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**Culture and Belonging in the USA:
Multiracial Organizing on the Contemporary Far Right**

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Culture and Belonging in the USA

Multiracial Organizing on the Contemporary Far Right



Proud Boys member Tusitala "Tiny" Toese at the August 4, 2018 far right Patriot Prayer rally in Portland, Oregon.

Credit: Laura Sennett, One People's Project.

[Cloee Cooper](#), [Daryle Lamont Jenkins](#) | September 3, 2019

August 4, 2018, the day of the “Gibson for Senate Freedom March,” was a balmy day in Portland, Oregon. Patriot Prayer, a group loosely associated with the Alt Right, had organized the march, calling on like-minded people to “make history today” and fight for free speech in the face of Portland’s “intolerant hateful culture.”¹ Joey Gibson, the founding leader of Patriot Prayer, was running for U.S. Senate in Washington state in the Republican primary—a platform he used to promote and coalesce local far-right forces in the Pacific Northwest. It was one of dozens of rallies the group had organized in the region since April 2017; after the deadly “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville,

Virginia, in August 2017, Patriot Prayer’s presence in the streets had only grown. (While Patriot Prayer members were not openly present in Charlottesville, reputed members of

the Proud Boys, a group with overlapping membership, were.) A year later, the Southern Poverty Law Center warned that the Patriot Prayer rally could be Charlottesville 2.0, drawing Alt Right groups from all along the West Coast to flex their muscles.²

Chants of “USA! USA!” filled the air along the Naito Parkway as an estimated 500 members of Patriot Prayer, the Proud Boys, the militia group Three Percenters, and their various supporters, converged on the city.³ The Arkansas-based neo-Confederate group the Hiwaymen—themselves veterans of the Unite the Right rally—waved Confederate flags against a backdrop of men in MAGA hats and a smattering of Blue Lives Matter flags (pro-police symbols in opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement).

And yet, when counter protesters challenged Gibson’s coalition with antiracist chants, they encountered a strange rebuttal.⁴ As one rally-goer told a counter protester, “If you support the Left, you are 100 percent racist. It’s the Left that wanted to keep Black people in Slavery. It’s the Left that wanted to keep Black people from voting. If you support them, that’s exactly what you are supporting.”⁵

Gibson, a Washington-based Japanese-American activist⁶ who says he was politicized during the 2016 Trump campaign,⁷ echoed those thoughts. When asked by a journalist to respond to antifascists’ charge that Patriot Prayer is racist, Gibson said, “Why is it that we have way more [people] of color than they have? ...I am darker than 90 percent of those people that are calling me a racist.”⁸

Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys are part of a trend of Far Right organizing that departs from their explicitly White nationalist contemporaries, and often fuses antiracist language into otherwise nationalist, misogynistic, libertarian, and xenophobic platforms.

Coming onto the scene in 2016, Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys are part of a trend of Far Right organizing that departs from their explicitly White nationalist contemporaries, and often fuses antiracist language into otherwise nationalist, misogynistic, libertarian, and xenophobic platforms. With people of color in positions of leadership and representing 10 percent⁹ of their August rally, the groups represent something substantively different from old-style White supremacy in terms of both ideology and organizing: what scholars and journalists refer to as the Multiracial Far Right.

The emergence of this new bloc raises several questions. First, why are people of multiracial backgrounds gravitating to Far Right groups? Further, is this a new phenomenon or is there historical precedent for this sort of unlikely partnership? Finally, if racial exclusion isn't the ultimate glue that binds this sector of Far Right groups together, how are these groups "transcending" race, and what issues continue to be fault lines within their movement?

The Multiracial Far Right

Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys are two of the most prominent Far Rightⁱ organizations that include significant membership of people of color. But street crews like Battalion 49 and the 211 Bootboysⁱⁱ are also part of the contemporary multiracial Far Right.

Patriot Prayer, an organization with connections to Three Percenter militia circles,¹⁰ was founded in 2016 by Joey Gibson under the pretense of promoting libertarian ideas and free speech—although for Patriot Prayer, that has often meant physically attacking those they consider to be enemies of free speech. Its two most prominent members, Gibson and Tusitala "Tiny" Toese, are both men of color. (Toese, who is of Samoan descent and in his early 20s, claims to have been anti-Trump before meeting Gibson.¹¹)

Founded in 2016 by Vice Magazine co-founder Gavin McInnes, the Proud Boys describes itself as a men's fraternity dedicated to the idea that the "West is the Best." Its rhetoric is marked by inflammatory misogynistic positions that defend "natural" gender differences and advocates for violence and protest against Muslims, undocumented immigrants, reproductive justice, the Left, and transgender rights. McInnes denies

immigrants, reproductive justice, the LGBT, and transgender rights. McInnes denies being a White supremacist and the group welcomes men of various ethnic and religious backgrounds, including Jewish men, as long as they agree to the Proud Boys'

principles.¹² Their website features a video of a young Black man, identified only as "Yosef," who describes the Proud Boys as a "multi-ethnic organization that like [sic] pounding beer, defending the Constitution, and making Western babies."¹³

The 211 Bootboys are far-right nationalists with roots in New York City. Founded in 1999 by a Dennis "F.U." Davila, the lead singer of a hardcore punk band called Fed Up, the 211 Bootboys come out of the New York City hardcore punk scene, and in particular traditional ⁱⁱⁱ and anti-racist skinhead circles. In recent years, 211 Bootboys shifted to embracing Far Right and xenophobic politics, despite its predominantly Latinx membership. Members of its multiracial crew were implicated, along with the Proud Boys, in an October 2018 attack on Antifa protesters who demonstrated against an appearance by McInnes at the Republican Club in Manhattan.¹⁴

Our concern is that multiculturalism within the Far Right may represent an effort to copy the Left's embrace of multiculturalism in the service of a new version of right-wing rebellion.

An Uneasy Alliance

While Joey Gibson denies any accusations of racism, he regularly organizes and attends rallies with well-known White supremacists and neonazis. And some of them have turned to violence. In April 2017, a White supremacist named Jeremy Christian attended a Patriot Prayer "free speech" rally in Portland; less than a month later, Christian killed two Portland residents and injured a third, in one of the most shocking displays of White supremacist violence in Oregon's history.¹⁵

When Gibson attended a later rally in Rhode Island with Brien James, a Proud Boys member who also co-founded the neonazi organizations Vinlanders Social Club and American Guard, he told a journalist that James' history was irrelevant since he said nothing bad at the rally."¹⁶

At the Unite the Right rally in August 2017, the infusion of people of color into the Far Right was evident. In fact, Alex Michael Ramos, a Latinx associated with the Three Percenters militia movement and the Proud Boys, is now in prison for his role in attacking a Black man named DeAndre Harris in a parking lot that day.¹⁷ Ramos later

claimed that he attended the rally not because he was racist, but because he was a conservative who cared about free speech, claiming he can't be racist because he is Puerto Rican.¹⁸

Historical Precedents

Since the election of Donald Trump, many have rightfully pointed out that White nationalism, a movement that seeks to create an all-White nation-state, is on the rise in the United States.¹⁹ White nationalist movements spiked in the U.S. in the wake of the Civil Rights movement.²⁰ But in the past as well as today, there is political tension within the Far Right regarding race: some groups with roots in paleoconservatism advocate for an all-White nation and predicate membership based on what they refer to as being part of the "Aryan race"; other groups align with White nationalist politics on some principles but embrace a broader notion of America-first nationalism, which doesn't discriminate based on race, as long as other far-right principles are shared.

Within the former group, there is a history of White nationalist organizations building tactical alliances with nationalist movements within U.S.-based communities of color, to advance their goal of separatism. The most famous example is when Tom Metzger, founder of the neo-Nazi group White Aryan Resistance, led his supporters to join Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and his supporters in a 200-person meeting in Michigan in 1985.²¹ The meeting was allegedly held based on shared notions that Black and White people should have separate nations and governments within the U.S. They also shared the antisemitic position that Jewish people had taken control of the government.²²

Multiracial far-right organizing that *doesn't* advocate separation of races is less common in the Far Right, however. The 1990s militia movement, which is the precursor to the modern Patriot movement (and with which Patriot Prayer is closely associated), may offer the best example.

Matthew Lyons, author of the recent book *Insurgent Supremacists: The U.S. Far Right's Challenge to State and Empire*, describes tensions surrounding race within the 1990s

Challenge to State and Empire, describes tensions surrounding race within the 1990s militia movement. The movement drew inspiration from White supremacist and antisemitic organizations like the Posse Comitatus, which rejected the federal government's legitimacy and advocated against "the New World Order."²³ Considered a right-wing anti-government phenomena, the militias shared membership with the revived gun rights movement, Mormon ultra-conservatives, Christian Reconstructionists, and elements of the anti-environmentalist Wise Use movement. But the militias' anti-government, pro-Second Amendment emphasis also attracted some sympathizers from groups more commonly associated with the Left, including some communities of color that have immigrant populations, who saw government encroachment on individual rights as a threat. According to Lyons, some militia groups explicitly embraced and "promoted blatant racism" and others "directly confronted or harassed White nationalist organizations such as the KKK."²⁴

In 1994, James J. Johnson, a Black utility worker from Columbus, Ohio, cofounded a Patriot Movement group called E Pluribus Unum and became a leader and spokesperson for the Ohio Unorganized Militia.²⁵ Johnson actively attempted to recruit other people from Black communities, calling the militia movement "the Civil Rights Movement of the '90s."²⁶

Despite blatant White supremacist and antisemitic trends within the militia movement, Johnson embraced its aspirational American patriotism and saw a place for Black Americans within the burgeoning anti-government movement.

"The KKK and the Aryan Nation[s] neither invite or desire the presence of non-whites at their meetings," Johnson wrote.²⁷ "The militia does... The militia does not hyphenate its membership. We are all Americans first."²⁸

While Johnson saw government agencies as the primary enforcer of racism, he embraced a movement that not only had its roots in White supremacist and antisemitic ideology, but also held anti-globalization and anti-Communist beliefs, which led militia chapters to plot violence against the Latinx community.

According to an April 2009 report on right-wing extremism prepared for the Department of Homeland Security, the 1990s militia and other Far Right groups were concerned with immigration's effect on people competing for jobs.²⁹ Believing that illegal immigrants were taking away American jobs through their willingness to work at

significantly lower wages, one Wyoming militia member was arrested in February 2007 for plotting to kill immigrants crossing into the United States at the Mexican border. Later that year, six militia members were arrested for various weapons and explosives violations, with the specific purpose of violently attacking Latinx immigrants.³⁰

Fighting Communism against Central America and the Philippines became a galvanizing force for 1990s militia and Second Amendment advocacy. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, they saw gun control laws as signs of an impending tyrannical and Communist government.³¹

These groups' embrace of violence, anti-immigrant and anti-Communist advocacy, and multiracial membership are all mirrored in their current counterparts: today's Patriot Prayer and Proud Boys groups. This was particularly evident at a June 30, 2018, rally in Portland when a Proud Boys organizer said, "[For] all the illegals trying to jump over our border, we should be smashing their heads into the concrete—handling business, separating them from their kids."³²

(At the Aug 4 rally, Proud Boys member "Tiny" Toese, as well as other members of the group, wore shirts reading, "Pinochet did nothing wrong." When asked by reporter Christopher Mathais about Pinochet killing, torturing and detaining an estimated 40,000 of his countrymen, Toese responded, "Aren't they all communists?"³³ The reference was to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, notorious for murdering thousands of Leftists after rising to power in a U.S.-backed military coup, including some executed by being thrown out of helicopters—an historical atrocity that has since become a right-wing meme.³⁴)

But while the 1990s militia provides some context for what we are seeing today, the specific attributes of the contemporary Multiracial Far Right are unique and require further probing and exploration.

“Transcending” Race

Why people of color in the U.S. are joining Far Right organizations has become a topic of inquiry across academic, journalist and activist spaces. Some of the inquiry follows the question: If race is not the glue that binds these Far Right groups together, what is?

According to Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph Lowndes, authors of *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity*,³⁵ the ascent of select elites of color and multiculturalism within the Right reflects a shift.

“Racially subordinated groups have been made even more vulnerable in this period of economic crisis, evident in disparities of wealth, income, debt, incarceration rates, health outcomes, etc.,” Lowndes explained in an email to PRA.³⁶ “Multiculturalism on the right becomes represented as the ethical embodiment of an exceptional American national identity... These figures are meant to testify to the enduring qualities and virtues of the nation, the exemplars of individualistic striving and persistence in the face of hostility and institutional failure.”³⁷

Multiculturalism on the right becomes represented as the ethical embodiment of an exceptional American national identity

Lowndes highlighted the irony of Gibson calling himself a Civil Rights activist, and featuring Civil Rights imagery on his website, while aligning in the streets with White supremacists and violently defending a nationalist, racist, xenophobic and misogynist U.S. president.

According to journalist Arun Gupta people of color are often drawn into the movement for its patriarchal elements, and to find companionship and affinity. He also suggests that the Left tends to over-homogenize the views of people of color, assuming they all share progressive values.

“There is a complex reality of communities of color [joining Far Right organizations],” Gupta told PRA.³⁸ “The Left wants to reduce [all communities of color] to progressivism, which is just not true... These are more suburban middle-class and upper-middle-class [guys],” Gupta said. “Some are in the tech industry. They work with computers for a living. It gives them a feeling that they are engaged in a heroic struggle. That sweeps in men of color along with it.”³⁹

When Gupta spent time with members of Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys in Vancouver, Washington, prior to their August 2018 demonstration, he asked their Caribbean and Latinx members what attracted them to the movement. Enrique Tarrío, the Proud Boys' Afro-Cuban chairman, argued that institutional racism no longer exists in the U.S. Elysa Sanchez, who is Black and Puerto Rican, and attends rallies with the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer, told Gupta, "If black people are committing more murders, more robberies, more thefts, more violent crime, that's why you would see more black men having encounters with the police."⁴⁰

Gupta added, "If you are anti-Communist and you do have reactionary attitudes about gender, then the combination tends to make you more in sync with Alt Right views."⁴¹ For example, some U.S. communities that were part of Cold War refugee resettlements hold lingering anti-Communist views⁴² that make some right-wing perspectives more attractive.

Far-right positions on gender roles also provide common ground for groups like Patriot Prayer, Proud Boys, and 211 Bootboys. Alex DiBranco, a Yale doctoral candidate on social movements and the U.S. Right, makes the case that the contemporary Far Right is as much about misogyny as it is about race.⁴³ Being a man (as well as a "Western Chauvinist") is a prerequisite to joining the Proud Boys, for example.⁴⁴ And as Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes elaborated in a 2018 video, "We are going to continue being proud of ourselves. We are going to continue getting married, living in the suburbs, having kids and loving America."⁴⁵

One of the Proud Boys' organizational tenets is to "venerat[e] the housewife."⁴⁶ When asked what that means, McInnes says that women are capable of many things, but there are just some things women can't do, like write. Consequently, there is a Proud Boys' Girls organization, for women who are supportive of Proud Boys politics.⁴⁷

Last fall, Patriot Prayer members attended a #HimToo rally in Portland which displayed the misogyny common within the multiracial Far Right. In the wake of the Kavanaugh hearings, the rally addressed what organizers claimed was a rash of "false rape allegations."⁴⁸ Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer also recently turned up in support of the annual pro-Life rally in Portland.⁴⁹

In many ways, what seems to bind this new sector of the Far Right together is a

secularized Christian Right traditionalism. With Patriot Prayer and Proud Boys combining support for restrictive gender roles with a fantasy of a new male supremacy and embrace of Western culture, they invoke a new version of the traditional Judeo-Christian values that defined the Christian Right over the past four decades.⁵⁰

Fault Lines

The factors outlined above are only a few hypotheses regarding the rise of a multiracial Far Right. But within the ranks of the contemporary movement, multiracial membership has sparked intense debate and controversy. Some explicitly White nationalist Far Right leaders have condemned the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer over their inclusion of people of color. Others support a multiracial coalition in pursuit of creating a broader Far Right alliance.

In an article on the explicitly antisemitic and White nationalist website the Daily Stormer, Adrian Sol writes, “Jews and shitlibs have gotten so insufferable these days that even brown people are joining the ‘Neo-Nazi White supremacist’ movement in droves.”⁵¹ (The article was a direct response to Gupta’s *Daily Beast* article, “Why Young Men of Color Are Joining White-Supremacist Groups.”⁵²)

Others, such as American Guard founder Brien James, advocate in favor of building coalitions across Far Right organizing—the same goal that inspired the Unite the Right rally. James criticizes White nationalist groups, which he sees as dividing the “civic nationalist” movement by excluding people of color from their ranks.

“It’s just as foolish for the civic nationalists to try to appease or convince the Left as it is for White nationalists to turn away good patriotic citizens who are willing to bleed in the streets beside them due to the color of their skin or any other reason,” he said in a YouTube video.⁵³ “The biggest problem for the White nationalists is trying to bring a racially exclusive message to events organized by people who have other goals in mind.”⁵⁴

To some on the Far Right, building a broader coalition that includes people of color is self-evidently part of their project to redefine nationalism. However, tensions around race, and who should be included in their vision of a new society, continue to be fault lines within their movements. But above all, what the multiracial Far Right demonstrates is how much their movement can and will continue to change form, at times coalescing within communities more often associated with the Left and along

times coalescing within communities more often associated with the Left, and along other axes than race.

Endnotes

[i] PRA defines Far Right as a range of tendencies on the political Right that hold small government values, embrace explicit ideologies of supremacy, and seek a different government structure in line with their values.

[ii] Not to be confused with the prison gang 211 Crew.

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