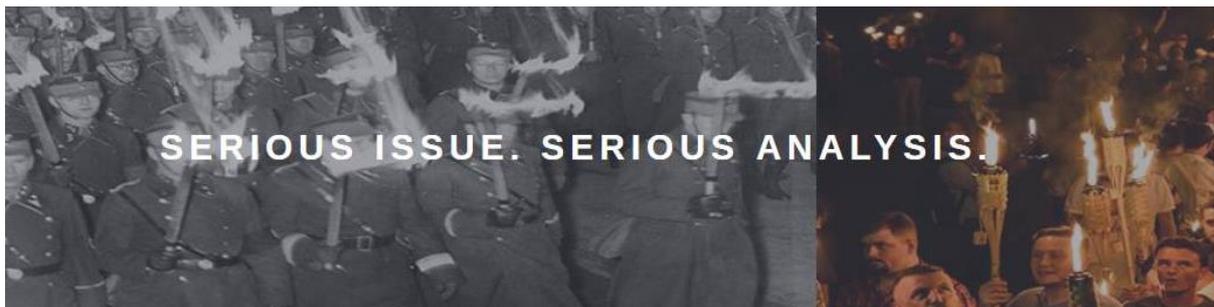


Two Americas: The Radical Right, Then and Now

CARR RESEARCH INSIGHT

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Mark Potok is an internationally renowned expert on the American radical right who for 20 years helped lead the Southern Poverty Law Center in exposing hate groups, right-wing terrorism, and the rapidly increasing infiltration of extremist ideas into the political mainstream. As the director of the SPLC’s *Intelligence Project* and, later, Senior Fellow at the SPLC and Editor in Chief of its award-winning *Intelligence Report* investigative magazine, Potok was a key spokesman for the SPLC, a civil rights organization based in Alabama. He has testified before the U.S. Senate, the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights, and the Helsinki Commission. Potok has been described as having “a reputation as the preeminent editorial commentator who follows the American radical right.” In 2018, a year after leaving SPLC, he joined the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right as a Senior Fellow.

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The following seven words were spoken in 2016, but their echoes, and the violence they imply, are very much with us today: “Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!”¹

They came from a modern-day white supremacist named Richard Spencer as he ended a conference of the so-called “alternative right”— just 11 days after Donald Trump shocked the world with his election victory.

Spencer spoke in the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, D.C., a five-minute walk from the White House. More than 200 people cheered. But it was what happened next that was truly stunning. Members of the audience jumped to their feet and gave Spencer the Nazi salute.

Their reaction was understandable. “Hail victory,” of course, translates into German as “sieg heil” — the very words the Nazis used to accompany their own stiff-armed salutes. Spencer was directly referencing Adolf Hitler.

In the months and years since then, the resurgence of the radical right in America has been illustrated in blood and ruin:

- Twenty-two people massacred in an El Paso, Texas, Walmart by a white terrorist bent on stopping a “Hispanic invasion.”²
- A woman run down and killed and dozens of others injured as street battles between white supremacists and their opponents raged in the streets of a Virginia college town.³
- Thirteen mail bombs sent to American politicians and others,⁴ most of whom had been publicly disparaged by President Trump, and a Coast Guard lieutenant arrested with a hit list of Democratic politicians, media personalities and Supreme Court justices he wanted to kill in pursuit of a “white homeland.”⁵
- Eleven congregants gunned down by a murderous anti-Semite in Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life synagogue⁶ and, six months later, an attack on another synagogue in California that would have left many more than one dead had the assailant’s gun not jammed.
- Three black churches burned in Louisiana,⁷ allegedly by a son of a local sheriff’s deputy who was into so-called “national socialist black metal” music (NSBM).⁸

That’s only a small, recent sampling — and only in the United States. The white supremacist, or white nationalist, movement is truly transnational.

In March 2019, 51 people were slaughtered in Christchurch, New Zealand, by a white nationalist who hated Muslims and admired Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik.⁹ Five weeks later, in what the defense minister of Sri Lanka claimed was a tit-for-tat retaliation, more than 250 Christians in Sri Lanka were massacred by Islamist terrorists.¹⁰

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/richard-spencer-speech-npi/508379/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/09/us/el-paso-suspect-confession.html?module=inline>

³ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/crime-courts/james-alex-fields-found-guilty-killing-heather-heyer-during-violent-n945186>

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2018/10/26/suspected-explosive-devices-addressed-cory-booker-james-clapper-probe-expands-packages/>

⁵ <https://apnews.com/e919eb94af514cfc9a43982fc7e2e617>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/active-shooter-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting.html>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/16/us/louisiana-black-church-fire-hate-crime.html>

⁸ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2000/national-socialist-black-metal-becoming-soundtrack-racist-right>

⁹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/new-zealand-mosque-shootings>

¹⁰ <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/23/716258085/sri-lanka-orders-state-of-emergency-after-bombings-killed-hundreds>

Two days after that, a black man in California drove into a crowd of people he thought were Muslims.¹¹ And six days further on, an Army vet, also in California, was arrested for plotting to bomb a white supremacist rally in retaliation for Christchurch.¹²

It's not exactly the race war that the Christchurch killer said in a lengthy manifesto he wanted to provoke in the United States.¹³ But there's very little question that the American extreme right, which has only become more extreme as it moves increasingly into the political mainstream, has swollen to historic levels.

Arguably, the U.S. has not flirted so openly with racial nationalism in 100 years.¹⁴ It has not had a president so reluctant to denounce this racism in almost that long.

"America," Spencer told his fellow Trump supporters in Washington, "was until this past generation a white country designed for ourselves and our posterity. It is our creation. It is our inheritance. And it belongs to us."¹⁵

Spencer is not alone. In the years since Trump was elected, men and women with similar views have become more and more visible in the United States. So has their violence.¹⁶

In the aftermath of Trump's election, it was as if an evil genie — the genie of racial, religious and ethnic hatred — had been freed from its bottle.

Race Treason and the White House

Over the last 40 years, the extreme right — a world that in the 1970s seemed to be heading rapidly toward oblivion — has evolved into a real movement. The number of hate groups in America has grown from a few hundred in the 1990s to well over a thousand today.¹⁷ Racial hate crime is endemic.¹⁸

Terror from the right has swelled into a threat that is every bit as serious as the danger from radical Islamists.¹⁹ Racists have carried out mass murders, major bombings, deadly rampages and the killings of police officers.²⁰ Ethnic, or racial, nationalism — a malevolent force that most of us hoped would finally burn itself out in the ashes of Auschwitz — is on the rise.

And the core ideas of so-called "white nationalism" — immigrants and refugees as the invading enemy; black Americans, LGBT people, Jews and other minorities as social parasites; the claim that healthy societies must be based on racial or ethnic homogeneity — are invading the political mainstream.

President Trump's "America First" rhetoric reflects and elevates this sorry reality. It's worth remembering that Gerald L.K. Smith in the 1940s called his isolationist group the America First Party. Smith was a rabid anti-black racist, an avowed enemy of "Jew Communism," and a Holocaust denier.²¹

Trump is far from the only national politician using such language. A single example: In early 2019, a congressman named Steve King, Republican of Iowa, wondered aloud

¹¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/04/27/sunnyvale-crash-police-say-driver-was-intentionally-targeting-muslims/>

¹² <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/05/23/army-veteran-indicted-in-bomb-plot-against-nazi-rally/>

¹³ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/new-zealand-mosque-terrorist-may-have-targeted-country-because-it-n983601>

¹⁴ Since the presidential administrations of Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921), Warren G. Harding (1921-1923) and Calvin Coolidge (1923-29).

¹⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/richard-spencer-speech-npi/508379/>

¹⁶ https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/domestic-terror-particularly-white-supremacist-violence-as-big-a-threat-as-isis-al-qaeda-dhs-says/2019/09/20/dff8aa4e-dbad-11e9-bfb1-849887369476_story.html

¹⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/us/hate-groups-rise.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2006/report-fbi-hate-crime-statistics-vastly-understate-problem>

¹⁹ <https://www.upworthy.com/most-domestic-terrorism-comes-from-white-supremacists-fbi-tells-lawmakers>

²⁰ <https://www.splcenter.org/terror-from-the-right-archives>

²¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/04/16/archives/gerald-lk-smith-dead-anticommunist-crusader.html>

how “white supremacy” had become an offensive thing — and, in the same breath, he equated that racist doctrine with “Western civilization.”²²

How did we get here? How did we end up in a place where anti-Semites and white supremacists are celebrating the president of the United States?²³ Where David Duke — the former Klan leader and author of *Jewish Supremacism: My Awakening to the Jewish Question*²⁴ — says a vote against the man in the White House is a vote for race treason?²⁵ Where the radical right is spreading like an oil slick?

It’s not merely the work of deranged individuals, though there certainly are mentally ill people in the movement, or violent video games, as so many on the political right like to claim.²⁶

It’s not just the algorithms that help drive social media and Internet propaganda into the homes of millions of young people.

It is not a vast right-wing conspiracy, or the insidious infiltrations of Russian Internet bots.

America, like Europe and many other parts of the world, is changing — and changing fast. And those changes are causing enormous social stress and a backlash of historic proportions.

Topsy Turvy: A World in Flux

For most of American history, the population was about 90 percent white.²⁷ But that began to shift in 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson signed a new immigration act that ended a 41-year-old racist quota system.²⁸ No longer would the immigration of non-whites, Asians, southern Europeans and others be drastically limited.

“Today, with my signature, this system is abolished,” the president said then. “We can now believe that it will never again shadow the gate to the American nation with the twin barriers of prejudice and privilege.”²⁹

More than half a century later, largely as a result of the 1965 Act, the country is a little over 60 percent white — or, to be technical, non-Hispanic white.³⁰

And just about 25 years from today — by 2045, according to the Census Bureau’s most recent projection — that proportion of whites will fall to below 50 percent of the population.³¹

That means that white Americans — the group that has dominated U.S. life and culture for all of its history — will become just one more minority, along with black people, Latinos, Asians, and others.

And many white people resent that mightily.³²

At the same time, the foreign-born proportion of the population is nearing historic highs.³³ About one in seven people in the U.S. today was born elsewhere.

And globalization — the knitting together of the world’s economy that is also responsible for the increased movement of workers³⁴ around the world — is leaving many

²² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/10/us/politics/steve-king-trump-immigration-wall.html>

²³ <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/11/09/white-nationalists-and-so-called-alt-right-celebrate-trumps-victory>

²⁴ Covington, La.: Free Speech Press, 2003

²⁵ <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/02/david-duke-trump-219777>

²⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/08/05/kevin-mccarthy-dan-patrick-video-games-el-paso-shooting/>

²⁷ <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab08.html>

²⁸ <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/us-immigration-since-1965>

²⁹ <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/lyndon-baines-johnson/timeline/lbj-on-immigration>

³⁰ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/IPE120218>

³¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/>

³² <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/1/26/14340542/white-fear-trump-psychology-minority-majority>

³³ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2019/10/01/us-foreign-born-gains-are-smallest-in-a-decade-except-in-trump-states/>

³⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/labour-mobility>

people behind. While free trade and immigration without question help to grow our economy and material quality of life, it is also true that they hurt people who work — or used to work — in certain sectors of the economy.

Just ask a steelworker³⁵ or an autoworker³⁶ or someone who once labored in the textile³⁷ industry. Huge numbers of such jobs have moved overseas.³⁸ And no matter what the president says, there is little that can be done to bring them back.³⁹

Massive cultural change is also upending the worlds of many who feel this is no longer the country they grew up in.

Same-sex marriage may be the best example of that. Just a few years ago, the legalization of marriage equality seemed unimaginable.⁴⁰ Today, it's the law of the land, and people who are openly gay and lesbian also serve in the military.

Or think about television shows and advertisements. For those of us who grew up in the 1960s, the idea of a black-and-white interracial couple on TV was virtually inconceivable.⁴¹

Today, that's commonplace. So are depictions of a kind of libertine sexuality that is offensive to many religious conservatives.

For many Americans, the apparent triumph of multicultural ideology is a liberating development. But among others, it has unleashed a kind of political fury.

We are living through a backlash. The United States is more polarized politically than at any time in living memory.⁴² Very real social stresses, along with a healthy dose of far-right propaganda, have brought us to where we are.

Back to the Beginning

This is not the first time the country has seen ugly nationalistic and xenophobic backlashes. We have a long and sorry history of such episodes.

Right at the start, Ben Franklin attacked “swarthy” German immigrants, who he said “are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort.”⁴³ Alexander Hamilton warned of a “Gallic faction.” John Jay said that American “Jacobins” — a reference to guillotine-loving French revolutionaries — were “numerous, desperate, active.”⁴⁴

The Know-Nothing movement of the 1840s and 1850s targeted Irish and German Catholics and others of that faith as dangerous subversives threatening American democracy.

The Civil War, of course, was fought to protect the South's “peculiar institution” — the barbaric system that enslaved millions of Africans.

The first Ku Klux Klan, born in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, quickly developed into a loose-knit terrorist organization that helped bring “redemption” to the Deep South — that is, the reimposition of white supremacy, initially in the form of the infamous Black Codes, but particularly, beginning in 1877, with the legalization of Jim Crow segregation.⁴⁵

³⁵ <https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet>

³⁶ https://www.usitc.gov/employment_changes_working_paper.htm

³⁷ <https://www.bls.gov/mlr/1997/08/art3full.pdf>

³⁸ <https://www.businessinsider.com/sad-facts-deindustrialization-america-2011-11>

³⁹ <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/autos/2019/06/12/auto-industry-faces-decline-analyst-predicts/1421777001/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>

⁴¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/03/business/media/advertising-multiracial-families.html>

⁴² <https://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/>

⁴³ https://www.dialoginternational.com/dialog_international/2008/02/ben-franklin-on.html

⁴⁴ David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Far Right in American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 22.

⁴⁵ Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), passim.

In 1866, during debate over the 14th Amendment, Sen. Edgar Cowan of Pennsylvania raged against the legalization of birthright citizenship and warned of a “flood of immigration of the Mongol race” and “people from Borneo, man-eaters and cannibals.”⁴⁶

In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. It would be another 61 years before Chinese immigrants or even family members born in the United States were allowed to become citizens.⁴⁷

And at various other times, Jews, Asians, southern and eastern Europeans, blacks, Mormons, Freemasons and many others were demonized and mistreated. Throughout its history, America has experienced periodic outbreaks of xenophobic nativism, angry reactions to waves of immigrants who were seen as enemies of what the Klan called “100 percent Americanism.”⁴⁸

David Bennett, a leading scholar of U.S. nativism, has written that early anti-immigrant movements arose “in times of economic instability and political disarray.”⁴⁹

The most instructive case for us – the one that seems to offer many insights into what we are living through today – may be the 1920s.

Let me say up front: I am not arguing that today’s circumstances are the same as they were a century ago. This is not the Weimar Republic. We are not confronting the return of classical fascism, at least not as it arose in the interwar period. Civil society in both America and Europe is far stronger today than it was in the 1920s and ’30s. We are not likely to see colored-shirt fascist troops in the streets, or the revolutionary seizure of power.

But 1920s America, like the United States and much of Europe today, was a society under tremendous stress. While many remember the period as the “roaring twenties,” an era of remarkable economic growth and optimism, that masked another reality.

Change and the Ku Klux Klan

The world was changing, shifting the earth under the feet of many Americans.

In the aftermath of World War I, enormous numbers of people left the countryside for the swelling cities. They found factory jobs and a frenetic, impersonal urban culture, and they lost their ties to family and neighbors, the land, and a real sense of community.

Alienation flourished in the anonymity of the cities.

The 1920 census was the first to show that a majority of Americans now lived in urban settings.⁵⁰ Industrialization was altering the very basis of society.

Minorities were on the move. Some 500,000 black Southerners traveled to northern cities during the war in response to new employment opportunities.⁵¹ Deadly race riots hit several of those cities in the “Red Summer” of 1919, most notably Chicago.⁵² Lynching was endemic,⁵³ and so was a hagiographic rewriting of Confederate history.⁵⁴ In 1921, white rioters destroyed the entire black community in Tulsa, Oklahoma, leaving as many as 300 dead.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ F. and J. Rives, *The Congressional Globe: The Debates and Proceedings of the First Session of the Thirty-Ninth Congress* (Washington: Congressional Globe Office, 1866), 2891.

⁴⁷ <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/chinese-exclusion-act-1882>

⁴⁸ Bennett, *The Party of Fear*, passim.

⁴⁹ Bennett, *The Party of Fear*, 199.

⁵⁰ https://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/urban_and_rural_areas.html

⁵¹ David E. Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-39, Decades of Promise and Pain* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 14.

⁵² Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011), passim.

⁵³ <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingyear.html>

⁵⁴ <https://theweek.com/articles/718986/how-america-forgot-true-history-civil-war>

⁵⁵ <https://www.tulsaohistory.org/exhibit/1921-tulsa-race-massacre/>

At the same time, rural America was being left behind. The cities may have been roaring, but in the countryside the Great Depression began nine years early with the crash of farm prices in 1920.⁵⁶ Two fifths of the nation lived in poverty.⁵⁷

A wave of strikes in 1919 — along with the Russian Revolution of 1917 — stoked national fears of “Bolshevism,” an ideology that was seen as an import brought by dangerous foreigners. Nearly 1,000 people were deported in the infamous Palmer raids for their socialist ideas or activism.⁵⁸

The role of women, who won the right to vote in 1920, was changing dramatically.⁵⁹ Many left their homes for factory and other jobs, entering the economy for the first time and winning a measure of independence as a result.

Sex came into public view in a way not seen before. This was the Jazz Age, and urban “hedonism” and “deviant” social behavior were widespread. Four-fifths of men and almost half of women now admitted to having premarital sex.⁶⁰

Prohibition, enacted in 1920, may or may not have led to a more sober population, but it certainly drove the rise of bootlegging and speakeasies, and with them, a kind of happy-go-lucky rejection of traditional morality, not to mention the law.⁶¹

Religion, too, was being challenged as never before. That was highlighted in the Scopes “monkey trial” of 1925, pitting the advocates of evolution and science against Christian fundamentalists. The fundamentalists won, but their faith became an object of national ridicule. Skepticism was on the rise.⁶²

Amid all of this, ideas about a “scientific” basis to race, rooted in a pseudo-Darwinian approach to human development that developed in the 19th century, took hold of the leading intellectuals and universities of the time. Influential books like Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) and T. Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color* (1921) carried the message that Nordic whites were inherently superior — but also faced an existential threat from the lower races.

At the same time, eugenics, the “science” of breeding a better human race, was not only applauded, but translated into more than 30 states’ involuntary sterilization laws — laws that were precursors to Nazi statutes.⁶³

And America — a country then still dominated by white Protestants — was seeing enormous waves of Catholic and, to a lesser extent, Jewish immigration. (At least 12 million immigrants entered via Ellis Island alone between 1892 and 1924.⁶⁴) These immigrants headed mostly for the cities, which increasingly came to be seen by conservatives as dens of iniquity and civilizational rot.

Immigration also led to the highest percentage of foreign-born population since the earliest days of the nation. In 1920, that proportion was more than 13 percent — a number that would not be approached again for nearly 100 years.⁶⁵

An angry backlash, not unlike today’s, was brewing.

Catholics quickly became the main target. They were pictured as scheming and loyal only to the Pope — the same “dual loyalty” charge later applied to Jews. The fact that

⁵⁶ Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-39*, 10.

⁵⁷ Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-39*, 179.

⁵⁸ Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-39*, 4-5.

⁵⁹ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1931), 99-102.

⁶⁰ Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-39*, 115.

⁶¹ Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-39*, 16-17.

⁶² Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-39*, 131.

⁶³ James Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), passim.

⁶⁴ <http://pluralism.org/encounter/historical-perspectives/catholic-and-jewish-immigrants/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2019/10/01/us-foreign-born-gains-are-smallest-in-a-decade-except-in-trump-states/>

Irish Catholics and others were becoming prominent in many northern cities sparked great resentment.

Catholics were described as enemies of public schools. They were accused of setting up their own private institutions in order to propagandize children and keep them from absorbing the fundamentals of American civic life. They were seen as enemies of Prohibition and enthusiasts of alcohol — in large part, because of the role of wine in Communion.⁶⁶

An entire semi-pornographic literature arose that purported to describe licentious activities in the churches, monasteries and convents of Catholicism.⁶⁷

These were hardly outlying views.

In 1921, The New York Times editorialized about immigration: “The need of restriction is manifest. [...] American institutions are menaced; and the menace centers in the swarms of aliens whom we are importing.” With them, the Times warned, came ignorance, Bolshevism, and “the most loathsome diseases of the flesh.”⁶⁸

The Washington Post, the scholar Daniel Okrent notes, editorialized at around the same time that 90 percent of Italians migrating to the United States were “the degenerate spawn” of “Asiatic hordes.”⁶⁹

Jews became targets as well.

Some of them, too, were rising to prominence in the cities, and their prosperity fueled a kind of jealous anti-Semitism.

Many of the new Jewish immigrants were from eastern Europe, and to many natives — including a number of prosperous American Jews — they looked strange and un-American. They were generally poor, often spoke bad English if they spoke it at all, and clustered in dense urban neighborhoods. Their religion was not widely understood, and they were demonized as Christ-killers.⁷⁰

They also were vilified by a whole new class of professional anti-Semites. In the early 1920s, the auto tycoon Henry Ford published a series of violently anti-Semitic attacks under the rubric of “The International Jew.”⁷¹

Others, a little later on, included William Dudley Pelley, founder of the pro-Nazi Silver Shirts, and Charles Coughlin, the infamous anti-Semitic “radio priest.” Together, these men were reaching tens of millions of people.

And then there was the Ku Klux Klan.

The so-called “second era” Klan cashed in on the malaise afflicting much of the country. It was anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, anti-alcohol, anti-jazz, anti-sex. Fundamentally, it was anti-modern.⁷²

By 1925, the Klan had some 4 million members — the largest Klan of American history.⁷³ It was powerful. It controlled politicians around the country, and in some cases — like Indiana⁷⁴ — it virtually ran an entire state.

⁶⁶ <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/09/when-america-hated-catholics-213177>

⁶⁷ This literature, much of it in pamphlet form, mirrored an earlier wave of anti-Catholic propaganda, the most famous of which was *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk, or The Hidden Secrets of a Nun's Life in a Convent Exposed*, published in 1836.

⁶⁸

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1921/02/09/107008045.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=ArticleEndCTA®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=7>

⁶⁹ Daniel Okrent, *The Guarded Gate: Bigotry, Eugenics, and the Law That Kept Two Generations of Jews, Italians, and Other European Immigrants Out of America* (New York: Scribner, 2019), 99.

⁷⁰ <https://teachinghistory.org/history-content/beyond-the-textbook/25059>

⁷¹ Originally published serially in *The Dearborn Independent*, owned by Henry Ford, the articles were gathered in a four-volume set entitled *The International Jew: America's Foremost Problem* (Dearborn, Michigan: The Dearborn Independent, 1920-1922).

⁷² Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: Liveright, 2017), passim.

⁷³ <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3688-broadside-for-the-trump-era-the-ku-klux-klan-of-the-1920s>

⁷⁴ <https://www.theindychannel.com/longform/the-ku-klux-klan-ran-indiana-once-could-it-happen-again>

That year, 25,000 robed Klansmen marched through the nation’s capital in a chilling display of strength.⁷⁵ Another huge Washington “klonvocation” followed in 1926.⁷⁶ And the Klan supported, as a primary goal, the 1924 Immigration Act.⁷⁷

The Act was aimed at restricting immigration from eastern and southern Europe — and keeping out Catholics and Jews. It completely banned Asians.⁷⁸ This racist quota system stayed in place until LBJ signed the 1965 immigration overhaul.⁷⁹

The second-era Klan faded out soon after — the victim of sex scandals, newspaper exposés, congressional investigations and internal strife. But its legacy lived on in the 1924 Act. For four decades, America’s immigration policy — and its demography — were controlled by a Klannish quota system.

Second Verse, Same as the First

Today, it’s déjà vu all over again.

Immigration — now dominated by Latinos, followed by Asians⁸⁰ — is once again at near-historic levels. Demographers predict that by 2025, almost 15 percent of Americans will have been born in another country. That’s slightly higher than the very highest levels reached since record-keeping began.⁸¹

By contrast, fewer than 5 percent were foreign-born in 1970.⁸²

The changing racial makeup of the country was dramatically underlined by the 2008 election of Barack Obama — a remarkable moment in a country with a history of black enslavement, but also one that frightened many whites.

Polling, in fact, shows that anti-black attitudes went up, not down, during Obama’s eight years in the Oval Office.⁸³

At the same time — just as in the 1920s — a large hunk of the population is in distress, even as the so-called “elites” flourish.

As income inequality reaches highs that have provoked comparisons to the Gilded Age⁸⁴ — with the wealthy growing wealthier still amid Trumpian tax cuts and a still-expanding stock market — manufacturing wages continue to fall.⁸⁵ Good jobs continue to disappear. Millions are still without health care, even after the passage of Obamacare.⁸⁶ Many rural and industrial areas are in crisis.

Higher education has become essential. Those who have it are likely to thrive, while those who don’t are typically consigned to poverty.

There are two Americas, and one of them is dying.

⁷⁵ <http://mallhistory.org/items/show/175>

⁷⁶ <https://mashable.com/2015/12/24/kkk-parade/>

⁷⁷ Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 194-195.

⁷⁸ <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>

⁷⁹ <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1951-2000/Immigration-and-Nationality-Act-of-1965/>

⁸⁰ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#Demographic>

⁸¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/30/immigrant-share-in-u-s-nears-record-high-but-remains-below-that-of-many-other-countries/>

⁸² <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2014/02/the-second-great-wave-of-immigration-growth-of-the-foreign-born-population-since-1970.html>

⁸³ <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2014/02/27/oh-really-bill-once-again-o-reilly-cant-admit-mistake>

⁸⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/oct/26/worlds-witnessing-a-new-gilded-age-as-billionaires-wealth-swells-to-6tn>

⁸⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/15/for-the-biggest-group-of-american-workers-wages-arent-just-flat-theyre-falling/>

⁸⁶ <https://khn.org/news/number-of-americans-without-insurance-rises-in-2018/>

Suicide is up⁸⁷ in the America described in J.D. Vance’s book *Hillbilly Elegy*⁸⁸ — a place where poor whites struggle to survive. Opioid use has reached epidemic proportions⁸⁹, along with prescription painkillers and methamphetamines.

The white working class is hurting.

But that’s not even the most important part of it. One study — by the Public Religion Research Institute and *The Atlantic* magazine — found that white working-class voters, who make up about a third of the population, were actually more likely to support Hillary Clinton than Donald Trump.⁹⁰

The real predictor of support for Trump, the study found, was cultural anxiety — not anxiety connected to financial status. *The Atlantic* put it like this: “Trump’s most powerful message, at least among some Americans, was about defending the country’s putative culture.”

What does that mean?

White working-class voters who say they feel like “strangers in their own land” were far more likely to support Trump than Clinton. The same was true of those who favored deporting undocumented immigrants. And it was true also of those who felt that college education was a gamble — that its utility might well be outweighed by its cost.

These are people who feel they have been abandoned — not unlike many voters who supported Brexit⁹¹ in the United Kingdom. Their troubles are not the subject of much media attention. Politicians generally ignore them. As various minorities expand their visible presence in national life — at least from the point of view of these white folks — their own role, their ownership, is shrinking.

A racist writer, Wilmot Robertson, gave a name to this idea in a 1972 book that has since become a bellwether of the white supremacist movement: *The Dispossessed Majority*.⁹²

The central theme was that it’s now white people who are the oppressed group in American society. They are being robbed of their culture and the privileges that came with it. Their own country no longer really belongs to them.

Racist activists today call it “white genocide”⁹³ — the idea that white people are an embattled group increasingly being pushed out, and outbred, by others. It’s the same idea embodied in the Christchurch killer’s manifesto, which argues that whites are being subjected to a “Great Replacement”⁹⁴ in their own countries.

A 2011 study by the Harvard Business School suggested that such thinking is widespread. It found that most whites view racism as a zero-sum game in which decreases in bias against black people mean increases in bias against whites. A majority of whites, the study added, “have now come to view anti-white bias as a bigger societal problem than anti-black bias.”⁹⁵

That belief is ludicrous. Almost every indicator shows blacks have it worse than whites.⁹⁶ But that doesn’t mean that tens of millions of whites don’t think it’s true.

⁸⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db330.htm>

⁸⁸ *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: Harper, 2016).

⁸⁹ <https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/about-the-epidemic/index.html>

⁹⁰ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/white-working-class-trump-cultural-anxiety/525771/>

⁹¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0176268018301320>

⁹² Cape Canaveral: Howard Allen.

⁹³ <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/white-genocide-a-dangerous-myth-employed-by-racists-1.3981739>

⁹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/us/politics/grand-replacement-explainer.html>

⁹⁵ <https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=40027>

⁹⁶ <https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2018/race-economics-and-social-status/pdf/race-economics-and-social-status.pdf>

Gas on the Flames

Donald Trump appealed to these people directly.

He began his election campaign by denouncing Mexican immigrants as rapists. He went on to pillory Muslims, suggesting they should be banned from the country. He encouraged violence against black protesters at his rallies,⁹⁷ and outraged black Americans with his depiction of inner cities as terrifying hellholes.

He embraced conspiracy theorists and theories — starting with the “birther” claim that Barack Obama was not a native-born American. In one speech, he railed on about “international bankers” and “global special interests”⁹⁸ — phrases commonly used by anti-Semites to describe Jews.

And, once in office, Trump appointed a series of advisers and others who were anti-Muslim ideologues, gay-bashing homophobes, misogynistic creeps, and even — as exemplified in the person of one-time senior adviser Stephen Bannon⁹⁹ — white nationalists.

In the fall of 2017, Trump refused to denounce the white supremacists who marched in Charlottesville, Virginia, despite the murder of an anti-racist activist. There were, he said, “very fine people” on both sides.¹⁰⁰

White supremacists heard all of this clearly.

Andrew Anglin — who runs a neo-Nazi website called The Daily Stormer — wrote after Trump’s election that “our Glorious Leader has ascended to God Emperor.”¹⁰¹ Jared Taylor — publisher of a white nationalist journal — also cheered Trump’s victory, saying it showed white Americans were not “obedient zombies.”¹⁰² And Richard Spencer — the same man who hollered “Hail Trump!” shortly after the election — called his win “a victory for identity politics.”¹⁰³

In the 1920s, a decade of increasing polarization and strife ended with the 1929 collapse known as the Great Depression. It wasn’t clear what direction the country would take. But with the New Deal programs of Franklin D. Roosevelt — and the era of national unity and sense of purpose fostered by World War II — the United States took a turn for the better. Fascism and its various ideological cousins were thoroughly rejected, at least for the foreseeable future.

Today, that rejection — or more specifically, the rejection of the contemporary version of white nationalism — doesn’t look so solid.

It’s now commonplace to hear national politicians denounce Muslims as terrorists, accuse LGBT people of “recruiting” straight youth, claim that Latino immigrants are parasitic criminals, and blame Jews like George Soros for allegedly undermining society in a myriad of ways. They routinely embrace conspiracy theories, traffic in falsehoods, and denigrate those who disagree.

But the most remarkable accelerant — the thing that has pushed the United States into a class of its own with regard to the radical right — has been the role of the president. His rhetoric, his insults, and his constant attacks on anyone he deems an enemy, have normalized hatred in a new and dangerous way.

⁹⁷ <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/back-trump-comments-perceived-encouraging-violence/story?id=48415766>

⁹⁸ https://www.nj.com/politics/2016/11/trump_criticized_for_anti-semitic_memes_in_closing.html

⁹⁹ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/03/16/bannon-racist-badge-honor/417286002/>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2019/04/trump-defends-claim-that-there-were-very-fine-people-on-both-sides-of-white-supremacist-rally/>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/11/09/white-nationalists-and-so-called-alt-right-celebrate-trumps-victory>

¹⁰² <https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-celebrate-trumps-victory>

¹⁰³ <https://quillette.com/2017/12/07/impasse-modernism-postmodernism/>

The Trump Effect

Supporters of Donald Trump argue that there's no proof that the spate of hate violence and other incidents that followed his election — very much like the 40% jump in religious hate crimes seen in England and Wales immediately after the Brexit vote¹⁰⁴ — had anything to do with his rhetoric.

But that's not true. Examining the 1,000-plus incidents that followed Trump's victory, the Southern Poverty Law Center found that in 37 percent of them the perpetrator directly cited Trump, his "Make America Great Again" slogan, or his infamous comments about groping women's genitals.¹⁰⁵

Between 2014,¹⁰⁶ the year before Trump began campaigning, and 2018,¹⁰⁷ the most recent numbers available, hate crimes of all kinds rose significantly: by 7 percent against LGBT people, 20 percent against blacks, 22 percent against Muslims, 24 percent against whites, 37 percent against Jews, and 62 percent against Latinos.

A 2019 study by three University of North Texas professors, published in *The Washington Post*, also found a remarkable correlation between the counties that hosted one of Trump's 275 campaign rallies in 2016 and a rise in hate crimes there in subsequent months. The number of hate crimes in those counties was 226 percent higher than in comparable counties that hosted no rallies.¹⁰⁸

Another study by a team of economists at the University of Chicago, Northwestern University and UCLA made a related point. It was an ingenious test designed to figure out the effect of Trump's often ugly comments on what regular people were willing to do and say publicly.

Legal scholar Cass Sunstein summarized its findings: "The upshot," he wrote, "is that if Trump had not come on the scene, a lot of Americans would refuse to authorize a donation to an anti-immigrant organization unless they were promised anonymity. But with Trump as president, people feel liberated. Anonymity no longer matters, apparently because Trump's election weakened the social norm against supporting anti-immigrant groups."¹⁰⁹

Trump, in other words, is a kind of modern-day Henry Ford — or a Pandora with her box. He has undercut American norms of civility and tolerance and normalized the kinds of hatreds that often express themselves in criminal violence.

That is the influence that is known today as the Trump Effect.

Jews and the Alt-Right

Social, economic and cultural factors have played foundational roles in driving the expansion of the American radical right. A key accelerant has been the virtual endorsement of much of the extreme right's propaganda by President Donald Trump, not to mention the abject failure of much of the political class to counter that propaganda. And it is true that the Internet and social media have made it easier to build a radical social movement.

But those factors don't fully explain one of the most surprising aspects of this movement: its white-hot core of anti-Semitism.¹¹⁰ This is especially true of the contemporary iteration of the radical right known as the "Alt-Right."

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/16/uk/hate-crime-religious-england-wales-intl/index.html>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2017/trump-effect>

¹⁰⁶ <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2014/tables/table-1>

¹⁰⁷ <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2018/topic-pages/tables/table-1.xls>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/03/22/trumps-rhetoric-does-inspire-more-hate-crimes/>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2017-05-26/yes-trump-is-making-xenophobia-more-acceptable>

¹¹⁰ <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/11/4/20947833/richard-spencer-white-nationalism-audio-milo-alt-right>

That core was on display in the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, in the fall of 2017, when marchers chanted “Jews will not replace us” and “Judens raus” — “Jews out!”¹¹¹ It is reflected in the names of some of today’s top movement websites: *The Daily Shoah*,¹¹² mocking the Holocaust, and *The Daily Stormer*,¹¹³ with its name taken from *Der Stürmer*, published by Julius Streicher, who was hung in 1946 at Nuremberg.

And it was seen in the 2018 murder of 11 people in a Pittsburgh synagogue, and the similar attack on a California synagogue in 2019.

Anti-Semitism doesn’t have nearly as long a history in the United States as in Europe, where it dates back to the Middle Ages. While American history has been marred by all sorts of prejudices, anti-black hatred, born and nurtured under the original sin of slavery, has long been its chief pathology. Jews in America have faced far less hatred and violence than their fellows in Europe.

So how have Jews become the chief enemy for the Alt-Right?

It’s true that there were vocal American anti-Semites in the 1920s and especially the 1930s. Between 1933 and 1941, more than 100 anti-Jewish organizations arose, up from fewer than half a dozen in all American history up to that time.¹¹⁴ In 1938, Hitler actually gave Henry Ford a major award honoring his anti-Semitism.¹¹⁵ During the same period, some on the extreme right excoriated President Roosevelt — incorrectly — as a Jew.¹¹⁶

But the Nazification of the American radical right really began in the 1960s.

George Lincoln Rockwell — head of the American Nazi Party, which operated from 1959 to 1967 — was an atheist. But, recognizing the religiosity of most Americans, he adopted the anti-Semitic theology of Christian Identity as a way of selling the doctrine of National Socialism.¹¹⁷

Christian Identity, at least in its hardline forms, proposes that Jews descend from a sexual mating of Eve and the Serpent in the Garden of Eden. It describes Jews as biologically evil, working to destroy the godly Aryan in order to prepare the world for the rulership of their father, Satan.¹¹⁸

That theology spread through the radical right, to the point where a large proportion of once-Protestant Klan groups are now Christian Identity. Like all Christian Identity believers, they see Jews as the chief enemy of God’s people.

Rockwell also was an early advocate of Holocaust denial,¹¹⁹ a key claim for those who want to convince Americans that Jews are their enemy. In fact, many of the leading institutions of the global Holocaust denial scene would be developed in America by Americans.

Liberty Lobby, formed by Willis Carto in 1955, became an important anti-Semitic institution in Washington, and for many years Carto had friends in high places.¹²⁰ And in 1979, the Institute for Historical Review¹²¹ opened in California with a purportedly

¹¹¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/08/14/jews-will-not-replace-us-why-white-supremacists-go-after-jews/>

¹¹² <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/michael-enoch-peinovich>

¹¹³ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/andrew-anglin>

¹¹⁴ Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 112.

¹¹⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/daily/nov98/nazicars30.htm>

¹¹⁶ Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 109, 121.

¹¹⁷ Frederick J. Simonelli, *American Fuehrer: George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 115-122.

¹¹⁸ For a serious study of Christian Identity, see Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹¹⁹ Simonelli, *American Fuehrer*, 106-114.

¹²⁰ George Michael, *Willis Carto and the American Far Right* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2008), 62-74.

¹²¹ Michael, *Willis Carto and the American Far Right*, 124-143.

scholarly approach to supporting denial. Forty years later, it remains the world's leading denial organization.

Gradually, these ideas infected much, if not most, of the American radical right. They were helped along by the perceived role of Jews in supporting the civil rights movement and the developing ideology of multiculturalism.

Another critical development was the publication, between 1994 and 1998, of a trilogy of books¹²² by an anti-Semitic California psychology professor. Kevin MacDonald's works, dressed up as scholarly publications, claimed that Jews are driven by genetic factors to undermine the majority-Christian societies in which most live.

His theories boil down to the idea that Jews practice ethnocentrism for themselves while hypocritically pushing immigration, miscegenation and multiculturalism for others, thus weakening Gentile society in a bid to protect themselves from pogroms and other persecution.

Macdonald's books are still the most important contribution to National Socialist ideology since the 1925 publication of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. They offer a "scientific" basis for believing Jews are a treacherous internal minority, what Hitler promised but failed to deliver with his "anti-Semitism of Reason."¹²³

And one more important contributor has been anti-Semitism among black Americans, which is considerably higher than among whites.¹²⁴

In 1991, the Nation of Islam, a very large black hate group, published a book that it still sells called *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews*.¹²⁵ It claims, falsely, that Jews dominated the transatlantic slave trade.¹²⁶

Another black nationalist theology, Black Hebrew Israelism, asserts that black Americans are the real descendants of the Old Testament Hebrews, and that today's Jews are lying about being God's chosen people.¹²⁷ The theology is a mirror image of Christian Identity.

There are other strands of society and history that feed into contemporary American anti-Semitism, including left-wing anti-Zionism that goes beyond mere criticism of Israel to attack Jews in general.

One of the most important relies on the ancient stereotype of Jews as "cosmopolitan" and "internationalist" — people who have no real loyalty to the nations they live in, only to money and their own tribal self-interest. In an age of increasing resentment of globalization, that stereotype seems to many on the far right to fit the bill.

Whither the American Right?

All of this leads us to a final question: Where are we headed now? Will we slide further and further to the right, or can we still change course?

As I've tried to say clearly, the 1920s are not directly comparable to the times we are living through now — in the United States or in Europe. But in the case of 1920s America, we do see a society that has come under tremendous pressure from vast

¹²² Kevin MacDonald, *A People That Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy, with Diaspora Peoples* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1994); *Separation and Its Discontents: Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Anti-Semitism* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1998); *The Culture of Critique: An Evolutionary Analysis of Jewish Involvement in Twentieth-Century Intellectual and Political Movements* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1998).

¹²³ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/adolf-hitler>

¹²⁴ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/adl-survey-finds-anti-semitism-high-in-black-community>

¹²⁵ Published by the Historical Research Department, Nation of Islam.

¹²⁶ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1995/09/slavery-and-the-jews/376462/>

¹²⁷ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2015/history-hebrew-israelism>

demographic changes, cultural upheaval, economic inequities, and an intensely polarized political scene — very much like the challenges that face the United States almost exactly 100 years later.

In the 1920s, those strains fueled an anti-immigrant movement that produced the Klan-backed Immigration Act of 1924. But as the nation's health improved, through the New Deal and the Second World War, Americans adopted a sunnier attitude. Self-confidence and hope for the future replaced many of the fears that had darkened earlier decades.

Our circumstances today are different — but in some ways just as perilous.

Who knows what effect global warming will have on our world as flooding and other natural disasters overtake us? When desperate populations are on the move? If food and water are scarce commodities?

Moreover, the American two-party system — unlike European parliamentary models — tends to exclude the radical right from open participation.¹²⁸ As a result, many frustrated radicals grow more radical still, choosing to embrace political violence.

I think it's fair to say that the United States today finds itself at a frightening crossroads.

We may not be facing classical fascism, but we are struggling with an increasingly authoritarian president, a political atmosphere poisoned with conspiracy theories and open hatreds, and an undeniable rise in violent right-wing terrorism. Globalism and its discontents pose a whole array of threats.

At the same time, we have witnessed in recent years the very dramatic rise of the Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo movements. A new wave of forward-looking politicians, many of them young women, are making themselves felt. Polls show increasing disenchantment, if only among some, with President Trump.

Young people are dramatically more open-minded about interracial¹²⁹ and same-sex relationships¹³⁰ than previous generations. And, at least to some extent, American institutions have so far resisted the most egregious attacks on liberal democracy from the right.

Where will we go from here? The path forward very likely depends on how we deal with the many challenges that face us: demographic and social upheavals, economic inequality and competition, and potentially catastrophic climate change among them. The only sure thing is that both the challenges and the stakes that face us in the coming decades are enormous.

¹²⁸ <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-politicalscience/chapter/the-two-party-system/>

¹²⁹ <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/05/18/2-public-views-on-intermarriage/>

¹³⁰ <https://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>

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