

## Backgrounder on Barre Seid, the Billionaire Extremist who Enabled Leonard Leo to Stack the Court and Overturn Roe

**Why Should One Super Rich Old Guy and His Regressive Buddy Have Such a Totally Outsized Role in Our Courts and Our Rights? They Shouldn't.**

By Lisa Graves

ON AUGUST 22ND of this year, the *New York Times* [reported](#) that a secretive Chicago industrialist named Barre Seid had transferred more than \$1.6 billion into the control of Leonard Leo, to whom Donald Trump outsourced the packing of the U.S. Supreme Court. (For more on that court-packing, check out Jim Hightower's piercing [series](#) on Leo.)

That story by Ken Vogel and Shane Goldmacher details the non-profit trust Seid created with Leo and his closest confidantes—called the Marble Freedom Trust—to transfer the proceeds of the sale of his business to fund Leo's dark money operations. They have targeted the Supreme Court and other high offices to implement their shared agenda of

repealing decades of legal precedents protecting Americans' rights, including *Roe v. Wade*.

That same day, *ProPublica* and *The Lever* [published](#) a joint investigation into the Marble Freedom Trust, which provides additional details about the massive and secretive trust and more. That story by Andrew Perez, Andy Kroll, and Justin Elliot highlights key elements of Seid's long history of funding anti-choice politicians.

It also illuminates Seid's funding of other favored vehicles of Leo, like the Federalist Society, which Leo helps steer, and the law school at George Mason University that Charles Koch along with Seid and Leo have stocked with right-wing lawyers. For example, *ProPublica* noted that an investigation by a student working with UnKoch My Campus obtained emails through an open records request where Seid refers to his allied beneficiaries of his largesse to that school as his "[Fellow Members of the Vast Right Wing Conspiracy](#)," a callout to Hillary Clinton's early description of the right. (Note: I reviewed that UnKoch report

about Seid as part of my prior role as an informal advisor to UnKoch My Campus and its previous fiscal sponsor through the Center for Media and Democracy.)

It turns out that Seid's massive infusion of money to Leo came on the heels of the 2019 *Washington Post* [exposé](#) on Leo and the then more than \$250 million that had been given, mostly from anonymous sources, to groups tied to Leo's efforts to pack the Court and remake American law. That was the tally

of Robert O'Harrow and Shawn Boberg based on non-profit tax filings up through 2017. True North Research updated that figure through 2020 earlier this year and it was up to [nearly \\$600 million](#), not including any money raised specifically to block nominees of Joe Biden. Our tally has been cited by Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), who has [spearheaded efforts](#) to uncloak and limit dark money engulfing the Supreme Court and undoing our rights and our democracy. He has also [sought records](#) about Leo's role in packing the Court.

The *Washington Post*'s in-depth examination uncovered that in 2018—after Anthony Kennedy announced his retirement—Leo paid off his 30-year mortgage on his home more than two



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decades ahead of schedule. The Federalist Society had told reporters that Leo was not being paid for his time “volunteering” to help Trump choose who to give lifetime jobs on the Supreme Court and it did pay him less, according to tax filings. O’Harrow and Boberg also uncovered that on the eve of the vote to confirm Kavanaugh to the Court, in one of the narrowest judicial confirmation votes in history, Leo literally closed on a seaside mansion in Maine the day cloture was invoked to force a Senate vote on Kavanaugh.

Because Leo was not technically a White House employee he was not required to file any financial disclosure reports about any of his sources of income to support such expenditures. That is the case, even though he was playing such a decisive role in judicial appointments and in helping to marshal right-wing groups to push those very controversial nominees through.

Since then, Leo has used that robber baron era, 7,900 square foot [palazzo to host political fundraisers](#) for [Sen. Susan Collins](#) (R-ME), who basically cast the deciding vote on Kavanaugh. He has also hosted a particularly controversial couple, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and his wife [Ginny Thomas](#), as Jane Mayer has [reported](#).

One fallout of the *Post*’s blockbuster on Leo’s dark money operations appears to be that Leo left his day job at the Federalist Society, though he remains a leader of its Board. In early 2020, he [told](#) Jonathan Swan and Alayna Treene of Axios that he had launched what we view as an even darker/more opaque set of operations with his friend Greg Mueller. They call it “CRC Advisors” and he described it as a vehicle for telling donors who to give to and then advising those groups that he steers funding to.

The [anchor beneficiaries](#) of that effort have been the Judicial Crisis Network (JCN), which also goes by the new name the Concord Fund, along with the 85 Fund (the new name of JCN’s affiliate that used to be called the Judicial Education Project).

Through these vehicles, as Coral Davenport of the *New York Times* [reported](#) earlier this year, JCN/Concord is by far the biggest donor to the Republican Attorneys General Association (RAGA) as GOP Attorneys General have sought victories from the packed Supreme Court. This included trying to block the power of the EPA and other agencies to regulate corporations. (For more on how the right-wing faction controlling the Court was determined to make it easier to regulate women’s bodies than corporations, watch Laura Flanders’ [interview](#) from May.)

As Davenport reported, JCN/Concord’s funding

of RAGA is dramatically larger than other donors like Koch Industries and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce—by millions of dollars. The true multi-million dollar donor of those efforts has been kept hidden by Leo, who boasted to a closed-door meeting of the [Council on National Policy](#) (CNP) that—due to Trump’s appointments to the Court—America stands at the precipice of what he called the revival of the so-called “structural Constitution,” harkening back to the days before the New Deal. (The watchdog group, Documented, which I co-founded in 2017, has more CNP videos and other materials catalogued [here](#); the full quote from Leo’s speech is reprinted further down below.)

As I noted this May in [Common Dreams](#):

“Our only hope is that people rally together to reject this gross overreach and hold accountable those who have sought to use the Court to roll back our rights. This regressive agenda has been bankrolled by some very wealthy and secretive individuals who do not have the courage to be honest with the American people about who they are, what interests they represent, and the future of America they envision, where women’s rights are nullified but the extremist agenda of a few of the richest is exalted.”

So was it all mostly from Seid? Was he the biggest source of the [big secret bucks](#) being spent as Leo directed in order to pack the Court and capture state supreme courts and attorneys general? That seems likely, since the two of them are apparently so close that Seid gave Leo a gigantic billion-dollar fund to deploy. It certainly will be the case going forward that Leo will be able to throw around millions of dollars to try to make his views binding law on the rest of us.

Over at True North, we have long suspected that it was Seid making million-dollar transfers to the now-defunct Wellspring Committee to fund JCN as it backed Neil Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett to pack the Supreme Court with anti-choice activists, a pet issue of Seid’s for decades. But that has not been proven, yet.

We also suspected it is Seid who has been the original funder of the attack on so-called “woke” corporations spearheaded by Will Hild. He is another former Federalist Society staffer who worked with Leo and now helms a previously long dormant special interest group that calls itself [Consumers’ Research](#). Seid did not respond to our request for comment last year when we wrote

about his secret role in re-animating that attack group.

So below we are posting an excerpt of our research on Seid from May 2021, which provides additional details about Seid's history, including his role in secretly funding briefs submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court and more to try limit Americans' rights. This research was compiled by Lisa Graves and Evan Vorpahl.

### Consumers' Research Reborn with Secret Funds via Barre Seid

In 2013, Consumers' Research moved from a unit in a DC townhouse owned by [M. Stanton] Evans to a mansion in North-west DC. Suddenly, between 2013 and 2014, the group received more than \$1.4 million. Five hundred thousand of that came from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, a fund built from the industrial fortune of the long dead Bradley brothers.

It was staked with at least \$250,000 that came from a secretive multi-millionaire donor. That new detail comes from a trove of Bradley Foundation [files](#) that were likely hacked by [Russia in 2016 and posted on the web](#), and then authenticated by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in 2017.

True North Research reviewed that trove and found a 2013 memo written by a Bradley executive, Mike Hartmann, noting that its grants totalling \$250,000 that year would "match a \$250,000 contribution from the anonymous donor in Chicago."

That trove also contains documentation of "matching" grants, which indicate that the anonymous donor Bradley was matching in 2013 was "Seid." The only Seid referred to in numerous Bradley documents -- such as executive travel to meet with major donors and to "coordinate" funding -- is Barre Seid, a super wealthy Chicago industrialist whose net worth is not publicly known. Seid did not respond to a request for a comment about his funding of Consumers' Research.

**WHO IS BARRE SEID?** The secretive Seid (who is the son of Russian immigrants) made his fortune running a private company that makes power strips and surge protector products that are in millions of homes and businesses.

Over the years Seid's name has come up as a major donor for [controversial](#) politicians like [Steven Baer](#), a failed Illinois gubernatorial candidate and [zealot](#) who wants to end legal abortion in the U.S. Seid has been funding the right wing for decades; he was [born in 1932](#).

Seid's family foundation has disclosed that it is a major funder of the [Heartland Institute](#), a pay-to-play group notorious for trying to equate people who recognize climate change with [the Unabomber](#). In addition, computer scientist John Mashey's [analysis](#) of Heartland's biggest funder, dubbed "Anonymous Donor" in leaked documents, indicates it was Seid who secretly gave the group more than \$13 million from 2007-2011 to attack "global warming" science and Obama's efforts to expand access to health care, according to DeSmog.

The Bradley trove also stated Seid had used DonorsTrust, which *Mother Jones* has called a "[dark money ATM](#)," to cloak some donations. This was noted in [Mike] Hartmann's 2013 proposal summary about a Florida group called the Foundation for Government Accountability:

Indeed, in 2013, Consumers' Research received a single grant in the amount of \$250K from Donors Capital Fund, the dark money partner of DonorsTrust. That could well be Seid.

Notably, Salon [reported](#) in 2010 that the [Clarion Fund inadvertently disclosed that a "Barry Seid" gave it "excess contributions" of more than \\$16 million](#), the year it spent almost that amount distributing an anti-Muslim film called *Obsession*, which "was [widely criticized for its cartoonish portrayal of Muslims as modern-day Nazis](#)." Clarion released millions of those DVDs in the months before the Barack Obama v. John McCain presidential election in 2008.

Clarion later claimed its tax form release was in error. Tax filings show that DonorsTrust, the dark money conduit noted above, transferred more than \$16 million to Clarion. Seid's spokesperson said he did not give money "to" Clarion, which is technically true. It appears that DonorsTrust operated as designed, to provide secrecy as well as [deniability](#). (Seid also [used DonorsTrust to funnel millions to Shimer College](#) in an apparent bid to capture it.)

In sum, the trove True North Research reviewed indicates that Seid rebooted Consumers' Research with at least \$250,000, but the total Seid has given to the group is unknown.

Seid is the only known human funder of the group since 2013. The funder, or funders, of its new million-dollar ad campaign against Coca Cola, American Airlines, and Nike are secret.

### Secret Funds to Consumers' Research Fueled Amicus Briefs and PR

What did the new funding for Consumers' Research that started in 2013 help underwrite?

As the Bradley trove shows, its 2013 funding to match Seid's anonymous \$250K funding to Consumers' Research was provided to support litigation by Republican Attorneys General. Its focus was on [climate issues](#), to be pursued along the lines of the AGs' attacks on the Affordable Care Act and Dodd-Frank reforms following Wall Street's meltdown in 2008.

**RE SCOTT PRUITT.** According to the trove, funding for Consumers' Research would help launch a "Center for Energy Innovation and Independence" (CEII). Specifically, Bradley wanted to aid then-[Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt](#) and other GOP AGs with "*amicus curiae*," or friend-of-the-court briefs, and support multi-state litigation. It also mentioned Pruitt's efforts to discover if environmental groups were advising EPA on fines. He later [became Trump's EPA administrator](#) and was [embroiled in numerous controversies](#).

In the documents, Bradley's Hartmann noted that -- in addition to aiding Pruitt -- the CEII project would be advised by "C. Boyden Gray, David Rivkin, and George Mason University School of Law professor Todd Zywicki" -- all of whom have close ties to oil billionaire [Charles Koch's network](#). Gray is a former White House Counsel, an heir to the RJ Reynolds tobacco fortune, and is linked to front groups that have sought to block regulations.

**SEID AND KOCH.** Gray's name also headlines a special center at GMU, whose law school received two major, secret



gifts after Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died in 2016: \$10 million, which turned out to be from the [Koch fortune](#), and \$20 million that has been linked by [UnKoch My Campus](#) to ... Seid. Seid has also funded other non-profits closely tied to Charles Koch, including the Cato Institute and the [Competitive Enterprise Institute](#).

The secret gifts to the Scalia law school apparently anointed Leonard Leo -- the man who helped pick the Supreme Court candidates Donald Trump chose from -- with special powers at the law school. Leo was Executive Vice President of the Federalist Society until after his dark money network, and [increase in personal assets](#), were [exposed by Robert O'Harrow and Shawn Boberg](#) in a blockbuster investigation by *The Washington Post* in 2019. Last year, Leo and Greg Mueller of Creative Response Concepts (CRC) launched a for-profit group called "[CRC Advisors](#)" as a vehicle to steer secretive donors to select nonprofits.

The \$500K from Bradley to Consumers' Research was described as aid for launching CEII, which Pruitt helped get [incorporated in Oklahoma in 2013](#), the year [CEII filed an amicus brief against carbon regulations](#). [It has disclosed no significant income from 2013-2017](#).

**THE AMICUS BRIEFS.** Starting in 2013, however, Consumers' Research suddenly began appearing as a "friend of the court" in appellate cases filed with Republican AGs. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) has [spearheaded efforts](#) to [shine a light](#) on [dark money amici](#).

The amicus briefs of Consumers' Research attacked the insurance exchanges under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which provides health care access to millions of Americans and protects tens of millions who with pre-existing conditions from being denied coverage.

Some of the \$1.4 million the group received in 2013-2014 was spent on briefs to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of Consumers' Research and Pruitt, plus six other Republican men elected to serve as Attorneys General (Oklahoma, Alabama, Georgia, West Virginia, Nebraska, and South Carolina/Scott Pruitt, Luther Strange, Sam Orens, Patrick Morrisey, Jon Bruning, and Alan Wilson, along with other state officials). These AGs were part of the [Republican Attorneys General Association](#) (RAGA), a group that Documented noted was [embroiled in the Jan. 6 events](#). It is [known for soliciting money from regulated industries in order to funnel cash toward helping the electoral campaigns of GOP candidates for state Attorney General](#).

Those ACA briefs were filed by Pruitt and the law firm of Kellogg, Huber, Hansen, Todd, Evans & Figel, which received \$200K from Consumers' Research in 2014. (*King v. Sebelius* was

renamed *King v. Burwell* when the case was argued before the Supreme Court.)

Consumers' Research also submitted a solo amicus brief in that case, which was written by Ronald Cass. In all, Consumers' Research spent more than \$335K in 2014 using tax-free money to fund private law firms to fight the Obama administration. Consumers' Research and the GOP AGs lost their case attacking the ACA's health insurance exchanges, which was spearheaded by the [Competitive Enterprise Institute](#) with the Bradley Foundation's support.

**OTHER LITIGATION.** In 2015, the Obama administration's EPA proposed the Clean Power Plan to mitigate the climate changes underway through limits on carbon emissions

from power plants. Patrick Morrisey, the Attorney General of West Virginia, [sued the EPA](#), and Pruitt and most other GOP AGs joined, except Nevada. Subsequently, in 2016, [Consumers' Research joined with the Attorney General of Nevada, Paul Laxalt, to oppose the measure](#).

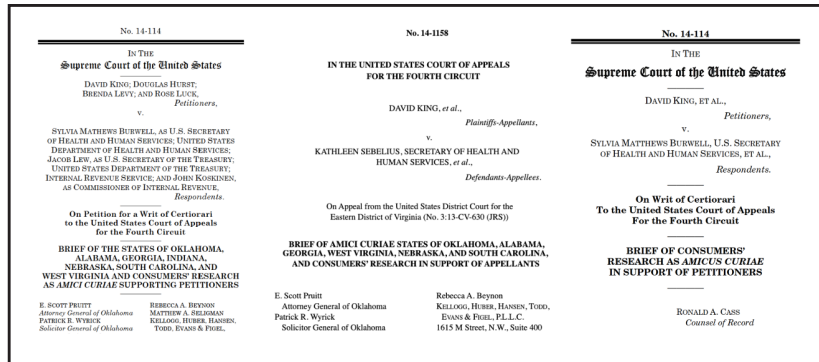
In 2015, Consumers' Research also disclosed that it paid the law firm of Wiley, Rein and Fielding more than \$400K. That was apparently for a brief with the Rutherford Institute in [Matal v. Tam, a case challenging the federal authority to deny trademarks that disparage people](#). Consumer's Research's successful First Amendment challenge to the Lanham Act took the same side in the case as the football franchise that was then called the Washington Redskins. The underwriter of that litigation, if any, was not disclosed. In 2016, Consumers' Research spent \$189K on legal fees, although the firms were not listed. With the arrival of Trump, the spigot for amicus briefs attacking the administration appeared to mostly dry up.

**BIG PR, TOO.** From 2013-2019, Consumers' Research spent nearly one million dollars (\$960K) on PR. Most of that spending -- more than \$600K -- was on CRC, the PR group with close ties to Leonard Leo. (\$110K in 2014, \$300K in 2015, \$200K in 2016, \$133K in 2017; \$120K in 2018; and \$110K in 2019). It is not yet public how much Consumers' Research spent in 2020 or what it will spend in 2021, with its latest surge in secret funding.

Who is in charge of Consumers' Research now?

**WILL HILD.** In 2019, William Hild III became the Executive Director of Consumers' Research.

Hild previously worked as a Deputy Director for the Federalist Society, where dark money maestro Leonard Leo worked as Executive Vice President. Hild directed the Federalist Society's regulatory transparency project and its Article I Initiative, which describes itself as focused on restoring Congress' traditional power. What that means in reality is that Hild helped advance the vision of Leo and Steven Calabresi -- and their funders -- to limit the power of Congress to delegate rulemaking to federal



King v. Burwell

agencies, among other things.

As the *Washington Post* [reported](#) in 2019, Leo told funders at the Council on National Policy that because of the people Leo helped get Trump to appoint to lifelong judicial positions:

“We stand at the threshold of an exciting moment in our republic: the revival of our structural Constitution by the U.S. Supreme Court, a revival in those very important principles of limited constitutional government—separation of powers, federalism, enumerated powers, limits on judicial power, sovereignty – and this is really I think, in recent memory, a newfound embrace of limited constitutional government in our country. I don’t think this has really happened since probably before the New Deal, which means no one in this room has probably experienced the kind of transformation that I think we are beginning to see.”

As True North has [noted](#): “the decades before the New Deal, known as the ‘Lochner Era,’ were marked by extreme judicial activism where courts struck down protections people clamored for to regulate the business activities of industrialists whose wealth and agenda had dominated U.S. law. ‘Limited constitutional government’ is a variation on the ‘limited government’ mantra used by major [Koch](#)-funded groups, like Americans for Prosperity, the Cato Institute, and the American Legislative Exchange Council.” Duke University history Professor Nancy MacLean uses the phrase “[democracy in chains](#)” to describe this dogma. ■

*Lisa Graves is Executive Director of TrueNorth Research. President of the Board of the Center for Media and Democracy/PR Watch, and board member of the Public Concern Foundation, publishers of The Washington Spectator. A national expert in the investigation of right-wing dark money groups, she previously served as the Chief Counsel for Nominations on the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, and as Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the U.S. Department of Justice, among other roles.*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

# A Fork in the Road

**F**OR THIS ISSUE OF THE *SPECTATOR* WE HAVE DRAWN on some of the valuable reporting and commentary we’ve seen recently that bears on the issues at stake in the coming midterm elections.

For several years we’ve published Anne Nelson’s [prescient reporting](#) on the takeover of the Republican party by the far right. We’ve traced the rise of Christian nationalism; the centrality of Steve Bannon; and the role of the libertarian right in financing the [communications platforms](#) and disinformation apparatus of the far-reaching conservative movement. We published George Black on the arc of [aggrieved veterans](#) from Vietnam to the Capitol steps on January 6th; we ran his unsettling chronicle of the cadres of ex-military that have aligned with MAGA and Trumpism and are now entering [electoral politics](#); and we’ve charted the close ties these various strands of American political extremism have built with the international authoritarian right.

That process is now complete, the new Republicans have purged the moderates and non-believers and the party stands on the threshold of power at what President Biden is calling “an inflection point” in American democracy. (Never mind that many voters think Biden is saying “infection point” – which may be more accurate - and that “fork in the road” would have done just fine.)

This analysis by now has entered mainstream coverage of our politics and is shaping much of the reporting on the fast-approaching elections. Less well understood by a distracted electorate are the backstories on themes that have resonated throughout this campaign - how Roe was overturned, the pervasive racism and antisemitism of these “Christian” factions and the extensive and unambiguous documentation of Trump’s venality.

For our cover story on the Republican hijacking of Roe, we turned to Lisa Graves - the respected researcher and reporter who helped build the Center for Media and Democracy and now presides over True North Research. For a decade, Lisa has been reporting on the Chicago billionaire Barre Seid and Leonard Leo, the Co-Chair of the Federalist Society - “one super rich old guy and his regressive ally” – and their outsized roles in stacking the federal courts and overturning hard won constitutional rights.

Next up is Charlie Sykes, the veteran conservative talk show host from Wisconsin and now editor-in-chief of the Bulwark, a center-right online news and commentary site that has diverged usefully from Trumpism and the current drift of the Republican party and its allies. In his piece “The Right Normalizes Anti-semitism,” Sykes goes behind all the pandering to the Jewish vote at home and the solidarity with right-wing factions in Israel to expose the pervasive and persistent antisemitism of the American right.

The liberal commentator and long-time Newsweek columnist Jonathan Alter writes from the virtual set of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, and calls it a wrap. In his column “Trump’s Criminal

Intent – Day 9,” Alter sums up the committee’s incontrovertible case: “Trump is so guilty – and his behavior so indefensible,” that even in the 14-page letter Trump released at the conclusion of the hearing he didn’t try to rebut the charges against him. Instead he opted to recycle the claims of vote fraud dismissed in late 2020 by 60 state and federal courts and his own Department of Justice.

We’ve also included Chris Hedges’ piece on the politics and culture of gun ownership that first appeared on [scheerpost.com](https://scheerpost.com). Hedges is the author of the celebrated *War is a Force that Gives us Meaning*, and co-author with Laila Al-Arian of *Collateral Damage: America’s War against Iraqi Civilians*, another powerful anti-war title he published a number of years back at Nation Books. You can find him on [substack \(https://chrishedges.substack.com/\)](https://chrishedges.substack.com/) and at [scheerpost.com](https://scheerpost.com). If you agree that at least part of the purpose of the best political and social commentary is to challenge readers to question their assumptions, then Hedges will be a revelation.

In this installment of the ongoing economics seminar Steven Pressman has conducted on our pages, the professor looks at debt in general and household debt in particular, and raises unspoken questions around the impact of rising interest rates and just how much growth in personal debt the economy can withstand.

Finally, in this issue we’re introducing *The Wide Angle* with Dave Troy, a new column concerned with threats to democracy. Troy is an investigative journalist who focuses on online extremism and the activities of far right actors abroad. [Paranoia on Parade: How Goldbugs, Libertarians and Religious Extremists Brought America to the Brink](#), his essay on the century-old attempts of wealthy industrialists and tech entrepreneurs to control the currency, appeared in *The Washington Spectator* last June.

Global inflation has taken its toll on the lives of everyday Americans, and the Fed’s sledgehammer efforts to tame inflation by shutting down the economy are adding fuel to the smoldering partisan fires.

Bolstered by billions in dark money contributions, the MAGA extremists, election deniers, climate deniers, originalists, dominionists, nativists, dog whistle racists and corporate puppets that make up the new Republican party are trying to pin these daunting problems on the Democrats.

They’re hoping people will forget who eased the pain of the pandemic, made crucial investments in a crumbling infrastructure and rebuilt a shattered economy, creating more jobs in the process than at any time in our history – all over near-seamless Republican opposition.

Before heading to the polls next week, voters are encouraged to reflect on what they know to be true about the different candidates—their public statements, their records, the sources of their funding and their known affiliations—and to peer over the horizon at what a government controlled by the far right in this country will actually look like. ■

—WS Editors

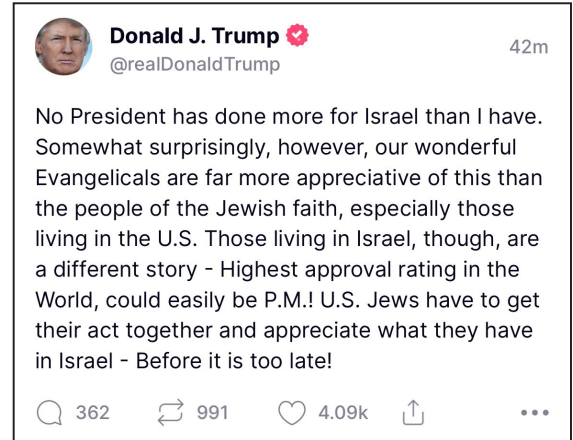
## The Right Normalizes Anti-Semitism

**Not with a bang. But with a shrug.**

*By Charlie Sykes*

**P**ERHAPS THE FROG WASN’T BOILED AFTER ALL. Maybe it was just exhausted. How else to explain the flaccid reaction this week to American conservatism’s casual normalization of anti-Semitism?

It’s been two weeks since the former president blasted out his complaint about ungrateful Jews.



The implicit threat got no points for subtlety. Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO and national director of the Anti-Defamation League, [called](#) Trump’s post “insulting and disgusting.”

“We don’t need the former president, who curries favor with extremists and anti-Semites, to lecture us about the US-Israel relationship,” he said. None of this, however, is new. The [ADL has been warning](#) about Trump’s dalliance with anti-Semitism for years. After Trump tweeted out an image of Hillary Clinton and a Star of David in 2016, the ADL sounded the alarm:

**We’ve been troubled by the anti-Semites and racists during this political season, and we’ve seen a number of so-called Trump supporters peddling some of the worst stereotypes all through this year. And it’s been concerning that [Donald Trump] hasn’t spoken out forcefully against these people. It is outrageous to think that the candidate is sourcing material from some of the worst elements in our society.**

As we know, Republican voters — and the GOP establishment — brushed off the anti-Semitic imagery, and Trump went on to win the presidency. The alt-right blended into the GOP mainstream. In 2017, in Charlottesville after tiki torch carrying thugs chanted “Jews will not replace us”, [Trump praised](#) what he called “very fine people on both sides.”

You know the rest of the story.

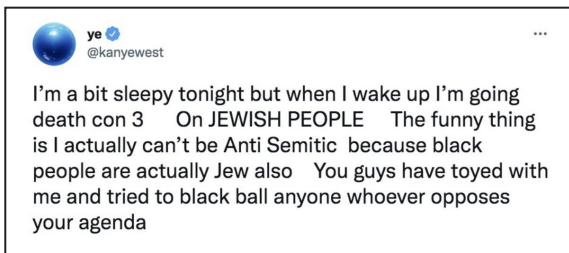
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Politico's Jonathan Lemire [put Trump's latest threat in context](#):

This tweet comes at a moment where bias incidents and hate crimes, anti-Semitic incidents are already skyrocketing, they have been on the rise in recent years, and it feels like we know the president has inspired the violence of January 6th, called for supporters to be violent other times, related to the Mar-a-Lago case, sending out warnings, and threats to the FBI, and the fear here is this could be interpreted by his followers as a moment to potentially commit violence against Jews, and that is deeply worrisome...

Trump's outburst also came amid Kanye West's [ongoing anti-Semitic meltdown](#).



Meanwhile in Pennsylvania, the GOP nominee [continues to send out anti-Semitic signals](#), which is hardly surprising, given Mastriano's track record.

[Democrats have highlighted Mastriano's ties to white supremacists and antisemites](#) – in particular Gab, the social media platform that serves as a haven for the far-right – in hopes of swaying independent voters. Gab founder and CEO Andrew Torba is the co-author of the just-published book “Christian Nationalism: A Biblical Guide to Taking Dominion and Disciplining Nations” that has recently been among Amazon's best-sellers.

The reaction?

Even amid evidence of rising anti-Jewish violence, the normally voluble right-wing media could not even be bothered to shuffle its feet. Elected Republicans could hardly muster a tired shrug among them; they are, apparently, too worn out, beaten down, and numbed to be outraged.

Fox News ignored, or shrugged off, the whole thing. [Tucker Carlson edited out](#) Kanye's anti-Semitic rants from his broadcast interviews. The Daily Wire's Candace Owens [jumped to his defense](#), while her boss, Ben Shapiro, [explained](#) that Kanye's anti-Jewish rant was “clearly anti-Semitic” and “disturbing,” but, but, “Kanye's moves toward pro-life, faith, and family conservatism are encouraging.” Days later, Kanye announced [he was buying](#) the right-wing troll platform Parler (whose CEO is Candace Owen's husband). After that news broke, [Politico reports](#), Kanye and Trump spoke by phone. “West placed the call, during which the two confirmed plans to have dinner though nothing is currently scheduled.”

And [this tweet](#) from the House GOP Judiciary Committee official account is still up:



Meanwhile, Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has speculated about Jewish Space Lasers, continues to rise in the GOP ranks and [is poised to assume a much larger and powerful role](#) in a GOP-controlled Congress.

And Trump? Historian Michael Beschloss asked on October 20th:



So far, nothing. *Nada. Crickets. And no one was surprised.*



It was not always so.

The founder of modern conservatism, William F. Buckley, thought that exorcizing the demon of anti-Semitism was so critical that when he founded *National Review* in 1955, he declared that the magazine “declined association with anti-Semites.” And he moved aggressively to purge the ranks.

[When it became clear, in 1957, that the direction the American Mercury was headed was anti-Semitic, I ruled, with the enthusiastic approval of my colleagues, that no writer appearing on the Mercury's masthead, notwithstanding his own innocence on the subject, could also appear on National Review's.](#)

Buckley's adamancy was all the more noteworthy because of his own checkered background. “I have some credentials in the area,” he wrote, “among them my own father's anti-Semitism.”

In 1937, when he was 11 years-old, [he later confessed](#), he “wept tears of frustration at being forbidden by senior siblings” to go with them to burn a cross outside a Jewish resort.

But after the horrors of the Holocaust, Buckley became convinced that, **“The age calls for hypersensitivity to anti-Semitism, over against a lackadaisical return to the blasé conventions of the prewar generation, which in one country led to genocidal catastrophe.”**

Years later, he would ban writer Joseph Sobran from his magazine, and defied and horrified many of his allies on the right by writing [“In Search of Anti-Semitism,”](#) and denouncing Pat Buchanan. Buckley wrote that he

**[found] it impossible to defend Pat Buchanan against the charge that what he did and said during the period under examination amounted to anti-Semitism, whatever it was that drove him to say and do it. . . .**

But even Buckley’s excommunication couldn’t disguise the fact that the guard-rails on the right were shaky. Despite Buckley’s conclusion that Buchanan had trafficked in anti-Semitic rhetoric, *National Review* nevertheless endorsed Buchanan in the 1992 presidential primaries as a “protest” against George H.W. Bush.

As [First Things reported at the time](#), “Eleven distinguished figures, plus two editors of this journal, signed a letter protesting any endorsement, even a ‘tactical endorsement,’ of a candidate who refused to retract his anti-Semitic remarks.”

But, as it turned out, Buchanan was just the precursor. By the time Trump came around, what remained of Buckley’s guardrails were gone.

And now, it’s almost as if the right has forgotten they were ever really there at all. ■

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## Trump’s Criminal Intent — Day Nine

**The final hearing of the January 6th Committee pulls it all together**

*By Jonathan Alter*

**I**T HAS BEEN THREE MONTHS SINCE [THE LAST JANUARY 6th Committee hearing](#) — a lifetime in the theater of politics — so it was only natural that members opted to use Day Nine to offer a refresher course on how Donald Trump tried to overturn the 2020 election and end American democracy.

In doing so, they finally absorbed a lesson that Trump himself learned years ago: Repetition, which Democratic presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama found boring and the press abhors, is essential for imprinting a narrative on the public’s prefrontal cortex. There was a lot of commentary this week that the hearings didn’t move the needle with Republicans. But even if around a third of Americans refuse to accept it, the true story of what happened is now set in concrete—a slab of settled history that won’t be easy to dislodge.

The Select Committee’s surprise ending — a subpoena of Trump — looks like a stunt, a way of staying relevant while members and staff prepare their final report. Trump is so guilty — and his behavior so indefensible — that even in the unhinged 14-page letter he released on Friday he doesn’t try to rebut any of the committee’s findings. The gist of his screed is that he’s upset that Congress won’t investigate the claims of vote fraud dismissed in late 2020 by 60 state and federal courts and his own Department of Justice. It’s better that he wasn’t subpoenaed a long time ago; that spared us months of pointless wrangling that would have interfered with the Select Committee’s compelling presentation of the case against him. But now’s the time for the distraction. The fake drama of whether he’ll comply with the subpoena (he won’t) will keep his name in the news and maybe help drive some Democratic turnout in the midterms.

Chair Bennie Thompson opened Day Nine by making an important point about the genuine bipartisanship of this investigation, which goes beyond the presence of two Republicans (Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger) on the Select Committee:

**When you look back at what has come out through this committee's work, the most striking fact is that all this evidence came almost entirely from Republicans. The evidence that has emerged did not come from Democrats or opponents of Donald Trump. Instead, look at who's written and testified and produced evidence.**

As she has throughout the hearings, Cheney got to the essence of what the Select Committee wanted to convey on Thursday:

**President Trump knew from unassailable sources that his election fraud claims were false. He admitted he had lost the election. He took actions consistent with that belief.**



Claims that President Trump actually thought the election was stolen are not supported by fact and are not a defense.

There is no defense that Donald Trump was duped or irrational. No president can defy the rule of law and act this way in a constitutional republic, period.

For those of you scoring at home, there was fresh stuff on Thursday. The most striking was the [new video from inside the secure location](#) where congressional leaders in both parties were held. Drawn from an upcoming HBO documentary shot and directed by Alexandra Pelosi, daughter of the speaker, it proves Trump was lying when he claimed Pelosi and other congressional leaders in both parties didn't try to bring in reinforcements for Capitol Police. It also includes this soundbite for the ages from Nancy Pelosi:



Pelosi (speaking on whether Trump decides to come down to speak to the Capitol rioters): “I hope he comes, I’m going to punch him out. I’m going to go to jail and I’m going to be happy.”

My two big substantive takeaways: First, the Committee offered new evidence of Trump’s premeditation and criminal intent, a requirement for convicting him in any conspiracy case the Justice Department might bring. Second, it now seems likely that pro-Trump elements within law enforcement downplayed or ignored clear signs that a violent attack on the Capitol was coming. (As outside reinforcement of that impression, [NBC News broke a story Thursday of an FBI whistleblower](#) reporting that a “sizable percentage” of the Bureau was [sympathetic to the insurrectionists](#)).

The first takeaway fits into the familiar pattern of every revelation about Trump — it’s shocking but not surprising. We learned that October 31, 2020 — nine days before the election — is an important date in establishing that the coup attempt was premeditated. That’s when [Tom Fitton](#), the same conservative activist who months later advised Trump that he didn’t need to return any of the purloined documents he kept at Mar-a-Lago, wrote a memo about the strategy for Election Night. Fitton counseled the president to say, “We had an election today - and I won.” He

told Trump to insist that no ballots received after the polls closed (i.e. any mail-in ballots) should be counted.

Just after 5 p.m. on Election Day, Fitton spoke to Trump about the plan. (“Sending along again,” Fitton emailed Mike Pence’s staff. “Just talked to him about the draft below.”). In the wee hours, Trump went before the cameras to claim victory and declare that vote-counting should stop, just as Fitton had advised before anyone went to the polls.

Trump was executing a sinister coup plot hatched months earlier. Brad Parscale, Trump’s former 2020 campaign manager,

#### WATCH ON YOUTUBE

LEAKED AUDIO: Trump planned to falsely claim victory, according to Bannon

testified that Trump planned as early as July to claim that he won even if he lost. And Steve Bannon, [speaking a few days before the election](#) in 2020 to a group of Chinese (!) visitors, said this:

Some lawyers have argued that Trump’s state of mind — his belief that he actually won the election — will be a good

#### WATCH ON YOUTUBE

Trump Pressed Georgia Official to Find 11,000 Votes in Heated Call

defense for him in the Georgia case, where he looks terrible in telling Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to “find 11,780 votes.”

In truth, Trump knew he had lost even if he could not ever accept it. Establishing criminal intent requires the former but not the latter. On Thursday, the Committee revisited the several occasions when Trump discussed having lost the election (“Can you believe I lost to this fucking guy?” he asked White House Former White House Director of Strategic Communications Alyssa Farah), plus Attorney General William Barr’s testimony that he repeatedly informed the president that a thorough DOJ probe had shown there was “zero basis” to the fraud claims in Georgia or any other state and that Trump was “doing a grave, grave disservice to the country” in pushing them.

The Select Committee also drove home the fresh and legally significant point that Trump had not only been told he lost but was acting on his acknowledgment of it. Rep. Adam Kinzinger, in what will likely be his farewell appearance, explained how four days after the election (on the day Joe Biden was declared the victor) [Trump signed orders](#) “which would have required the immediate withdrawal of troops from Somalia and Afghanistan, all to be complete before the Biden inauguration on January 20th.” The National Security Council and Pentagon pushed back hard at this rash and unworkable decision, which Trump made so as to get credit for the withdrawal before he left office. “These are the highly conscious actions of a president who knows his term will end,” Kinzinger explained.

Similarly, when [Trump lost his final appeal to the Supreme Court on December 11](#), he was livid that the justices he appointed would do this to him. His “state of mind” was not that he had

actually won in the high court; he simply defied the decision and thus the rule of law. Cassidy Hutchinson, the star witness of these hearings, heard Trump tell his chief of staff:

I don't want people to know we lost, Mark [Meadows].  
This is embarrassing. Figure it out. We need to figure it out.  
I don't want people to know that we lost.

Kinzinger summed up Trump's criminal and seditious intent:

Not only did the courts reject President Trump's fraud and other allegations, his Department of Justice appointees, including Bill Barr, Jeffrey Rosen, and Richard Donoghue did as well. President Trump knew the truth. He heard what all his experts and senior staff were telling him. He knew he had lost the election, but he made the deliberate choice to ignore the courts, to ignore the Justice Department, to ignore his campaign leadership, to ignore senior advisers, and to pursue a completely unlawful effort to overturn the election.

His intent was plain. Ignore the rule of law and stay in power.

Here's where the plot thickens. Rep. Elaine Luria pointed to mid-December as a turning point: "Even when top law enforcement officials told the president his election fraud claims were false, he still repeated the claims in the days and weeks that followed." [Luria then proved her argument in dramatic fashion](#) by juxtaposing testimony of Trump being told in private that fraud claims in Michigan, Pennsylvania and elsewhere were phony with Trump amplifying those lies in public the very next day.

This was an important moment in Thursday's hearing. Afterwards, Andrew Weissmann, a former Assistant United States Attorney, [explained on MSNBC](#) that "the way you build a case is to show the gap between what he knows privately and what he says publicly. These repeated lies will be devastating if [Merrick] Garland pulls the trigger."

As if previewing an effective summation for the jury at a criminal trial, Select Committee members reprised some highlights from earlier hearings:

- Ivanka Trump's friend Julie Radford in the Oval Office witnessing an irate Trump call Pence "the p-word" on the phone on the morning of January 6th when he learned Pence wouldn't steal the election for him
- Pence saying of that plot that "there's no idea more un-American than the notion that any one man can determine who is president"
- RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel testifying that Trump was on the call with her and John Eastman when they discussed the fake electors scheme (a subject of great interest to DOJ's fraud and RICO investigations)
- Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, Donald Trump Jr. and Kevin McCarthy pleading with Trump to tell his

followers to leave the Capitol. When he finally did, nearly three hours after first learning about the violence, the video of rioters immediately exiting spoke volumes about his power to stop the assault much earlier had he chosen to do so.

Beyond familiar elements of the coup attempt that still have the ability to shock, my second big takeaway from Day Nine involved the response of law enforcement. Call me naive, but even knowing about the widespread support inside the FBI for Trump in 2016, I was surprised that [the Bureau would fail to act on intelligence in December of 2020](#) about a plot to attack the Capitol. For months, FBI Director Christopher Wray and other officials insisted they had no suspicion anyone was planning anything. Now, with evidence they alerted the Secret Service of violent threats, they got some 'splainin' to do.

And so does the Secret Service. Rep. Adam Schiff said that over the summer the Select Committee had collected more than one million emails, messages and documents related to the Secret Service and possible violence in Washington but [apparently none of them are from January 5th or 6th](#), the only two dates from which everything has been lost or erased. White House and Secret Service witnesses previously testified that they had received no intelligence about violence that could have potentially threatened any of the protectees on January 6th, including the vice president. How *conveeeenient*.

Schiff was scathing about what the committee had heard from the Secret Service: "Evidence strongly suggests that this testimony is not credible."

Had they been available, the January 5th and 6th texts might have shed light on why [Tony Ornato](#), the former Secret Service agent serving as White House deputy chief of staff, wanted Pence evacuated from the Capitol to Andrews Air Force Base, where he would have been unable to certify that Biden had been elected. That's when Pence uttered what Rep. Jamie Raskin famously calls "[the six most chilling words in U.S. history: 'I'm not getting in that car.'](#)"



The Select Committee familiarized the public with “The Donald,” an online message board community that got its start in 2015 as a subreddit. A few days before January 6th, Jason Miller, a longtime senior adviser to Trump, texted Mark Meadows: “I GOT THE BASE FIRED UP.” He included a link to TheDonald.win that featured comments about the joint session of Congress on January 6th: “Gallows don't require electricity.” “If the filthy commie maggots try to push their fraud through, there will be hell to pay.” “Our lawmakers in Congress can leave one of two ways; one, in a body bag, two, after rightfully certifying Trump the winner.”

This smells like the president politicizing the Secret Service, turning it into a Praetorian Guard. And recent stories about [Oath Keepers being in touch with a Secret Service official](#) before January 6th raise a whole set of other questions. If either (or, miraculously, both) chambers of Congress remain in Democratic hands after the midterms, we need hearings next year devoted to the conduct of the FBI, Secret Service and Department of Homeland Security.

In the meantime, the Select Committee is helping DOJ cover the bases on criminal intent. After revisiting how Trump was told that his followers were refusing to go through metal detectors on the Ellipse, Rep. Pete Aguilar said:

Let's pause at this point to consider President Trump's state of mind, his motivation at this moment. By that point, it was known to Secret Service that members of the crowd were armed. President Trump had been told, and there was no doubt that President Trump knew what he was going to do, sending an angry mob, a number of whom were clad in tactical gear and military garb, armed with various weapons to the Capitol. There's no scenario where that action is benign.

As in prior hearings, Raskin did a good job contextualizing events. When Trump finally told his people to go home, Raskin read his statement aloud, then unpacked it:

“These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously, viciously, stripped away from great patriots who have been badly unfairly treated for so long.”

These are the things that happen, he said, giving the whole game away. Trump was telling us that the Vice President, the Congress, and all the injured and wounded cops, some of whom are with us today, got what was coming to us. According to Trump. January 6th should not be a day that lives in shame in infamy in our history, but rather in glory.

Remember this day forever, he wrote proudly, as if he were talking about D-Day or the Battle of Yorktown. Trump did nothing to stop the deadly violence for obvious reasons. He thought it was all justified. He incited it and he supported it.

While the Select Committee will likely reconvene when it releases its report, this was almost certainly the last of these terrific show-and-tell sessions that have set a new standard for high-profile congressional hearings. Even when hearings return to the squabbling and preening of the past, they will more often feature a multi-media dimension and a new concern about not boring the audience.

If nothing else, the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol has provided a vivid historical record and the building blocks of true accountability. Can those blocks be assembled into a convincing criminal case that deters future assaults on the republic? We're about to find out. ■

*Jonathan Alter is an American journalist, best-selling author, Emmy-winning documentary filmmaker and television producer who was a columnist and senior editor for Newsweek magazine from 1983 until 2011. This piece originally appeared in his “Old Goats” column on substack ([oldgoats.substack.com/p/trumps-criminal-intent-day-nine](#)) and is published here with permission of the author.*

## America's Gun Fetish

**There will be no gun control, not only because of the gun lobby and a corrupt political class, but because for many white Americans the idea of the gun is the only power they have left.**

*By Chris Hedges*

**G**UNS WERE A UBIQUITOUS PART OF MY CHILDHOOD. My grandfather, who had been a master sergeant in the army, had a small arsenal in his house in Mechanic Falls, Maine. He gave me a 2020 bolt action Springfield rifle when I was 7. By the time I was 10, I had graduated to a Winchester lever action 30-30. I moved my way up the National Rifle Association's (NRA) Marksmanship Qualification Program, helped along by a summer camp where riflery was mandatory. Like many boys in rural America, I was fascinated by guns, although I disliked hunting. Two decades as a reporter in war zones, however, resulted in a deep aversion to weapons. I saw what they did to human bodies. I inherited my grandfather's guns and gave them to my uncle.

Guns made my family, lower working-class people in Maine, feel powerful, even when they were not. Take away their guns and what was left? Decaying small towns, shuttered textile and paper mills, dead-end jobs, seedy bars where veterans, nearly all the men in my family were veterans, drank away their trauma. Take away the guns, and the brute force of squalor, decline, and abandonment hit you in the face like a tidal wave.

Yes, the gun lobby and weapons manufacturers fuel the



violence with easily available assault-style weapons, whose small caliber 5.56 mm cartridges make them largely useless for hunting. Yes, the lax gun laws and risible background checks are partially to blame. But America also fetishizes guns. This fetish has intensified among white working-class men, who have seen everything slip beyond their grasp: economic stability, a sense of place within the society, hope for the future and political empowerment. The fear of losing the gun is the final crushing blow to self-esteem and dignity, a surrender to the economic and political forces that have destroyed their lives. They cling to the gun as an idea, a belief that with it they are strong, unassailable, and independent. The shifting sands of demographics, with white people [projected](#) to become a minority in the U.S. by 2045, intensifies this primal desire, they would say need, to own a weapon.

There have been [over 200](#) mass shootings this year. There are nearly 400 million guns in the U.S., some [120 guns](#) for every 100 Americans. Half of the privately-owned guns are owned by [3 percent](#) of the population, [according to](#) a 2016 study. Our neighbor in Maine had 23 guns. Restrictive gun laws, and gun laws that are inequitably enforced, block gun ownership for many Blacks, especially in urban neighborhoods. Federal law, for example, prohibits gun ownership for most people with felony convictions, effectively barring legal gun ownership for a third of Black men. The outlawing of guns for Blacks is part of a long continuum. Blacks were denied the right to own guns under the antebellum Slave Codes, the post-Civil War Black Codes, and the Jim Crow laws.

White people built their supremacy in America and globally with violence. They massacred Native Americans and stole their land. They kidnapped Africans, shipped them as cargo to the Americas, and then enslaved, lynched, imprisoned, and impoverished Black people for generations. They have always gunned down Black people with impunity, a historical reality only recently discernable to most white people because of cell phone videos of killings.

“The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic and a killer,” D.H. Lawrence [writes](#). “It has never yet melted.”

White society, sometimes overtly and sometimes unconsciously, deeply fears Black retribution for its four centuries of murderous assaults.

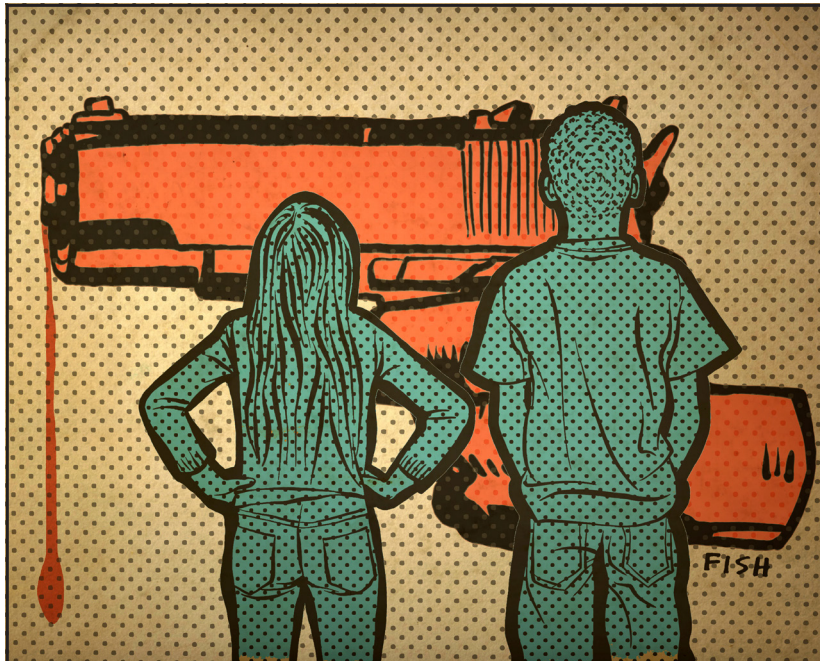
“Again, I say that each and every Negro, during the last 300 years, possesses from that heritage a greater burden of hate for America than they themselves know,” Richard Wright notes in

his [journal](#). “Perhaps it is well that Negroes try to be as unintellectual as possible, for if they ever started really thinking about what happened to them, they’d go wild. And perhaps that is the secret of whites who want to believe that Negroes really have no memory; for if they thought that Negroes remembered they would start out to shoot them all in sheer self-defense.”

The Second Amendment, as the historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz writes in [Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment](#), “[was designed](#) to solidify the rights, often demanded under state law, of whites to carry weapons. Southern white men were not only required to own guns but serve in slave patrols. These weapons were used to exterminate the indigenous population, hunt down enslaved people who escaped bondage and violently crush slave revolts, strikes and other uprisings by oppressed groups. Vigilante violence is wired into our DNA.

“Most American violence – and this also illuminates its relationship to state power – has been initiated with a ‘conservative’ bias,” the historian Richard Hofstadter [writes](#). “It has been unleashed against abolitionists, Catholics, radicals, workers and labor organizers, Negroes, Orientals, and other ethnic or racial or ideological minorities, and has been used ostensibly to protect the American, the Southern, the white Protestant, or simply the established middle-class way of life and morals. A high proportion of our violent actions has thus come from the top dogs or the middle dogs. Such has been the character of most mob and vigilante movements. This may help to explain why so little of it has been used against state authority, and why in turn it has been so easily and indulgently forgotten.”

Payton Gendron, the 18-year-old white shooter in Buffalo who killed ten Black people and wounded three others, one of them Black, at the Tops Friendly Markets in a Black neighborhood, gave expression in a 180-page manifesto to this white fear, or “great replacement theory.” Gendron repeatedly cited Brenton Tarrant, the 28-year-old mass shooter who in 2019 [killed 51 people and injured 40 others at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand](#). Tarrant, like Gendron, live streamed his attack so, he believed, he could be cheered on by a virtual audience. Robert Bowers, 46, [killed 11 people at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh](#) in 2018. [Patrick Crusius](#), a 21-year-old, in 2019 drove more than 11 hours to target Hispanics, leaving 22 people dead and 26 injured in a Walmart in El Paso. [John Earnest, who](#)



“White Light/White Heat” by Mr. Fish

[pleaded guilty](#) to murdering one and injuring three others in 2019 at a synagogue in Poway, California, saw the “white race” being supplanted by other races. Dylann Roof in 2015 fired 77 shots from his .45-caliber Glock pistol at parishioners attending a Bible study at the Black Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. He murdered nine of them. “You Blacks are killing white people on the streets everyday and raping white women everyday,” he [shouted](#) at his victims as he was firing, according to a journal he kept in jail.

The gun enforced white supremacy. It should not be surprising that it is embraced as the instrument that will prevent whites from being dethroned.

The specter of societal collapse, less and less a conspiracy theory as we barrel to climate breakdown, reinforces the gun fetish. Survivalist cults, infused with white supremacy, paint the scenario of gangs of marauding Black and brown people fleeing the chaos of lawless cities and ravaging the countryside. These hordes of Black and brown people, the survivalists believe, will only be kept at bay with guns, especially assault-style weapons. This is not far removed from calling for their extermination.

Historian [Richard Slotkin](#) calls our national lust for blood sacrifice the “structuring metaphor of the American experience,” a belief in “regeneration through violence.” Blood sacrifice, he writes in his trilogy [Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier](#), [The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization](#), and [Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America](#), is celebrated as the highest form of good. Sometimes it requires the blood of heroes, but most often it requires the blood of enemies.

This blood sacrifice, whether at home or in foreign wars, is racialized. The U.S. has slaughtered millions of the globe’s inhabitants, including women and children, in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria and Libya, as well as in numerous proxy wars, the latest in Ukraine, where the Biden administration will ship another [\\$700 million](#) in weapons to supplement [\\$54 billion](#) in military and humanitarian aid.

When the national mythology inculcates into a population that it has the divine right to kill others to purge the earth of evil, how can this mythology not be ingested by naïve and alienated individuals? Kill them overseas. Kill them at home. The more [the empire deteriorates](#), the more the impetus to kill grows. Violence, in desperation, becomes the only route to salvation.

“A people unaware of its myths is likely to continue living by them, though the world around that people may change and demand changes in their psychology, their world view, their ethics, and their institutions,” Slotkin writes.

America’s gun fetish and culture of vigilante violence makes the U.S. very different from other industrialized nations. This is the reason there will never be serious gun control. It does not matter how many mass shootings take place, how many children are butchered in their classrooms, or how high the homicide rate climbs.

The longer we remain in a state of political paralysis, dominated by a corporate oligarchy that refuses to respond to the

mounting misery of the bottom half of the population, the more the rage of the underclass will find expression through violence. People who are Black, Muslim, Asian, Jewish, and LGBTQ, along with the undocumented, liberals, feminists and intellectuals, already branded as contaminants, will be slated for execution. Violence will spawn more violence.

“People pay for what they do, and, still more, for what they have allowed themselves to become,” James Baldwin [writes](#) of the American South. “The crucial thing, here, is that the sum of these individual abdications menaces life all over the world. For, in the generality, as social and moral and political and sexual entities, white Americans are probably the sickest and certainly the most dangerous people, of any color, to be found in the world today.” He added that he “was not struck by their wickedness, for that wickedness was but the spirit and the history of America. What struck me was the unbelievable dimension of their sorrow. I felt as though I had wandered into hell.”

Those who cling to the mythology of white supremacy cannot be reached through rational discussion. Mythology is all they have left. When this mythology appears under threat it triggers a ferocious backlash, for without the myth there is an emptiness, an emotional void, a crushing despair.

America has two choices. It can reintegrate the dispossessed back into the society through radical New Deal types of reforms, or it can leave its underclass to wallow in the toxins of poverty, hate and resentment, fueling the blood sacrifices that afflict us. This choice, I fear, has already been made. The ruling oligarchy doesn’t take the subway or fly on commercial jets. It is protected by the FBI, Homeland Security, police escorts, and bodyguards. Its children attend private schools. It lives in gated communities with elaborate surveillance systems. We don’t matter. ■

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## OPINION

## The Wide Angle

By Dave Troy

**I**N JUNE, *THE WASHINGTON SPECTATOR* PUBLISHED MY long-form investigation into the complicated history behind the January 6th insurrection, [Paranoia on Parade](#). Covering nearly a century, the piece was the result of several years worth of collaborative research, looking into root causes and obscure movements that busy reporters at our daily papers understandably have little time to consider.

At the invitation of Hamilton Fish, editor of the *Spectator*, I'm now also looking forward to publishing a monthly column here, where I can share insights and analysis in something closer to real time, while also pursuing long-form, sense-making investigative work. And I'm indebted to both Ham as well as my network of research partners who make any of this work possible.

I did not arrive in the world of investigative journalism intentionally. My educational background includes a focus on both history and computer science, and I have been a professional technology entrepreneur since I was a teenager — now several decades ago. I became involved with online culture and the internet in the 1980's. I started and successfully exited several technology businesses and have been fortunate to be able to pursue a variety of projects I find challenging and worthwhile.

Since 2007, I have been heavily involved in analyzing data from social media platforms, such as Twitter and LinkedIn. For the last five years, I've focused on research and journalism with the intent of countering threats to our democracy. I've worked with many journalists and researchers to help document and counter ongoing threats in the information environment.

I'll be focusing on keeping you up to date on emerging stories and trends that other outlets may not have the patience or capacity to cover, with a particular focus on irregular warfare, networked insurgency, and the alternate belief systems that animate these phenomena. Many of the stories my team and I are following derive from empirical network analysis. Our practice has been to let research, data, and evidence take us to the story — rather than the other way around.

As we head into the midterms and the eighth month of Vladimir Putin's disastrous and cruel war in Ukraine, Americans are distracted by the team sports-style of coverage that most journalism delivers around election time. While that's understandable, my colleagues and I mostly have our eyes elsewhere.

The anti-democracy forces we saw on display on January 6th, which included individuals connected to Putin's regime, Falun Gong, the Moonies, and a variety of domestic anti-government (and historically anti-communist) networks have not faded away, but rather are aligning globally.

As Russia's military continues to falter in Ukraine, Putin's tactics have become increasingly desperate with forced mobilization, referenda held effectively at gunpoint, and illegal annexations that the international community has mostly refused to recognize.

Elon Musk has become part of Russia's [propaganda thrust](#), serving as a proxy voice for the Kremlin, suggesting that Ukraine simply "compromise" — or risk the eruption of nuclear war. Tensions are heightening with North Korea, and propaganda channels are also suggesting that conflict between China and Taiwan is imminent.

Putin is also focused on establishing a new global economic bloc. Their intention is to pull together "BRICS+" countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and other friends like Iran and North Korea) into a unified economic zone not dependent on SWIFT, NATO, or the European Union. Representing over 3 billion people, they intend to use XRP, a cryptocurrency run by the company Ripple, as a way to bypass SWIFT and avoid sanctions. Additionally, various oligarch interests are lining up around metals-backed cryptocurrencies. So rather than Bitcoin, they are opting for digital currencies backed by nickel, gold, copper, palladium, and the like — resources Putin and his allies have in ample supply.

Underlying Putin's economic strategy to confront the West is a two-fold approach. First, to empower a global network of royalist, faux-royalist, and separatist networks, intent on challenging their national and local governments. Second, to implement the esoteric ideas of Russian "cosmist" Vladimir Vernadsky, later popularized in the West by Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, centered on the concept of a noosphere ("mind sphere") — a kind of global brain theorized to emerge with the expansion of communication networks such as the Internet.

Putin is advancing the noosphere as an alternative to the system of individual state sovereignty which has been the norm since the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. As a 2020 [RAND report](#) lays out, Vernadsky and the "noosphere" concept is rather well-known in Russia, and is part of Russian Cosmism, a philosophy of science that challenges Darwin's theories in favor of a more unitary, anti-positivist approach to exploration of the universe. Putin appears to be offering noocracy (literally "rule by the wise") to his autocratic allies as an alternative vision to the perceived failures of sovereign liberal democracy.

Russia expert Marlene Laruelle dedicated the first chapter of her (free) [2018 book](#), "Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields" to Russian Cosmism, stressing its centrality to the nationalist worldview. Putin's Chief of Staff [Anton Vaino](#) claims to have invented a "nooscope," a device to measure the global consciousness and our progress towards realizing the noosphere. Artifacts in the information warfare theater also suggest that Putin is, at least aspirationally, actively pursuing this approach — even as facts and reality continue to get in his way.

We are hard at work on an investigation that will lay all this out. Western analysts should expand their thinking about the nature of this conflict, its scope, and the ideas that animate it. Tuning the knobs on the set — voting out a few politicians, or sending aid to Ukraine — is necessary but not sufficient to address the broadly scoped 4th generation total and spiritual war we now find ourselves in. Grasping the breadth of the conflict requires looking in places few care to look, and applying



imagination far beyond what we're used to seeing displayed on cable television news. ■

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## Will Household Debt Derail the US Economy?

By Steven Pressman

US HOUSEHOLD DEBT HIT A RECORD \$16.15 TRILION in the second quarter of 2022. Mortgage debt accounts for 75% of the total; college debt another 10%. The rest is mainly motor vehicle and credit card debt.

Rising household debt over the past two years is worrisome, and will become a greater problem as interest rates continue to rise. What's more worrisome, however, are its consequences. Excessive debt can force people to reduce their spending, which will slow economic growth and lead to a recession.

\$16 trillion is a large number. But what really matters is debt relative to what people have to repay it. College debt exceeding \$100,000 is not a big deal for doctors and lawyers making several times that amount each year. The situation is very different for teachers making half what they owe.

From this perspective, things have gotten better lately. Household debt relative to disposable income fell from 150% in 2009 to 130% in 2016, where it has since remained; and household finances improved during the coronavirus pandemic. Consumer debt payments (which excludes mortgages) relative to disposable income fell from 13% in 2007 to 8.4% in early 2021. Delinquencies (debt payments 90-plus days overdue) fell from 3% before covid to under 2% in 2020 and 2021. Covid (which kept people at home and reduced spending), low interest rates, and generous government benefits during the pandemic (stimulus checks, child tax credit, and a moratorium on repaying college debt) helped bring this about.

Furthermore, debt isn't always bad. Mortgages let households purchase a home and gain equity when they pay it off. Borrowed money lets people attend college and buy cars. Debt also enables people to survive hard times-- a layoff, gig workers getting fewer gigs and non-gig workers getting fewer hours, or any catastrophe precluding employment for some time. However, high debt

levels make life stressful and difficult. People worry about eviction, utilities being shut off, putting food on the table, as well as saving for retirement.

Household debt also stimulates the economy and creates jobs. But this, too, is a double-edged sword. Even a small spending cutback due to high debt levels will have negative macroeconomic consequences. Inventories will pile up, firms will cut production, and lay off workers. Service-sector workers will receive less income, and have their gigs or hours reduced.

The main force reducing consumer spending since the 1980s has been the greater share of total income going to the rich, who save large fractions of their income. This leaves less for households struggling to maintain their standard of living. Since low- and middle-income households typically spend nearly all their income, these households have gone into debt or deeper into debt.

But households can handle only so much debt. While the actual breaking point is uncertain, the economic results can be catastrophic once this limit is reached.

In 2008, the Great Recession began when homeowners couldn't pay their mortgages. Lehman Brothers collapsed, and many other financial institutions stood on the brink of bankruptcy. The government bailed out the financial institutions that created the problem, but then did little to help households saddled with mortgages they couldn't possibly repay. This is one reason the economic recovery was so weak and it took nearly a decade before household income (adjusted for inflation) reached its pre-2008 level.

A similar problem led to the October 1929 stock market crash and Great Depression. During the Roaring 20s people bought stock on borrowed money. Once stock prices fell a bit, margin calls went out. Lacking sufficient savings to repay loans from stockbrokers, people had to sell stocks to get cash and repay their loans. This pushed down stock prices further, generating more margin calls, and eventually a market crash. What happened on Wall Street soon affected Main Street, as everyone became reluctant to spend money.

While household debt levels have not yet approached a tipping point, four forces will sharply increase debt-to-income ratios in the months ahead.

First, the Federal Reserve has been raising interest rates since early this year. They plan to continue doing so at least through the end of 2022 (see "The Fed's Battle with Inflation: A Pyrrhic Victory? Or Will the Federal Government Join the Fight?" in the July/August 2022 Washington Spectator). This will increase rates on credit cards, college debt, and car loans. We have already seen one consequence of this-- the ratio of consumer debt payments to disposable income rose to 9.5% in the second quarter of this year (from its record low of 8.4% last year).

Second, the majority of household debt comes from housing. Home prices grew 4.5% annually from 1992 to 2019. Starting in 2020, they have soared more than 10% a year, resulting in a nearly 40% increase in home prices between 2019 and today. Homes are less affordable now than at any time since June 1989. As the Fed continues raising interest rates, housing prices will

begin to fall, putting some homeowners underwater. Similar to the Great Recession, many won't be able to repay their mortgages and will lose their homes.

Third, President Biden recently announced that the college debt moratorium would end in 2023. This moratorium is a leading reason household debt was less problematic during the covid pandemic. Income not used to repay college debt went to repay other debt and kept people from falling further into debt. When college loan repayments resume in January, many households will struggle to pay their bills and also repay their debt.

Finally, government benefits helped US households during the coronavirus pandemic. These benefits have ended. Families struggling to make ends meet must now rely on high-interest borrowing (credit cards, payday loans and auto title loans) to survive.

The good news is that financially strapped households can be helped. For starters, the Fed can stop raising interest rates before they push the economy over the edge.

A more difficult fix is meaningful bankruptcy reform, including allowing people to discharge their college debt, rather than being squeezed during their working lives and then having whatever they still owe taken from their Social Security checks.

Before the 2005 Bankruptcy Reform Act it was easy and cheap for people to reduce their debt through bankruptcy. This is no longer the case. Now people must take two credit counseling courses before having their debt reduced. Many studies have found these classes to be worthless. They don't change behavior, but they are costly for people already drained of their financial resources. Moreover, delaying bankruptcy protection leads to abuse by creditors and possible loss of one's home and car.

For many people, bankruptcy is the only option to escape from the crushing debt that comes from job loss, enormous medical bills, divorce, and other unanticipated events. Changing the bankruptcy code is needed. Towards this end, Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) introduced a new bankruptcy bill in the Senate in 2020. It remains stuck in Committee, lacking the votes to end a Republican filibuster.

A more liberal bankruptcy law would help, but it doesn't solve the underlying problem. People accumulating great debt, and then eliminating it in bankruptcy court every half-dozen years or so, epitomizes Einstein's quip about insanity--it is "doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." The root cause of the household debt problem--greater inequality--needs addressing. As noted above, when more income goes to the top 1%, everyone else must pick up the slack by spending more or going into greater debt. If this doesn't happen, economic growth slows and household debt levels become more problematic--not due to more debt but due to having less income to repay that debt. This is why higher taxes on corporations and the rich, and more generous spending programs (for example, reviving the refundable child tax credit and increasing Social Security and Medicare benefits), are needed. It is for the good of the economy and the nation.

Unless some action is taken, household debt will continue to rise. And it will threaten to rise to the point where it breaks the backs of American households and the US economy. ■

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