Hate Groups," October 4, 2017. www.splcenter.org.

5. Quoted in Michael Biesecker et al., "El Paso Suspect Appears to Have Posted Anti-Immigrant Screed," Associated Press, August 4, 2019. www.apnews.com.

6. Quoted in Nicole Chavez et al., "Pittsburgh Synagogue Gunman Said He Wanted All Jews to Die, Criminal Complaint Says," CNN, October 31, 2018. www.cnn.com.

7. Quoted in Steve Miller, "Muslims and Government Officials Plan Next Steps in Christchurch," VOA News, March 19, 2019. www.voanews.com.

8. Quoted in Daniel L. Byman, "Terrorism and the Threat to Democracy," Brookings Institution, February 2019. www.brookings.edu.

ORGANIZATIONS AND WEBSITES

Anti-Defamation League (ADL)—www.adl.org

The ADL offers a large variety of anti-hate programs and resources. The Research and Tools section on its website includes a Hate Symbols Database that provides a list of symbols used by white supremacist groups and other types of hate groups.

Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism
https://csbs.csusb.edu/hate-and-extremism-center

A nonpartisan research and policy center, the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism provides objective information regarding hate and bias to government officials, law enforcement, scholars, community activists, the media, and others.

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)—www.fbi.gov

The FBI investigates and seeks to prevent crimes based on bias against race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity. By entering the phrase "hate crimes" into the FBI website search engine, visitors can find the FBI's year-by-year statistics on the number of hate crimes that are committed in the United States.

Life After Hate—www.lifeafterhate.org

This organization, founded by former members of the white power movement, is committed to helping people exit hate groups and supporting those who have already left. Life After Hate uses a variety of strategies such as education, public awareness campaigns, and

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Books

Andrew Marantz, *Antisocial: Online Extremists, Techno-Utopians, and the Hijacking of the American Conversation*. New York: Viking, 2019.

Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies*. Croydon, UK: Zero, 2017.

David Neiwert, *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump*. New York: Verso, 2017.

Christian Picciolini, *Breaking Hate: Confronting the New Culture of Extremism*. New York: Hachette, 2020.

Alexandra Minna Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate: How the Alt-Right Is Warping the American Imagination*. Boston: Beacon, 2019.

Internet Sources

Joseph Cox and Jason Koebler, "Why Won't Twitter Treat White Supremacy like ISIS? Because It Would Mean Banning Some Republican Politicians Too," *Vice*, April 25, 2019. www.vice.com.

Sean Illing, "This Filmmaker Spent Months Interviewing Neo-Nazis and Jihadists. Here's What She Learned," Vox, March 17, 2019. www.vox.com.

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Clarence Page, "How White Supremacy Morphed into White 'Victimization,'" *Lafayette (LA) Daily Advertiser*, August 17, 2017. www.theadvertiser.com.

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