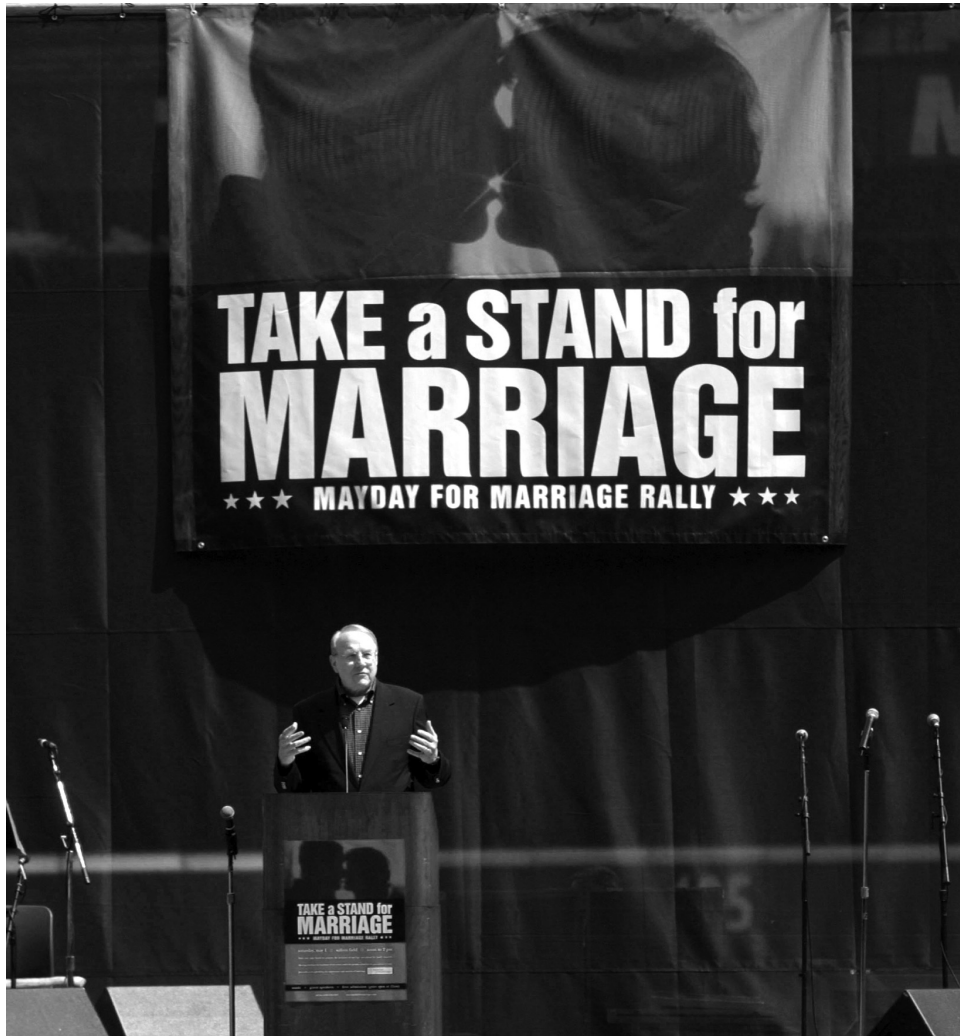


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Ron Wirtzer/Getty Images

Dr. James Dobson, founder of the Christian Right group Focus on the Family, with the slogan of the moment.

The North American Union

Right-wing Populist Conspiracism Rebounds

By Chip Berlet

The same right-wing populist fears of a collectivist one-world government and new world order that fueled Cold War anticommunism, mobilized opposition to the Civil Rights Movement, and spawned the armed citizens militia movement in the 1990s, have resurfaced as an elaborate conspiracy theory about the alleged impending creation of a North American Union that would merge the United States, Canada, and Mexico.¹

No such merger is seriously being contemplated by any of the three governments. Yet a conspiracy theory about the North American Union (NAU) simmered in right-wing "Patriot Movement" alternative media for several years before bubbling up to reach larger audiences in the

North American Union continues on page 11

Pushed to the Altar

The Right-Wing Roots of Marriage Promotion

By Jean V. Hardisty

After the 2000 presidential campaign, I felt a shock of recognition when I read that the George W. Bush Administration planned to use its "faith-based" funding to support organizations to encourage women,

especially welfare recipients, to marry. The rationale was that marriage would cure their poverty. Wade Horn, appointed by Bush to be in charge of welfare programs at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), had been the titular head of the

Pushed to the Altar continues on page 21

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— COMMENTARY —

Judicial Watch Glories in Victories over Undocumented Workers

By Eleanor J. Bader

To enter the world of Tom Fitton, President of the conservative, D.C.-based group, Judicial Watch, you're going to need to forget the stories you've heard about hard-working immigrants being torn from their U.S.-born children and deported to their countries of origin. You'll need to forget tales of workplace raids and anecdotes about people deported for driving five miles above the speed limit. You'll also need to forget about the 185,431 people who were deported in 2006.

That's because, in Fitton's worldview, a vast network of "sanctuary cities" is coddling illegals and refusing to allow local law enforcers to work with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). As Fitton sees it, the roster of recalcitrants includes Anchorage, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Portland, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

Speaking at the National Press Club three weeks before the Iowa Presidential caucus, Fitton—along with allies Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigrant Studies and a contributor to *National Review* online, and John Fonte, director of the ominously named Center for American Common Culture and a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute—recounted a host of heinous crimes to buttress their assertion that if we want a safer United States, the undocumented must be removed. Their flawed rationale is meant to incite distrust and resentment among the native born.

Like a wily adolescent, 14-year-old Judicial Watch is trying on identities. Its website describes it as a "nonpartisan educational foundation that promotes transparency, accountability and integrity in government, politics and the law." At the same time, the group's tentacles extend into traditional right-wing territory—opposition to abortion

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The New Secular Fundamentalist Conspiracy!

By Frederick Clarkson

One of the most remarkable, and least remarked upon, features of the contemporary discussion of faith in public life is that a defining feature of the religious right worldview has filtered deeply into mainstream and even progressive thought. This defining feature is the idea that somehow God, and/or Christianity, and/or “people of faith” are being driven from “the public square.” It is a powerfully animating idea for many Americans; yet it is rarely factually supported and even more rarely challenged.

Interestingly, much of this distortion hinges on a single word. The word is “secular” and such variants as “secular humanists,” “secular fundamentalists,” and just plain “secularists.” While the word has simple and benign definitions, the word is also the touchstone of a powerful and usually subterranean set of meanings that often makes it a term of derision and demonization.

Tracing the word “secular” exposes how an important and dynamic dimension of religious right ideology has drifted to the top of American political discourse as well as elements of the liberal/left. This has, as we shall see, consequences for the mainstream discussion of separation of church and state, while also fomenting unnecessary divisions among progressives, and even raising the specter of old fashioned red baiting with its echoes of the “Godless

Frederick Clarkson is a member of the editorial board of The Public Eye and cofounder of the group blog site Talk2Action.org – from which parts of this essay are adapted. He is the editor of Dispatches from the Religious Left: The Future of Faith and Politics in America – forthcoming from IG Publishing in 2008.



Reverend Jim Wallis with the three major Democratic Party contenders at a Sojourners magazine forum on faith, values, and poverty at George Washington University in June 2007.

Paul J. Richards/AFP/Getty Images

Communist”¹ smear leveled at generations of American progressives.

Secular Baiting Goes Mainstream

Former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney staged a speech at the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library, in Midland, Texas early in the GOP presidential primary season in 2007. It was considered a speech of great moment for Romney, particularly given the personal introduction by former president Bush. It was at least a trial balloon on the party’s approach to religious freedom and separation of church and state. Indeed, Romney sought at once to echo John F. Kennedy’s famous 1960 campaign speech in which the Democrat declared that the Catholic Church did not speak for him and he would not speak for Rome; that his religious views were private; he believed in the absolute separation of church and state; he would be president of all of the people; and would swear to uphold

the Constitution of the United States. In so doing, Kennedy at once dissolved some people’s concerns about whether he harbored any divided loyalties to the Vatican — and set a standard for the relationship between organized religion and candidates for office for a generation.

Romney’s task was a little different. He wanted to dissolve concerns about his Mormon faith and simultaneously appeal to conservative Christian evangelicals, many of whom were explicitly anti-Mormon. He cast himself within the broad American tradition of religious liberty and separation of church and state — and then the other shoe dropped. “In recent years,” he declared,

the notion of the separation of church and state has been taken by some well beyond its original meaning. They seek to remove from the public domain any acknowledgment of God. Religion is seen as merely a private affair with no place in public life.

It is as if they are intent on establishing a new religion in America — the religion of secularism. They are wrong. The founders proscribed the establishment of a state religion, but they did not countenance the elimination of religion from the public square.²

In making this charge, Romney tapped a deep vein of religious right ideology; attributing malevolent intentions and considerable power to “some” people; an unnamed “they” — who are somehow seeking to foist a new religion of secularity on unsuspecting Americans — and subvert the will of the founding fathers to boot. He didn't say who, and he didn't say how, or offer even a hint of a fact in support of his argument. He didn't have to. He was offering the first few notes of a tune so well known to his intended audience that they could complete it themselves. The tune carries the story of Christian nationalism that has served as an animating vision of the Christian Right for decades. It was heard by those with ears to hear it. And the key word to unlocking the inner tune was the word “secular.”

Chip Berlet, Senior Analyst at Political Research Associates, writes that for decades, the religious right has promoted a conspiracy theory that Christianity is under attack by “secular humanists.”

The idea that a coordinated campaign by “secular humanists” was aimed at displacing Christianity as the moral bedrock of America actually traces back to a group of Catholic ideologues in the 1960s. It was Protestant evangelicals, especially fundamentalists, who brought this concept into the public political arena and developed a plan to mobilize grassroots activists as foot soldiers in what became known as the Culture Wars of the 1980s....

The idea of a conscious and coordinated conspiracy of secular humanists has been propounded in various ways by a variety of national conservative organizations and individuals.³

For example, longtime televangelist and religious right leader, the late D. James Kennedy, offers a typical religious right use of the term: “God forbid that we who were born into the blessings of a Christian America should let our patrimony slip like sand through our fingers and leave to our children the bleached bones of a godless secular society. But whatever the outcome, one thing is certain: God has called us to engage the enemy in this culture war.”⁴

On *Fox News*, Bill O'Reilly routinely uses the term “secular progressive” in a way that slyly implies that progressives are inherently non- or even anti-religious.

Perhaps the most infamous example is Reverend Jerry Falwell's explanation to Pat Robertson of the 9/11 attacks on Robertson's 700 Club cable TV show: “I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way — all of them who have tried to secularize America — I point the finger in their face and say ‘you helped this happen.’”⁵

By framing these claims as a conspiracy to provoke a “Culture War,” Berlet concluded, “conservative Christians transform political disagreements into a battle between the Godly and the Godless, between good and evil, and ultimately between those that side with God and those that wittingly or unwittingly side with Satan.”

This framing is powerful, highly adaptable, and profoundly resonant. And because

that is so, we see the frame employed by rightwing propagandists on specific issues and against groups or individuals all the time. For example, nationally syndicated columnist Cal Thomas, a former spokesperson for Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, drew on the power of the frame in a recent effort to discredit concern about global warming, snidely referring to “the secular fundamentalists who believe in Al Gore as a prophet and global warming as a religious doctrine...”⁶ On *Fox News*, Bill O'Reilly routinely uses the term “secular progressive” in a way that slyly implies that progressives are inherently non- or even anti-religious. But sometimes, the fullness of his meaning surfaces. During a tirade about the alleged “war on Christmas,” he declared: “See, I think it's all part of the secular progressive agenda—to get Christianity and spirituality and Judaism out of the public square. Because if you look at what happened in Western Europe and Canada, if you can get religion out, then you can pass secular progressive programs like legalization of narcotics, euthanasia, abortion at will, gay marriage, because the objection to those things is religious-based, usually.”⁷

A New Rosetta Stone

One of the political and intellectual tasks of our time is learning to have an open ear to the way the meanings of secular and its variants shift to accomplish ideological ends. The word offers a Rosetta Stone for interpreting the worldviews of several overlapping factions in contemporary political and religious debate. It is also the key to effectively challenging this central framing of the religious Right's worldview in public life—and particularly for deprogramming progressives who have unwittingly internalized the frame.

The code phrases are all familiar. In addition to “secular humanist,” the main terms, often interchangeably, are secularist, secular fundamentalist, secular progressive, secular militant, and secular left.

But let's begin with some basic definitions first. There are two main usages of the word “secular.” One has to do with the rela-

tionship between government and public life. A secular government or a secular policy of government is neutral in relationship to religion; not just in the sense of not preferring one religion over another, but also in relation to non-religious persons and groups. This use of the term is epitomized in a 1971 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Lemon vs. Kurtzman*—a landmark decision in the history of church-state law. At issue was state funding of parochial schools. The court recognized that there is a perennial gray area in these matters, and that the gray area necessarily changes as society itself evolves. So the court identified three guiding principles—called “The Lemon Test”—for sorting out these matters from a constitutional perspective.

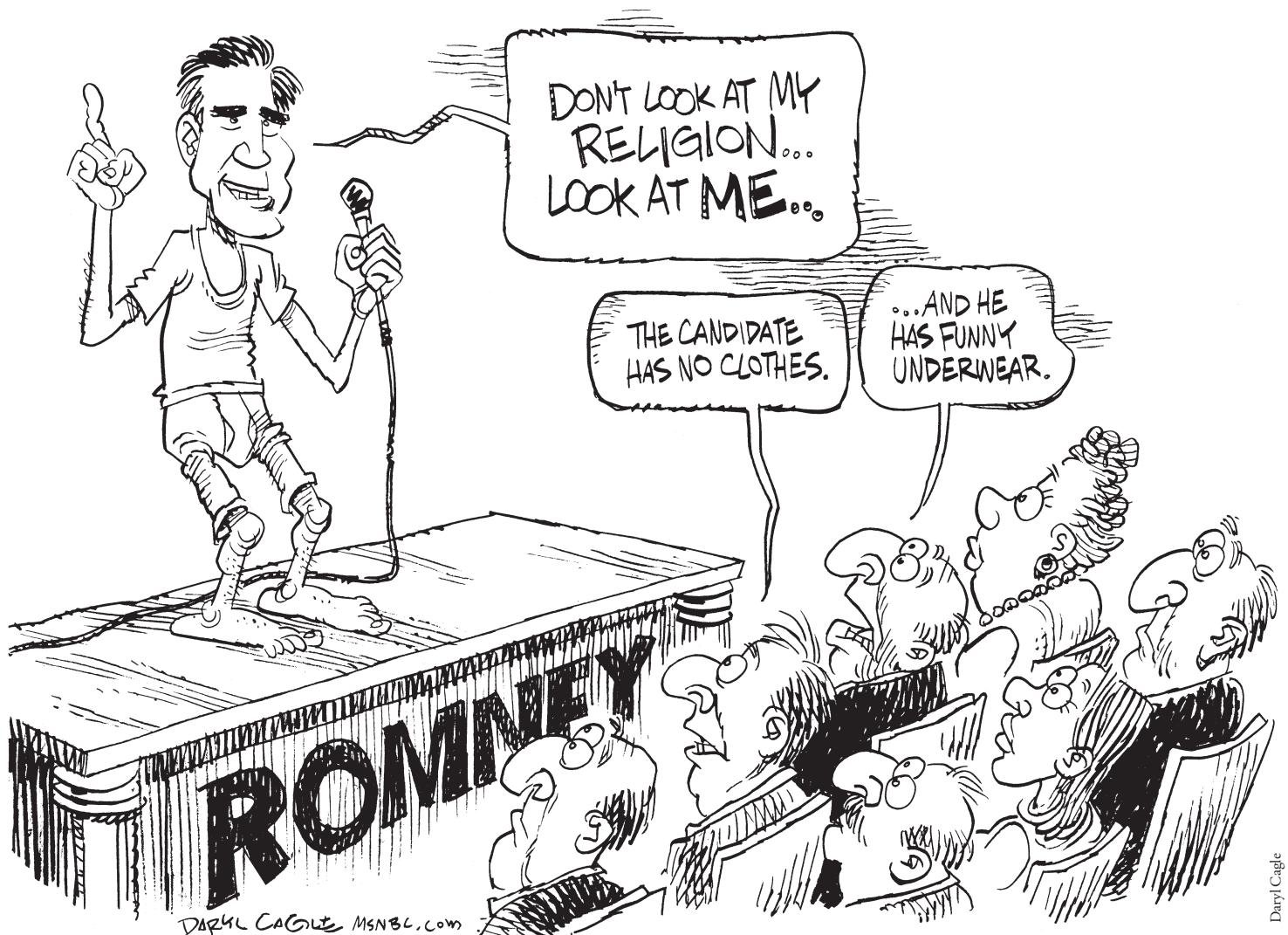
Every analysis in this area must begin with consideration of the cumulative criteria developed by the Court over many years. Three such tests may be gleaned from our cases. First, the statute must have a secular legislative purpose; second, its principal or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion, finally, the statute must not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion.⁸

Neutrality does not mean that government or its officials must become non-religious or anti-religious. Rather, neutrality affirms the rights of individuals to believe as they will and that government shall serve as the uncompromised guarantor of

those rights; and recognizes that within any government agency or program, there will be people who hold a range of religious and non-religious beliefs and that these are to be respected.

The second definition makes “secular” synonymous with non-belief, or more particularly, non-theism. A good example of this contemporary usage comes from the Secular Coalition for America, a Washington D.C.-based “national lobby for atheists, humanists, freethinkers and other nontheistic Americans.”

The Secular Coalition’s mission statement further explains: “While the coalition was created expressly by and for nontheistic Americans, we also enthusiastically welcome the participation of religious



individuals who share our view that freedom of conscience must extend to people of all faiths and of none.”

And then, the group employs the other main usage of secular: “...our full-time lobbyist and support staff engage public policy makers and the media to increase the visibility and respectability of nontheistic viewpoints and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all.”

When the Religious Right uses the term, it means something else altogether. The Religious Right does not buy the notion that government can be neutral with regard to religion. Indeed, secularism is the godless enemy, paving the way for Satan or Satanic agents; thwarting the advance of religion in general, or the kingdom of God in particular.

That is why it is shocking when we hear the religious right-like usages employed by such noted, ostensibly progressive authors as Reverend Jim Wallis, the leader of Sojourners/Call to Renewal; and Rabbi Michael Lerner, leader of the Network of Spiritual Progressives. Both of these men have published best selling and widely influential books that demonize secularism and use the term and its variations to smear the Left. These are, respectively, *God's Politics: Why the Religious Right is Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (2004); and *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right* (2006). The way they use the term “secular” is indistinguishable from the way that religious right leaders use the term.

Assailing The “Zombie” Left

To listen to or read Wallis and to a lesser extent Lerner, one would think that legions of the secular Left are rampaging across the land; that the secularity police are billy-clubbing every expression of religious faith out of public life; ruthlessly blocking “people of faith” from participation in constitutional democracy; and requiring politicians and ordinary citizens to hide their religiosity. But in their respective books (and as far as I can tell, their other published works and statements), neither

has ever named anyone who has been driven from the public square, let alone any of the drivers.

“We contend today,” Wallis writes early in *God's Politics*, “with both religious and secular fundamentalists, neither of whom must have their way. One group would impose the doctrines of a political theocracy on their fellow citizens, while the other would deprive the public square of needed moral and spiritual values often shaped by faith.”

It is important to note the book opens with this false equivalence between religious fundamentalists and “secular fundamen-

The Religious Right does not buy the notion that government can be neutral with regard to religion.

talists” as if they were problems of the same kind. However, nowhere in the book does Wallis tell us anything about these secular fundamentalists whose “way” must be thwarted or indeed, what that “way” even is. This is not unusual in the world according to Wallis: “In this election,” he wrote in 2006, “both the Religious Right and the secular Left were defeated, and the voice of the moral center was heard.”⁹ Nowhere in this article did he explain who this secular Left might be, how it was defeated, or why anyone should care.

Sixty-nine secular-baiting pages into *God's Politics*, he finally gets around to naming a few names. It turns out that the bad guys are all civil liberties organizations, with Wallis using a tone that echoes leaders of the Religious Right: “Today, there are new fundamentalists in the land. These are the ‘secular fundamentalists,’ many of whom attack all political figures who dare

to speak from their religious convictions. From the Anti-Defamation League [ADL], to Americans United for Separation of Church and State, to the ACLU and some of the political Left’s most religion fearing publications, a cry of alarm has gone up in response to anyone who has the audacity to be religious in public. These secular skeptics often display amazing lapse of historical memory when they suggest that religious language in politics is contrary to the ‘American Ideal.’”¹⁰

Wallis does not offer a single example of anything these civil liberties groups have ever done to justify these charges. He implies that these groups are militant anti-religionists, when clearly they are not. Indeed, the entirety of his argument is his use of the term secular as a pejorative, adding “fundamentalist” for some extra kick.

All of these organizations are at the forefront of efforts to protect religious freedom in America. Indeed, the ADL represents the civil liberties interests of Jews; and the leaders of Americans United for Separation of Church and State have always been predominantly religious. The current executive director, Barry Lynn is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and formerly headed the Washington office of the ACLU. In fact, all of the named groups are secular in the *Lemon vs. Kurtzman* sense of the term, in both the composition of their membership and in terms of the public policy agenda they pursue, as well as their general understanding of the meaning of the Constitution.

Wallis tried, unsuccessfully, to clear the air in 2007 in a blog post on *Beliefnet*. But he made the situation worse by simply repeating himself, passing off hearsay as facts, and refusing to substantiate his claims.

However, we... know that there are powerful voices on the Left that have no tolerance for faith. As I said, I won't name names, but here are just a very few specifics: I've been attacked publicly by leaders of major progressive organizations who've said that the Left has no need for religion. They've said that religion, “whether

conservative or progressive” should have no place in politics. “It’s still religion,” they say.¹¹

While there are certainly individuals who are hostile to religion, he offered no evidence that they are as big a problem as he infers. Nor does he in any way justify his implied conflation of such people with the civil liberties groups he names in his book.

In the wake of the 2004 elections, the Brookings Institution hosted a discussion of *God’s Politics* featuring Wallis and religious right leader Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention. According to a report in the *Baptist Press News*,¹² Land was celebrating:

After Wallis, who is identified with the evangelical Christian left, spoke about the subject of his book to a standing-room-only crowd, Land explained the significance of the moment from his perspective.

“Jim’s book, this gathering, the discussion that it symbolizes across the country means that the so-called religious right has won its fight with secular fundamentalism,” Land said....

Land said a “debate about which values and how those values are to be applied between myself, and people like me, and Jim Wallis is going to be a much more productive debate for the country than a debate between myself, and people like myself, and those secularists of the ACLU stripe and Americans United [for Separation of Church and State] stripe and People for the American Way stripe who want to disqualify people of religious conviction from even suiting up and coming out onto the field.”

Meanwhile, Michael Lerner also takes a few pages from the religious right playbook and puts them in a chapter of his book: *“The Religion of Secularism and the Fear of the Spirit.”* He not only fails to define what he means by secular and its variants, he names not a single person, let alone any adherents of, or institutions associated

with, what he calls the “Religion of Secularism.”

Lerner goes out of his way to make clear that he supports the rights of nonbelievers. But he sends profoundly mixed messages. For example, while he acknowledges and criticizes the Religious Right for secular baiting the Left—he also takes a great deal of space to do it himself.

Lerner goes so far as to blame the Left (without explanation) for “bad theology” on the religious Right! He claims that “[t]his bad theology has been able to flourish in part because the political Left has given little attention to its own religious Left, presenting itself instead primarily as a secular force.”¹³ At the same time, Lerner claims that (unnamed) secularists are somehow complicit in fostering a “spiritual crisis” in the nation.

He also implies that no one engaged in the political Left happens to be religious—except for those hiding in the closet. “When I critique the Left in this book,” he writes, “I’m referring to the most militant secularists; I am well aware that these criticisms don’t apply to many spiritual people who are engaged in the Left but feel they need to keep a low profile.”

The many diverse organizations of the liberal/left—Democracy for America, the National Organization for Women, the AFL-CIO as well as the Green and Demo-

cratic Parties—are, and have always been populated with people who are religious as well as people who are not. Lerner offers no evidence of people being pressured or silenced regarding their religious identity or views, let alone shows any kind of pattern or trend.

Lerner then asserts that “what underlies the secular Left’s deep skepticism about religion is their strong faith in another kind of belief system”—yet another religion that unnamed secularists are said to ascribe to—claiming that it derives from “scientism,” which he accurately describes as a “reliance on the value of empirical observation to determine truth and guide observations.”¹⁴ Once again, he names not a single person or organization who subscribes to this idea, or a single relevant action resulting from such beliefs. Nevertheless, he declares “It has become the religion of the secular consciousness.”¹⁵

However apocryphal Lerner’s claims may be, they form the backdrop to one of the four guiding principles of his National Network of Spiritual Progressives: “Challenge the misuse of God & religion by the Religious Right and religio-phobia on the Left.” Suffice to say, the Network’s web site fails to offer a single example of “religio-phobia on the Left;” explain its significance; or provide any examples of how it has been “challenged.”

Thomas Jefferson on Church and State

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

— excerpt from January 1802 letter to Danbury Baptist Association

Such claims populate the writings of Wallis and Lerner like legions of the undead. We can illustrate how their argument relies almost entirely on the repetition of the word “secular” by replacing it with the word “zombie:”

Lerner: “What underlies the Zombie Left’s deep skepticism about religion is their strong faith in another kind of belief system”; “[Scientism] has become the religion of the Zombie consciousness”; “The Religion of Zombieism: And the Fear of the Spirit.”

Wallis: “Zombie fundamentalists tell us that religion should be restricted to one’s church or family”; “Religion is not inherently undemocratic, as the Zombie fundamentalists want to make it out to be.”¹⁶

The Religion of Secular Humanism

It is worth underscoring that Lerner invokes the same phrase “the religion of secularism” as Romney used in his speech and offers no more evidence for it, despite the space afforded by an entire book. In the 1970s and 80s, the Religious Right was quite exercised about what they called “the religion of secular humanism.” Chip Berlet detailed in *The Public Eye* how “shift in focus from anti-communism to the claim that secular humanism now plays the key subversive role in undermining America” is rooted in the works of leading religious right figures such as John Stormer and Francis A. Schaeffer, and David A. Noebel of Summit Ministries, whose 1991 *Understanding the Times* was used in 850 Christian schools in the United States. The book, Berlet writes, “argues that secular humanism has replaced communism as the major anti-Christian philosophy.”¹⁷

Indeed. The argument that secular humanism, the general idea that humankind can self govern without a god, was cast as the bogeyman. Today’s shorthand is secular or secularism, but the basic worldview remains the same. Litigation was then, as it is now, commonplace. One such landmark case was the 1986 Alabama Textbook Case, in which a legal arm of the Pat Robertson empire sued the Mobile,

Alabama school board. They claimed that school text books were promoting the supposed religion of secular humanism.

What happened is a classic example of how the allegation breaks down in the light of factual challenges. Robertson’s legal team hired University of Virginia sociologist James Davison Hunter to evaluate the disputed texts and to serve as an expert witness to testify that secular humanism was not only a religion, but that it was somehow advanced by the school books. Hunter testified, “the material is presented in such a way that it is consistent with the tenets of secular humanism.” He also said that his studies had “persuaded me that a

**Some Democratic
consultants advise clients
not to talk about separation
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secular humanism of a sort is a dominant ideology of public school textbooks, at least the ones reviewed.” Because some of the texts omitted certain historical references to religion in American history, Hunter argued that the “secularization of public life generally, and education specifically is epitomized by the omission of certain references to religion.”

“Is it a tenet of secular humanism,” Hunter was asked on cross examination, “that history be portrayed inaccurately?” Hunter had to not only acknowledge that it was not but that he had in fact found no passages in the elementary school social studies books he had reviewed that were “consistent with secular humanism,” rather that the books “advance a secularistic view of the world. Not a humanistic, but a secularistic.”

Federal District Court Judge Brevard Hand’s ruling that the Mobile school board had unconstitutionally established secular humanism as a religion nevertheless relied heavily on Hunter’s testimony. However, the appellate court promptly overturned Hand. “We do not believe,” the appellate court wrote in reversing the decision, “that an objective observer could conclude from the mere omission of certain historical facts regarding religion or the absence of a more thorough discussion of the role of its place in modern American society that the State of Alabama was conveying a message of approval of the religion of secular humanism.”¹⁸

When Democrats Adopt the Frame

What is remarkable today is that the views of Pat Robertson and an obscure judge in the 1980s are almost indistinguishable from some leading Democrats and Republicans who are not affiliated with the Religious Right. Senator Barack Obama, the Illinois Democrat speaking at a forum organized by Jim Wallis in 2006, declared that (unnamed) “secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering the public square.”¹⁹ In the wake of the ensuing outcry, Obama never again resorted to secular baiting, and later came to adopt an unambiguous public position on the importance of separation of church and state. Nevertheless, some Democratic Party campaign consultants actually advise their clients not to talk about separation of church and state because it raises “red flags with people of faith.”²⁰ This according to Mara Vanderslice of the Washington D.C.-based firm Common Good Strategies—whose clients have included candidates for U.S. Senator and governor as well as the Democratic National Committee. Just before the November 2006 elections, her partner Eric Sapp wrote:

In case anyone doesn’t know, [the phrase] “separation of church and state” is not in the Constitution. It shouldn’t be in our vocabulary as Democrats either. There are two

main reasons for this. First, the political answer: many moderate-to-conservative **Christians recoil at the term because it is often misused by secularists to attack any use of faith in the public sphere.** Second, the legal/policy answer: this phrase is a very imprecise and misleading shorthand for a beautifully crafted section of the First Amendment. Rather than “separation of church and state,” our Constitution has an “Establishment and Free Exercise Clause,” and that’s the language Democrats should use to describe the legal principles that define the interaction of church and state in this country.

Our Constitution guarantees everyone a right to freely exercise their religion and forbids the state from establishing a single religion. On the other hand, **the “separation” language used by many Democrats implies the complete exclusion of faith from the public square, thereby creating restrictions on the free exercise of religion.**”²¹ [emphasis added]

First, Sapp parrots a standard religious right talking point—the phrase is not in the Constitution.²² True. However, it has been used by the Supreme Court (drawing on Thomas Jefferson’s famous letter to the

Danbury Baptists), as a way of explaining the meaning of the establishment clause of the first amendment since the case of *Reynolds vs. The United States* in 1878 and it has been central to every major religious freedom case since. Justice Sandra Day O’Connor wrote in a Ten Commandments case in 2005: “Those who would renegotiate the boundaries between church and state must therefore answer a difficult question: why would we trade a system that has served us so well for one that has served others so poorly?”

Religious and nonreligious leaders long before had used the phrase and its variants to describe this foundational concept²³ but perhaps the most famous and influential use since Jefferson was by Senator John F. Kennedy in his landmark speech during his 1960 campaign for president. “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute – where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishoners for whom to vote...”²⁴ Those words would not have passed Kennedy’s lips if he were advised by Sapp’s firm.

Sapp also, like the others, draws sweeping conclusions without offering any evidence or any justification. Just because some unnamed people—secularists of course—allegedly misuse the phrase, no one should use it. Nor does he explain how talking about separation of church and

state in any way restricts anyone’s freedom of religion.

Conclusion

So much is revealed by how people use the term secular. Understanding how it is used by the Right helps us to better contend with the way that it is used as a wedge to divide the left against itself; especially between religious and nonreligious progressives. Mindless anti-secular sloganeering makes nonreligious progressives roll their eyes in astonishment at the vacuousness of the argument, the lack of intellectual integrity, and the sheer political ham-handedness of those who write and speak in such a fashion.

But most importantly, when left of center religious and political leaders engage in secular baiting, they are strengthening the religious right-framed argument against the best American ethos and the Constitutional doctrine of separation of church and state. ■

End Notes

¹ See Chip Berlet, “Dances with Devils: How Apocalyptic and Millennialist Themes Influence Right Wing Scapegoating and Conspiracism,” *The Public Eye*, Fall 1998.

² Mitt Romney, Transcript, National Public Radio, December 6, 2007. Romney repeated his main assertion on *Fox News’* Hannity & Colmes, December 13, 2007, explaining that he wanted “... to make sure that we don’t push God out of the public square, as some secularists would do.”

³ Chip Berlet, “How Apocalyptic and Millennialist Themes Influence Right Wing Scapegoating and Conspiracism,” *The Public Eye*, Fall 1998.

⁴ Rob Boston, “D. James Kennedy: Who Is He And What Does He Want?,” *Church & State*, April 1999.

⁵ Wikipedia profile of Jerry Falwell, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Falwell

⁶ Cal Thomas, “Secular fundamentalists,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, December, 24, 2007. Available at <http://www.calthomas.com/index.php?news=2135>.

⁷ “O’Reilly: ‘War’ on Christmas part of ‘secular progressive agenda’ that includes ‘legalization of narcotics, euthanasia, abortion at will, gay marriage,” *Media Matters for America*, November 21, 2005. http://mediamatters.org/items/200511210003?f=s_search

⁸ Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602 (1971): [463 U.S. 783, 797].

⁹ Jim Wallis: “A Defeat for the Religious Right and the Secular Left,” *Beliefnet*, November 9, 2006. <http://blog.beliefnet.com/blogs/godspolitics/2006/11/jim-wallis-defeat-for-religious-right.html>

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Secular Fundamentalist continues on page 30

THE CONSPIRACY'S KERNEL OF TRUTH

By Laura Carlsen

The North American Union conspiracy theory grew out of a kernel of truth, called the “Security and Prosperity Partnership” (SPP). But cultivated by xenophobic fears and political opportunism, the NAU outstripped its reality-based progenitor so fast that it has become hard to separate the wheat from the chaff. A little history helps.

After the North American Free Trade Agreement went into force in 1994, the three governments began to talk about expanding the scope of the agreement. Mexico, in particular, hoped to negotiate a solution to the border/immigration problem. However, the process was brought to a grinding halt by the attacks of Sept. 11th.

In a 2005 summit of then-Presidents George W. Bush, Vicente Fox, and Prime Minister Paul Martin in Waco, Texas plans for “deep integration” between the three countries finally progressed with the official launch of the SPP. In the post-September 11th political context, immigration was definitively off the table and U.S. security interests, along with corporate interests in obtaining even more favorable terms for regional trade and investment, dominated the agenda.

The SPP established working groups, rules, recommendations, and agreements without Congressional oversight or public participation in—or even knowledge of—its proceedings. It created a “North American Competitiveness Council” that reads like a “Who’s Who” of the largest transnationals based on the continent.

While the lack of transparency and the U.S. corporate and security-dominated agenda are cause for great concern, they are not evidence of a plot to move toward a North American Union. Even a perfunctory analysis of politics in the three NAFTA countries shows that a North American Union was, is, and always will be a non-starter. It began as an academic proposal and never got off the ground politically.

Among the most bizarre assumptions of NAU scare-mongers is the contention that the SPP will threaten U.S. sovereignty and erase borders. The idea of a regional union that effaces U.S. sovereignty is light-years away from George W. Bush’s foreign policy of unilateral action and disdain for international law and institutions. On the contrary, the precepts of the Bush administration’s foreign policy point to a return to the neoconservative belief that the world would be a better place if the U.S. government just ran everything.

Officially described as “... a White House-led initiative among the United States and the two nations it borders—Canada and Mexico—to increase security and to enhance prosperity among

the three countries through greater cooperation,” the SPP does pose a threat to national sovereignty, but to the sovereignty of NAFTA’s junior partners. Canadians have been the most active in opposing the SPP, not out of fear of a mythical NAU but because of real threats to their ability to protect consumers’ health, natural resources, and the environment. SPP rules would force open oil production in environmentally sensitive areas and channel water supplies to U.S. needs. Likewise, Mexican civic organizations have protested SPP pressures to privatize Mexican oil and impose U.S. security priorities on Mexican foreign policy.

As for moving toward a borderless North America, the years since the SPP began have witnessed a hardening of the U.S.-Mexico border never seen before in modern history. Fifteen thousand Border Patrol agents, 6,000 members of the National Guard and a border fence powerfully belie any suggestion that the U.S. government aims to eliminate borders.

The NAU myth obscures the very real globalization issues raised by NAFTA—job loss, labor insecurity, the surge in illegal immigration, and racial tensions caused by the portrayal of immigrants as invaders. This is convenient for both right-wing politicians and the government and business elites they attack because real solutions to these problems would include actions anathema to them all, including unionization, enforcement of labor rights, comprehensive immigration reform, and regulation of the international market. Instead, these options are shunted aside with the redefinition of the problem as a conspiracy of anti-American elites.

In this context, outrage over a nonexistent NAU should not be confused with growing criticism of the Security and Prosperity Partnership. The SPP has proceeded to change national regulations, and create closed business committees without the participation of labor, environmental, or citizen voices. SPP negotiations provide a vehicle for more of the corporate integration that has eliminated jobs, impoverished workers, and threatened the environment across borders.

It has also served to extend the dangerous Bush security doctrine to Canada and Mexico, despite its lack of popularity in those countries and among the US public. It’s latest outgrowth, the \$1.4 billion-dollar Merida Initiative or Plan Mexico, would provide money, U.S. training, and equipment to the Mexican military, police, and intelligence services. This militarized model of fighting real problems of drug-trafficking and human smuggling would lead to greater violence and heightened binational tensions.

It’s time to separate out false threats from real threats. A good place to start is to demand transparency in trilateral talks and informed public debate on regional integration.

Laura Carlsen is Director of Americas Policy Program in Mexico City.

NORTH AMERICAN UNION *continued from page 1*
mass media when callers to talk radio and cable television news programs began asking about the alleged plans for the North American Union, and what was dubbed the “NAFTA Superhighway” linking Mexico to Canada through the American heartland.²

Now millions of Americans have been exposed to the conspiracy theories on national television and tens of thousands of websites sport claims such as “Treason Exposed,” and “Who Really Controls the United States?”³ One online video posted on YouTube in July 2007 titled “North American Union & VCHIP Truth” has been viewed more than 1.7 million times (see sidebar).⁴ Opponents of the nonexistent plans have produced maps, a flag, and even a faux currency—the “Amero,” (similar to the Euro) which one entrepreneur has actually minted as coins available for sale.⁵ The issue is starting to be discussed seriously in progressive circles as well, even though it is a repackaged defective product of the political Right.

The NAU conspiracy theory has legs; it has already played a role in state, federal, and Presidential campaign politics and generated legislative proposals. Thirteen states have passed anti-NAU and related resolutions, and seven are considering them. In January 2008, Utah state Representative Stephen Sandstrom introduced a resolution calling for the withdrawal from the union (H. R. 1), and then promoted it in a speech at the annual convention of the Utah affiliate of Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum.⁶

Right-wing conspiracy theories have been used effectively by political organizers and electoral campaign operatives for decades. Recent examples that reached the level of Presidential politics include the barrage of conspiracy theories leveled at Pres-

ident Bill Clinton in the 1990s, and the 2004 Swift Boat Veterans for Truth campaign that helped sink the Presidential aspirations of Senator John Kerry. Veterans of both smear campaigns are actively promoting the North American Union conspiracy theory. In addition, anti-immigrant xenophobes and antisemitic conspiracists are using the issue to recruit new adherents. There is a split, however, between right-wing anti-globalist activists supporting the main Republican Party

The conspiracist concerns of the Patriot movements are deeply rooted in nightmares that periodically disturb the American Dream.

candidates, and those supporting marginal candidates such as Ron Paul or third parties such as the U.S. Constitution Party; the mainstream denounce the margins as conspiracy theorists, and the margins denounce the mainstream as clueless—or part of the conspiracy.

The claims about the North American Union, like all conspiracy theories, start with a grain of truth. There is a “Security and Prosperity Partnership” project involving common interest planning and streamlining of regulations among the three countries. (see sidebar by Laura Carlsen). There also are private groups seeking to upgrade existing highways linking Mexico with the United States and Canada. But the idea that these are secret preliminary steps to a planned North American Union is a concoction of right-wing conspiracy.

Distrust of the federal government, distaste for bureaucratic regulation, and sus-

picion that national sovereignty is eroding—all of these are popular themes throughout the United States.⁷ This is, after all, a country where the bootlegger who makes homemade “moonshine” liquor to avoid paying federal taxes is a folk hero. While the suspicious conspiracist concerns of the Patriot and armed Militia movements reflect hyperbolized versions of these core themes, it is useful to see them as deeply rooted in nightmares that periodically disturb the American Dream.

The Alleged Plot

The basic allegation of the North American Union (NAU) conspiracy theory is that “behind closed doors, the Bush administration has collaborated with the governments of Mexico and Canada to merge the three nations into one Socialist mega-state.”⁸ The quote is from an online video featuring long-time ultra-conservative leader Howard Phillips interviewing author Jerome R. Corsi on Phillips’ “Conservative Roundtable” program.

Phillips, Corsi, and Phyllis Schlafly are among the major right-wing figures promoting the conspiracy theories about the NAU.⁹ Others include former Presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan; right-wing organizations such as the John Birch Society and Accuracy in Media; right-wing media including World Net Daily, *Human Events*, and supporters of libertarian Republican Presidential aspirant Ron Paul.¹⁰ Antisemitic publications such as *The American Free Press* have also jumped on the North American Union conspiracy juggernaut.¹¹ Even a few self-described leftists peddle the theory.

Corsi featured the NAU in his book, *The Late Great U.S.A.: The Coming Merger with Mexico and Canada*, published on the fourth of July, 2007. Corsi’s book was in its third printing within a few weeks, and hit 28 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and the “No. 1 spot on Amazon’s ‘Non-fiction’ list.”¹² The publisher was WND Books, an imprint of WorldNetDaily.com, a nasty right-wing website featuring xenophobia larded with conspiracy theories. Corsi was a staff reporter and columnist for

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WND, and a contributor to *Human Events*, an ultra-conservative newspaper with a history of involvement in right-wing, anti-liberal, and anti-immigrant causes.¹³ He was exposed as a blogger on the right-wing site FreeRepublic.com with a history of racist and anti-Catholic posts, including “Who are the Frogs going to cry to when the rag-heads destroy the Eiffel Tower?”¹⁴ Corsi previously was best known as the author of *Unfit for Command*, part of the dubious attack on John Kerry coordinated as a political dirty tricks campaign by Swift Boat Veterans for Truth during the 2004 Presidential race. *Human Events* promoted the Corsi book.

In June 2006, Corsi explored a new front on the NAU conspiracy theory with his claims that the nefarious secretive globalists were:

...working behind the scenes to create the NAFTA Super Highway, despite the lack of comment on the plan by President Bush. The American public is largely asleep to this key piece of the coming ‘North American Union’ that government planners in the new trilateral region of United States, Canada and Mexico are about to drive into reality.¹⁵

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Patrick Buchanan picked up the story for his syndicated newspaper column. Buchanan quoted television newscaster Lou Dobbs, who, like Buchanan, is anti-immigrant. According to Buchanan:

“This is a “mind-boggling concept,” exploded Lou Dobbs. It must cause Americans to think our political and academic elites have “gone utterly mad.”

Dr. Robert Pastor, vice chair of the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force on North America, had just appeared before a panel of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations—to call for erasing all U.S. borders and a merger of the United States, Mexico and Canada in a North American union stretching from Prudhoe Bay to Guatemala.

Under the Pastor-CFR plan, the illegal alien invasion would be solved by eliminating America’s borders and legalizing the invasion. We would no longer defend the Rio Grande.¹⁶

Discussion of and opposition to the NAU became so widespread that in January 2007, a Republican Congressman from Virginia named Virgil Goode drafted a resolution (H.R. 40) that urged President Bush “not to go forward with the North American Union or the NAFTA Superhighway system.”¹⁷ The resolution gained over forty bipartisan cosponsors by February 2008.¹⁸ In the *Boston Globe*, Drake Bennett reported that:

As fears of the mythical NAU grow, they appear to be subtly shaping more mainstream debates about immigration and trade.... Similar resolutions have been introduced in several state legislatures — in Montana’s case, the resolution passed nearly unanimously. And back in July, the U.S. House of Representatives easily approved a measure that would cut off federal funds for an existing trade group set up by the three countries.¹⁹

Corsi used the Congressional anti-NAU

resolution as another news peg for an article on WorldNet Daily where he crowed “Congress debate begins on North America Union: Resolution calls for end of NAFTA superhighway, abandonment of integration with Canada, Mexico.” The kicker headline was: “Premeditated Merger.”²⁰ This became a slogan picked up by conspiracist groups including the John Birch Society.

By the fall of 2006, even a number of conservative commentators were growing tired of the hysteria, and began to attack the right-wing conspiracy theorists. Corsi then wrote columns in *Human Events* denouncing the denouncers.²¹ In September of 2007, however, even the new editor of *Human Events*, Jed Babbin, was himself denouncing Corsi as a “black helicopter Internet conspiracy theorist” at a meeting of Schlafly’s Eagle Council in St. Louis.

Scraps of Facts, Truckloads of Rumors

There is an actual “North America’s Supercorridor Coalition,” and it received so many complaints about its suspected role in the NAU and the alleged “NAFTA Superhighway” that at one point it junked its website’s home page and pointed browsers to a statement that read in part:

As of late, there have been many media references to a “new, proposed NAFTA Superhighway.” While NASCO and the cities, counties, states and provinces along our existing Interstate Highways 35/29/94 (the NASCO Corridor) have referred for years to I-35 and key branches as “the NAFTA Superhighway,” the reference solely acknowledged and recognized I-35’s major role in carrying a remarkable portion of international trade with Mexico, the United States and Canada. In actual fact, there are no plans to build “a new NAFTA Superhighway.” It already exists today as I-35 and branches.²²

In a story debunking the rumors, the *Nation* magazine noted that though “oppo-

sition to the nonexistent highway is the cause célèbre of many a paranoid, the myth upon which it rests was not fabricated out of whole cloth. Rather, it has been sewn together from scraps of fact.”²³

Dr. Robert A. Pastor, for example, is a real analyst. “Nobody is proposing a North American Union,” Pastor patiently told a reporter.²⁴ Pastor, a professor at American University, wrote “Towards a North American Community: Lessons from the Old World for the New,” a 2001 study that earned Pastor the reputation among Patriot conspiracy mongers as the “father” of the North American Union. “They also point to his cochairmanship of a Council on Foreign Relations task force that produced a report in 2005 on cooperation among the three countries.” Pastor blamed the hysteria over the NAU and “NAFTA Superhighway” on “the xenophobic or frightened right wing of America that is afraid of immigration and globalization.”²⁵

When the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* ran a debunking article titled “North American Union? Rumor sweeps the right” in May 2007, it resulted in more clamor for the “truth” from right-wing activists using their alternative media. The summer 2007 issue of the magazine *Intelligence Report* tracked the use of the conspiracy theory by anti-immigrant forces and several online news sources and blogs began following the story in detail, linking it to both anti-immigrant organizing and supporters of Presidential candidate Ron Paul.²⁶

The story went international when a question about the NAU was posed to President Bush of the United States, President Calderón of Mexico, and Prime Minister Harper of Canada, at an international press conference during their meeting on August 21, 2007.²⁷ All three leaders dismissed the conspiracy claims and joked about it.

The conspiracists were not amused. Phyllis Schlafly responded with a column titled “Bush Refuses to Deny the North American Agenda.”²⁸ This follows the typical conspiracist format in which no comment is further proof to the conspiracists of the truth of the allegation; and in which



Congressman Virgil Goode of Virginia greets some of the 30 people who attended a June 2007 rally sponsored by the Minuteman Project and received cheers when he encouraged the small crowd to “fight the North American Union.”

Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

the plotters are asked to disprove a negative premise—which is impossible.

In mid October 2007 the John Birch Society magazine *New American* published an entire special issue devoted to alerting the nation: “Merger in the Making: North American Union Edition.” Since then the Birchers have distributed close to 500,000 copies.²⁹

Not all the conspiracy theorists peddling the NAU and “NAFTA Superhighway” myths are on the political right. In mid-2007 the ostensibly left-wing Centre for Research on Globalization published an article, “Canadians Completely Unaware of Looming North American Union.” The Centre has a history of transposing right-wing conspiracy theories into articles for a leftist audience.³⁰ A June 2006 article by Corsi on the “NAFTA Super Highway” even won an award from the left-leaning watchdog group, Project Censored, which further eroded Project Censored’s reputation on the left, already tarnished by its repeated promotion of dubious right-wing conspiracy theories.³¹ Still, most critics appear to be on the political right and have ties to the Patriot movement.

The dynamic of conspiracism is the

same across the Patriot movement—the more that mainstream publications, politicians, and pundits dismiss or ridicule the North American Union conspiracy theory, the more Patriot proponents see this as evidence that the plan is underway, and how sneaky the conspirators really are. Michael Barkun has called this dynamic “stigmatized knowledge.”³²

Roots of Suspicion

Why did these rumors about the NUA spread so quickly through the U.S. Patriot movement and burst into mainstream public policy discussions? Partly because such rumors are rooted in the American tradition; implausible conspiracies have captivated large numbers of people before—repeatedly.³³

While fear of evil conspiracies can be found as far back as the Salem witch hunts in the 1600s, in the late 1700s, conspiracies tied to anti-immigrant fears of “alien” sedition swept the nation. The 1800s saw hysterias about the Illuminati, the Freemasons, and immigrant Catholics that historian Richard Hofstadter identified as apocalyptic. The scholar Justin Nordstrom argues that during this period:

...claims of Catholic subversion, immorality, and danger to the nation can thus be understood as illustrating an “imagined” community of rural Anglo-Saxon Protestants valiantly defending the nation from threats by an internal, foreign, and sinister force invading American cities.³⁴

These early periods established a dynamic of right-wing populism in the United States, whereby economic anxiety and a distrust of elites could be focused on “aliens,” “outsiders,” and “others” through pre-existing prejudices. The result has been a series of largely middle-class movements that disproportionately scapegoat and demonize immigrants, people of color, and Jews.

The Populist movements of the late 1800s brought many important reforms, but also developed elaborate conspiracy theories about the plutocrats and bankers manipulating money.³⁵ Claims of Jewish cabals emerged in the early 1900s, and were spread through the infamous hoax document the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Communism and the drive for international cooperation through the League of Nations and later the United Nations were tied to prophetic end times beliefs about agents of the Antichrist attempting to create one unified world government and one world religion.³⁶

The anti-immigrant Palmer Raids of 1919–1920 were justified by wildly exaggerated government-issued conspiracy theories about subversive communists and anarchists on the brink of toppling U.S. democracy with bombs and guns.³⁷

Most famously, during the 1950s McCarthy era, media reports, books, pamphlets, and even movies warned of the Red Menace as a vast subversive conspiracy controlled from Moscow.³⁸

These conspiracy theories were repackaged numerous times, with right-wing groups such as the John Birch Society and Liberty Lobby peddling them in the 1960s and the 1970s.³⁹ (a detailed timeline of these conspiracy theories is online, see note at end).⁴⁰

Three Conspiracy Narratives

Marcela Sanchez wrote an online column in July 2007 for the *Washington Post* titled: “Stop, Stop! A North American Union! As Some Stoke Fears of ‘Dangerous’ Partnership, Reality Takes a Detour.”⁴¹ The column ridiculed the conspiracy theories. Larry Greenley of the John Birch Society denounced the Sanchez article in a response claiming that “Even President Bush Called the Security and Prosperity Partnership a ‘Union’ Back in 2005.”⁴² For the Birchers, the editors at the *Washington Post* are among the secret elites behind the sinister plot in the first place.

Conspiracy theories about the impending creation of a North American Union are now seeping into discussions within progressive political circles.

The Birch Society version of the conspiracy is one of three main right-wing narratives of skullduggery which center around Generic Secret Elites, Apocalyptic Christians and Antisemites. Launched in 1959, the Society repackaged as conspiracy the conservative cry of 1950s anticommunists, moral traditionalists, and economic libertarians that the federal government was pushing collectivism.⁴³ William F. Buckley led a campaign by conservatives to shun the Birch Society for its conspiracy views and the public perception (of mixed validity) that the group was a safe harbor for white supremacists and antisemites.⁴⁴ From the 1960s through the 1980s, most organized conspiracism was limited to marginal groups on the political right with small constituencies networked through print publications and conferences. During this

period the three main tendencies consolidated their theories:

Secret Elites: The Birch Society version of the conspiracy traces back to the Illuminati scare alleging secret elites infiltrating the United States through Masonic lodges of Freemasons, a fraternal organization for men. Over time, the Birch Society and similar groups updated this to include the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, the Bilderberg Group (a banking network), the United Nations, NAFTA, and the Rockefeller family, among others. This is the generic version of the conspiracy narrative. While on the surface it appears secular, it is often tied to certain underlying fundamentalist Christian beliefs.

Apocalyptic Christians & the End Times: Some Christian evangelicals are raised on a diet of conspiracy theories about secular humanist liberals working with the secret elites plotting a global New World Order and One World government on behalf of Satan in the approaching End Times. This is based on a specific idiosyncratic reading of prophecies in the Christian Bible, especially in the book of Revelation. One interpretation is that as the End Times approach, Satan sends his agent, Antichrist, to achieve world peace through the construction of a single global government. The Antichrist tricks some Christians into believing he is Jesus in his Second Coming. True Christians, however, see through the evil conspiracy and warn others about how trusted political and religious leaders are betraying them to Satan who intends to crush Christianity and establish Hell on Earth.⁴⁵

This is the basic plotline behind the successful fictional Left Behind series of a dozen novels that have sold over 70 million copies. They are authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.⁴⁶ LaHaye argues in his theological newsletter that the “fascination (or obsession) of the elite of this world for “globalism” or a “One World Order” or “One World Government” is almost everywhere.” LaHaye believes that

the elitists who control our government-run educational system...have

prepared our nation's children to be members of the socialist world government which they are planning. Many of them don't realize that control of that government will be taken away from them and end up in the hands of the antichrist.⁴⁷

LaHaye is a founder of the Christian Right and its early political action network the Council for National Policy. He is a key player in pushing the Republican Party to the right over the past 30 years. Apocalyptic beliefs like these are currently playing a role in the way some Christian fundamentalists view contemporary politics, U.S. foreign and domestic policy, and even the 2008 Presidential race.⁴⁸

Jerome Corsi and Howard Phillips, major proponents of the NAU conspiracy theory, offer views similar to LaHaye's about the origins of the plot, but have stepped further outside the Republican Party. Phillips is founder of the ultra-right Constitution Party, and its former presidential candidate in 1992 and 1996. Formed as the U.S. Taxpayers Party in 1992, the Constitution Party has adopted a platform generously described as calling for a theocratic imposition of Christian Biblical law in the United States.⁴⁹ According to WorldNet Daily (WND), Jerome Corsi "resigned as a WND staff reporter" in May 2007 and said he had "joined the Constitution Party" and was "willing to explore a serious pursuit of the nomination" for its candidate as President.⁵⁰

In the 1996 race the Constitution Party was on the ballot in some form in 39 states, and Phillips' vice presidential running mate was Herbert W. Titus, an ultra-conservative Christian attorney who later represented Roy Moore, the judge who fought to keep a two-and-one-half-ton granite monument representation of the Ten Commandments in his courthouse in Montgomery, Alabama.⁵¹ Titus is currently legal counsel to The Liberty Committee, which supports legislation to block the North American Union, (H.R. 40).⁵² The Liberty Committee also supports "The American Sovereignty Restoration Act, H.R. 1146 [which] ends United States

Can YouTube Recognize Hateful Videos?

Dozens of videos concerning the "North American Union" conspiracy theory are posted on YouTube, including some that are clearly antisemitic. YouTube has a stated policy that it will consider deleting videos flagged as 'Inappropriate'

We encourage free speech and defend everyone's right to express unpopular points of view. But we don't permit hate speech (speech which attacks or demeans a group based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status, and sexual orientation/gender identity).

After watching the video "Zionist Chertoff's Subversive North American Union Plan," I flagged it as "Inappropriate."

The video is so obviously antisemitic that it plays like a Saturday Night Live hoax video ridiculing antisemitism. I mean, in this video, Jews are portrayed with the Devil's horns, dogs wear the Star of David. It is not subtle. The video traces back to a website called, *www.realjewnews*, with predictable antisemitic content. I thought the link name alone might have been a clue that this video might contain hate speech.

I flagged this video as "hateful" repeatedly over a period of several weeks. At one point I noted in my comments to the automated system, "Anti-Jewish Conspiracy theories are a form of hate speech that attacks or demeans a protected ethnic group."

I also posted public comments stating that the video was antisemitic. Here was one response:

"Anti-Semitic" has been so abused that I wouldn't even address those who throw it around. It's like hearing Oprah, Barack, Colin, Condie, Jay-Z, Clarence Thomas, L. Douglas Wilder (and on and on) whine about how hard it is being black. Ignore the ignorant folks who, in their desperation, can only turn to name-calling, as stick w/ your point.

I repeatedly contacted a public spokesperson for YouTube and asked what criteria they used to determine if a particular video was anti-Jewish or antisemitic hates speech. They kept referring me to the community guidelines statement posted above. Who decides what is bigoted? What criteria are used? I sent them this message:

[I] am seeking a copy of the standards you folks use to consider delisting videos that might be bigoted, especially those relating to anti-Semitism.

YouTube responded with an e-mail that repeated boilerplate from the above statement of "community guidelines."

As I said, we do not control the content on our site. It is our community that polices the site and flags content they deem inappropriate. YouTube reviews the flagged videos and removes everything that violates our Guidelines. Once again, as is clearly stated in the sentence you quote, hate speech is not allowed on the site. If a flagged video is found to contain hate speech it will be removed from our site.

Three times I pressed for details. Same circular response. No details. No criteria revealed. Trust them to know what bigotry is.

Finally, as this issue went to press, YouTube removed the video with the message "This video has been removed due to terms of use violation."

membership in the United Nations;” and “H.R. 190 -Social Security for American Citizens Only Act.”⁵³ Given these ties, it is no surprise an End Times-oriented website becomes home to NAU fears like this one:

If the Supreme Court rules against gun ownership in the United States, the Council of Foreign Relations is completely in the clear to speed the creation of the North American Union. You can do a search on this web site about our many posts about the North American Union, a government based on the European Union model. The European Union model is not a democracy and its representatives are not directly appointed by the countries that they represent.

We believe that the European Union model of government may be adopted by most of the world and will become the platform by which the World Union President (the antichrist) can come to power.⁵⁴

Antisemites: One article clearly in the category of antisemitic conspiracy theories refers to “Zionist Chertoff’s Subversive North American Union Plan” singling out Michael Chertoff, the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security.

America’s memory is a Christian heritage which Jews despise. A North American Union, (by which the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, will unite as a sovereign unit), will eradicate America’s Christian memory. This will make the Jews very happy. And the Jew Michael Chertoff is the leading instigator of the Anti-Christian North American Union.

NOT ONLY DO WE HAVE THE JEW MICHAEL CHERTOFF POLICING our nation as Secretary and chief of U.S. Homeland Security, he wants to destroy our nation’s sovereignty as well. Why? Because Jews wish to destroy America’s Christian memory.

This antisemitic tirade is crossposted or referenced at over 100 other websites,

including a video version on YouTube, posted on January 10, 2008 which garnered some 240 views in its first five days online.⁵⁵

One of the most influential purveyors of this antisemitic model of the secret elite conspiracy theory was Myron Fagan. One website features his work under the title “Myron Fagan Exposes Bankers with their Illuminati, CFR, UN, Godless Communism, National Council on Churches [*sic*] etc.” According to Fagan:

...this satanic plot was launched back in the 1760s when it first came into existence under the name of the Illuminati. This Illuminati was organized by one Adam Weishaupt, born a Jew, who was converted to Catholicism and became a Catholic priest, and then, at the behest of the then newly organized House of Rothschild, defected and organized the Illuminati.

Naturally, the Rothschilds financed that operation, and every war since then, beginning with the French Revolution, has been promoted by the Illuminati operating under various names and guises. I say under various names and guises because after the Illuminati was exposed and became too notorious, Weishaupt and his co-conspirators began to operate under various other names. In the United States, immediately after World War I, they set up what they called the Council on Foreign Relations, commonly referred to as the CFR, and this CFR is actually the Illuminati in the United States. And its hierarchy, the masterminds in control of the CFR, to a very great extent, are descendants of the original Illuminati conspirators. But, to conceal that fact, most of them changed their original family names to American sounding names.⁵⁶

Public Policy & Conspiracy Theories

Fears of global cooperation gained an increased following in the 1990s as

conspiracy theories, the Patriot Movement and armed militias and libertarian ideology intersected and flourished.⁵⁷ This period also saw the collapse of the Soviet bloc, President Bush using the phrase “New World Order” to describe his administration’s vision, and the approach of the year 2000 which sparked speculation about the approaching End Times among some Christian fundamentalists. All of this fed into Patriot movement speculation about conspiracies as the new millennium approached.

The Patriot movement today is one current manifestation of what in the past has been called “Americanist” or “Nativist” movements. It is composed of an overlapping series of dissident right-wing social and political movements located between mainstream conservatism and the ultra-right that is itself made up of neonazis, the Ku Klux Klan, and other similar militant and openly white supremacist and antisemitic racist groups.⁵⁸

During the height of the Militia Movement—the short-lived armed wing of the larger “Patriot” movement that crested in the mid-1990s—there were widespread fears that the U.S. federal government was about to impose a draconian tyrannical dictatorship using jack-booted thugs delivered in black helicopters sent by the United Nations.⁵⁹

Patriot group activists are constantly stepping across boundaries into mainstream conservatism on one side or the ultra-right on the other, depending on the historic moment, political events, and shifting ideology.⁶⁰ Especially during the heyday of the Militia movement in the ‘90s, there were close ties between the Patriot movement and conservative Christian evangelicals. Patriot movement conspiracism has real world implications, reaching out to legislators and elected officials on the state level; and extending up to the federal level with Steve Stockman of Texas and the late Helen Chenoweth of Idaho as examples of Congressional representatives willing to openly push the Patriot movement agenda, even as the armed militia movement was fading.⁶¹

Other national political figures joined



C. Berlet/publiceye.org

Phyllis Schlafly

When the heads of state dismissed the conspiracy claims and joked about it, the conspiracists were not amused. Phyllis Schlafly responded with a column titled “Bush Refuses to Deny the North American Agenda.”

in promoting fears of “Global Governance,” the title of a 1997 video from Phyllis Schlafly with the subtitle “The Quiet War Against American Independence.”⁶² The video featured appearances by Congresswoman Chenoweth; Patrick Buchanan, syndicated columnist & “Crossfire” cohost; John Ashcroft, then-U.S. Senator, Missouri; Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations; and Jesse Helms, then-chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Writing in *The Nation*, Christopher Hayes interviewed anti-NAU activists in Texas, and what surfaced was rhetoric that reflected longstanding conspiracy theories, including one woman who warned about the NAU, using the Patriot buzz words: “Global Governance.”⁶³ Terri Hall is a conservative Republican and Christian evangelical home schooler who opposes the NAU. She told Hayes that it was like the “robber barons of old.” According to Hall, “Someone is really jockeying around to control some things here in America. It explains the open borders, it explains our immigration issues, it explains our free-trade issues, what it’s doing to the middle class,” she said. “It really all started with NAFTA,” Hall told the reporter, who noted that Hall “laughed nervously and apologetically,” and then said:

It sounds like a conspiracy. But I do know there are people who have tried for a long time to go to this

global governance. They see there’s a way to make it all happen by going to the heads of state and doing it in a secretive way so they can do it without a nasty little thing called accountability. So they won’t have to listen to what We the People want.

This is classic right-wing populist rhetoric, with conspiracy theories mixed together with the “producerist” narrative of being squeezed from secret elites above and parasitic immigrants and freeloaders below.

Right-Wing Populism

Progressives need to recognize the pitfalls of right-wing populist rhetoric, especially when mixed with producerism and apocalypticism, because this constellation of processes generates conspiracy theories that demonize and scapegoat targeted groups rather than focusing on transformative social change to extend human rights.

Across wide segments of the secular and Christian Right you can find conspiracy theorists mobilized through the rhetorical style of right-wing populism.⁶⁴ Jean Hardisty refers to this process as “mobilizing resentment.”⁶⁵ Populist antielitism as a rhetorical style often takes the form of attacks on liberals, secularists, intellectuals, the news media, and Hollywood.⁶⁶ Allegations that these elites are part of a vast conspiracy against the common people

are frequently interwoven into the fabric of the stories that are told—sometimes with references to Satanic End Times plots tied to prophecies in the book of Revelation.⁶⁷

Right-wing populism often is based on racialized, patriarchal, and heterosexist narratives that buttress a sense of privilege and entitlement among a targeted audience of straight white Christian men who see themselves as victims. It tends to frame economic questions in terms of hard working producers pitted against parasites above and below.⁶⁸ This technique was used to mobilize poor and working class whites against newly freed Black former slaves after the Civil War.⁶⁹ It was utilized by George Wallace in his first Presidential campaign, and later borrowed by Richard Nixon and the Republican Party to create the “Southern Strategy.”⁷⁰ It exists in stories of “welfare queens” where race need not be mentioned.⁷¹

There is also a natural historic congruence between the Calvinist-based theology of many white evangelicals, and the ideology of Free Markets and less government regulation fostered by the Republican Party.⁷² Doug Henwood points out that despite accurate criticisms of some of his overly-broad conclusions, the work of historian Richard Hofstadter helps explain this connection:

Hofstadter’s emphasis on the individualism of American white Protestantism is highly relevant now—it

illuminates what's the matter with Kansas, since American white Protestants love "The Market" as an instrument of reward and discipline. That love is not some recent confidence trick perpetrated by Karl Rove, but has deep roots.⁷³

According to sociologist S. Wojciech Sokolowski:

What is at stake here is not reason vs. irrationality or stupidity but different cognitive frames that manifest themselves, among other things, by a preference for bucolic rural life or for urban diversity. Both are pre-rational, that is, they frame and direct the rational thought process.

So if we drop the charge of irrationalism, Hofstadter's thesis that traditional American culture tends to be anti-urban and rather local, with all the accoutrements of that localism—navel gazing, suspicion of outsiders, suspicion of high culture, suspicion of big organizations and government, love of small business, religiosity, etc.—still stands.⁷⁴

Sokolowski stresses the interplay of factors with a basic right wing frame, the "perception of imminent danger," which creates a need to organize for "safety and protection." According to Sokolowski, this fear factor activates a strong response when added to the constellation of other beliefs of the Right: "the Manichean dualism of good and evil, right and wrong, us and them; the vision of apocalyptic battle between good and evil; the need for vigilance and unquestioned support of 'our' side and a militant posture toward 'them.'"

Conclusions

When a society is undergoing transition or turmoil, social movements can arise that portray the idealized nation as being subverted by alien ideas. This can involve internal or external forces, or both, and it can involve the idea that the government is part of the conspiracy, or that the government is being subverted from

within, or both. This complexity is one reason mainstream analysts often dismiss such conspiracy theories as "crackpot" or "irrational."

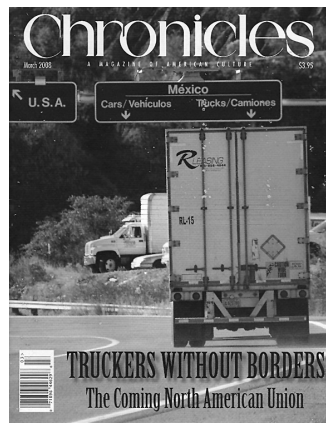
In a healthy national community, few take conspiracy claims seriously.⁷⁵ When conspiracy theories develop a mass base, it is usually an indication of some ailment in the body politic. This is often related to a sense of powerlessness and the feeling that the average person no longer has any real role in influencing government decisions that touch their daily lives.

Mark Fenster believes conspiracy theories attempt to "ideologically address real structural inequities, and constitute a response to a withering civil society" and the over-concentration of wealth and power.⁷⁶ A fatal flaw in conspiracism, however, is that it misunderstands how power is actually exercised.

We have a natural and appropriate distrust of governments that choose to work in secret. Robert Alan Goldberg observes that conspiracism "thrives when power is exercised at a distance by seemingly selfish groups zealous in their authority."⁷⁷ One obvious antidote to widespread conspiracism, then, is to reduce government secrecy and increase the transparency of government operations and reinvigorate public participation in governance.

It is clear that some white racial supremacist and neofascist organizers use conspiracist theories that do not appear to have racist or antisemitic themes as a relatively less-threatening entry point in making contact with potential recruits. Phrases such as "international bankers," "welfare queens," and "one world government" are interpreted in different ways by different listeners, and can be viewed as coded appeals with bigoted subtexts.

This means that even when conspiracist theories do not center on Jews, people of color, or other scapegoated groups, conspiracism creates an environment where racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, and other forms of prejudice, bigotry, and



oppression are likely to flourish. Decent people of all political stripes need to denounce conspiracy theories as toxic to democracy.

Conspiracy theories about the impending creation of a North American Union are now seeping into discussions within progressive political circles. This not only is a waste of time and energy that is already in short supply on the political Left, but steals attention and resources from important progressive campaigns to challenge unfair trade, development, and economic policies in Mexico, Canada, and the United States. Conspiracy theories undermine struggles for human rights. ■

A collection of images, charts, and slide shows related to this article are posted online by Political Research Associates at <<http://www.publiceye.org/conspire/dynamics.html#nau>>. Unless otherwise noted, all URLs were retrieved February 2, 2008.

End Notes

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and GLBTQ rights, and the need to shore up American's border, among them. Its vitriol also extends to the Clintons and its "Hillary Watch" posits her as an ethical nightmare.

Krikorian was the first to raise the specter of violent foreign hordes. "On December 12, 2002, a 42-year-old woman was abducted and gang raped on Long Island. The woman was a legal immigrant. Four of the five Mexican men responsible were illegal. Three of the five had repeatedly been arrested by the New York Police Department but NYPD never checked to see if they were legally in the country. That's because New York is a sanctuary city. Despite Mayor Bloomberg's denial, city employees do not cooperate with immigration officials."

"That 700,000 state and local law enforcement agents across the country refuse to use immigration law as one of their tools is foolish," he continued. "Law enforcement should act as if every city is a border city and every state is a border state."

Fonte went one further, invoking 9-11. "Five of the hijackers were in violation of immigration laws," he began. "Four had been stopped for traffic violations but their immigration status was never checked. This was a missed opportunity of tragic pro-

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portions."

More recently, he said, a plot against Fort Dix was discovered and thwarted. The masterminds? Three men, in the U.S. illegally, who had previously been cited for speeding, driving without a license, disorderly conduct, and possession of marijuana. A few months later, in August 2007, four innocent African American college students were shot, execution-style, in Newark, New Jersey. The perpetrators? Undocumented men who had previously been arrested for "barroom brawls and aggravated sexual assault."

Invoking fear is front and center in this schema. Despite documented evidence of low criminality among immigrants—arrest and incarceration rates are below that of the native born—Fitton, Fonte and Krikorian want the government to protect Americans from potential terrorists and criminals, *aka* "illegal immigrants," using whatever means are necessary. By calling up actual tragedies, they conjure a predictable emotional response, reality be damned.

The trio place most of the responsibility for stemming unlawful entry on local, state and federal agencies. Nonetheless, they also see a role for the grassroots. Judicial Watch's staffers, for example, have sued the Chicago, D.C., and Los Angeles police departments for failing to report suspected unauthorized immigrants to federal authorities and have initiated lawsuits against Laguna Beach, California and Herndon, Virginia to force day labor centers to ver-

ify the immigration status of would-be workers. Herndon closed its job center in September 2007, something Judicial Watch takes credit for.

The group has also championed—and has worked to popularize—Hazelton, Pennsylvania's 2006 Rental Registration Ordinance. The ordinance requires tenants to show proof of citizenship or legal residency and obtain an occupancy permit before a landlord can rent to them.

Conservatives say that these efforts have begun to pay off. The nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute agrees, citing the 1000-plus bills aimed at regulating immigrants that came before state legislatures in 2007. The 156 that passed run the gamut, from fining landlords who rent to the undocumented to directing state and local police to report immigrant offenders to ICE.

Although Fitton, Fonte and Krikorian are cheered by these developments, they are far from satisfied. Their vision includes not only mass deportations, but the shutting down of all "sanctuary cities." Krikorian laid out the game plan: first, convince the Department of Justice to cut funds to "sanctuary cities" by ten percent a year until the cities "cry uncle." Secondly, enforce cooperation between ICE, law enforcement and social service agencies.

In short, they want to remove what's left of the welcome mat for the world's hungry, poor and tempest tossed, burying, once and for all, Emma Lazarus' vision for this country. ■

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PUSHED TO THE ALTAR *continued from page 1*

“fatherhood movement.” Now inside the government, he morphed his fatherhood campaign of the 1990s — which promoted men as the God-given leader of families and obedient wives — into a government program to promote heterosexual marriage and fatherhood as a solution to the poverty of those who remained as welfare recipients.

Marriage promotion and fatherhood initiatives are just two examples of how the Right has moved from ideas to messaging to capturing political power, on to developing programs, and finally to policy implementation. The Right’s ideological focus on family, the free market, and minimal government touched a chord in the U.S. public that was, and often still is, in a mood of reaction against the 1960s and liberalism. But there was more to the Right’s success than its timely and resonant message. Its success has also rested on a keen understanding of itself as a movement and of the importance of nurturing movement infrastructure and promoting movement leaders.

In this case, the goal of the Right’s agenda is to replace “liberal” programs that are known to raise people out of poverty — such as education, jobs that pay a living wage, health care, child care, and subsidized housing. Further, by channeling money through faith-based programs, they diminish the separation of church and state. In 2005, Congress legitimized these conservative programs by funding marriage promotion and fatherhood funding at the level of \$150 million annually for five years.

Attempts to raise low-income women out of poverty with marriage and fatherhood programs are hardly benign. They elevate a patriarchal version of family structure, denigrate the role and abilities of single mothers, endorse marriage only

for certain people (excluding same-sex couples), and further the stereotype of female welfare recipients and their children as socially and economically handicapped without the presence of a male family head. Further, they demonstrate how the public has been encouraged by the Right to feel free to invade the privacy of low-income women and manipulate them by threatening their subsistence income.

The Bush Administration sanctioned the use of federal welfare funds, already cut to an unconscionable level, specifically to fund marriage programs targeting welfare

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recipients. The Healthy Families Initiative of HHS’s Administration for Children and Families targets African-American, Hispanic, and Native American communities in particular for special marriage promotion and fatherhood projects. By supporting conservatism within these communities, the Right is building its movement and lending credence to its dubious claim of being colorblind. At the same time, it is promoting its political agenda and public policies from within the communities, rather than a less-subtle imposition of those ideas from the arena of white politics.

Framing Marriage, Fatherhood and Welfare

By definition, conservatives seek to conserve the *status quo*—present conditions. They see what progressives call “social change” as dangerous and destabilizing for society. But the contemporary U.S. Right is determined to return to the *status quo ante*—that is, a period *before* the present time. As a result, it is what is known in political analysis as “reactionary.”

The reactionary forces within the Republican Party gained control of the Party as a whole with the election of Ronald Reagan as President in 1980. At that historic moment, the Right—now calling itself the “New Right” to distance itself from the discredited Old Right of Senator Barry Goldwater, the John Birch Society, and the Ku Klux Klan — attained the ability to legitimize its ideology and implement some of the policies that flow from that ideology.

“Welfare” benefits have always been strongly symbolic within the larger agenda of the contemporary Right. The Right’s leaders and followers mock what they call liberalism’s habit of “coddling” the poor, claiming that it weakens the poor by providing the necessities of food and shelter, without which they would be harder workers. It is no surprise that “welfare reform” became an early commitment of the New Right in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Reagan himself repeatedly told a story of Linda Taylor, a welfare recipient in Chicago, who allegedly had defrauded the Illinois Department of Welfare of \$8,000. With each telling the amount increased, until Reagan was reporting that she had defrauded the Welfare Department of \$150,000.¹

Since the creation of the New Right in the 1970s, the Right’s leadership has known the importance of avoiding the label “racist,” lest they show their roots in the discredited segregationism of the Old Right. By stereotyping welfare recipients as African-American and demonizing them as women of loose sexual morals who are prone to defraud government agencies, the Right was able to mobilize the racial

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resentment of large numbers of white voters against welfare recipients. In order to escape the label “racist,” the Right developed an analysis of virtue and achievement as “colorblind”—adhering to individuals regardless of race. Thus, a campaign against “undeserving” people is not racist, but simply corrects injustices done to “good, working people” who do not receive government assistance.

The Reagan years also promoted the thinking of sociologist George Gilder about the poverty-fighting power of marriage. According to Gilder, monogamous marriage and family formation cause men to become productive by making them responsible for the maintenance of the family. Compared to the alleged lower productivity of bachelors, Gilder states that “A married man . . . is spurred by the claims of family to channel his otherwise disruptive male aggressions into this performance as a provider for a wife and children.”²

Gilder thus ties marriage to national productivity and asserts that laziness and lack of personal responsibility cause poverty. He goes to great lengths to negate the role of discrimination in creating poverty, and defends capitalism as offering prosperity to anyone who works hard.

This is one example of bad social science: The assertion that marriage and fatherhood will cure poverty is simply unproven.

While Gilder provided a blueprint during the Reagan years, it was only after the Republicans gained control of the House of Representatives under the leadership of Congressman Newt Gingrich of Georgia in the 1994 elections that they could more fully realize his vision. They delivered to President Bill Clinton’s desk the 1996 “Welfare Reform” act, which created Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) to replace Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). As its name implies, TANF is a welfare program that ends the federal government’s commitment to an indefinite safety net for poor women and their children.

Signed by Clinton, the law contains stunning victories for the Right’s agenda, including: 1) a “family cap” or “child exclu-

sion” provision that allows the states to deny any increase in benefits to a mother who becomes pregnant and gives birth while receiving welfare; 2) denial of food stamps to most documented immigrants who are not yet naturalized; 3) a five-year lifetime cutoff of welfare benefits; 4) bonuses to states that remove the greatest number of people from welfare rolls; 5) reduced food stamp assistance to millions of children in working families; and 6) payment of a

Christian fatherhood campaigns of the 1990s promoted men as the God-given leader of families and obedient wives.

bonus to states that reduce the number of out-of-wedlock births (known among welfare rights activists as the “illegitimacy bonus”).

Often overlooked is the law’s emphasis on marriage as a means to improve childrearing and lift recipients out of poverty. The first three of nine declarative statements that introduce the provisions of the bill are:

1. Marriage is the foundation of a successful society.
2. Marriage is an essential institution of a successful society that promotes the interests of children.
3. Promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is integral to successful childrearing and the well-being of children.

The remaining six statements address child support, single-mother families, teen pregnancy, and out-of-wedlock births. None of these statements addresses: poor housing; substandard education; lack of health care; institutional racism and sexism; lack of employment opportunities; or language barriers. The 1996 Republican Congress placed marriage at the center of its framing of the poverty the law is intended to address.³

In June 1995, President Clinton had launched a government-wide initiative to strengthen the role of fathers in families, which expanded HHS’ efforts to assist men in their roles as fathers. But it was not until the election of George W. Bush in 2000 that this initiative was advanced, publicized, and given a large amount of funding, and the federal bureaucracy began to fully implement the marriage and family formation aspects of welfare reform. The Administration teamed up with the Heritage Foundation to develop programs now being implemented across the country with federal and state funding, including: advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health; education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting; and marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement for nonmarried pregnant women and nonmarried expectant fathers.⁴

As a result of the Administration’s commitment to funding faith-based organizations, much of the federal money for these programs has gone to religious organizations or to groups heavily influenced by conservative evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity.⁵ Although the federal government has long funded religious charities, it previously stipulated that they receive the money through a secular arm and adhere to strict rules for separation of church and state. That meant no prayer or other form of worship in the program, and no religiously-based discrimination in hir-

ing. The Bush Administration has resisted these restrictions and implemented the \$2 billion “Charitable Choice” program by administrative fiat since Congress has never passed Charitable Choice legislation.⁶

The 1996 “Welfare Reform” law had opened the door to the use of TANF money to promote “healthy marriage” through religious charities by allowing states to administer and provide welfare funds through nongovernmental entities. Arizona and Oklahoma were the first states to use TANF money to fund marriage initiatives, followed by Utah and West Virginia. Beginning in 1996, West Virginia notoriously provided a \$100 monthly welfare bonus to recipients who marry, though the program has since been suspended.

By the Bush years, the funds were flowing. In Dallas, the Friendship West Baptist Church won \$546,025 per year from 2006 to 2011 in African American-targeted funds for a media campaign, marriage education and a teen program. Another \$550,000 a year distributed through a ministers’ network is supporting the pastoral teaching of a Keys to a Healthy Marriage curriculum to black youth in 25 cities over the same time period.

It is difficult to know exactly how much state and federal money goes to support marriage promotion programs. The 2005 Deficit Reduction Act has authorized \$100 million per year for five years for a total of \$500 million. But, according to Timothy Casey of Legal Momentum, it is not possible to name the exact figure. One complicating factor in researching the amount of money awarded to programs and states for marriage promotion is that some marriage promotion grants are made not only through separate funding streams within HHS, such as the \$30 million Compassion Capital Fund, but also through Executive Branch departments other than HHS, such as the Department of Justice.

Together, federal and state faith-based funding, as journalist Jason DeParle said, “seeks a third way between cold government and cool indifference [to those in need]. Yet with much of the money flowing to conservative supporters of President Bush,

the [Compassion Capital] fund is also a tool of realpolitik.”⁷ The funds advance a systematic Republican courtship of conservative African-American and Latino voters by providing government funding to explicitly African-American and Latino organizations, showcasing support for a segment of those communities.

The Christian Right’s marriage and fatherhood activism of the 1990s provided a solid base for the Bush Administration’s redirection of poverty programming in the first decade of the 21st Century.

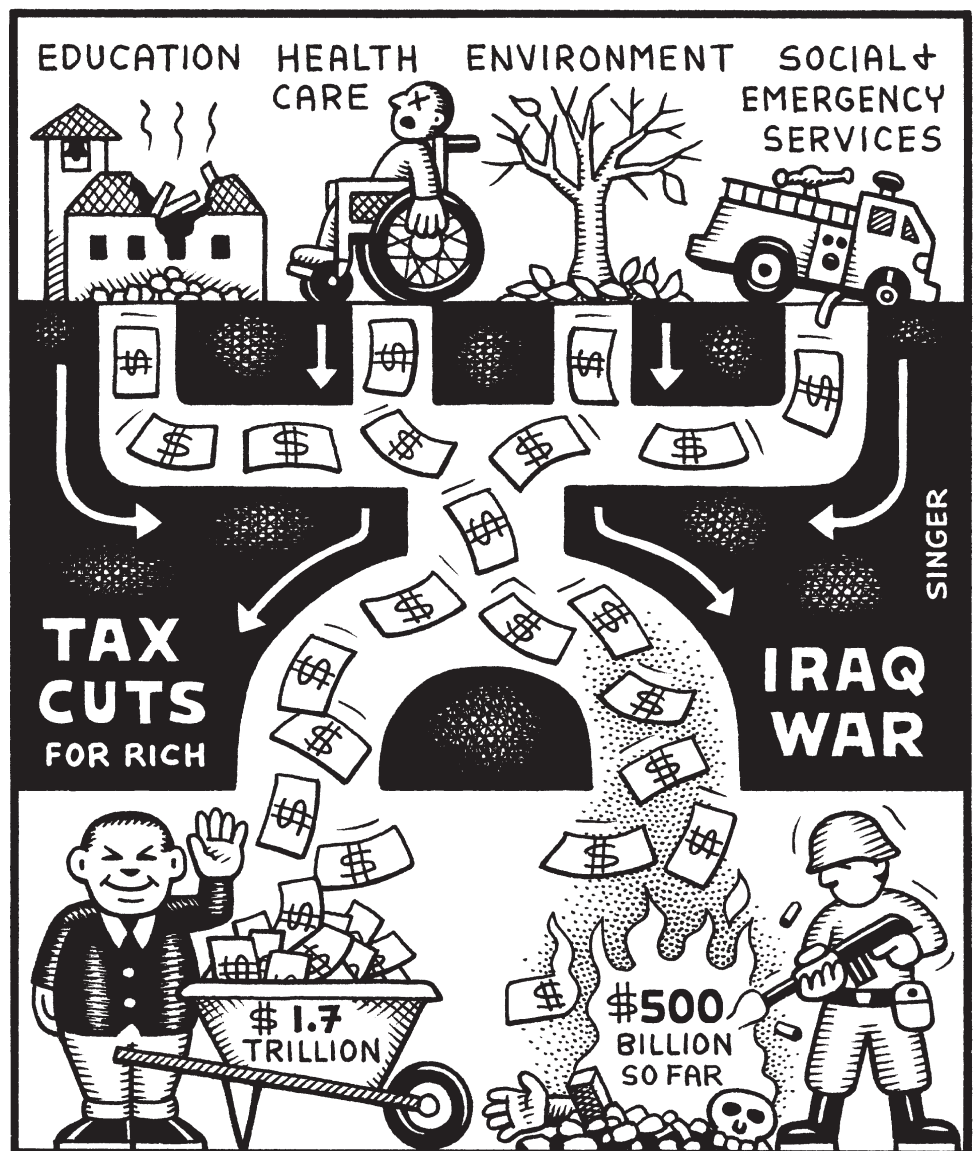
Pro-Marriage Activism: From Grassroots to Government

Although ideas have consequences, they do not become policy unless there is pressure brought to bear by institutions, organizers, activists, and voters. This network of national and local institutions, informal groups, and fellow-travelers constitutes a movement “infrastructure.” Attention to nurturing and strengthening this network is usually called “movement building.”

During the 1990s, the Right presented its family values theme as an antidote to the

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social changes that had occurred during the preceding thirty years, especially the rise of feminism. In 1995, the rate of divorce stood at approximately 50 percent, presenting a challenge to the traditional inviolability of marriage vows. Families had become increasingly “melded” — made up of two divorced parents and their respective children. Single motherhood had increased dramatically, growing across social classes, and had lost much of its social stigma. At the same time, the number of gay and lesbian families was beginning to grow, presenting perhaps the most serious challenge of all to the traditional heterosexual nuclear family model. The Right’s leadership blasted all these social changes and blamed them on liberalism, especially the women’s movement and the gay rights movement.

One movement response from the Right was massive Promise Keeper rallies. These evangelical Christian revivals, for men only, were launched in 1990 by University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney to teach men the importance of their role as husbands and fathers. They were also intended to recruit men to the ranks of the Christian Right and lure them back to conservative Christian churches, which for decades have been attended and maintained predominantly by women worshipers. Specifically addressing the role of a woman within a marriage, Rev. Tony Evans of the Promise Keepers states in *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*:

I can hear you saying “I want to be a spiritually pure man. Where do I start?” The first thing you do is sit down with your wife and say something like this: “Honey, I’ve made a terrible mistake. I’ve given you my role. I gave up leading this family, and I forced you to take my place. Now I must reclaim that role.” . . . there can be no compromise here. If you’re going to lead, you must lead. Be sensitive. Listen. Treat the lady gently and lovingly. But *lead*. (Emphasis in the original.)⁸

The stadium rallies held by Promise Keepers across the country were a media sensation for at least two years. They were huge, professional productions, with a soundstage and production values to rival a large industrial convention. The Promise Keepers’ budget midstream in its organizing in 1995 was estimated to be \$22 million. The budget peaked at an estimated \$117 million in 1997, then declined following the successful Million Man March on the National Mall in October 1997, which seemed to sap its coffers. Still, the Promise Keepers continues to host regional events — 19 in 2006 alone — as it continues to promote an anti-abortion, antigay, conservative fatherhood agenda.

Federal marriage promotion funds advance a systematic Republican courtship of conservative African-American and Latino constituents.

While media coverage of Promise Keepers’ activities in the 1990s was intense, the press paid little attention to various conferences and meetings that were simultaneously organizing a rightist “fatherhood movement,” largely made up of white leaders and members. The movement is focused on issues such as divorce, custody of children, child support payments, “false” accusations of abuse, and control of access to children (for instance, by blocking the mother and child/children from moving out of state).

The fatherhood movement represents a serious attack on divorced women, women who are single parents, and same-sex families.

The titular head of the movement was Wade Horn, leader of the largest and most powerful of the fatherhood organizations, the National Fatherhood Initiative. Other prominent leaders included David Blankenhorn, David Popenoe, and Don Eberly.⁹

As Wade Horn acknowledges, these sectors were not all on the same ideological page:

Religiously oriented advocates believe fatherhood is part of God’s plan, without recognition of which the institution of fatherhood will not be recovered. Fathers’ rights advocates consider the current focus on dead-beat dads inaccurate and counter-productive and lobby for divorce and child custody reforms. Advocates for low-income men believe poor economic circumstances are a primary cause of fatherlessness and see the solution in job training and education programs for disadvantaged and minority men. Culturalists believe fatherlessness is a failure of our culture to reinforce a compelling fatherhood script and seek the definition of one. Marriage advocates believe only a restoration of the institution of marriage will lead to a renewal of fatherhood.¹⁰

This diversity of ideology and agenda within the fatherhood movement allows the movement to present many faces to the world. Its most militant wing calls itself the “fathers’ rights” movement and is led by fathers on a crusade to put right the injustices done to them by: 1) the divorce court “system;” 2) their “vengeful and spiteful” ex-wives (who were inevitably abetted by “the system”); or 3) “man-hating feminists” and welfare workers who have stolen their children after their wives brought false accusations of battering or incest against them.

The debut of the slightly more moderate center/right fatherhood movement occurred at a “National Summit on Fatherhood,” held in Dallas, Texas, in October 1994. It was sponsored by The National

Fatherhood Initiative, the largest and most respectable of the fatherhood groups. This meeting was followed by a 1996 conference convened in Minneapolis by the movement's leadership. The Minneapolis conference resulted in the definitive statement of the ideology and agenda of the fatherhood movement, titled "A Call to Fatherhood," published in a collection of essays titled *The Fatherhood Movement: A Call to Action*.¹¹ Marvin Olasky, a principal architect of the Bush Administration's faith-based initiatives, was an original signer of this Call.

While *A Call to Action* is a comprehensive introduction to the movement and required reading for anyone interested in the Bush Administration's family policy, it tends to present the movement as self-invented by its leadership. The movement actually owes a great deal to several intellectual and activist predecessors, especially: Daniel Patrick Moynihan of the well-known and controversial "Moynihan Report" (1965); George Gilder and the "family values" agenda developed by the New Right during the Reagan and George H. W. Bush Administrations; the mythopoeic men's movement headed by Robert Bly and captured in his book, *Iron John: A Book About Men*; and the national activism of Promise Keepers.¹²

The 1999 book, *The Fatherhood Movement*, edited by Wade F. Horn, David Blankenhorn, and Mitchell B. Pearlstein, pulls together the movement's major articles and serves as its guidebook. When Horn was appointed Assistant Secretary for Children and Families at HHS and put in charge of the Bush Administration's programs for welfare recipients, the centerpiece of his policy implementation was to fund marriage promotion and fatherhood programs, putting the federal seal of approval on the importance of a father in low-income families.

Despite its ideological diversity, a few basic tenets run throughout the predominantly white fatherhood movement. Underlying every rightist sector of the movement is a conservative Christian reading of the nature and role of the family.

Christian Right theological principles are central, and adherents often refer to Christianity as the basis for the movement's legitimacy. The movement explicitly supports patriarchy, asserting that it is damaging to children for them to grow up without a father present in the home.

Importantly, there is a liberal sector of the fatherhood movement that is often called "profeminist fatherhood." These groups, such as Dads and Daughters, the National Center for Fathering, A Call to Men, and the Fathering Program of the Men's Resource Center for Change, organize men to be better fathers while taking on problems of male dominance. Rightist fatherhood groups have stereotyped these groups as not representing "real men."¹³

Ideological common ground between liberal and conservative fatherhood groups is elusive at best.

Senator and presidential candidate Barack Obama, who himself grew up with little contact with his father, has urged fathers in the Black community to be more responsible and has linked their absence to family poverty.¹⁴ Because he is considered a liberal on social and economic issues, his voice is one strain of the liberal pro-fatherhood position, one often expressed by Democrats in the House and Senate.

Ideological common ground between liberal and conservative fatherhood groups is elusive at best. The best recent effort to achieve some degree of unity was a moderate statement, signed by fifty participants at a multiracial 1999 conference held at Morehouse College and cosponsored by the Morehouse Research Institute and the conservative Institute for Ameri-

can Values.¹⁵ The statement, whose signatories ranged from conservative to liberal, cites declining economic opportunity for inner-city Black men, racial discrimination, and a culture that increasingly has become uninterested in marriage. But clearly that unity has not held.

The most important institutionalization of the conservative fatherhood ethos prior to the George W. Bush Administration was the 1998 Southern Baptist Convention's resolution on marriage. It maintains that wives should voluntarily yield to their husbands, following Saint Paul's words to husbands and wives. The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Baptist group in the world and the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. It is second only to the Roman Catholic Church in U.S. membership. Its marriage resolution drew substantial media attention because its adoption followed a hard-fought battle in backrooms and on the convention floor.¹⁶

Despite the Right's support for the principles of the fatherhood movement, neither the Christian Right nor The Heritage Foundation envisioned using federal funds to promote its principles. It took the election of George W. Bush in 2000 for this to happen.

Fatherhood and Marriage Promotion in Black Communities

White marriage and fatherhood promoters see low-income communities of color as their most challenging project. Because many families in these communities do not conform to the model heterosexual, nuclear family configuration, they are identified by rightists and also many liberals as "problem" or "unhealthy" communities.

However, to effect change in low-income communities of color, the primarily white fatherhood movement must gain access to them. Under Horn, HHS' primary strategies involved awarding grants to both faith-based and select secular organizations, publishing a newsletter, and sponsoring convenings that target specific communities of color.¹⁷ By gaining access and building trust with federal grants, the

white fatherhood movement (through its allies in the federal bureaucracy) has an opportunity to recruit men and women in low-income communities of color to collaborate in the Right's "cure" for their poverty.

HHS itself often points out that it is particularly concerned with promoting marriage within the African-American community. The justification for this racial "marriage promotion affirmative action" is that, according to the 2000 U.S. Census and 2003 National Center for Health Statistics Report, African-Americans have the lowest marriage rates and the highest divorce rates of any group in the United States, the highest rate of households headed by single mothers, and the highest rate of childbirth to single mothers. These statistics have given rise to events such as "Black Marriage Day," put on in 70 cities by the Wedding Bliss Foundation, with direct assistance from HHS.

By targeting African-Americans for marriage promotion, HHS is responding to the statistics cited above, claiming that marriage promotion must, logically, be most active in the communities with the poorest record on marriage. In this stealth logic, marriage is elevated to the status of a community asset, while the lack of robust marriage statistics is seen as a community deficit (the word "pathology" is no longer popular); therefore the African-American community receives a disproportionate share of marriage promotion efforts. The entire argument rests on the association of a low marriage rate with a lack of community health—such that the government can justify intervening.

Conservative activists in communities of color, often adhering to the rightist notion that issues of race and racism should be "colorblind," tend to focus on the community itself as the cause of fatherlessness. They argue that blaming poverty, white racism, or joblessness allows the fathers in the community to shirk their responsibility to provide for their children. Traditionalist African-American organizations, such as the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Responsible

Fatherhood and Family Revitalization, and new publications, such as *Proud Poppa*, promote the nuclear family model that emphasizes the father as the principal determinant of the success of children and the family. They encourage fathers to be heavily involved in the rearing of children. Many of these more conservative African-American organizations talk very little about the challenges of poverty or the crucial role of the mother in childrearing. Their message is that "fathers make the family."

It is these few organizations, and a number of conservative pastors and ministers, that tend to work most closely with the Healthy Marriage Initiative of the George W. Bush Administration. For example, as part of its outreach to African-Americans, HHS's Administration for Children and Families hosted a 2004 conference in Chicago to spread the word in the African-American community about the government's efforts to promote marriage. The Forum's title was, "Why Marriage Matters: The Role of Faith-Based and Community Organizations."¹⁹ Approximately one third of the attendees identified themselves as pastors from around the country.

At the conference, one workshop leader, Rev. Darrell L. Armstrong of Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, N.J., illustrated the gap between the more conservative marriage analysis promoted by rightists at HHS and a more liberal analysis of marriage when he warned participants to be wary of two groups that would oppose their efforts: advocates against domestic violence, who are concerned that marriage initiatives will encourage people to stay in abusive relationships; and gay and lesbian groups that are fighting for access to marriage.

Although liberal fatherhood and marriage organizations of color are equally dedicated to strong families and involved fatherhood, they are less attached to the traditional nuclear family model than are conservative fatherhood organizations. In the words of Ronald Mincy, a scholar who studies African-American fathers, these organizations "encourage fathers, whether married or not, to become more involved

in their children's lives, both emotionally and financially, and to develop a better relationship with the child's mother."²⁰ They explicitly promote marriage and fatherhood within the reality of a world where low-income men of color face barriers in employment, housing, and access to health care.

Senator Barack Obama, for instance, in his comments chastising "absentee Black fathers," also notes that the federal government has "gone AWOL" as low-income families deal with unemployment and lack of health care.²¹ These organizations, activists, academics, and politicians appropriately emphasize poverty as the cause of family distress, and then help fathers develop a healthy relationship with their families. More researchers are pointing out that the statistics showing most low-income black families are headed by single-mothers don't reveal the larger truth that some young men of color are involved with the mothers of their children, sometimes live with them, and even are active in their children's care.²² Yet the couple may decide not to marry.

Another ideological sector of the fatherhood movement within the African-American community is nationalistic fatherhood, almost single-handedly represented by the Nation of Islam, which has long emphasized the importance of the family. Its call for a million African-American men to come to Washington, D.C. on October 16, 1995 to stand up for "unity, atonement, and brotherhood" resulted in one of the largest marches ever seen on the Mall, drawing many who were not affiliated with the Nation of Islam, but wanted to make a statement in support of African-American empowerment. Speakers from the podium called on African-American men to "clean up their lives and rebuild their neighborhoods."

Conclusion

Whatever critique liberals and progressives justifiably make of the Right's ideas and methods, nearly all students of the Right will agree that its leadership had a remarkable understanding of the importance of movement building. In

studying the specific area of marriage and fatherhood promotion, it is clear how strategically the movement's organizations molded and mobilized public opinion against single mothers and, most especially, against single mothers who are welfare recipients. Simultaneously, they elevated the role of "father" to make the presence of a father necessary for the formation of a healthy family.

The Right points to the success of its policies in shrinking welfare rolls and the numbers of welfare recipients who have gone to work. Then shouldn't the poverty rate in the United States be at an all-time low? But the U.S. Census Bureau's report for 2005, released in August 2006, details a grim picture of poverty in the U.S. The report finds that the percentage of people living in poverty in 2005 (12.6 percent) contains the highest percentage of people living in "deep poverty" since the government began keeping poverty statistics in 1975. That's because nearly half (5.4 percent) of those living in poverty are *living below half the poverty line* of \$17,170 for a family of three, according to 2007 Health and Human Services Guidelines.²³

Much of the public does not know the extent of deep poverty in the United States or the expenditure of federal money to promote marriage among low-income women and to promote fatherhood in family formation. Even if they did know, they might assume that the program was driven by solid evidence from the social sciences that marriage does indeed result in a higher income for poor women. But *there is no such evidence* (as I will document in a forthcoming article). This is a program driven by right-wing ideology, a backlash against the social reforms of the 1970s and 1980s, and a commitment by the Republican Party to "restore" the idealized "father knows best" family model of the 1950s. If this were a harmless pursuit of a fantasy ideal, that would explain why it fairly often garners bipartisan support. But on close examination, it is more accurately a cynical social experiment, using as its subjects the low-income women of the early 21st century. ■

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GROUNDBREAKING REPORT FROM POLITICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Pushed to the Altar:

The Right Wing Roots of Marriage Promotion

The Bush Administration has abandoned proven poverty reduction strategies and instead is encouraging women — especially welfare recipients — to marry their way out of poverty. PRA founder Dr. Jean Hardisty traces the influence of right-wing fatherhood groups on the Administration's "marriage promotion" programs, and the channeling of millions of federal dollars back to these groups, violating the separation of church and state. Jointly published by PRA and the Women of Color Resource Center.



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.....Reports in Review.....

REPORT OF THE MONTH

Ultrasound Politics

Ultralove: The Medical Right Falls Hard for Ultrasound, Despite Lack of Evidence

By Cynthia L. Cooper, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Washington D.C., February 2008.

http://www.rcrc.org/issues/medright_ultrasound_one.cfm

This online report sketches out the rising popularity of using ultrasound imaging as a way to dissuade pregnant women from considering abortion. Specifically, it documents how anti-abortion groups like Focus on the Family invested "\$4.2 million in a single year to pay for training and ultrasound equipment for crisis pregnancy centers" for over 350 ultrasound machines in 48 states, while Heartbeat International has equipped 460 of its 1100 affiliates with ultrasound capability. As the president of the National Institute of Family & Life Advocates Thomas A. Glessner is quoted as saying, "NIFLA firmly believes that PRC's (pregnancy centers) should place evangelism and a presentation of the gospel as a top priority in their ministries."

The report criticizes religious and political anti-abortion groups for using a medical diagnostic test with no medical expertise and for

wielding ultrasound's powerful imagery as a way to discourage abortion. It also argues that no research substantiates Focus on the Family's claim that "research shows' that 89% of women considering abortion change their minds after having an ultrasound and counseling at a crisis pregnancy center." Furthermore, the report argues that unregulated and non-medical ultrasound use is suspect because ultrasounds, while being safe, are not completely innocuous and should not be used without a medically justifiable reason and without medical professionals to diagnose the images. The report underscores this second point by saying 'Failure to diagnose' a fetal sonogram has been the reason for a large number of medical malpractice claims." If a sonogram is a diagnostic tool that a physician is obligated to read carefully, how can a crisis pregnancy center justify using sonograms if it cannot fulfill its responsibility to read and understand the image? Anti-abortion groups might have a right to free speech, the authors write, but they do not necessarily have a right to use a medical diagnostic tool for other purposes.

Other Reports in Review

Illegal Wiretaps Ignored in Debates

Candidates Still Not Asked About Wiretaps, FISA, or Telecom Immunity in Debates

Media Matters for America, Washington, D.C., January 24, 2008. http://mediamatters.org/items/200801240006#comments_bottom_nav

Despite the public stir after *The New York Times* broke the news in December 2005 that President Bush allowed wiretapping without Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court approval, *Media Matters for America* discovered that only one question has been asked of a candidate during presidential debates on this important issue. This is especially striking because according to the report, "[a]t least ten of the candidates who have participated in presidential debates in the past year have been in Congress as it has considered legislation concerning FISA, wiretapping, and the immunity issue." Congress itself had also sidestepped the debate by enacting temporary

legislation to allow itself more time to deliberate and craft policy around the issue (debate has since resumed as of January 24th).

The issues at the center of the FISA debate include whether there should be judicial approval of warrants to search communication between U.S. citizens and foreigners overseas and whether telecommunications companies, such as AT&T, who have assisted the government to gather records, should be held legally culpable if it is found that the wiretaps were illegal. The Electronic Frontier Foundation has filed a class-action lawsuit against AT&T for cooperating with the illegal wiretapping. It charges the President with abusing executive power and ignoring the U.S. Constitution's protection from unreasonable search and seizure in bypassing judicial approval for warrants. *Media Matter for America* raises the question of how such an important and hotly contested issue could be almost completely absent from the many public presidential debates we have already witnessed.

Subprime Time

Foreclosed: State of the Dream 2008.

By Amaad Rivera, Brenda Cotto-Escalera, Anisha Desai, Jeannette Huezco, and Dedrick Muhammad, *United for a Fair Economy, Boston, Mass., January 15, 2008.* http://www.faireconomy.org/files/StateOf-Dream_01.16.08_Web.pdf

The subprime lending crisis worsens the economic woes of lower income people, many of whom are people of color, strapping them with untenable debt and *Foreclosed* predicts approximately 2.2 million foreclosures and \$2.3 trillion in economic losses in loans originally issued between 1998 and 2006. Because subprime lenders stood to profit more from subprime loans than conventional ones, they had an incentive to push subprime loans falsely as a cheaper refinancing opportunity (only 11% of subprime loans went to first time home buyers). Lenders also steered people who qualified for conventional loans towards subprime loans—somewhere between one-third to one-half of

subprime borrowers qualified for less-expensive conventional loans.

While the report gives strong evidence that subprime lending practices have and will continue to disproportionately affect minority communities, the report would have benefited from further evidence to support its argument that predatory lending was targeted on the basis of race. The report shows that subprime loans were disproportionately given to African Americans compared to whites. Yet it did not break down the data by income and credit record to highlight that fewer low-income whites with spotty credit were steered into subprime loans than similarly situated African Americans.

The report estimates the crisis will cost the economy between \$355 billion to \$462 billion in direct losses, including \$164 billion to \$213 billion in losses to people of color. Community “spillover” costs, which include higher crime rates, less funding for education and other public services, and the administrative costs of processing the glut of foreclosures, are estimated at \$2.3 trillion

The final section of the report urges more progressive taxation to aid the economically disadvantaged in achieving home ownership and in general improving their educational and economic prospects, simplifying the home-buying process so that consumers will be better informed and less easily exploited, and rethinking redevelopment projects, such as the one currently underway in New Orleans, so that, instead of evicting poorer residents, they are included in the rebuilding.

Election Day Warnings

Asian American Access to Democracy in the 2006 Elections

By Glenn D. Magpantay with Nancy W. Yu, *Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund*, New York, January 2008. www.aaldef.org.

Along with gerrymandering districts along ethnic lines, not providing adequate or any polling stations in communities of color, and the poll taxes and literacy requirements of the Jim Crow era, a language barrier can also be a key factor in disenfranchising a voter, this report shows.

Until 1975, localities were not required to ensure there were no barriers preventing non-English-proficient speakers from voting.

AALDEF has pressed for and monitored the application of the Voting Rights Act mandate that communities with limited-English proficient populations of either five percent of the county or 10,000 people provide language assistance, including translators, translated materials, and if needed, personal assistance in the voting booth to facilitate voting.

AALDEF’s survey of Asian-American voters at poll sites in nine states and Washington D.C., 43 percent of respondents had limited English language proficiency and in some locations the percentage was as high as 88 percent. The survey found consistent problems impeding the voting process including poorly translated materials (including the ballots and complementary materials), a shortage of translators, difficulty in attaining provisional ballots for voters in cases where voter registration rolls had problems, and requiring identification from Asian American voters, though of the voters who were asked for identification, 78% were not required to present any in the cases observed.

AALDEF urges the Justice Department to continue pressing counties to comply, and urges counties to take advantage of federal funds and support provided to enfranchise voters with limited English-language proficiency throughout the entire registration and voting process. Finally, the AALDEF reminds counties that other than translated ballots, it is essential to provide language assistance in terms of registration forms, polling site information, signs, translators, and provisional ballots in cases where problems arise from registration rolls or confusion.

Immigrant Economics

Immigrant Integration in Low-Income Urban Neighborhoods

By Lynnette A. Rawlings, et al., *The Urban Institute*, Washington, D.C., 2007. http://www.urban.org/Uploaded-PDF/411574_immigrant_integration.pdf

This rich report evaluates how factors such as education level, ownership of a car and driver’s license, English-language proficiency, and citizenship status affect various immigrant groups’ economic prospects. Its strongest finding is that “Education is the most important determinant of economic advancement regardless of race, ethnicity, nativity, citizenship or origin.” Having a driver’s license and

car was another significant determinant of economic opportunity because “lack of transportation may be a more important barrier to economic advancement in low-income urban neighborhoods than elsewhere. Drivers licenses are also important forms of government-sanctioned identification, and adults who do not have them may experience difficulties accessing government benefits and services, as well as credit, bank accounts, home loans and other financial services products.” This is significant because 30% of immigrants in the survey were not documented and in many states cannot access licenses.

Those with higher education, and a driver’s license and car were more likely to be employed and have a savings account and credit card (access to the financial system). Those with good English language skills and who were citizens were more likely to own homes and have access to higher paying jobs.

Education-level is heavily related to English-language proficiency, the report shows; and “over a quarter of working age immigrant respondents from Mexico, Central America and Southeast Asia did not have a ninth grade education.” To illustrate the dramatic relationship between education-level and poverty, the survey found that respondents with no college education were four to five times more likely to live in impoverished households than respondents with a four-year college degree.

The report also compares Southeast Asian immigrants, who “mostly came into the country as refugees, received substantial integration services after entry, and have a high rate of citizenship,” and Mexican and Central-American immigrants who are “generally barred from public benefits, ineligible for citizenship, and subject potentially to arrest and deportation.” Southeast Asians “fare far better on measures of economic advancement and integration than comparable groups given their very low levels of educational attainment and English proficiency.” This highlights the importance of federally supported immigrant integration initiatives for the economic success of immigrants. Together, this data shows the many benefits from having official status and documentation, even if only drivers licenses.

Reports in Review compiled by Aaron Rothbaum.

SECULAR FUNDAMENTALIST *continued from page 9*

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COINTELPRO: What the (Deleted) Was It?

From its founding, *The Public Eye* investigated government spying, as in this article by Mark Ryter in the second issue ever.

From *The Public Eye*
Vol. 1 No. 2, 1978

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Eyes RIGHT

THE RON PAUL CONSPIRACY

Writers for the *American Free Press* have a lot to say about the Republican primaries and their favored candidate Ron Paul. The paper cites “corrupt” national polls, voter fraud, and a national media bias to stem support for Paul. The paper goes further and tries to expose Huckabee’s “leftist, statist, and non-Christian agenda” to prove that Huckabee is a bait-and-switch candidate to deceive Christian voters. *The American Free Press* wants voters to know that Ron Paul has the most popular support even though polls, elections, media coverage, and even support for other candidates would seem to contradict that at this point in the primaries.

Sources: “Ron Paul REVOLUTION At the Crossroads,” by Pat Shannan, *American Free Press*, February 11, 2008, 10. “Media’s Masters Adore Huckabee,” by Michael Collins Piper, *American Free Press*, December 31, 2007, 13; “Who Would Jesus Vote For?: Michigan pastor says it probably would not be Mike Huckabee,” by Pastor Bret McAtee, *American Free Press*, February 11, 2008, 14-5.

SATAN’S CHRISTMAS PRESENT

The theatrical release of the children’s movie *The Golden Compass* last December inspired a flurry of reactions from Christian magazines reminiscent of the concern voiced about Harry Potter. Troubled parents warned, “Keep those children in prayer. Then, with grace and love, share the truth about *His Dark Materials*.” On a more severe note, another publication suggested an “eighteen-count indictment of Pullman [the author of the original children’s book] on the charge of promoting Satanism.”

Sources: “Dark Materials” by Adad R. Holz, plugged in, *January*, 2008, 3-4. and “Satanism for Young Readers” by Lee Duigon, *Faith for All of Life*, Jan/Feb 2008, 29-32.

THEY DESTROYED EVIDENCE, BUT THAT’S OK!

Human Events writer Jed Babbins defends the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) act of destroying tapes recorded during interrogations involving waterboarding and other forms of torture. Babbins laments that the government shifted from the “clear” definition of torture, in which almost any interrogation technique is allowed, to the more “vague” one where some acts, including waterboarding, are considered torture.

Apart from defending the government’s clear right to use any form of interrogation, regardless of ethical questions, and including “sprinkling bacon bits on a [Muslim] detainee’s head,” Babbins defends the CIA in destroying evidence to thwart a Congressional investigation. In Babbins’ view, the investigation could lead to outlawing waterboarding and other forms of interrogation and expose interrogators who used these techniques *after* the definition of torture was amended in 2005. Thus, the CIA had a right to destroy tapes both because it should defend its right to torture and because the Congressional investigation deserves to be thwarted.

Source: “CIA Was Right to Destroy Tough Interrogation Tapes,” by Jed Babbins, *Human Events*, December 17, 2007, 1.

TRUST ME: BE VERY AFRAID

Family Security Matters, an online presence that seeks to maintain continued fears of a terrorist attack, recently demonstrated its particular brand of fear mongering by publishing excerpts from a book by one of its contributing editors, William Federer: *What Every American Needs to Know About the Qur’an: A History of Islam and the United States*. Federer was upset when Keith Ellison, a Minnesota state legislator, used a copy of Islam’s holy book during his swearing in ceremony. In the excerpt, Federer selects

verses of the Qur’an such as: “Believers, take neither the Jews nor the Christians for your friends” (Sura 5:51); or “Kill the disbelievers wherever we find them” (Sura 2:191) and then asks, “Are these verses from the *Qur’an* taken out of context? Does it matter if a politician swears on a *Qur’an*? Is it Islamophobic to be concerned? Is Islam a peaceful religion?”

Source: “What Every American Needs to Know About the Qur’an,” by William J. Federer, *Family Security Matters*, February 19, 2008.

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One Raid at a Time: How Immigrant Crackdowns Build the National Security State

BY ROBERTO LOVATO

This isn’t the first time in U.S. history that the U.S. government expanded furiously in crackdowns on immigrants. Now it is doing so in a sort of a Homeland Security Keynesianism, with big government contracts to favored companies, and one third of the Homeland Security budget going to controlling migrants.

Public Eye Editorial Board member Roberto Lovato compares then and now.

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