

# The Public Eye

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## The Extreme Right in Europe Fascist or Mainstream?

By Jérôme Jamin

Parties of the extreme Right now have a role in the governments and/or the parliaments of several European countries, including Flanders (northern Belgium<sup>1</sup>), France, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland. They now have a share in political power in these countries, directly or indirectly, locally or nationally, alone or in coalitions. What was widely feared—for example, vis-à-vis the Front National in France<sup>2</sup>—has to a significant extent become the reality. And as power went from democratic hands to these new parties, the words used to describe these parties were changed: the neo-Nazis became “parties with extremist trends”; the fascists became the radical Right or national Right.

As yesterday’s fascists have entered government, such word-changes have made it increasingly difficult to identify the extreme right in contemporary Europe. Can one still apply the term fascist to a xenophobic party like the Lega Nord<sup>3</sup> now that it has been in power (with Forza Italia led by Silvio Berlusconi) for many years? Can one view France’s Front National as a mere relic of Pétainism when it made it into the second round of the presidential election (May 2002) and when cities such as Toulon, Orange, Marignane and Vitrolles have had mayors from the FN? In what terms is it possible to stigmatize the Vlaams Blok<sup>4</sup> in northern Belgium—a direct offshoot of pro-Nazi collaboration during World War II—when this party is one of the most powerful in Flanders? It is very hard to use the old words to characterize

those parties in power today. It was a lot easier yesterday when they were small and noisy racist parties instead of the big powerful actors they have now become.

### Words and Actions

To address this concern, we need to focus on how these parties have acted once they got into office. Let us look more closely at the cases of Austria, France, and Belgium.

Jörg Haider and his Austrian Freedom party (FPÖ)<sup>5</sup> often showed their fascination for Nazism and its xenophobic views of politics. Among many examples, he said that the Waffen SS “were part of the Wehrmacht, and therefore deserve honor and respect like other armies.”<sup>6</sup> Speaking about the concentration camp of Mauthausen, Haider called it “a simple punitive camp.” Regarding migrants and foreigners, he has been very clear: “Africans in Austria are drug dealers who try to seduce our youth. We have the Polish who steal cars, the ex-Yugoslavs who are experts in robbery, the Turks who are responsible for the heroin traffic, the Russians who specialize in the black market and in violent assaults.” Regarding Slovenians from Carpathia (Haider’s stronghold), the FPÖ leader said that they “have sex with dogs and should not be surprised to wake up with fleas.”

In 1999, with a huge propaganda campaign against migrants, against elites and against the European Union, the FPÖ got 26.9% in the national election. The outcome was a coalition between the FPÖ and the ÖVP (the conservative party), a coalition which has been criticized

by most of the European governments. Following what would come to be known as the “Haider affair,” the European Union decided to vote sanctions against Austria to protest its acceptance of a fascist party in power.

After a few months of embargo against Austria, the European Union decided to bring in a special commission to evaluate the policies of the FPÖ/ÖVP coalition in order to see if migrants and minorities were suffering under this new xenophobic government. The conclusions of the report are most interesting. It said that although the FPÖ was a “populist party with extremist trends that promote xenophobic speech,”<sup>7</sup> it was impossible to prove a difference between Austria and other countries in their treatment of foreigners. More precisely, the report said, “in some domains, and notably regarding the rights of the national minorities, the Austrian standard could be considered higher than standards in other nations within the European

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# Guest Commentary

## McCarthyism Redux?

By Victor Wallis\*

This issue's lead article examines the mainstreaming of fascist parties in present-day Western Europe. The scenario is one in which those parties have largely shed their extreme-right image without, in the process, giving up their defining agenda. They remain profoundly racist even if they no longer boast of their racism. Although their supporters include many people who are ill served economically by the prevailing system, their coalition partners—when they have them—are parties committed to preserving the economic status quo. This is in the grand tradition of 20th-century fascism, which from its beginnings railed against privilege while pandering to capital and serving it faithfully once in power.

In the United States, no fascist party has entered the electoral arena, but the trademark goals embraced historically by such parties have been attained through other channels. Military aggression, the scrapping of international treaties, preventive detention, widespread torture of prisoners, and the ethnic screening of immigrants have been implemented without any need for the prior services of an avowedly fascist party. It has all come about under the authority of at least one and sometimes both of the “established” political parties.

How this has happened is a complex story, many of whose components are already familiar to readers of *The Public Eye*. At the core of the process are traditions of acquisitiveness, vigilantism, aggressive religiosity, and a peculiarly arrogant patriotism—forming a mindset whose more authoritative public expressions are couched in a persistent euphemistic rhetoric of diversity and moderation. In what follows, I will explore some recent manifestations of this discursive swamp, in terms of how they reflect the larger global agenda that has driven U.S. policy since before the end of World War II.

The 9/11 attacks have supplied the pretext for the U.S. government to reaffirm and intensify its global role. The significant increase in the scope—and the brazenness—of U.S. interventionism invites comparison with the immediate post-World War II period. As in that earlier period, it has been necessary for the government to enlist popular support for policies which in themselves, especially when they come to involve tangible sacrifices, are bound to be unpopular. In both cases, this has entailed creating a climate of fear, which has meant on the one hand constructing an “enemy” and, on the other, setting up a machinery of institutionalized intimidation.<sup>1</sup>

Constructing an enemy means portraying as a threat to the whole people what is in fact a threat only to the corporate interests that permeate the U.S. government. What threatens these interests is any movement (or associated regime) that might reduce the scope of their activity anywhere in the world. Turning such movements into “enemies” means linking them in people’s minds with scenarios of being brought under some kind of foreign military subjugation—or, in the more recent setting, of being exposed to a permanent threat of sudden attack, with the latter seen as something undertaken by

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\* I am grateful to Chip Berlet, Pam Chamberlain, and Roberta Salper for their encouragement and suggestions. I take full responsibility, however, for all opinions expressed in this essay.

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Union.”<sup>8</sup> The Haider affair gave a clear message to the progressive community. The immediate policies implemented by right-wing parties do not necessarily give an accurate indication of their agenda.

The French example illustrates this further. In June 1995, after local elections, the Front National had mayors in office in three cities: Jean-Marie Le Chevallier in Toulon (pop. 175,000), Daniel Simonpieri in Marignane (32,000) and Jacques Bompard in Orange (28,000). Two years later, Catherine Mégret took office in Vitrolles (45,000). Since the beginning of the ‘80s, the leader and founder of the FN had many opportunities to show his nostalgia for Pétain and his xenophobic view of France and Europe. Talking about race, Jean-Marie Le Pen said in August 1996: “I believe there is inequality between races. That is obvious. History shows it. Races do not have the same ability in terms of evolution.”<sup>9</sup> One month later, he added that during the Olympic games he saw “an obvious inequality between black race and white race,” suggesting that while black people excelled in sports, they were inferior in intelligence. Regarding the Holocaust, Le Pen said in September 1987 that while he didn’t deny the existence of gas chambers, he personally did not see any of them, he wondered about it, and anyway “it was a detail of the history of the second World War.” This was said at a time when several “historians” were trying to raise the idea that gas chambers did not exist. In this way, Le Pen was supporting the works of these negationist<sup>10</sup> “historians.” Recently, in 2004, the FN’s number-two man Bruno Gollnisch went in the same direction when he said: “I did not question the existence of concentration camps.... I question the numbers of victims. Historians should debate it.” This year again, Le Pen came back with the idea that “the German occupation [of France] was not especially inhuman”<sup>11</sup> and that we have been too strict about Nazi treatment of the French population during World War II.

Once the Front National got enough votes to elect four mayors, the progressive community focused attention on how

Toulon, Marignane, Orange (and two years later Vitrolles) were being governed. It was about time to see how old words like fascism and Nazism could still make sense in analyzing the extreme right in power. The first year brought many scandalous decisions. Among other examples, we can mention the withdrawal of many “progressive books” from public libraries in those cities and the purchase of literature very favorable to the Front National and Le Pen—a leader who eventually hoped to

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see his own hagiographies on the shelves. Let’s also mention the proposal by Catherine Mégret to offer a grant for any “French white mother” in Vitrolles who would have a baby and register it.<sup>12</sup> Finally, let’s mention the money the mayors put into new uniforms for the police when they stopped financing a “bunch of leftist” associations viewed as enemies of the FN. But although many of these early measures reflected the real nature of the Front National, several years in office have not helped the progressive community to demonstrate dangerous links between words and acts, between the FN and a fascist threat. In brief, the FN could withdraw books from libraries and support the police, but they were not starting to set up an authoritarian state in France, nor did they hold a book-burning rally.

A third example deserves our attention. The separatist nationalist Vlaams

Blok (VB, Flemish Bloc) has been growing continuously since 1978 and, according to recent opinion polls, has now become the leading party in Flanders. Like the Front National in France, the VB has had many opportunities to reveal links with (and nostalgia for) Nazism and the collaboration. The old founder of the Vlaams Blok was a member of the Vlaams National Verbond, a fascist group that collaborated with the Nazis. And Philip Dewinter, one of the leading figures of the Blok, never misses an occasion to show his racist views. In 1990, he said that he and his fellows were “for a total amnesty regarding acts of collaboration during the war.”<sup>13</sup> Speaking about migrants and foreigners, Dewinter said in 1991, “Only prostitutes leave their doors open. We don’t want to transform Flanders into a public brothel open to any foreigners from Africa or Asia.”<sup>14</sup> The same year, after having been accused of racism, Dewinter had this interesting reply: “If people say we are racist because we apply the principle ‘Our people first’ and give priority to it, then we consider racism an honorable title!”<sup>15</sup>

The Vlaams Blok is today one of the most powerful extremist parties in Europe. But although the VB is, according to surveys, the number one party in northern Belgium, it never got the opportunity to enter a coalition in any government because of the principle of the *cordon sanitaire* (quarantine). Launched in 1989 by parties of the Left, the *cordon sanitaire* has led to a tacit agreement among “democratic” parties to avoid any coalition with the Vlaams Blok. Through personal commitment of deputies or collective commitment from parties, the VB has been kept out of all posts and positions of power in Belgium. The party has hundreds of deputies at all levels, but none of them could show how they would act if they held executive office.

The *cordon sanitaire* has given the VB, like the Austrian FPÖ and the French Front National, the appearance of a democratic party; its members have been in public councils for twenty years without being able to implement a fascist program. Once again, the progressive community

had to deal with an obvious contradiction between old, deep and strong words (fascism, Nazism, etc.) and daily life with a party which, whatever its rhetoric, lacked the opportunity to differentiate itself in practical terms from others. Even worse, it had to deal with a democracy that institutes a quarantine against an elected party to keep it out of power. Does it still deserve to be called a democracy?

### The Extreme Right and the Elections

Focusing on the words of the extreme right might be useful for showing its historical links with the fascism of the 1930s, or to highlight the racist views of some of its leaders. But this understanding is not enough to convince the electorate that the extreme right is a threat to democracy and to democratic values. What accounts for this difficulty?

In the first place, like the FN and the FPÖ, extremist leaders from all over Europe learned through the years how to use democratic rhetoric to legitimate the access of xenophobic parties to government coalitions. Parties like Die Republikaner (REP) or the Deutsche Volkunion (DVU) in Germany, the Dansk Folkeparti (DF) or Fremskridtspartiet (FP) in Denmark, the British National Party (BNP), the Lijst Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands, Ny Demokrati in Sweden, and Schweizer Volkspartei in Switzerland, have all received large numbers of votes at several levels of power for many years. On the basis of their votes, they claim a “democratic” mandate to oppose the democratic values that the progressive community defends against them (antiracism and so on). The extremists reduce democracy to mere numbers of votes, without acknowledging that it depends also on principles such as tolerance, pluralism and debate. Progressives, for their part, invoke these principles to show the threat posed by the extreme right to European democracies. As scholar Guy Hermet says, extremists, populists and democrats fight each other for the people and for legitimacy.<sup>16</sup> The problem, however, is that democracies depend not only on

elections, but also on values.

A strong example can illustrate our point. French presidential elections are organized in two rounds. Many candidates may take part in the first round, but if none of them receives more than 50% of the vote, then a second round is held in which only the top two candidates participate. In May 2002, after weeks of a pathetic electoral battle<sup>17</sup> between the candidates of the two leading parties (Prime Minister Lionel Jospin for the Socialist Party and President Jacques Chirac for the Union for the Majority), the fight to get into the second round ended with a big surprise. Jean-Marie Le Pen from the Front National got more votes than Jospin and went to the second round against Chirac. As the leftist daily paper *Libération* put it

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at that time,<sup>18</sup> voters could then choose between “l’escroc et le facho” (the crook and the fascist<sup>19</sup>). While many intellectuals, singers, artists and politicians denounced Le Pen’s fascist heritage, he could claim democratic legitimacy on the basis of his first-round vote. He presented himself as an embodiment of democracy. Once again, democracy as electoral process clashed with democracy as a set of values and principles. The two pillars of the system were at odds.

Why is it so hard to tell people about the extremist threat to democracy? A second explanation lies in the evolution of extremist parties over the past twenty years. In all European countries, there are laws to curb racist, xenophobic and “negationist” rhetoric. Enacted in response to the electoral success of extreme right parties, these laws punish incitement to racist behaviour, notably against foreigners and migrants. After many convictions in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and other countries, most of the extremist leaders have changed the way they talk about World War II and about migrants in general. To evade laws against racist rhetoric, they replaced their overt xenophobia with a defense of ethnic homogeneity. Instead of attacking foreigners, they advocated the right to cultural expression for their own people;<sup>20</sup> they set aside their nostalgia for fascism to champion their European heritage. Except for the Front National with its leaders who maintain their negationist rhetoric, most of the parties tried to change their discourse in order to avoid legal challenges and to give a better image of themselves to the electorate.

Ever since the early ‘80s, the progressive community has warned the public about links between extremist parties and Nazi Germany, Pétainist France or Fascist Italy. Paradoxically, however (and this is a third element in our analysis), the success of the extremist leaders in responding to the legal threats against them served at the same time to cover up such historical links. The legislation led them to change their language. It also showed them how to look respectable in the eyes of the public opinion. Convictions in court led many actors to change their rhetoric and their image in order to avoid stereotypes denounced by progressives. Today, most extremist parties hide their connection with skinheads and avoid offensive language; the leaders are polite and most of them wear suits and ties like democratic politicians.<sup>21</sup> Parties have changed their face and don’t scare the public anymore. Thus it is harder for the progressive community to tell the electorate that those parties are dangerous.



The new face of the extreme right leads to some confusion regarding the difference between the democratic and the non-democratic right. An example is the title of a recent book by Hans-Georg Betz: *La droite populiste en Europe: Extrême et démocrate?* (The Populist Right in Europe: Extreme and Democratic?).<sup>22</sup> It is true that distinctions between the “soft” and the “hard” right are not as clear as before. Thus, the three main political issues of the extreme right (crime, unemployment and immigration) were taken up by most of the traditional parties. The myth of Europe under siege and the threat of uncontrolled migration and crime in the streets are no longer peddled just by the heirs of fascism. These themes have been mainstream for years, even on the Left, as Socialist or Green coalitions in France and Belgium have joined in the expulsion of illegal migrants. But although crime, immigration and unemployment have become mainstream issues, asserting systematic causal links among them remains an extremist characteristic. Only Le Pen, Dewinter and Haider persistently identify migrants with criminals and the unemployed, or speak of Muslims (especially since 9/11) as terrorists. In fact, with an obvious link between radical Islam and terrorism, many parties used the event to explain how they were not racist against the Muslims but wanted to protect Europe from terrorism and fundamentalism.

The question remains, however, of whether the extreme right, despite the change in its image, has undergone any change in its essential nature.

### Defining the Extreme Right

Between the old fascist rhetoric with boots and brown shirts and the new polite discourse about enemies of Europe,<sup>23</sup> is there a way to define the extreme right? If we look at the literature on the extreme right in Europe, a first characteristic of it is clearly the idea of extreme nationalism. This means the conception of a people with sacred ties to a specific territory; it implies a very inflexible identity which shuffles racial, ethnic, biological, linguistic

and cultural characteristics. A second feature of the extreme right would be racism, xenophobia, homophobia and anti-Semitism as attitudes stimulated by the party to protect the people—partly against outsiders who threaten its homogeneity (foreigners, migrants, Jews, etc.) and partly against internal enemies who threaten the future of the race (homosexuals, reproductive rights activists, etc.). The hunt for enemies leads to a third feature: the ideology of “Law and Order.” In fact, protecting the homogeneous white nation means

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Today, most extremist parties hide their connection with skinheads and avoid offensive language...

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building an authoritarian regime to repress internal enemies and a strong army for the fight against external ones. Other characteristics include hostility to democracy and parliamentarism, along with hatred of pluralism, debate and tolerance. Underlying all these traits, however, the belief in racial inequality—and, in fact, in race itself—is the common core of all definitions.<sup>24</sup>

Returning to the parties discussed above, we can conclude two things. Most of the parties are extreme in terms of political rhetoric, but not in terms of their political activity in office (when they have been in office, which has not been the case for the Vlaams Blok so far). Although it may seem paradoxical, we might say that we cannot evaluate the extreme right in office today because it never got power by itself but only in coalitions, which means sharing common objectives with democratic parties. Even when its coalition partners are conservative, the European Union acts as a

restraining factor, as we saw vis-à-vis the FPÖ of Jörg Haider. This probably explains the gap between old fascist rhetoric and daily action.

### The Front National and the Vlaams Blok

Although some parties might be more populist than extremist,<sup>25</sup> the Front National and the Vlaams Blok fit our criteria for extremism. Both of them champion an extreme nationalism to protect the French people and the Flemish people against foreigners, migrants, Walloons,<sup>26</sup> Jews, and other kinds of enemies such as homosexuals or pro-abortion activists. Both the FN and the VB have direct links with World War II collaborationists, and both display nostalgia for fascist leaders. The two parties have developed a racist rhetoric for years, and they persistently link criminality with migrants and call for strengthening the police and the state.

The fact that they fit the extreme right definition is significant because they are the most powerful parties in that category in Europe. Let us now look at their electoral base. In regional councils, the FN went from 137 deputies in 1986 and 237 deputies in 1992 to 275 deputies in 1998 and 156 deputies in 2004. At the national level for the legislative elections in the parliament, the FN had 25 deputies in 1986. After the abandonment of proportional representation, the FN saw this number reduced to 1 in 1988, 0 in 1993, 1 in 1997, and 0 in 2002. In elections to the European Parliament, the FN got 10 representatives in 1984 and 1989, 11 in 1994, 5 in 1999, and 7 (including Le Pen himself) in 2004. At the presidential level, Le Pen got 0.75% of the vote in 1974, 14.4% in 1988, 15% in 1995, and 17% in the first round for his second-place finish in 2002 (an amount to which he added less than 1% in the second round). These figures show that the party has a continuing impact on French politics at all levels.

Although the Vlaams Blok has been excluded from administrative office at all levels by the *cordon sanitaire*, it has continuously increased its representation, its

role and its influence as an important part of the opposition. At the local level, the VB progressed from 2 deputies in one local council in 1982 (in Antwerp, the biggest city in Flanders) to 23 deputies in 10 councils in 1988, 204 deputies in 86 councils in 1994, and 461 deputies in 163 councils in 2000. At the provincial level (Belgium has 9 provinces), the VB went from 2 deputies in 1978 and 1985 to 36 deputies in 1991, 34 in 1994, and 54 in 2000. In the federal parliament, the VB started with 1 deputy from 1978 to 1985. It got 18 deputies in 1991 (during what has come to be known as Black Sunday), 32 in 1995, 43 in 1999, 49 in 2003, and finally 64 in 2004. The Vlaams Blok is today as powerful as the main traditional parties. In the European elections, the VB got 1 deputy in 1989, 2 in 1994 and 1999, and 3 in 2004. The VB is thus one of the most powerful parties in Flanders today, a position which is confirmed by opinion polls.

What can we say for the future? Insofar as the Front National maintains its aggressive rhetoric of nostalgia, Holocaust denial and xenophobia, it will continue to tap a protest vote. The presidential election of May 2002 showed that people were voting less for the FN than against the other parties. The Front National thus appears to have a future as an anti-system party but not as a participant in governing coalitions with the main traditional parties. The situation is very different for the Vlaams Blok, which, as a result of court convictions, has changed its name, a part of its program, and some of its rhetoric. The VB personifies Flemish nationalism against Unitar-

ian Belgium and “cosmopolitan Europe.” As a deeply rooted party becoming “respectable,” it may well enter future coalitions and become “mainstream.” Using the old terms fascism and Nazism to characterize it might then seem to be out of place. But no amount of “mainstreaming” will change the party’s basic goals.

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Belgium is a federal State divided into three regions: Flanders in the northwest, Wallonia in the southeast, and Brussels as the capital in the center.

<sup>2</sup> www.frontnational.com

<sup>3</sup> www.leganord.org

<sup>4</sup> Since the Vlaams Blok (Flemish Bloc) has been convicted for racist rhetoric, the party has changed its name hoping to escape the courts. It is now called the Vlaams Belang (officially translated as Flemish Interest). We will keep the earlier name of the party in this article because we are talking about events that happened before the change of name (www.vlaamsbelang.org).

<sup>5</sup> www.fpoe.at

<sup>6</sup> Jörg Haider, quoted in the 2004 brochure *Tolérance: Des mots pour le dire*. Brussels: Présence et Action Culturelles, 2004, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Report by Martti Ahtisaari, Jochen Frowein and Marcelino Oreja (Paris, September 8, 2000), p.32.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Marie Le Pen, quoted in *Tolérance: Des mots pour le dire*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> “Negationist” is a stronger term than “revisionist” to describe those who try to question the existence of the Holocaust and the gas chambers in order to rehabilitate fascism by denying its crimes.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in the extreme right French newspaper *Rivarol*, January 7, 2005 (www.rivarol.com); 2005 is the 60th anniversary of the freeing of the Nazi camps.

<sup>12</sup> The offer was later declared unconstitutional.

<sup>13</sup> *Parce que!*, no. 7, February 22, 1990, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Speech at the VB’s «Family Festival» in 1991.

<sup>15</sup> During a speech in Leuven in November 1991, quoted in Van den Brink, Rinke. 1996. *L’Internationale de la haine: Paroles d’extrême droite*. Brussels: Éditions Luc Pire, p. 103.

<sup>16</sup> Hermet, Guy. 2001. *Les populismes dans le monde: Une histoire sociologique XIXème–XXème siècle*. Paris: Fayard, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Angeli, Claude, and Mesnier, Stéphanie. 2002. *En basse campagne*. Paris: Grasset.

<sup>18</sup> www.liberation.com

<sup>19</sup> Chirac was called a crook because of charges of illegal financing of his party, among other things. As president since 1995, he has enjoyed immunity from court action against him.

<sup>20</sup> Taguieff talks about the “absolutisation” of cultural differences. Among many sources, see Taguieff, Pierre-André. 1991. *Face au racisme* (vol.II). Paris: La Découverte, pp. 35, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Occasionally, some of them lapse, as during a May 1995 rally in Paris when skinheads from the FN threw Brahim Bourram (a young man of Maghreb origin) into the Seine, drowning him.

<sup>22</sup> Betz, Hans-Georg. 2004. *La droite populiste en Europe. Extrême et démocrate?* Paris: CEVIPOF/Autrement.

<sup>23</sup> See Backes, Uwe. 2001. «L’extrême droite: les multiples facettes d’une catégorie d’analyse», pp. 13-29, in Perrineau, Pascal. *Les croisés de la société fermée: L’Europe des extrêmes droites*. Paris: Editions de l’aube; Betz, Hans-Georg. 1994. *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. London: Macmillan Press; and Mudde, Cas. 2000. *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Backes, op.cit., pp. 16-20.

<sup>25</sup> Populism is understood here as an appeal to the people against the “corrupted” elite. See Canovan, Margaret. 1981. *Populism*, London: Junction Books.

<sup>26</sup> Flemish nationalism has been directed against the French-speaking Walloons of southeastern Belgium. The Walloons are viewed by the VB as corrupted and lazy people who live thanks to the work and the money of the North. Analyzed in terms of the producerist narrative as described by Chip Berlet, Walloons would be a mix of parasites from above (corrupted elites) and from below (lazy and immoral people). See Berlet, C., and Lyons, M., (2000), *Right-Wing Populism in America*, New York: Guilford Press, p. 6.

**A NEW ACTIVIST RESOURCE KIT  
BY POLITICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATES**

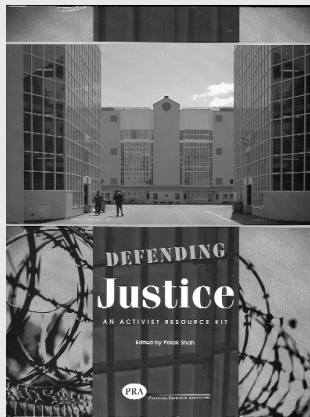
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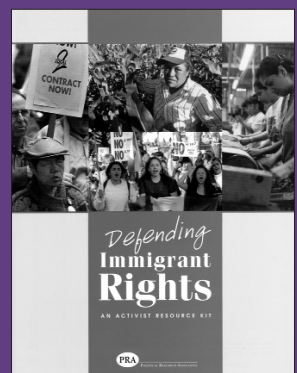
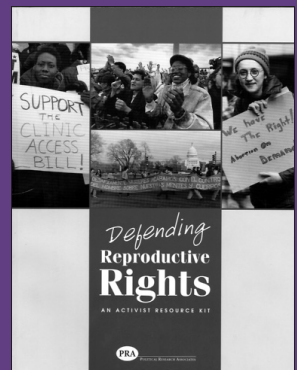
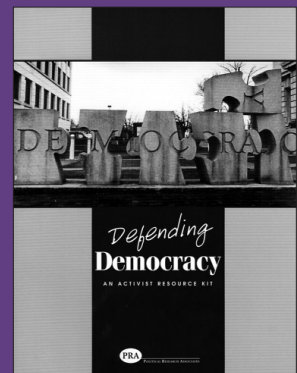
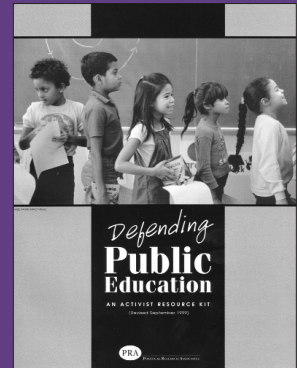


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# Progressive and Conservative Campus Activism

By Pam Chamberlain

*Extracts [pp. 2-4, 35-39] from Deliberate Differences: Progressive and Conservative Campus Activism in the United States, a Political Research Associates report by Pam Chamberlain (2005), 84 pp.*

Our findings are summarized as follows:

## 1 Energetic college students all over the country are engaged in campus-based activism, but their numbers are small.

Although both conservative and progressive students organize on campus, the sum total of activist students is small compared to the overall student population. Progressive organizations outnumber conservative groups by a 4:1 ratio, with a range of issue-specific groups being the norm for progressives and a single, general conservative organization the core of conservative campus strength. According to the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, almost equal numbers of first-year students identified as progressive and conservative in 2003: 27% as progressive, and 23% as conservative. Perhaps just as relevant is the fact that 50% of first-year students label themselves independent or unaffiliated.

Campus activists are confronted with the challenge of mobilizing the vast majority of students who have other priorities besides political activity. Despite unpromising odds, small numbers of campus activists create and often sustain a wide range of campaigns, representing various perspectives on issues related to the environment, labor, reproductive rights, free speech, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) people, multiculturalism, and the war. When major issues emerge, as they did in 2003, like the war in Iraq and affirmative action in university admissions, activists are

able to generate a high level of student interest and mass mobilizations.

**2 Conservative and progressive students approach activism differently.** Because there are fewer conservative organizations on campus, usually a core group of activists coordinates campaigns across several issues. Progressives tend to maintain an array of issue-based organizations that do not regularly function with a coordinated strategy unless they create a coalition of progressive groups.

Conservatives' shared view of themselves as being in the minority and enduring a hostile environment on campus shapes their public education and political activity. They tend to use "fortress reasoning," focusing on the need to protect themselves from their numerous opponents. Conservative activists recast some of the terms that have proved successful for progressives in the past, such as valuing freedom of speech and diversity. Progressives, however, share no such common message; instead, they usually generate multiple issue-based messages from their various organizations. They describe a common feeling of fragmentation.

We were interested in the level of tensions between activist groups that traditionally disagreed on hot-button topics. The war in Iraq and the affirmative action court cases created a focus for both conservative and progressive activists.

## 3 Political mentors are absent from campus.

Virtually all the student leaders we interviewed described themselves as arriving at college with their politics already developed. For the most part, their political mentors were their parents or teachers. Both conservative and progressive students expressed disappointment that they could not find similar mentors on cam-

pus, especially from the faculty. In turn, the majority of the faculty we interviewed preferred to remain distant or exhibited disinterest when asked about their involvement with campus political groups. A few faculty members, mostly progressive, were actively engaged with student activism. All our sample schools had Student Affairs Offices that provided, at a minimum, organizational support and training to student groups. However, student leaders rarely mentioned staff in these offices as their mentors. Without access to ideological or strategic support on campus, students report they seek it elsewhere.

## 4 Students are responding to issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation as they perceive them on campus.

Progressive activists observe forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia persisting at their schools, despite the impact that previous activism has had on higher education. They view their work as far from over. Conservative students challenge progressive assessments and compensatory practices, dismissing them as "unnecessary" programs, "substandard" academic offerings, or simply "unfair." National conservative spokespeople stimulate discussion on these topics, providing students with arguments against affirmative action, feminism, multiculturalism, and area academic programs such as Queer Studies.

Activists at the single-sex school and the historically Black university in our sample use a gender or a race lens more readily than student leaders at the other schools to interpret and analyze their campuses and the issues that interest them. Historically Black fraternities and sororities are examples of organizations with legacies of both service and social action that provide an unusual, and often overlooked, source of activism.



**5 Debate is unpopular on campus.** Contrary to popular opinion, most college students do not enjoy debating political topics. Often the public hears about acrimonious confrontations between student groups or between students and their administrations over hot-button topics in the culture in general, such as the Middle East, terrorism, reproductive rights and racism, as well as over campus-specific concerns like union organizing on campus. Both politically uninvolved students and current student activists reported that they do not value political debate. Either they were intimidated by what they described as a confrontational situation, or they did not expect that engagement in formal or informal debate affects opinions. Most student leaders in this study, with the exception of law students, believed that debate wasted their time.

Many implications emerge for civil society of a generation of young people who do not value debate or do not have the skills to engage successfully in it. We suggest that, without a politically engaged population of young people and leaders who can and will conduct conversations across difference, we cannot expect a similarly engaged population of adults.

**6 National political organizations successfully influence campus groups with resources, mentors, and incentives.** Both progressive and conservative groups from the general political sphere are interested in student activists. These groups regularly become involved with students, often without having a visible presence on campus. Some of their methods include:

- using students as foot soldiers in electoral or other campaigns;
- establishing campus affiliates;
- training students to be leaders;
- supporting student-led organizations such as newspapers or clubs with training, materials, and funding;
- engaging student support through student activities fees;

- providing attractive organizing supplies;
- producing low- or no-cost events with political messages that tour campuses; or
- offering incentives to individual students for participation in their programs.

Conservative organizations use a coordinated strategy of national organizations to provide these services. Progressive organizations, while more numerous, are far less strategic in how they provide support.

**7 A “leadership pipeline” exists for both progressives and conservatives, but their approaches differ.** While there appear to be about equal numbers of opportunities for leadership development for conservative and progressive students, each group has access to different types of such programs. Centralized training opportunities, from summer schools to national conferences, exist for conservatives, but no equivalent, prominent, and multi-issue programs are advertised to progressive students. Although such training does exist for progressive activists, it is harder to identify.

Internships, now considered a necessary part of a college student’s career preparation, are available in scores of national political organizations. Information about these opportunities is available to students through the internet.

Conservative organizations promote their programs more visibly on their websites. Conservative groups tend to focus on developing public figures or stars, while progressive groups primarily develop lower-profile organizers. This distinction is relevant in part because of the general absence of political mentors from campuses. Conservative stars perform mentoring roles for students.

**8 Centrist students are not actively recruited by either conservative or progressive campus activists.** The majority of college students engage in community service, volunteer work of some sort, or service learning.

These numbers are growing as a result of directed efforts across the political spectrum to improve civic engagement among young people. Centrist students, those whose politics are neither entirely conservative nor progressive, constitute 50% of college students today. They are the largest body of potentially engaged students on U.S. campuses. Many centrist students engage in service work, but are not motivated to join activist groups on campus.

Surprisingly, neither conservative nor progressive activists report that they target this cohort of students. Centrist students are often the ones who report being “put off” by activists’ recruitment styles. We believe these students constitute an undeveloped source of potential activists.



*[Of the eight major findings summarized above, the treatment of the seventh is here reprinted in full. For reference notes, see the complete text.]*

### **A “LEADERSHIP PIPELINE” EXISTS ON BOTH THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT.**

Conservative and progressive movements want to recruit young people into positions of potential leadership, both to sustain their organizational structures and to identify leaders who can appeal to young adults. What are the mechanisms that have produced national conservative figures such as Karl Rove, Dinesh D’Souza, and Ann Coulter? Who are their progressive counterparts? We researched differences in how conservative and progressive campus movements define leadership, where the organizations of today find their young talent, and how campus activists who are eager to work in movement jobs after graduation find employment.

From surveying the main websites of conservative and progressive groups, we might easily conclude that conservatives are more active on campus than progressives. The websites of many of the major conservative groups, including the Independent Women’s Forum, Focus on the Family,

and the Eagle Forum, have direct links to their campus-focused divisions. On the websites of major progressive groups, however, it was often so difficult to find information relevant to progressive college students that we were forced to look more carefully at each site. In addition, we quickly found several prominent conservative organizations specifically focused on campus politics, including the Young America's Foundation, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, and the Collegiate Network, ISI's affiliate.

More difficult to find and seemingly less comprehensive from descriptions, there are many programs intended to develop political leadership among progressive students. Examples of national progressive organizations with as strong a commitment to college campuses as some of the conservative groups were the Feminist Majority Foundation, which has extensive resources for its Feminist Campus program online, and the Sierra Club, whose Sierra Student Coalition has its own website. After extensive Internet research, though, we found that progressive programs were approximately equal in number, if not greater than, conservative programs. The list we came up with included 15 conservative educational/training programs, including conferences and seminars, and 15 progressive educational/training programs. In addition, we researched 20 conservative and 29 progressive internship programs among the many regional and national organizations that have internship programs.

### Educational/Training Programs

Of the educational and training programs, we were only able to speak with participants or organizers for two events, both student conferences. One was sponsored by the conservative Young America's Foundation (YAF), and the other was organized by the progressive Student Environmental Action Coalition. At the Young America's Foundation's 25th Annual National Conservative Student Conference (NCSC) in 2003, we con-

ducted two in-person interviews with YAF staff involved in organizing the conference and two in-person interviews with students who attended the conference. In addition, we spoke informally with approximately five other students at the conference without taking notes; one student who attended the conference emailed responses to our questions.

The Young America's Foundation describes itself as the "principal outreach organization of the conservative movement." Its national summer conference is its largest outreach event. Over the course of their week in DC in 2003, 187 young conservatives heard about 30 hours of speeches by major conservative figures, culminating in an appearance by conservative writer Ann Coulter. The conference's goals, according to its organizer, were to educate students on conservative issues (something she said the students do not get on college campuses) and to create a "network of like-minded individuals."

The conference format used a traditional pedagogical approach, with a series of speakers addressing the entire group. Formal interaction in the sessions was limited to questions directed to the speakers. Attendees across the board expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity to be present. The students we talked to saw both of these aspects of the conference as valuable. Both students and speakers at the conference repeatedly referred to a phenomenon that Kathryn Lopez of the *National Review* called the "campus liberal orthodoxy," and complained that they did not feel comfortable talking about their conservative beliefs on campus. Thus, they were happy to be in an environment in which they felt they could discuss politics without being attacked. They also asserted repeatedly that there was no party line at the conference, which represented conservative views from libertarianism to Christian conservatism.

The conference's purpose, however, was not solely educational. While the conference organizer made it clear that YAF does not try to create political leaders at the NCSC, the event served as a stepping-stone

for many young conservatives to become actively involved in conservative political activism. All of the students we spoke with talked about networking at the conference with other students and with representatives of nonprofits and lobbying groups. One, for example, said she got an internship with Oliver North because she had met him at the conference the previous year. At a panel discussion including three "graduates" of the NCSC, each of the panelists said people they had met and information they had received at the conference allowed them to become more involved in the conservative movement. Jim Graham, now executive director of the Texas Right to Life Committee, said of the conference, "I think the most important thing I realized is that...there are people who change the world...and I can be one of them." Kathryn Lopez, an NCSC alumna, who went on to intern at the Heritage Foundation, said she would not have known about Heritage without the NCSC. Similarly, a current law student at Harvard University said the conference "connected [her] with the conservative movement," and spoke of using attendance at the conference as a credential with conservative organizations. Thus, through a combination of educational events featuring celebrity speakers and networking opportunities, the YAF's National Conservative Student Conference contributes significantly to the development of conservative leaders.

**We were unable to find a progressive equivalent to the YAF National Conservative Student Conference, which led us to conclude that no centralized progressive training program exists.** Although there are numerous programs offering training for campus organizers from groups such as the AFL-CIO's Union Summer, Feminist Majority Foundation, Sierra Student Coalition, and the Student Environmental Action Coalition, these programs tend to be more narrowly focused on specific issue areas, rather than offering a general training on progressive organizing. These organizer trainings, which last just a few days, are generally shorter than

YAF's conference, do not bring in celebrity speakers, and are focused on organization-building rather than discussing political ideas. And while there is one program, the Century Institute (run by the Century Foundation, a progressive think tank), that offers a more theoretical introduction to general progressive ideas, it serves only around thirty students a year. This lack of commitment to ideological training weakens progressive leadership development in important ways. Leaders become known by their issues alone, and little cross-issue work emerges.

### Internships

We conducted interviews with nine internship coordinators from five progressive and four conservative organizations: four by email, four over the phone, and one in person. We interviewed seven interns by email and one by telephone; four of them had interned at two conservative organizations, and the other four had interned at three progressive organizations. The internship programs we studied varied widely in size, from small programs with just two to three interns at a time to large programs like the conservative Family Research Council's Witherspoon Fellows Program, which has fourteen interns at a time and includes an extensive educational component. We were unable to secure cooperation to speak with interns or internship coordinators at the two largest internship programs we found in our search, the conservative Heritage Foundation (fifty summer interns) and the Libertarian Cato Institute.

The conservative and progressive internship coordinators generally described the goals of their internship programs in similar terms, saying that they hoped to get assistance with their work from the interns and to provide them with experience in the policy world. Several of the coordinators (both progressive and conservative) felt that both the interns and their organizations benefited from the degree to which interns were allowed to do serious work and were integrated into the day-to-day organizational operations. Several also men-

tioned that they had problems advertising their internship programs and would like to be able to publicize the internships more widely. At the organizations we studied, internship programs often served as points of entry for jobs after graduation, in spite of the small number of full-time staff at such organizations. This seemed to be true more often for conservative organizations.

All of the interns who responded seemed very happy with their internships. This response was probably related in part to students having applied to specific organizations and to their self-selection, since those who responded may have been more likely to be happy with their internships. The interns we talked with had varying levels of pre-internship political activism on their respective campuses. Some had not been involved in any political groups, whereas others had been leaders in college political organizations and had volunteered for local campaigns. **Nearly all, though, regardless of pre-internship political experience, said that their internships had affected their plans for future involvement in activism.** For some, that meant considering going into grassroots organizing directly after college. For others, participation in an internship program broadened their view of politics and allowed them to integrate political views into their daily lives. In the words of one intern, "It's not really my career plans that have been changed as much as my idea of politics, my attitude towards activism, and my genuine desire to make a difference." All of the interns seemed to think that the internships would affect their activism on campus: they planned to be more active in groups, and felt that they had gained skills to make their activism more effective. As one intern said, "I know that I will take back new skills, resources, and a greater passion to help advance the mission of our [Young America's Foundation] student group."

Those interns who did plan careers in the political world (whether or not those plans were made before or after their internships) clearly saw the internships as stepping stones to future jobs. One intern was

preparing to go directly from her internship into a job at the same organization. While this direct step from internship to job is relatively rare given the small staff size of most progressive nonprofit organizations, political internships give interns unusual opportunities to meet political and nonprofit leaders who might help them get jobs after graduation. In addition, interns often do the same kinds of work as staff members, and thus gain an edge in experience over other job applicants. Many of the interns expressed surprise at the level of responsibility they received in their organizations. **Interns generally cited these two aspects of political internships—networking and job experience—as the most valuable features of the programs.** At the Young America's Foundation's National Conservative Student Conference, a panel of three 'graduates' of the conference called internships "essential" for students interested in working in politics.

So, then, who wins the leadership-development race? The conventional wisdom is that conservatives are putting more resources than progressives into campus activism and programs that develop campus leadership. Our study suggests, however, that the picture is somewhat more complicated. **Because conservative and progressive groups approach leadership development in very different ways, it is difficult to directly compare their programs.** From the information we gathered, it is not possible to assess the relative *effectiveness* of conservative and progressive groups' respective programs to develop campus leaders. However, we can suggest some ways in which left- and right-wing programs and recruitment efforts seem to differ.

The Internet is now the dominant recruitment tool for programs of the kind we studied, and, as noted earlier, it was much easier to find information about campus-oriented programs on conservative sites than on progressive ones. This may be due in part to the importance of college campuses to conservative cultural dis-



course. Conservative organizations from the Young America's Foundation to the Eagle Forum describe college campuses as hotbeds of liberal or "politically correct" activism, places where conservative ideas simply are not welcome. YAF president Ron Robinson, for example, spoke of a "pattern of viciousness" aimed at outspoken campus conservatives; he maintained that the "campus establishment is either afraid of or hostile to conservative ideas." Conservative political organizations, such as Accuracy in Academia, ACTA, or the Center for the Study of Popular Culture devote considerable spaceeffort to studying and publicizing their claim of liberal bias in academia. Since conservatives see college campuses as sites of liberal indoctrination, they put a great deal of energy into making Internet and other resources for campus conservatives accessible.

Conservative sites also make various kinds of appeals and use different kinds of language in attempting to attract students (although we cannot tell from our study whether these appeals translate into programmatic differences). Conservative sites make proclamations like "IWF [Independent Women's Forum] is taking back the campus," and try to appeal to the individual frustrations of conservative students. The Eagle Forum Collegians website, for example, asks students:

- *Are you tired of student fees being used to promote liberal causes?*
- *Are you concerned about the blatant advocacy of radical leftist ideas in your classroom?*
- *Are you being pressured by the politically correct agenda on campus?*

The Independent Women's Forum similarly appeals to conservative students' frustrations, saying its campus project offers "information, guidance, and support for students inundated with rigid political correctness."

**In contrast to these general appeals to frustration about perceived hostility on the part of the campus establishment, progressive groups' student programs tended to assume that students access-**

**ing the site were already solidly in the progressive activist camp, and focused more on networking and organization-building.** Almost every campus progressive organization featured "networking" ideas prominently on its site; Feminist Campus ([www.feministcampus.org](http://www.feministcampus.org)), for example, had a message board for student activists to network and post event ideas, while JustAct ([www.justact.org](http://www.justact.org)) talked about "building a national grassroots youth network." The one progressive organization that used a personal, emotional appeal to students as a recruitment technique was Planned Parenthood's 'Vox' campus outreach group:

- *What would you do if you knew that anti-choice politicians fight to deny women and men access to...information and services?*
- *What would you do if you knew that anti-choice organizations spend millions of dollars on campuses each year to limit access to reproductive health programs and to keep college students in the dark about sexuality? What if they were on your campus and tried to limit your access?*
- You'd want to protect the services and information that you and your friends rely on, and Vox: Voices for Planned Parenthood is the way to do that.

The final major difference between conservative and progressive organizations' campus recruitment efforts is more programmatic. **Conservative organizations focus on stars, while progressive groups focus on organizers.** Groups like the YAF help campus conservative groups pay for conservative luminaries like author Ann Coulter and humorist Ben Stein to come to campus. The Student Environmental Action Coalition, the only progressive speakers bureau program we found, helps students get in touch with student organizers who live close enough to speak at their campuses relatively cheaply.

**The conservative focus on 'stars' is not limited to speakers: conservative organizations also seem more interested in creating future star leaders than do**

**progressive organizations.** Jeff Nelson, Vice President for Publications for the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, identified a unique characteristic of the conservative movement: "I think one of the principal, even signal, features of the conservative movement is its overriding concern for nurturing young people."

The Young America's Foundation, for example, has a "Club 100" program, which gives students rewards for bringing speakers to campus and hosting other events. The top Club 100 point earners win a trip to the Reagan Ranch, now used as an education and training center by the YAF. In the words of YAF president Ron Robinson, conservative groups focus on creating strong leaders because they "don't need a majority of activists." Conservatives know that college students are more liberal than the population at large, but, with well-funded, well-organized campus groups, conservatives can make as much of a splash as more widely popular progressive groups.

### The Path to Movement Work

We also solicited retrospective information from young staff people at movement organizations to learn more about the paths they took to reach their current positions. We contacted 29 organizations and received 16 responses.

**Young staffers describe their work primarily in terms of career development, not movement building.** There were no distinctions between staffers working at conservative or progressive organizations on this issue. Almost all the young staffers had been active in social or political movement organizations in college, and 100% felt positively about working in a movement position. Although some of the job descriptions were clerical or administrative – not the coveted policy analyst or media jobs – staffers across the board were pleased with their situations. Even more surprising still was the consistency of response to a question like: How well does this job fit with what you want to do with your life? All of the respondents described their satisfaction with their jobs in terms of personal career development, with only



one respondent articulating a desire to contribute to a larger movement.

**The process of landing a job in a competitive market during an economic downturn seems to be very similar for both progressives and conservative young graduates. Everyone in our sample acknowledged the crucial role networking plays in landing a job.** One student leader was quick to point out that, while networking was “instrumental” in getting a job, “I was not given the job because my contact knew me. I was given the job because my contact knew my work and my writing.” Another took a step further back to speak about how, even before using her network to apply for—and get—a job, networking had been “the foundation of gaining the skills and background necessary to secure [her] current job.” Respondents mentioned interning, meeting key players, getting entry-level positions, attending conferences, and using the Internet as part of the networking process.

When pressed about the role of college career service offices, almost all respondents

indicated that they either did not use the service or did not find it as useful as individualized networking and web searching. Progressive students often mentioned Idealist.org as a valuable site; conservative respondents did not mention a single job listing service for conservatives. Not one student from our on-site interviews, in response to a specific question about national organizations, mentioned that they noticed a presence of recruiters from outside organizations on campus. And no one expressed the expectation that they could get either a progressive or a conservative movement job by going through their career services office. This was true even at schools in our sample with extremely pro-active career services staffs.

**Although there are probably more progressive job openings available, because of the dispersed nature of the progressive movement, more centralized resources exist for conservative students to use to further their activist careers.** At times like these, when a Republican is in the White House, or in any state with a Republican governor, conservative

graduates clearly have more opportunities to work near the seats of power; the Republican Party structure quickly funnels promising young leaders into positions of responsibility. Conservative students mentioned more often than progressive students traditional avenues of networking, like working as an intern on Capitol Hill or volunteering on an election campaign. Progressive students described similar opportunities to network, but they benefited from a website for progressive job-seekers, [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org), that has no counterpart on the Right. Conservative students often described their devotion to hard work and the willingness to go the extra mile as indicators of their commitment to movement work: “It’s hard to find people like me who will sacrifice for the group—take a day off and maybe impact their grades.” While not expressed explicitly, some conservative students may hold the expectation that these qualities are desirable traits in the competitive job market.

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GUEST COMMENTARY *continued from page 2*

such enemies as an end in itself (embodying “hatred of our freedoms”), unrelated to any acts of U.S. foreign policy.

Both the earlier specter of Russian armies invading Western Europe (and then presumably the United States) and the current one of our being attacked just because of “who we are,” are based on conscious misrepresentation of reality by U.S. leaders. In the earlier instance, the very formulation of U.S. containment policy (the famous 1947 “X” article by the late George F. Kennan) was grounded in a recognition—missing from politicians’ rhetoric—that whatever threat was posed by Communism was fundamentally political rather than military.<sup>2</sup> In the present situation, U.S. policymakers have persistently made clear in their practical measures—as distinct from their ideological pronouncements—their awareness that the climate for terrorist attacks is directly fed by U.S. impositions and assaults on the Islamic world.<sup>3</sup>

In both periods, the thrust of the ideological sleight-of-hand consists in turning the U.S. role from that of an imperial power—seeking to control political outcomes in other countries<sup>4</sup>—into that of either a defender of the weak (protecting “friendly countries” against “Communist aggression”) or that of being a victim or potential victim in its own right. But at both historical moments, those who promoted the U.S. global agenda evidently doubted the persuasiveness of their scam. For this reason, they could not limit themselves to time-honored practices of fabrication. They had to scare potential dissidents not only by propagating nightmares and red/orange alerts, but also by directly threatening the personal freedom of anyone they perceived as “disloyal.”

The arsenals of intimidation are longstanding in the United States.<sup>5</sup> From the beginning they have had a private or vigilante dimension as well as an official one. The earlier agents of such enforcement were Indian-bounty hunters and Ku Klux Klan nightriders—terrorists by any neutral def-

inition. More recently, during the period known by the name of McCarthyism,<sup>6</sup> they included a large and highly impressionable sector of the population which, moved by the climate of the times, lost whatever capacity they might have had to respect people with unfamiliar convictions and got sucked into types of conduct for which at least a good many of them would later have to apologize. They snooped on neighbors and co-workers, ostracized schoolchildren, fired workers for their beliefs or associations, assaulted people at public events, and issued anonymous threats of bodily harm to individuals.

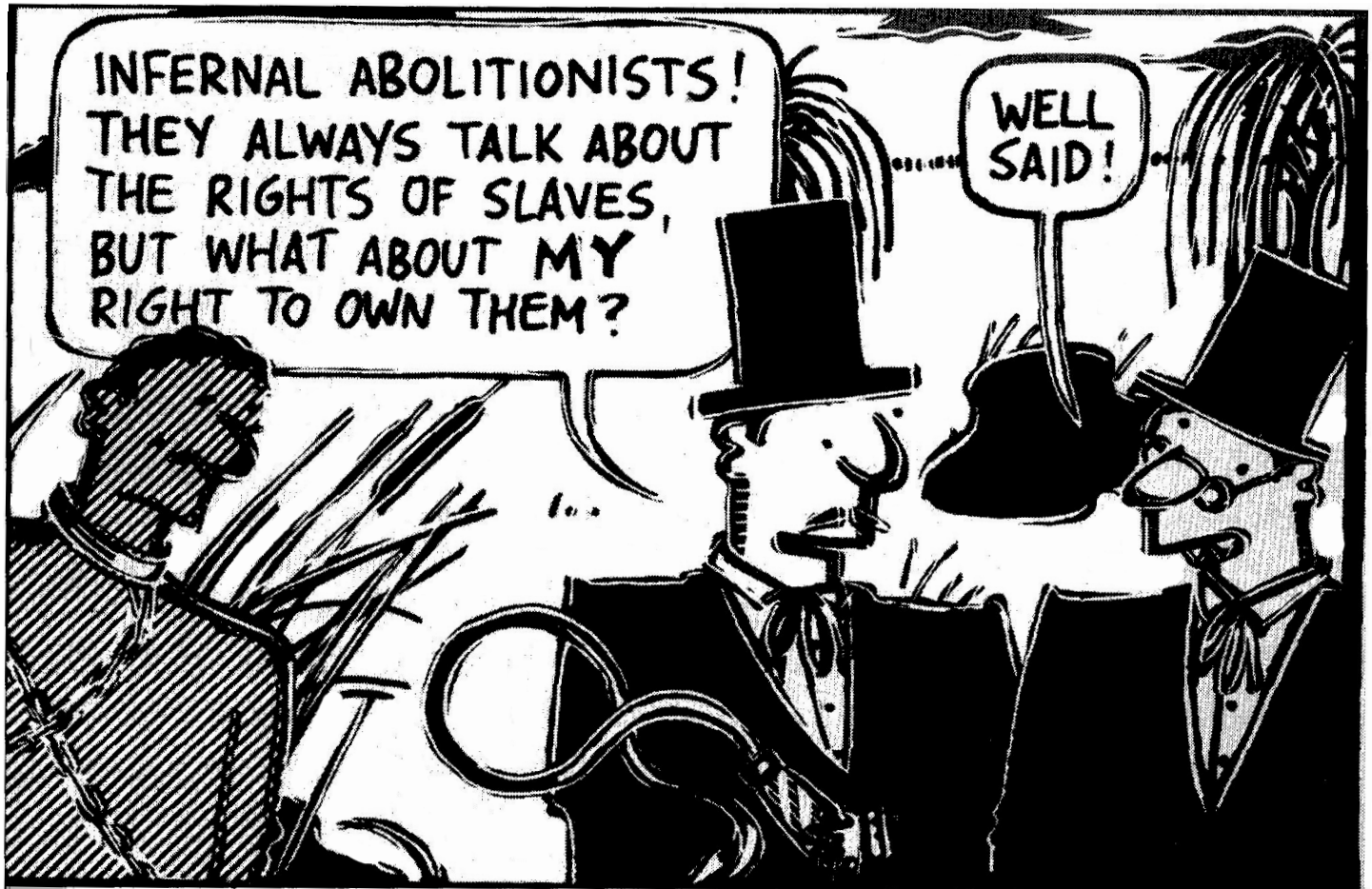
The present-day political climate is one in which the ground is being prepared for reenacting such practices on a vaster scale. The signals of this trend are numerous. Especially striking is the overturning, via the USA PATRIOT Act, of constitutional protections against unreasonable search & seizure and of constitutional guarantees of the right to assembly, the right to legal counsel, and the right to a speedy trial. No less impressive is the open disdain expressed by the White House for international legal norms. Underlying all these developments has been the willingness of the Republican party machinery to use strong-arm tactics to capture and hold the nation’s top offices.<sup>7</sup> Completing this basic picture is the growth of a constituency of often religiously inspired zealots who are disposed to enforce conformity—e.g. in matters of school curricula—by creating a climate of fear.

In terms of identifying and understanding what is new in present-day forms of repression, it is worth noting the changed historical setting. Several traits distinguish today’s conjuncture from that of the McCarthy period: 1. Washington’s expansionist agenda is unrestrained by any threat of serious military reprisal (the lurking specter of non-state terrorism is itself, ironically, a reflection of this circumstance, in which state-based forces disposed to deter U.S. attacks are essentially absent). 2. The U.S. government, in its selective rejection of international law, has embraced more

strongly than ever a culture of impunity regarding its own actions. This attitude extends down to the lowest levels of authority and readily informs the conduct of troops and prison guards. 3. On the other hand, in comparison with the earlier period, the U.S. global position is now weaker in terms of *a*) negative trade-balance, *b*) longterm resource prospects, and *c*) world public opinion. 4. Finally, much was learned from the earlier wave of repression, which ended up discrediting its perpetrators. As a result, any new campaign of repression will need to project some kind of “deniability” in relation to its forerunner.

In the intervening period, protest movements arose to challenge existing patterns of dominance in every dimension of social interaction (class, race, gender, sexuality, age, disability). To accommodate them, the discourse of “rights” was radically expanded, under the overarching banner of multiculturalism. The gut reaction of conservative sectors was to ridicule this trend, often very aggressively (e.g., Rush Limbaugh, Bill O’Reilly) and in a manner that readily encouraged violence on the part of their cohorts. Government officials, even when appealing to these sectors, generally eschew the more extreme rhetoric, but they do not hesitate to advocate legislation (including constitutional amendments) to take away the often painfully acquired rights of various oppressed groups.

The irony of the “new McCarthyism” is its attempt to appropriate the discourse of rights, diversity, and oppression in order, as it turns out, to undermine the social awareness that can be arrived at on the basis of free and open inquiry. A specific instance of this approach involves the labeling of all critics of Israeli occupation policies as anti-semites, a process by which critics are lumped together with the traditional bigoted persecutors of Jews. This frames the complex and fluid issues of victim and oppressor in the Middle East in a static one-dimensional way that portrays Israel solely as a victim and creates a chilling effect on other perspectives.<sup>8</sup> A more general expression of the assault on free inquiry has been



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the proposal, put forward in a number of states, to require universities to adopt a so-called Academic Bill of Rights.

The Academic Bill of Rights project has identified a new category of alleged victimhood: conservatives in academia. The idea is to legislate a measure which, under the guise of promoting freedom and diversity, can require professors to take seriously (and accept, if put forward by students) approaches lacking in intellectual or scientific merit.<sup>9</sup> The rationale for such a law resembles the arguments that have been used to advance the biblical story of creation against the teaching of evolution in public schools. The advocates of creationism are not fazed by the weight of scientific evidence against their contentions. By building up political pressure, they have been able to force into many biology textbooks the assertion that the literal biblical narrative of "creation" has the same level of sci-

entific validity as the theory of evolution.<sup>10</sup>

The only remarkable feature of these campaigns is their apparent embrace of the same principle of diversity whose introduction conservatives have otherwise opposed. What is particularly cynical about the Academic Bill of Rights project, however, is the way it treats conservative academics as though they were victims of social and political oppression. Conservative academics, in contrast not only to members of specific oppressed groups but also to their leftist counterparts in the professoriate, have the benefit of a whole hegemonic political culture in support of their outlook. The underlying assumptions of their approach are trumpeted on a daily basis from the highest levels of government and from the most widely diffused talk shows on the commercial media. While all this indeed makes it possible for them to claim that their opinions match

those of a significant portion of the public, it hardly proves that they reflect a serious effort to understand either the varieties of human experience or the underling social reality.

In fact, the persuasiveness of the right-wing worldview depends precisely on the insulation of its devotees from much that is well known to the majority of humankind—be it the experience of poverty or military occupation, the legitimacy of more than one culture, or the arrogance of U.S. behavior on the world stage. Not attuned to any of these realities, and shielded from argument or evidence by faith-based bigotry, the constituents of the Right are susceptible to any fiction that might suit the interests of their national leadership. They are also incapable of seeing themselves as they appear to people of the rest of the world. And when terrible atrocities that have been committed in



their name become known, they can rationalize them as part of a “moral” crusade and can claim exemption for their leaders from any conceivable international norms of conduct.<sup>11</sup> No wonder that devotees of such attitudes feel uneasy when they venture out of their ideological cocoon and are exposed to the fullness of human knowledge.

When we shift our attention, however, from the education sector back to the whole society, what we find is that the very forces which are demanding equal time for their own narrow perspective are attempting to deny equal time to those who might question official policies. It has reached the point now where people are arrested simply for displaying protest signs that might be visible to the president.<sup>12</sup> But there is a ready rationale for such measures: the attacks of 9/11 conferred upon the world’s most powerful and most interventionist country the status of permanent victimhood.

The view of “U.S. as victim,” along with the self-righteous anger it has unleashed, is the key cultural assumption, the key point of conformity of the new McCarthyism. Do you dare to question official priorities? Remember 9/11! Of course, the social agenda that goes along with all this is far from new, but this particular way of justifying it reflects the exhaustion of all other rationales, and poses the ultimate challenge—in terms of its effectiveness—to anyone committed to humanity’s longterm survival.

*Victor Wallis taught political science for many years in Indianapolis, where he was a frequent commentator on local media. He is now a professor in the General Education department at the Berklee College of Music and is managing editor of the journal Socialism and Democracy. His articles on recent U.S. history have also appeared in Monthly Review and New Political Science.*

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the links between overseas priorities and domestic measures, see: Freeland, Richard M. 1974. *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism*. New York: Schocken Books; and Kofsky, Frank. 1993. *Harry S. Truman and the War Scare of 1948*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

<sup>2</sup> See X. 1947. “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 4 (July), 566-82. Kennan describes Soviet foreign policy as cautious and flexible, and calls Russia [sic] “by far the weaker party” compared to the West (581). He nowhere mentions even the possibility of a Soviet military attack.

<sup>3</sup> Blum, William. 2005. *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> An outstanding treatment, richly documented, is: Blum, William. 1995. *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.

<sup>5</sup> For historical background, see: Wolfe, Alan. 1973. *The Seamy Side of Democracy: Repression in America*. New York: David McKay; and Goldstein, Robert Justin. 2001. *Political Repression in Modern America*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent overview of this period, see: Schrecker, Ellen. 1998. *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>7</sup> On the 2000 election, see: Palast, Greg. 2003. *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin; Nichols, John. 2001. *Jews for Buchanan: Did You Hear the One about the Theft of the American Presidency?* New York: New Press; and Bugliosi, Vincent. 2001. *The Betrayal of America: How the Supreme Court Undermined the Constitution and Chose Our President*. New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press. The 2004 election requires a more complex analysis; I offer a preliminary sketch in the Introduction to the March 2005 issue (vol. 19, no. 1) of *Socialism and Democracy*.

<sup>8</sup> An example was the recent successful campaign to terminate the participation of Columbia University Professor Rashid Khalidi in the annual workshops for teachers sponsored by the New York City Board of Education. Physical threats have even been made against a prominent Jewish critic of Israeli policies, Rabbi Michael Lerner (editor of the bimonthly magazine *Tikkun*). A valuable introduction to these issues is the 2004 documentary produced by the Media Education Foundation, *Peace, Propaganda and the Promised Land* ([www.mediaed.org/videos/MediaRaceAndRepresentation/PeacePropaganda](http://www.mediaed.org/videos/MediaRaceAndRepresentation/PeacePropaganda)).

<sup>9</sup> See the point-by-point commentary by the American Association of University Professors on the text of one such bill (in Maryland) at [www.aaup.org/issues/abor/Legislation/State/statelegMDanalysis.htm](http://www.aaup.org/issues/abor/Legislation/State/statelegMDanalysis.htm); also Jacoby, Russell. 2005. “The New PC: Crybaby Conservatives.” *The Nation*, April 4.

<sup>10</sup> For trenchant comment, see Pollitt, Katha. 1999. “Weird Science.” *The Nation*, September 20.

<sup>11</sup> For a seminal analysis of this process, see Davis, Walter A. 2005. “The Passion of the Christ at Abu Ghraib: Toward a New Theory of Ideology.” *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 19, no. 1 (March), 67-93.

<sup>12</sup> Bovard, James. 2004. “Quarantining Dissent: How the Secret Service protects Bush from free speech.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 4.



# Books Received

Compiled by Shelly Harter

Aho, James A.

*The Politics of Righteousness: Idaho Christian Patriotism*  
(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), pb, 226 pp,  
appendices, notes, bibliography, index.

Bronner, Stephen Eric

*A Rumor about the Jews: Reflections on Antisemitism  
and the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*  
(New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), hb, 154 pp, notes, index.

Christenson, Evelyn

*Under the Spell of Mother Earth*  
(Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), pb, 182 pp, glossary, index.

Daniels, Jessie

*White Lies: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in  
White Supremacist Discourse*  
(New York: Routledge, 1997), pb, 138 pp, appendices,  
notes, bibliography.

Dobson, James, Dr. and Gary L. Bauer

*Children at Risk: What You Need to Know to Protect  
Your Family*  
(Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), pb, 304 pp, appendices,  
notes, index.

The Economic Principles Commission of the National  
Association of Manufacturers

*The American Individual Enterprise System: Its Nature,  
Evolution, and Future Vol. I and II.*  
(New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1946),  
hb, 1031 pp, appendix.

Evola, Julius

*Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats  
of the Soul*  
(Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2000), hb, 227 pp,  
notes, index.

Freedon, Michael

*Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and  
Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought*  
(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pb,  
261 pp, index.

Gardell, Mattias

*The Gods of the Blood: Pagan Revival and  
White Separatism*  
(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pb, 343 pp,  
notes, works cited, index.

Gilens, Martin

*Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and  
the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*  
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pb, 216 pp,  
appendix, notes, bibliography, index.

Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas

*Black Sun*  
(New York: New York University Press, 2002), hb, 306 pp,  
notes, index.

Griffin, Roger

*The Nature of Fascism*  
(London: Routledge, 1991), pb, 236 pp, postscript,  
glossary, index.

Hunt, Dave, and T.A. McMahon

*The Seduction of Christianity: Spiritual Discernment  
in the Last Days*  
(Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1985), pb, 225 pp,  
notes.

Joshi, S.T., ed.

*Documents of American Prejudice: An Anthology of  
Writings on Race from Thomas Jefferson to David Duke*  
(New York: Basic Books, 1999), pb, 560 pp, notes,  
bibliography, index.

LaHaye, Tim

*Rapture Under Attack*  
(Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998), pb, 216 pp,  
appendices, bibliography, notes.

Lalich, Janja

*Bounded Choice, True Believers and Charismatic Cults*  
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pb, 263 pp,  
appendix, notes, bibliography, index.

Leiserson, William M.

*American Trade Union Democracy*  
(New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), hb, 346 pp, index.

**Marcus, Lyn**

*Dialectical Economics: An Introduction to Marxist Political Economy*

(Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1975), hb, 413 pp, notes, glossary, index.

**McDowell, Josh**

*The Myths of Sex Education*

(San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1990), pb, 284 pp, documentation.

**Moeller, Susan D.**

*Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*

(New York: Routledge, 1999), pb, 322 pp, notes, acknowledgements, index.

**Patterson, Thomas E.**

*The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty*

(New York: Adolf A. Knopf, 2002), hb, 186 pp, appendix, notes, bibliography.

**Pulera, Dominic**

*Visible Differences: Why Race Will Matter to Americans in the Twenty-First Century*

(New York: Continuum International Publ. Group, 2003), pb, 294 pp, notes, index.

**Rauschenbusch, Walter**

*Christianity and the Social Crisis*

(New York: Macmillan Company, 1908), hb, 422 pp, index.

**Scoville, John, and Noel Sargent**

*Fact and Fancy in the T.N.E.C. Monographs*

(New York: National Association of Manufacturers, 1942)

**Shieler, David K.**

*The Working Poor: Invisible in America*

(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), hb, 300 pp, notes, index.

**Shue, Henry**

*Basic Rights: Substinence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy*

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pb, 174 pp, notes, bibliography, index.

**Shulman, Beth**

*The Betrayal of Work: How Low-Wage Jobs Fail 30 Million Americans*

(New York: New Press, 2003), hb, 184 pp, notes, index.

**Singer, Daniel**

*Deserter from Death: Dispatches from Western Europe 1950-2000*

(New York: Nation Books, 2005), pb, 418 pp, index.

**Toch, Hans**

*The Social Psychology of Social Movements*

(New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), pb, 247 pp, index.

**Tolchin, Susan J.**

*The Angry American: How Voter Rage is Changing the Nation*

(Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), pb, 139 pp, notes, references, index.

**Will, George F.**

*Restoration: Congress, Term Limits and the Recovery of Deliberate Democracy*

(New York: Free Press, 1992), pb, 231 pp, notes, index.

**Wistrich, Robert**

*Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism and Xenophobia*

(London: Routledge, 1999), hb, 363 pp, index.

## Audiotapes

**Bliss, Richard, Dr., and Dr. Duane Gish**

*Teaching your Children about Creation*

(Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family, 1985)

**Focus on the Family**

*Family Values for Libraries*

(Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family)

**Focus on the Family**

*Evolution and Creation*

(Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family)

**Schlafly, Phyllis**

*Mind Abuse in Our Schools*

(Pomona, CA: Focus on the Family, 1985)

# Eyes RIGHT

## “THE LORD WANTS US TO BE FREE OF DEBT.”

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Howard Dayton, the CEO of Crown Financial Ministries, one of many Christian-based financial advisers, trained over 1 million people last year in the scriptural principles of Christian financial planning. Local churches pay nominal fees for seminars for their parishioners, and individuals receive free financial counseling and a “budget coach.”

How can the secular world of finance be Christian? Besides developing a debt repayment plan (known to their grandparents as a budget) and then practicing spending wisely—two well-known tools of recovery from debt—attendees learn the Christian financial principles of following the Bible in its advice about money. “There are more than 2350 verses in the Bible that refer to handling money,” Dayton reported in an interview on CBS News in February. “In fact, 15% of what Jesus said dealt with money or possessions.”

Crown reminds its clients that because “God is the owner of all we possess and that we are His stewards, . . . the Lord wants us to be free of debt.” The spiritual dangers of debt include the stress of finances, overwork, and less quality time with family, all factors leading to divorce.

In a country that reached record numbers of bankruptcies last year, Crown Financial Ministries seems to have found its calling. After a 2000 merger between Christian Financial Concepts and Crown Ministries, Dayton has been able to combine his local church networks with a powerful radio ministry and use financial planning as an entry point to hundreds of thousands of homes. Nowhere in the literature of Christian finance is there reference to the economic causes of debt or the collective responsibility to respond to institutionalized economic pressure.

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Source: <http://www.crown.org>

## HAIKU

xenophobia  
feast of fear and  
scapegoating  
society starves

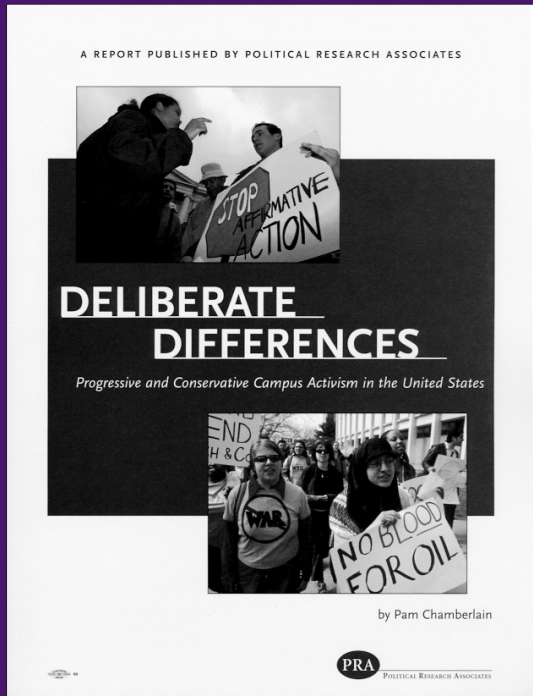
by Chip Berlet

## Eye LASHES

Focus on the Family has a new project to prevent abortions: Project Ultrasound. The Colorado Springs organization plans to supply more than 600 ultrasound machines to “pregnancy resource centers” across the country in the next five years.

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[Focus on the Family Magazine, April 2005, p.2.]



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