

BORN AND BRED: WOMEN IN THE BRITISH AND AMERICAN FAR-RIGHT FROM 1982 TO PRESENT

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Abstract: *After World War II, American and British conservative politicians sought to distance themselves from the stain of fascism while maintaining relevancy in the liberal democratic system. This required coalition building among anti-communist groups, including the far-right. Into the 1970s and 1980s, the rise of right-wing politics in both the US and UK built upon the anti-communist rhetoric of the postwar period. The success of mainstream conservatism gave room for the far-right and its racialized anti-communist rhetoric in the political mainstream. This paved the foundation for a new movement of far-right politics focused on anti-immigrant and white supremacist messaging. As such, the far-right in both nations appealed to a considerable number of white, women voters along the right-wing spectrum who perceived themselves as under attack from non-white, hypersexual, and criminal males. These concerns permitted the far-right to position themselves as the last defenders of women's freedom in the cultural war against the communist threat (i.e. racial equality). The role of white women and gender in the contemporary far-right varied between the US and UK but provided the far-right a veneer of decency to these otherwise radical policies in both nations. Adoption of pronatalist policies based on the protection of white women (and their wombs) from non-white encroachment enhanced the masculine image of the far-right and its appeal to conservative voters, while also engaging white women in anti-progressive political rhetoric via propagandist depictions of happy, white families, and looming threats to their safety. Centred on the Reagan and Thatcher period, this paper argues that the perceived collapse of white supremacy pushed the far-right to appeal to white women through gendered political rhetoric that centred womanhood and motherhood as national duties under attack by an elusive, foreign threat, masculinity as the last line of defence for women and nation, and that the sense of community created by the far-right entices women to join as their status above people of colour is solidified.*

The 20th century radically changed the course of American and British politics. Advances in racial and gender equality propelled both the liberal cause and the conservative cause along oppositional paths. Into the 1980s, the rise of right-wing politics in both the United States and United Kingdom built upon the anti-communist rhetoric of the post-war period, ushering in a new era of conservative politics, and the collapse of the rival Soviet Union. This paved the foundation for a new movement of far-right politics centred on anti-immigrant, and white supremacist messaging. Far-right groups appealed to white women via 1) conspiracies about non-white, hypersexual, and criminal males and 2) the community and family friendly imaging of far-right propaganda. Women in the far-right positioned themselves as the last defenders of women's freedom in

a conspiratorial culture war against immigration and radical Islam. Adoption of pronatalist policies centred on the protection of white women (and their wombs) from non-white encroachment enhanced the masculine image of the far-right and its appeal to conservative voters, while also engaging white women in anti-progressive political rhetoric via propagandist depictions of happy, white families and looming threats to their safety.

This paper will focus on the rise of British and American far-right organizations as these groups have become increasingly connected in the internet age and are among the most deeply connected globally.¹ Furthermore, contemporary British and American white supremacist groups often follow similar racist doctrines, particularly those that profess the natural ordering of whites over racial others.² The internet has allowed this doctrine and other white supremacist literature, music, and messaging to be widely shared between British and American members. Lastly, debates over family and sexuality in Britain and America often reflect one another and make references to each nation's respective policies in political debate.³ The recent spike of far-right political activity across Britain, the United States, and many places around the globe has created cause for concern. In many places, these groups are steadily gaining organizational cohesiveness and influence.

It is pertinent to establish the role gender (in particular, the gender expression of white women) have held in this network historically to better inform our understanding of their influence in contemporary debates on immigration, gender (including transgender debates), and the function of citizenship. Beginning in 1980 and moving to the 2000s, this paper argues that the perceived collapse of white supremacy and patriarchy wrought by social advances of the late 20th century pushed the far-right to appeal to white women through gendered political rhetoric that centred womanhood and motherhood as national duties under attack from an elusive, foreign threat. This paper will also discuss how the mainstream conservative movement aided in, and benefitted from, the growth of the far-right and the policies put forth in opposition to changing social norms. The impending doom of white supremacy was the catalyst for a rise in the far-right, not a signal of its loss. Women are valuable to the far-right as both its physical progenitors and for the symbolic value they provide for the white, heteronormative family and its superiority above racial and sexual others.

Scholars have produced many theories to explain what draws women to the far-right and what role gender may play in the development and maintenance of the movements. Regarding gender expression and far-right politics, there are a few useful works on the subject, particularly on German Nazism and Italian Fascism. Klaus Theweleit's groundbreaking psychological analysis of male sexuality and its relationship to violence demonstrated how gender anxiety in Nazi Germany led to misogynistic violence and the dehumanization of women subject to that violence.⁴ Barabara Spackman assessed virility as central to politics, not just Italian Fascism, and found that cultural definitions of natural, commonplace human life can shape rhetoric conducive to the development of fascist ideology.⁵ To have gender feature so strongly in both fascist manifestations is interesting, although the framework of fascism in each group is different, just as other far-right political leanings stray from these historical fascist manifestations. Fascist groups,

as explained by Robert Paxton, are united in their ability to grant unity to communities that believe they have been divided and discarded by liberal democracy, but fascism as a term is very difficult to define without losing the complexity of situation-specific factors that create its existence, which can vary across time and location.⁶ Both Britain and America have had their own fights against self-identified fascist groups, however, in this paper, the term far-right will be utilized to describe the many British and American extreme, radical, right-wing groups thriving in the 1980s through the early 2000s, not just those groups whom identify as fascist or neo-Nazi. This term better identifies the wide array of political and social positions that grew out of the fascist cause.

Groups and ideological enclaves, such as British imperialists and the American ultraconservatives, were adept at utilizing the passions and emotions of fascism to appeal to broader far-right positions, from anti-immigrant groups to the staunchest of neo-Nazis.⁷ Despite the outwardly male appearance of the far-right, there is a wide underbelly of women's membership and a critical influence of gender politics. It is problematic to say that far-right movements share a line of historical continuity, as movements differ in their constitution and in where they direct their anger.⁸ Implying historical continuity without critical analysis may lead to overgeneralizations and uncontextualised ignorance of what drives individual members of the far-right, including women. It is important to emphasise the point of Julie Gottlieb, that solutions to these questions are "sensitive to female subjectivity, agency, and the ways in which otherwise ordinary and 'normal' women enlivened their existence," as women in the far-right joined the cause for their own personal reasons.⁹ There are important questions raised by this framework: In what periods does gender appear to matter more to the far-right? To whom does it matter? What is the goal of caring about gender? These are all questions this paper will seek to address by focusing on British and American manifestations of the far-right from 1980 to the present.

Advances in racial and gender equality in both Britain and the US at the end of the 20th century seemed to predict the gradual deconstruction of the intertwined social forces of white supremacy and patriarchy. This threat to white supremacy led to a growth in both far-right and mainstream conservative movements, the proliferation of far-right talking points, and the centring of gender within these movements. Gender mattered in this period as it provided a solid reactionary argument against immigration, a means to prop-up white nationalism, and a tool to entrench racial inequalities. Furthermore, it was the notions of gender held by women that influenced their membership, as well as the sense of community and empowerment to otherwise disadvantaged women granted therein.

The 1980s and 1990s: Far-Right, White Might, and Gender Salience

To ascertain the attraction of women to the far-right and situations in which gender is salient in far-right discourse, one must first turn their attention to issues of race. Within mainstream conservative groups, so-called colour blindness (the belief that one does not see colour, and that seeing colour is inherently racist), allows conservatives to stymie efforts to address structural racism by centring blame on members of

disadvantaged communities rather than the macrolevel obstacles that plague them.¹⁰ In this framework, racism becomes an individual problem, something not reinforced or supported by oppressive social structures, nor the ideological movements that create and protect them. Some far-right groups have also adopted this ideology. The American organization National Equality for All (NEA) frequently espouses white supremacist rhetoric under the guise of racial equality, utilizing eugenics arguments on the natural, objective inferiority of Black and Latino people, and the need for reinvigorated white pride.¹¹ This perspective grants white nationalism mainstream appeal. These groups live alongside the mainstream, participate in mainstream culture, and defend their position as white people organised against a threat to their existence.

This is not the case for all the far-right groups. Some believe themselves to be driven out of mainstream society as the result of Jewish invasion, or immigration, or feminism, or any of the many social changes that challenge white supremacy. These individuals are not colour blind. A key component of their success is the construction of alternative cultures following an awareness of people of colour in their communities. Far-right groups have their own music, literature, entertainment, and even children's toys. There are white supremacist cookbooks and homeschool curricula, GI figures painted to be Nazis and Aryan Barbies, and more. The far-right has created a culture that parallels the mainstream, requiring its members to interact very little with cultures they believe themselves to be fighting against.¹² As this section will discuss, the creation of far-right communities perpetuates this culture, while also driving mainstream conservative beliefs further to the right.

There is also the principal issue of masculinity. To the far-right, their enemies can be grouped as either too masculine (dangerous, hypersexual, criminal), or not masculine enough (weak, feminine, unworthy).¹³ When gender is important to the far-right, so too is race and the intersections formed by these components of individual identities. These categorizations of masculine are also fluid, meaning they are weaponised by the far-right against their enemies in various ways. An enemy may be a hypermasculine rapist of white women one day, and devoid of masculinity in need of a helping hand the next. Far-right propaganda requires the depiction of the perfectly masculine white man and the perfectly feminine white wife. American and British political debates on race are thereby deeply gendered, especially to the far-right. Likewise, the relationship between the far and mainstream political right on these issues presents a dynamic shift of political boundaries that changes over time. One must analyse how the mainstream right rationalised issues on race and, in both the American and British case, drove further right and gave buoyancy to the sinking ship of white supremacy and far-right politics.

Thatcher, Immigration, and the Drive to Extremism

To understand the relationship between 1980s British Conservatives and far-right politics, one must note that the white, working class were not the sole perpetrators of racist and misogynistic political discourse. In the early postwar period, there were purposeful attempts by mainstream politicians and elites to codify race and citizenship in British law and society, thereby shaping working class perceptions of race and citizenship; this relationship is more than a fringe group pushing elites into action, but a

two-way exchange of actions and ideas.¹⁴ In short, race and white supremacy concerned members of all social classes and analyses of non-working class engagement with those ideas deserve greater attention. I also argue that the coalition of Britain's political right, which peaked in the 1980s, was rooted in racist, eugenicist, and patriarchal modes of thinking reimagined as conservative economic concerns. This process positions these ideas within the mainstream, not on the political periphery. As recent research suggests, this rhetoric may have existed as early as the 1960s.¹⁵ However, the gravity of this proposition is best observed in the Thatcherite period. During the administration of Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, local councils' policies to address racial inequalities were targeted.¹⁶ Thatcher and the Conservatives framed these policies as anti-British policies designed to support the gravest threats to the nation (i.e. multiculturalism).¹⁷

In a 1977 debate between Labour MP Audrey Wise and Tory candidate John Butcher, Butcher exclaimed that conservatives of the past were "too late" in conducting conservative policy, whereas Wise proclaimed such policies to be, "...in Mrs. Thatcher's words, the freedom to be unequal."¹⁸ The two-fold recognition of a shift in Conservative policy and fears said policies drew on, underscored the political tensions of the Thatcher administration and the broader conditions that fuelled the spread of far-right groups. Thatcher, one of the preeminent conservative leaders of her time, was careful to toe the line between the colour blindness perspective of her party, as well as the growing percentage of Brits concerned with the collapse of the white majority. Thatcherism was successful in turning British politics towards the right, while also returning power and control to the elites via the reestablishment of bourgeoisie hegemony.¹⁹ There were very real issues faced by the white working and middle classes (unemployment, lower education, poor health outcomes, and so on) that did not receive the same attention, thereby escalating racial tensions as immigration became the target of these frustrations. These anxieties may best be defined as fear for the loss of white, British status to a dangerous, uncontrollable enemy. This conspiratorial undertone would define British politics for decades to come.

It may seem paradoxical that Thatcher would gain such power among conservatives. One journalist remarked that Thatcher's "passionate conviction that the country's problems can be solved," launched a fresh style of political leadership that is not solely a "different gender."²⁰ However, it was difficult for some to untangle Thatcherite politics from gender. Indeed, a common critique of Thatcher was her lack of a "domineering" personality and her resemblance to "English spinsters" from popular novels.²¹ Others refer to Thatcher as "sociologically a man," under the assumption that she leveraged her femininity and masculinity to gain acceptance and power in varying scenarios.²² Regardless of one's personal beliefs about Thatcher, it is evident that her position as Prime Minister is both the result of, and further fuel for, a broader crisis of gender that Thatcher and her party benefitted from.

Her success is owed, in part, to her failure to conform to a warm, feminine image; her speeches and statements conveyed a sense of immense urgency and danger, leading her to swing working class and young voters to the Conservative side in the 1979 election.²³ She validated the fears of the white working class, and assured them of their superiority

to all others as white British people. In a 1988 speech at the College of Europe in Belgium, Thatcher spoke on the shared history and culture of European nations, stating: “the story of how Europeans explored and colonised – and yes, without apology – civilised much of the world is an extraordinary tale of talent, skill and courage,” a striking comment in support of the European imperial mission and the superiority of European governance and culture.²⁴ This is similar to many far-right depictions of imperialism as a general good for the world. In one of Thatcher's most infamous statements on British exceptionalism and the evasive foreign threat, she referred to the influx of Pakistani and other immigrants as detrimental for race relations, as “if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.”²⁵ She underlaid this assertion by describing the success of British democracy and her perception of its good for the world. Thatcher rebuked the criticism of her policies as racist, instead she referred to the unified people of Britain and support for their prosperity. In this argument, there is an important undertone of British exceptionalism presented as a benign mode of colour blindness. In sum, Thatcher argued that Britain was extraordinary in its culture and civilization, that it attracted immigrants, but that its culture must be protected from non-members (i.e. Pakistanis).

The result of governmental failures to address racial tensions were feelings of unfairness and identity loss among whites in the wake of growing cultural diversity and a keen lack of attention paid to whiteness by policymakers. The transition from an economic definition of the white working class into a cultural one has been significant in shaping the identification of the white working class based on their behaviours, appearance, and general conduct.²⁶ The white working class came to be known in a negative light, while public opinion stressed the homogeneity of the group. In addition to cultural ostracisation, the perspectives of the white working class were absent from British politics as the priorities of political parties had shifted.²⁷ Some blamed the invisibility of the white working class on the grouping of immigrants and marginalised groups within the same class, who white Brits thought were stealing political focus. This sentiment spoke to a white working class that felt disenchanted with Labour and the left, who felt these parties had not addressed the practical issues of race in British communities.

As Thatcher recognised, race was an important part of immigration policies especially to Tory voters. Despite attempts by the Tories to recruit ethnic minorities, the party failed to address internal racism and struggled to reconcile rising public anti-immigrant sentiment.²⁸ Thatcher stated that immigration was an issue driving people towards the far-right National Front (NF), even people who may not otherwise agree with the politics of the organization.²⁹ She presented two arguments that are vital for understanding the British perspective on race in this period. First, Thatcher argued that the NF was attracting more Labour voters than Conservatives, given the National Front's extremist stance on immigration. Secondly, she argued that the Conservatives must become stricter on issues of immigration and race relations, or people will succumb to extremism. Interestingly, Thatcher borrowed policies from the NF, particularly from supporters of white nationalist Enoch Powell. Powellism, as this ideology would come to be known, depicted immigrants of colour as sexual predators lurking in British streets.³⁰ Powell gained immense notoriety through the 1960s and 1970s because he did what Conservatives had not, he addressed what they saw as the most pressing issue:

immigration. He brought racism boldly into the mainstream, creating the opportunity for Thatcherism to capitalise on its rhetoric and grow.³¹ Powell, and later Thatcher, also demonstrated how the rhetoric and passion of the far-right was not exclusive to the fringe, white working class, and can be found within all social classes, and even among conservative political leaders. Thus, the National Front did not overtake the Conservatives, but it did highlight how gender became important to the right, and how it is utilised to gain support for political causes.

Thus, the decline in British white supremacy (brought about by immigration and the increasing fear of becoming outnumbered) fostered the growth of the NF and later, the British National Party (BNP). Between the Thatcher era and the election of Tony Blair in 2001, the far-right remained electorally insignificant.³² Studies of BNP voters suggest that the BNP's large base of support is only the beginning of a much longer tradition of anti-multiculturalism and anti-immigration feelings. Historically, the BNP is Britain's most electorally successful far-right party. From 1992 to 2005, the total number of BNP voters rose from around 7,631 to 192,700.³³ While these figures may seem politically insignificant considering the success of Britain's major political groups, these figures represent a sharp rise in BNP support not typical of far-right groups in Britain. The beliefs of the BNP were not marginal. Some voters (even those who had voted Labour) reported that they understood the appeal of the BNP and even agreed with some of its policy initiatives.³⁴ The upending of racial hierarchy concerned many Brits, from individual voters in working class communities to the Prime Minister herself. Latent support for the anti-multiculturalism movement fed the far-right, allowing it to persevere and adapt to changes in Britain's political scene.

The BNP's primary political positions focused on critiques of multiculturalism and the perceived failures of the British government to address the problems of immigration and race. The far-right often utilises the rhetoric of meritocracy, a system they believe is fairer to all, including white people marginalised by mainstream favouring of immigrants and people of colour. Given this cultural conflict, an important part of the BNP's later rise to success was the intergenerational movement of far-right ideals. For BNP voters in the 1990s and early 2000s, it was the experiences of their parents that shaped their far-right ideology. The generation that experienced economic depression and the impacts of decolonization after World War II inculcated the British government and its embrace of multiculturalism for their plight. The Nationality Act of 1948 (which granted equal citizenship to all members of the British Empire) was reimagined as an attack on whiteness and white people. Witnessing the poverty of their parents, coupled with the blame placed on immigrant communities circulating through communities at the time, aided in the development of a minority consciousness among the white, British working class.³⁵ In Britain, homeownership carries cultural prestige, meaning the inability of younger generations to find housing (and earn said cultural prestige) made it easy to blame minorities and racial justice programs.³⁶ The far-right understood the concerns of the white working class and provided validation, but perhaps even more important was the sense of ideological community given to a class who felt as though they were rapidly losing their physical community to others. One BNP voter recounted his dismay at the construction of "alien mosques" that, in his view, disrupted the architecture of the area.³⁷ For him, these mosques were not seen as a sign of racial

equality, but of unfairness to whites and preferential treatment for immigrants. BNP voters masqueraded their beliefs as critiques of culture because it allowed them to shed the stigma of biological justifications for racism.³⁸

In the case of the BNP, just as in the eyes of Thatcher Conservatives, belief in racial equality required the dismantling of racial equity initiatives that sought to uplift marginalised communities.³⁹ They saw themselves as the next generation of victims, behind their fathers and grandfathers. In their eyes, men could not fulfil their duty as providers and protectors, and women could not be women, so long as the danger of non-whites lurked. Evidence of their marginalisation was everywhere, threats to the safety of women and children were everywhere, and their whiteness became reimagined as a burden. This led individuals to validate their support for socially unacceptable political beliefs and behaviours they otherwise may not have had. Focusing on gender, sexuality, and other cultural norms granted space for racism without being labelled as such. Therefore, it is simply not enough to say that the far-right had little electoral influence overall in British politics. There is a broader, and greater, social and cultural movement at play that requires the investigation of gender.

It is at this juncture that the role of white women as the physical carriers of white children and ideological carriers of the far-right cause became most important, and gender became most salient. The relationship between the state and white women is central. The state plays a crucial role in the gendering of behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs and, as such, gender informs public opinion.⁴⁰ In this manner, personal perceptions of gender guide one's interpretation of race and immigration. Many believed the state's attempts to promote gender equality were dangerous for women because of personal belief in the natural inequality of the races and the danger posed to white women from men of colour. In this manner of thinking, feminism robs women of the natural protections they believe the patriarchy gives by sheltering women within the home in traditionally feminine roles. In the far-right imaginary, feminism places women in traditionally male spaces where they may become victimized by men or enter relationships with non-whites. State acceptance of non-white immigrants, or state acceptance of gender equality, would fundamentally alter the ideological framework the far-right rests upon. Thus, feminism and women's equality would be counterintuitive to white supremacy and to white women's protections from men of colour. They believed the state had failed women just as it has failed white people, a consistent theme throughout the British and American far-right. In this fear of government encroachment, the nuclear family becomes paramount to white supremacy. Coded in eugenics language, the BNP advocated for birth control to stop the reproduction of Muslims, as well as an end to all family arrangements that did not include a married, heterosexual family unit.⁴¹ Describing the conception of Black children as "breeding," and the children produced as "feral" further validated the supremacy of whites and the importance of white women to protecting the supreme, clean, pure British identity.⁴²

Feminism and related social justice causes were dangerous to Britain in the eyes of the BNP. BNP texts, including the party's journal *Identity*, denounce feminism and the movement of British society away from traditional gender roles; one author blames increasing male violence and alcoholism on women's success in higher education and

movement into male spaces, such as athletics.⁴³ Deviation in gender was equated to deterioration of society, with some of the blame placed on the state. Proposed solutions to the crisis varied, but many authors believed in the importance of heterosexual marriage and the birth of (white) British babies. Again, the anxiety wrought from immigration and fears of white replacement are evident. The ability of the BNP to send enemies “back to the darkness” became appealing for women who feared for their safety and for the future of their children.⁴⁴ Women also valued the BNP’s family-friendly image and its ability to protect them from the threats to their safety, namely men of colour. Moreover, women saw the BNP as a community aiding those oppressed by the state which left them vulnerable to a wave of foreign abusers.

Here the foundation of the female-nation and male-state takes effect. The state failed to protect the female-nation because the state is effeminate, much in the way the BNP believes British men have become effeminate and women have become masculine in the era of feminism. Far-right children are therefore socialised to perceive gender in a more conservative way. To detract from this vision of gender is to leave the individual women vulnerable, which the state has done through its overly progressive, supposedly evil policies of racial and gender equality. These parallel relationships (man/woman, nation/state) form the basis for the BNP’s prescription of the symbolic and literal function of women, an ideology that becomes more pressing in the post-9/11 period.

American Neo-Nazism, The New Right, and Reagan

The American far-right is just as complex as the British, particularly in the case of women. The United States’ most glaring examples of far-right politics are its white supremacist organizations, including the Ku Klux Klan and contemporary organised racist groups like the National Alliance (NA).⁴⁵ Since the 1980s, American organised white supremacy has increasingly attracted women who have been actively recruited to the cause.⁴⁶ Much like their British cousins, the American far-right is disillusioned with mainstream conservatism that it believes has not done enough to manage racial issues. American neo-Nazis frequently depicted the conservative movement as a Jewish conspiracy, and that the free market economic policies of Reagan and Bush allowed capitalism to perpetuate problems of race and the subjugation of white people.⁴⁷ The NA argued that conservatives may be racist but were still unwilling to do what was needed for the white race. Though the feelings and language of segregation have not entirely faded from the American consciousness (even in mainstream politics), social panic over race and the far-right’s notion of racial “suicide” are important factors that facilitate recruitment from mainstream prejudice into white supremacy.⁴⁸ As such, gender becomes more salient in American far-right political discourse when social panic over race becomes more prominent, and as white minority rhetoric propagates.

The New Right, an uneasy coalition of conservatives and elites, had to contend with the ideology of the far-right and its growing influence in the United States. The goal of the New Right was to build bridges between voters who were disillusioned with the social advances of the 1960s and 1970s. From the 1980s into the 1990s, the right saw the nation’s economic issues as evidence that the power and status of white men was under attack.⁴⁹ Gender is central to this cause. A core belief of many social conservatives was

the natural, innate authority of men over women within a nuclear family system.⁵⁰ This belief is fixed in the fear of women's vulnerability. To opponents of feminist advances like the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion rights, the state's authority over women and their role would render them sexually vulnerable via the dissolution of the nuclear family.⁵¹ In this, just as in the British circumstance, one can observe how small government ideology bleeds into issues of gender as people rebuke attempts by the state to advance women's rights and change perspectives on gender and race.

Of course, there were feminists within the Republican Party and anti-feminists within the Democratic Party. However, the important conclusion of the gender debate is the solidification of each party's position on gender and the movement of the Republican party to the right following the 1976 campaign of Ronald Reagan and the New Right, as well as the failure of moderates in the Republican Party to keep pace with the right wing.⁵² The moderate candidate Gerald Ford (whom most feminists preferred) won the GOP nomination but lost the election, signalling the beginning of the party's coalesce to the right. The leadership of Reagan and Thatcher moved their respective parties further to the right, but this process also gave fruitful ground for voters on the far-right to organise in their own ways. Thus, gender became wildly important to resist liberal gender roles and to garner support for one's own cause by promising protections for white women and the white family who had been discarded by the mainstream. However, while the far-right believed white women should be protected from the treachery of people of colour but would not go as far as to proclaim white women's equality to men. White masculinity gives white men power over people of other races and was the focus of progressive legislation that marginalised white men.⁵³ Civil rights laws of the 1960s and 1970s were received by white men as direct attacks on them, not on injustices.

Ronald Reagan succeeded in the 1980 election where he had failed in the 1976 election, due to this rightward shift. The festering of racial discontent and the legacy of the postwar Red Scare fed the far-right during the Reagan administration, through to the 21st century. Reagan was unpopular among women, and his support from the female electorate continued to slump through the early 1980s.⁵⁴ The "gender gap" resulted from what female voters saw as "daily attacks from the White House," particularly Reagan's failure to address gender discrimination and promote the Equal Rights Amendment.⁵⁵ Defence of children and the traditional family features heavily in Reaganite rhetoric. Reagan's commission of investigations into education and other institutions exemplifies this. As part of a broader series of reports sponsored by the National Institute of Education, Paul C. Vitz concluded that public school textbooks contained "clear attacks on traditional sex roles, especially traditional concepts of manhood," culminating in a "systematic denial of the history, heritage, beliefs, and values of a very large segment of the American people."⁵⁶ Vitz also found a lack of patriotism, appreciation for business, and white Protestantism in the textbooks he surveyed. The report later concludes that textbooks across numerous fields discount the role of Christianity and traditional values in American life, some of which the authors remark "fails the test of equity -- of fairness."⁵⁷ This echoes British sentiments and speaks to a pressing issue of entitlement and loss felt by white, Protestant America in the face of racial and feminist progress. The connection between Britain and the United States became clearer during the Reagan administration. In a speech delivered to British Parliament, Reagan referred to

the United States and Britain as “sister democracies,” built from the same foundation of “enduring greatness of the British contribution to mankind, the great civilised ideas: individual liberty, representative government, and the rule of law under God.”⁵⁸ It is interesting then, that the far-right of each nation could grow connected during this period and even more so in the internet age.

Despite hopes for the New Right, it did not satisfy white supremacists. While many on the left proclaimed the radicalism of Reagan's War on Drugs or his handling of other social issues, the far-right felt this administration did not go far enough.⁵⁹ Reagan was not a public supporter of the Ku Klux Klan, nor their vision of racial/religious discrimination.⁶⁰ In a 1984 letter to Morris B. Abram, the Chairman on the Commission on Civil Rights, Reagan remarked that he was “distressed to learn that some individuals back home have questioned whether my views on the Ku Klux Klan have somehow changed,” alluding to criticisms of Reagan's War on Drugs policies and his dismantling of important government policies and regulations in his efforts to downsize government spending.⁶¹ In 1987, the New York Times published quotes from several American mayors including Mayor Holland of Trenton, who explained that there was “a new awakening on the part of the people of the United States that we can't ignore pressing social problems.”⁶² These feelings speak to a broader shift in American politics wrought from feminist and gay rights campaigns, changes that the far-right did not support as they upended the very hierarchy that kept white men in a position of power and authority.

It is worthwhile to remember the organisation of the American right along anti-feminist and racial lines. The War on Drugs and its related policies cannot be analysed as simple criminal justice reforms, as they are not independent of the social perspectives of those who created them, and the movements inspired from them. The aggressive and violent rhetoric of the political divide is emblematic of the movement of the party away from the moderate mainstream, and the ever-increasing role of enemies and danger in the far-right imaginary. Symbols of degeneracy defined the right wing's enemies, while violence and virility defined their sense of self. T-shirts sold in New Jersey by the right-wing National Anti-Drug Coalition read “Warning: I Don't Brake for Liberals,” and “Pot Smokers Make Lousy Lovers.”⁶³ The first speaks to the widening gap between the political right and left, as well as the hypermasculine violence that shaped the right wing's notion of liberalism. The second shirt is explicitly sexual in nature, something the right often disassociates itself from as a product of the left and its sexual revolution and feminist movement.

In the eyes of the far-right, masculinity is constantly under attack and must be proven through the actions of men. Men of the far-right must prove their sexual success and ability to attract women and be attracted to women in the creation of the white family. Strongmen rule by control of bodies and use their sex life to gain credibility and legitimacy among voters, especially men.⁶⁴ The sexual prowess of the authoritarian is something for men to aspire to, and something used to justify sexual transgressions. So too is the masculine image of the average far-right man. For the far-right, the emasculation of men by mainstream society is something to be rectified; this goal is achieved through membership in the far-right and winning the highest prize, a woman.⁶⁵ This kind of macho, heroic tale entices men from the farthest, most rural corners of the United

States. Women allow men to prove their sexual virility and attraction to women to the other men in the group. The far-right likely felt inspired by the masculinity and small-government policies of Reagan, as well as his policing of marginalised communities. Gender is, once again, central in the relationship between the far-right and politics. It is not only women who were fixed into a gender role, but also men.

Where the far-right had previously been loosely tied together by ideology, the 1980s and 1990s became inundated with the development of white supremacist militias, neo-Nazi groups, and far-right organizations around the country. Regulations on firearms, tobacco, alcohol, and other goods enraged the far-right who feared growing government overreach into their communities.⁶⁶ Similarly to their British counterparts, American far-right groups recruited from white communities who felt marginalised, as well as the working poor. Just like the British, the new wave of American far-right activists were intergenerational. They felt robbed of their inheritance and birthright by global capitalism and the economic downturn of the white working class.⁶⁷ The racial blindness of mainstream American society prevented the development of class consciousness and coalition between whites and minorities, and instead drove the new, impoverished generation to the far-right.

Here, the similarities between the British and American far-right members become clear. These communities gave comfort, assistance, and a place to direct one's dissatisfaction.⁶⁸ Racist beliefs may or may not have existed prior to membership, but the far-right was able to recruit socially and culturally through appeals to the family and the necessity of community to uplift the unfortunate whites in ways the national government had not. In these communities, women were vital. The American neo-Nazi movement attracted many young women to its ranks, even more than its European counterpart.⁶⁹ Women joined white supremacist groups; women rationalised their membership in the far-right along gendered terms. They had a specific role to play, for themselves, for their families, and for the community they claimed membership to. Some women joined under the guise of self-transformation,⁷⁰ for others it was resignation to a racial duty.⁷¹ Their physical ability to carry white children is one of those, but so too is their social role in the family and as caregivers. Further, their membership can also be attributed to their desire to conform to a passive, feminine role for themselves, even if they did not believe such a role should be placed upon others. Thus, far-right does not necessarily mean anti-feminist to women, even when the groups they subscribe to are proud of misogynistic beliefs. There is clear ideological complexity here that displays the salience of gender in the American far-right in this period, as well as how gender is understood and mobilised for the far-right cause.

Regardless, women in these groups rationalised their membership along their own individual lines and for very rational reasons. Some objected to the misogyny and male-domination of their respective groups but still maintained membership. For them, the cause was as individual as it was national. Gender was important to the women, even if their gender expectations defied that of the group. The ability of American far-right groups to accommodate ideological variations is what drove membership and recruitment in the late twentieth century.⁷² The most successful of organised groups had an official platform or disseminated ideas through propaganda. But the reality was that the group was heterogenous, and this was a strength for its inclusion of women.

Conclusion

Transnational analysis of far-right groups is a growing field of study that has broadened our understanding of the creation, maintenance, and potential demise of many of these groups. An examination of the late 20th century relationship between US and UK groups demonstrates several key points. First, gendered politics and anxieties have a fundamental role in the ideologies of these groups and serve as a conduit for their engagement with women. Secondly, the dynamic between mainstream conservative politics and far-right politics is much more complex than they may appear. In both the Thatcher and Reagan administrations, the mainstream adopted components of far-right ideology (based on issues of race and gender), while the far-right also gained attention as an alternative to the perceived failures of the mainstream. Lastly, reproduction and sexuality are cultural norms that can shape the appearance and success of the far-right. This role shapes how women approach the far-right and how the far-right imagines women in their utopic societal imaginings. However, the debate over definitions of natural human behaviour and life extends beyond the far-right. Future analysis may consider how labelling certain people as unnatural may facilitate far-right radicalisation.

Recent political debates on immigration and transgender identities reflect many of these same gendered, socially conservative perspectives. The belief in the benefits of imperialism was not a novel belief during the Thatcher period, nor has it faded from relevancy. A 2020 YouGov poll found that 32% of Brits felt that the empire was a source of pride, with an additional 37% arguing it was neither a source of pride nor one of shame; further, imperial nostalgia was almost twice as prominent among Conservative voters than Labour voters.⁷³ Donald Trump's second-term rhetoric also reflects his imperialistic views, professing a desire to annex Canada and purchase Greenland and the Panama Canal.⁷⁴ Whether or not American and British Empires will rise again is not the key point here, it is the notion that such a goal is acceptable by voters. This is the impact of the far-right's push of the mainstream conservative party to the right. Hypermasculine visions of global domination, of protecting the white majority, of saving women, all culminate in the cult of personality that creates enemies and creates heroes. Efforts to tie definitions of womanhood solely to reproductive capability reflect this trend, as does anti-immigrant language. Gender is important now because women are the battleground that the far-right leverages for political gain; the last four decades of political upheaval and the slow return of racial violence and hate groups is evidence of this. Anglo-Saxon supremacists are created, born and bred.

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