



Displacement and Replacement: The Political History of David Duke, Patrick Buchanan, and Racial Resentment

ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, David Duke and Patrick Buchanan drew on long-running discourses about White replacement and displacement in their political campaigns. Duke, former leader of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, used White displacement fears to earn elected office in the Louisiana state legislature. He then ran for governor, senator, and president, but was thwarted in these campaigns partly thanks to Black voters. Duke's presidential ambitions were also undercut by the journalist and television personality Patrick Buchanan, who coopted Duke's message to seize his base. Despite trying several times, however, Buchanan was also unable to win the presidency. His main achievement was to push the Republican Party rightward, paving the way for the racialized populism of Tucker Carlson and Donald Trump.

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On the night of Friday, August 11, 2017, hundreds of demonstrators marched by torchlight through Charlottesville, Virginia, chanting, “Jews will not replace us.” Four years later, in April 2021, Fox News host Tucker Carlson announced: “The Democratic Party is trying to replace the current electorate—the voters now casting ballots—with new people: more obedient voters from the Third World” (Carlson, 2021, as quoted in [Bump, 2022, para. 1](#)). Carlson went on to claim that the importation of Third World voters diluted the value of the vote for current citizens. These two events, 4 years apart, demonstrate the extent to which the American right has embraced its extremist edge. Carlson, one of the most influential figures in the Republican party since his Fox News show, *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, premiered in November 2016, frankly endorsed the premise that White Americans should fear an intentional effort to “replace” them—the same idea that animated the racist extremists marching in Charlottesville in 2017. Carlson is not just a passive recipient of the ideas espoused at Charlottesville, however; in fact, he contributed to the climate that made the rally possible with his consistent rhetoric of White grievance throughout his media career.

This ideology is not new. When Carlson claimed that the White electorate was being “replaced,” he drew on a discourse that has existed for more than a century. American politicians have exploited fears of White displacement for even longer, since the country’s founding.

Slaveholders regularly used the threat of Black social equality to buttress their own power, and the same arguments were used to fuel the Jim Crow backlash that ended Reconstruction after the Civil War. In the late twentieth century, following the Civil Rights movement, many White Americans felt resentful and fearful in the face of what they saw as too much social change. They viewed every advance made by nonwhite people in the arena of electoral politics as a potential loss for them. White fears over their perceived displacement—that is, their loss of political, economic, and social privileges—crystallized around programs like welfare, affirmative action, and integrated busing, which they saw as giving unfair advantages to nonwhite, mainly Black, Americans at their expense.

These feelings were exploited by politicians of both parties, but increasingly by Republicans after the 1964 Civil Rights Act led White Southerners to abandon the Democratic party en masse. Beginning with Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign, Republican politicians actively pursued the “Southern Strategy”—the exploitation of White racism and anger over the end of Jim Crow and the increasingly visible Civil Rights movement—to draw Southern White voters away from the Democratic Party. As Goldwater said: “We’re not going to get the Negro vote as a bloc in 1964 or 1968, so we ought to go hunting where the ducks are” (Goldwater, 1961, as quoted in [Johnson, 1968, p. 2](#)).

The idea of “White replacement” is different from, but related to, that of displacement. “Displacement” is the idea that White Americans are losing political and economic dominance in America, whereas “replacement” is the idea that not only is the White race being displaced economically and politically by nonwhite people, especially immigrants, but that it is also facing extinction by way of racial intermixing. Far from being an original concept, the “Great Replacement” theory is just the newest iteration of ideas that have been present in America since at least 1916, when Madison Grant argued in his work *The Passing of the Great Race* that the result of unrestricted immigration to America “is that one class or type in a population expands more rapidly than another and ultimately replaces it. This process of replacement of one type by another does not mean that the race changes or is transformed into another. It is replacement pure and simple” ([Grant, 1921, p. 47](#)). Grant’s major contribution was that he provided a unified, pseudoscientific theory that articulated and legitimized pervasive fears in American political discourse at that time, an era of widespread nativism that saw the Ku Klux Klan reemerge and grow to a membership of 5 million and which culminated in the restrictive Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924.

The discourses of replacement and displacement have existed for a long time in American culture, long before Tucker Carlson endorsed the “Great Replacement” theory. Like other long-running discourses, they become meaningful and useful when people choose to use them, and when current conditions provide a receptive audience. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, David Duke,

the neo-Nazi and former Knights of the Ku Klux Klan leader who was elected to the Louisiana State Legislature in 1989, and Patrick Buchanan, the conservative journalist and former Reagan and Nixon aide who ran for president three times between 1992 and 2000, tried to interpret the mood of the American White electorate and chose to draw on the two discourses to achieve political power—ultimately with little success. Although Duke was able to find a highly motivated and extremely angry voting base in Louisiana that responded to his message of White displacement, he was unable to parlay this support into national electoral success, partly because of the strong opposition he faced from Black voters. Buchanan was able to exacerbate White fears of immigrant replacement in a way that earned him about three million votes in 1992, but his main achievement was the way he pushed the Republican party to the right. Two decades later, Tucker Carlson, Donald Trump, and other right-wing populist demagogues would once again draw on the two narratives with far greater success. The resurgence of these narratives two decades after Duke and Buchanan left the scene shows that their supporters and their ideas, dismissed as dangerous in the 1990s, have steadily taken control of the American right, partly thanks to growing fears of displacement and replacement.

As the extreme views of the far right have gained increasing currency in mainstream Republican politics, extremists have used that currency to legitimize themselves to the public. At the same time, that increased legitimacy lends greater credibility to far-right views, creating a feedback loop that pushes the right wing further to the right. As the criminal justice professor Barbara Perry (2004) has written: “We like to think that the white-supremacist movement is in fact a ‘lunatic fringe.’ Yet the vitriol of the hate groups is not so much an aberration as it is an affirmation of racist and gendered views that permeate society. Consequently, the political rhetoric of hate does not fall on deaf ears” (p. 89). Both David Duke and Pat Buchanan tried to exploit the similarities between their own racial rhetoric and that of the mainstream American right to earn legitimization by association. In the process, they contributed to the right’s radicalization and increasing reliance on White grievance as a political tool.

Both the far right and the mainstream right want to preserve an America where White people are dominant, but they use different tactics. David Duke and his National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP) can be classified as part of the racist right, a subset of the far right that treats race as the primary criterion for dividing people into groups and the main explanatory framework through which to view history and the world, in a poor imitation of Marxist’s use of class. These groups prioritize race over all other group identities and reject the pluralistic vision of America as a “melting pot” in favor of trying to restore or create a mythical all-White United States that has never existed. In contrast, the mainstream Republican Party treats race as one among many criteria, and racism is more of a means to an end than an end in itself.

When Duke sought political office, he tried to exploit the overlap between his own politics and those of the mainstream right by presenting himself as a Republican politician with a unique past. In 1989, David Duke was elected to the Louisiana State Legislature as the representative from Metairie, a suburb of New Orleans in Jefferson Parish (the Louisiana equivalent of a county). This was not Duke’s first political campaign, but it was his most successful. Duke had previously run for the Louisiana State Senate twice as a Democrat in the 1970s. In 1988, he ran for president as a Democrat, but switched allegiances part way through his campaign to run as the far-right Populist Party candidate. In December 1988 he switched again to the Republican Party and ran for the Metairie seat, which he won during a runoff election by a razor-thin margin of just 227 votes out of 17,000. (Powell, 1992, p. 13). Even though both President George H. W. Bush and former President Ronald Reagan endorsed Duke’s opponent, Metairie elected a former Ku Klux Klan leader and neo-Nazi.

Duke won by campaigning on the issue of White displacement. Specifically, Duke’s campaign slogan was “equal rights for all, special privileges for none.” This slogan represented Duke’s contention that White people were now a disadvantaged majority in America and that minority groups were the beneficiaries of “special privileges.” This idea was commonplace on the far right, and an old favorite of Duke’s. Still, he emphasized it to a greater degree during his campaign and toned down extreme racist rhetoric that he thought would be a liability or would not resonate with

the Metairie voting public. In his memoir *My Awakening* (1998), Duke characterizes his campaign platform as follows:

I did not change my rhetoric from that of the NAAWP other than to emphasize those issues that were pertinent to the district's voters. I spoke forthrightly about affirmative action and the massive discrimination against Whites, the high illegitimate welfare birthrate that was destroying our economy and causing the productive to become outnumbered and outvoted. I dared to speak about the minority crime that was reducing our streets to barbarism, and the fact that we needed at least one man in the legislature who would forthrightly stand up for us, just as the Black legislators do for their own people (p. 438).

Duke also argued that his rhetoric was not so different from that employed by national Republican leaders like Presidents Nixon or Reagan (Duke, 1998, p. 437). Although Duke's memoir is an exercise in self-aggrandizement similar in its virulent anti-Semitism, delusions of grandeur, and self-pity to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*—which Duke once called: “the greatest piece of literature of the twentieth century” (Powell, 1992, p. 44)—his characterization of his own rhetoric is accurate.

David Duke is a particular kind of White supremacist. Since at least 1980, he has made significant efforts to rehabilitate his image in order to gain entry to the mainstream of political discourse. This included disassociating himself from the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, which he left amid scandal after he was accused of trying to sell the organization's secret membership list for \$35,000 (Zeskind, 2009, p. 45). That same year he founded the NAAWP, an organization ostensibly meant to advance the interests of White people rather than to attack any other group. In an informational pamphlet produced by the organization titled “NAACP vs. NAAWP: Equal Rights for Whites?” (1990–1996), the Association claims to be the real champions of equality:

If the NAACP pushes for black civil rights ... the mass media and government refer to it as love and brotherhood. If a white dares to defend white civil rights, white interests, and attempts to instill white pride in his children—and opposes racial discrimination against anyone, it's often called hate and bigotry. It should be readily apparent that the real hatred rests with the minority-racists. (para. 4)

Here we see Duke's organization making an early attempt to deploy a White supremacist tactic that sociologist Mitch Berbrier (1998) has called “ethnic claims-making.” Racist groups use ethnic claims-making when they attempt to legitimize their movement by claiming that they are simply advocating for White pride and rights, arguing in the process “that if, according to the values of ‘cultural pluralism’ and ‘diversity,’ ethnic or racial pride is legitimate for (other) ethnic or racial minority groups ... then it is also legitimate for whites” (p. 499). David Duke used this tactic throughout his political career to counter accusations of racism.

In terms of rhetoric, however, there was little practical difference between the NAAWP and the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Far from simply celebrating White heritage, the materials distributed by the NAAWP regularly attacked nonwhite people and Jews. The NAAWP also constantly evoked and created fears of White replacement. In one fundraising letter titled “Help Us ... Fight!”, Duke (1981–1993) wrote: “Although busing and anti-white discrimination are tyrannical programs of anti-white repression, in the long run they are far less dangerous than the disparity between white and black birthrates and immigration ... once a people is reduced to an insignificant number, no amount of heroics can protect their civil rights, or even their right to live” (p. 1). Duke signed this letter, as he did all of his mailers, “Yours for White Victory!” (p. 2).

In another NAAWP mailer, titled “Action Report from David Duke” (ca. 1981), Duke recounted a cross-country publicity tour on behalf of the NAAWP that took him to El Paso, Texas, and across the border into Juarez, Mexico. Using racist imagery, Duke argued that immigration was increasingly turning the United States into a Third World country, describing this phenomenon as “a cancer spreading its dusky fingers over the geography of America like a greasy hand over a road map” (p. 3). Duke invoked the specter of immigrant's dark skin and stereotypes of Mexicans as greasy

to argue that immigration was a dual threat—it would both darken the American population and economically ruin its cities.

He also argued that White people were being exploited to support nonwhite people, writing that taxes taken from El Paso's "white suburbs ... and the rest of Anglo-America" were the only thing keeping that city from being indistinguishable from Juarez (p. 3). This type of argument was a regular feature of the *NAAWP News*, which ran articles by Duke with titles like "The New White Minority" and "David Duke: Is the White Race Doomed?" throughout the 1980s. One issue featured an image of a crying White baby with the caption "By the time he's out of high school, his race may have run out of time. Join the NAAWP and dry this baby's tears!" (NAAWP, 1981, p. 3).

Writing on behalf of the NAAWP, Duke argued that the most dangerous problem was White replacement; but he focused primarily on displacement fears while campaigning in Louisiana (McGill, 1992, para. 6). He ran against welfare and affirmative action programs and sought to convince the overwhelmingly White Metairie electorate that their economic woes were the fault of these "special privileges" accorded to minorities. Already primed by years of conservative race-baiting, Louisianans did not need much convincing. Tulane history professor Lawrence Powell (1992) wrote of Duke's election: "Duke is the beneficiary of twenty years of Republican bottom fishing for Wallace votes. Relentless Republican attacks against affirmative action as 'reverse discrimination' have conditioned whites to believe they have legitimate grievances against black people and the federal agencies championing their interests" (p. 16). Powell wrote this in 1992, when he and several other figures associated with the anti-Duke Louisiana Coalition against Racism and Nazism produced a book looking back at Duke's political career and its implications for American politics.

Duke himself was quick to exploit the similarities between his own arguments and those of conservatives; when asked in a radio interview whether he was a White supremacist pretending to be a conservative, Duke referenced the 1989 Supreme Court decision in *Richmond v. Croson*, in which the Court struck down a 1983 Richmond program that set aside 30% of construction subcontracts for minority-owned businesses on the grounds that it was racially biased against White people and therefore violated the fourteenth amendment (O'Neil, 2020, 550–551). "If I'm a racist, then so is the United States Supreme Court," Duke declared (Powell, 1992, 18). In a sense, then, Duke used mainstream conservative racial rhetoric and policies, like the *Croson* ruling, as a sort of Trojan horse within which he could sneak into elected office.

While campaigning, Duke repeatedly used the rhetoric of "symbolic racism," a phenomenon first identified in 1971 by the political psychologist David O. Sears and the political scientist Donald Kinder. Sears and Kinder (1981) defined symbolic racism as "a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo based on moral feelings that blacks violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, the work ethic, obedience, and discipline" (p. 416). Specifically, symbolic racism blames Black people for economic and social problems by arguing that many individual Black people fail to work hard enough and are prone to crime and welfare abuse, as opposed to biological racism, which openly argues that the Black race is innately inferior (Howell and Warren, 1992, 81). Symbolic racism, which became the primary form used to express racist sentiments after the success of the Civil Rights movement rendered overt biological racism taboo in mainstream discourse, is a major tool that racist activists have deployed to make their views more anodyne and acceptable. Establishment politicians have used this rhetoric both to enact "colorblind" policies that hurt Black people and as a dog whistle to their White constituents, further legitimizing the twin narratives of displacement and replacement—and extremists like Duke that promote them—in the process.

When surveys in the New Orleans area that measured symbolic racism among White voters in 1989 and 1990 were compared with national surveys from 1986 and 1988, the comparisons revealed that Whites nationwide tended to subscribe to symbolic racist views at about the same rate as those in New Orleans. The only difference was that Whites in the New Orleans area tended to hold these views more strongly (Howell and Warren, 1992, 82). This survey data is revealing because it shows that a majority of Whites at the time held racist views, but that New Orleans

voters prioritized racial issues over other political issues more strongly than did Whites nationally. This means that, if circumstances led Whites nationwide to prioritize their racial beliefs over other concerns the way New Orleans voters did, overtly racial politics could potentially succeed in national elections. This data also lends some legitimacy to Duke's oft-repeated claim that "most European-Americans down deep believe in the same things I do" (Duke, 1998, 436).

In the years since Duke's election, national commentators from across the political spectrum repeatedly drew attention to ongoing demographic shifts that seemed to prove that White Americans would imminently become a minority (Frey, 2018). This idea, while misleading and based on an essentialist vision of Whiteness, contributed to fears of replacement and displacement and lent greater credibility to the zero-sum-game approach to politics advocated by people like Duke and his successors. Understanding the power that these fears held, and still hold, for many White people helps explain the modern rise of right-wing populism (a style of politics that appeals to ordinary people with rhetorical attacks on elites) across the globe, as well as the rise of the "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory that Tucker Carlson has touted.

Duke purposely shaped his rhetoric to gain access to political power. In the process, he capitalized on the existing use of symbolically racist rhetoric by mainstream conservatives to legitimize his own views while pushing the mainstream discourse further to the right. Powell argued in 1992 that "Duke has already scored a classic 'success-in-failure' by giving welfare reform an ugly racial spin" (Powell, 1992, p. 33). At a time when the Republican Party was generally able to exploit racial issues with symbolically racist dog whistles while publicly claiming that race as a political issue had been resolved by the Civil Rights movement, Duke's open linkage of welfare and race put his adopted party in a difficult position. Duke's participation in politics demonstrates the danger of racially-tinged rhetoric while helping to reveal the extent to which mainstream politicians, especially those on the right, benefit from it—in subtler forms. The narrative of White displacement is a useful tool for both extremists and major-party politicians because it can be used to encourage voter turnout. At the same time, it can be used to whip up White resentment and promote anti-democratic measures and even to incite violence. The problem for the Republicans of the 1990s was that Duke was espousing White displacement politics too openly, in the process drawing comparisons between his positions and theirs.

The contradictory nature of the Republican reaction to Duke is best exemplified by the Party's national chairman Lee Atwater. When Duke won the 1989 election, Atwater marshaled the national Party to rebuke Duke for his racist past and to deny him any assistance. Duke's election came at a time when Atwater was actively pursuing Black voters (Dionne Jr., 1989). But Atwater's attempts to distance himself and the party from Duke's election stood in stark contrast to his exploitation of racial fears during his career as a top political consultant. In his role as George H. W. Bush's campaign manager in the 1988 presidential election, Atwater oversaw the Willie Horton advertising campaign, the notorious television commercials that attacked Bush's opponent, Democrat Michael Dukakis, on the grounds that, in his capacity as governor of Massachusetts, he had vetoed a law that would have denied furlough to first-degree murderers. Using symbolically racist language, the ads blamed Dukakis's veto for Horton's violent rape of a White woman, which occurred after Horton escaped while on furlough, thereby using the incident to raise the specter of Black crime as a dog whistle to motivate White voters.

Considering Atwater's use of the race issue in 1988, his rebuke of Duke a year later looked more like a reaction to the overtness of Duke's racism rather than a rebuke of his racist ideas as such. As the Democratic Senator John B. Breaux said of Atwater and his fellow Republicans at the time: "They think David Duke's a monster. Well, Lee Atwater ought to be considered Dr. Frankenstein" (Dionne Jr., 1989, 8). In the short term, Duke's presence on the political scene may have pushed the Republicans to the left on some racial issues—multiple commentators at the time saw President Bush's last-minute support of a civil rights bill as an attempt to distance himself from Duke (Raspberry, 1991). But in the long run, Duke contributed to support among the Republican base for politics and rhetoric that prioritized White people, politics that have since come to dominate the Party.

Of course, similarities in rhetoric aside, Duke and extremists like him are very different from the mainstream politicians who sometimes speak their language. For Duke, symbolically racist rhetoric attacking welfare and blaming Black people for White displacement was a mask meant to hide his far more radical ambitions. Duke admitted as much in a 1986 interview with Evelyn Rich, a British PhD candidate who later married the White supremacist Jared Taylor (Beirich, 2016). Duke, speaking with his fellow neo-Nazi Joe Fields in a conversation recorded by Rich, advised Fields not to be so blatant in his Nazism. Duke said that he wanted to bring new people into the movement, and that “if they can call you a Nazi and make it stick ...it’s going to hurt. It’s going to hurt the ability of people to open their minds to what you’re saying, it’s going to hurt your ability to communicate with them” (Rich, 1986, 5:49).

Duke’s *NAAWP News* once published a map proposing to divide America up into several different racial nations. These included “Alta California,” stretching from the Southern tip of California to the bottom of Texas and presumably meant to house Latino/a Americans; “Navahona,” which was to cover most of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah and was probably intended for Native Americans; and “New Africa,” which was to cover most of the deep South, with the exception of the very southern tip of Florida, which would become “New Cuba.” Other nations included “East Mongolia” (the Hawaiian Islands), “West Israel” (Long Island), “Francia,” which would cover the western portions of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont and would apparently be the home of all French-speaking Americans, including the Cajuns of Louisiana; and a small spot to be called “Minoria,” apparently intended to cover New York City. The entire rest of the continental United States would be a Whites-only nation.

By publishing this map, Duke demonstrated his willingness to endorse extremist solutions to racial issues—even those as radical as complete racial separatism. George H. W. Bush, or even Patrick Buchanan, would never have proposed such a policy. When confronted about this proposal by reporter Sam Donaldson during a contentious interview on *Prime Time Live* in late 1989, Duke backpedaled, claiming the map was meant to be “tongue-in-cheek”; he quipped that he would never support such a proposal because “Louisiana is in New Africa and I don’t want to give up Louisiana” (Duke, 1989, 48:41). As he attempted to transform himself into a nationally viable politician, Duke found his well-documented extremist past difficult to escape. When Duke ran in statewide and nationwide elections during the early 1990s, he repeatedly lost despite having attained high rates of White support. In the 1991 Louisiana gubernatorial race, Duke took 55% of the White vote, performing particularly well among young White male Republicans. In contrast to widespread claims that his voters were motivated by economic distress, his average voter was “a financially stable, middle-class white male, with a high school education and a born-again Christianity” (Zeskind, 2009, p. 274). In fact, his popularity with White Louisianans was significant enough that Duke lost the election only because of the Black vote, partial evidence of a repeated trend of Black voters acting as a defensive force against White supremacy (Zeskind, 2009, p. 262).

Duke’s political success among White Louisianans demonstrated that, for many White voters, race was the most important issue. He was able to achieve elected office in Metairie because he had rehabilitated his image just enough that some voters felt they could vote for him while denying that their vote was about race. His inability to advance further in American politics is due in part to the fact that his extremism was too difficult to deny—too many White voters who prioritized race were unwilling to vote for Duke because, unlike his supporters in Metairie, they felt that his racism, evidenced by his Nazi sympathies and his history in the Ku Klux Klan, was too blatant. Where Duke’s extremist past was ultimately an insurmountable barrier to his success in nationwide politics, his race-baiting strategies remained available to a candidate who had enough plausible deniability to use symbolic racism to achieve office, claiming all along to not be a racist. As Duke himself wrote of his victory in Metairie: “If I could win such a race ... if I could overcome what many would say was the political kiss of death, then great opportunities existed for others who simply espoused my beliefs without having my controversial past” (Duke, 1998, p. 440).

Still, the time for such a candidate was not yet ripe at the end of the 20th century, as evidenced by the multiple failed presidential runs of Pat Buchanan. Yet, although Buchanan was unable to win the presidency, he was able to take aspects of Duke’s message much further than Duke himself

had in national politics, especially during the 1992 presidential election in which both men ran as Republicans.

Buchanan, a Republican journalist and commentator, worked as a special assistant to President Nixon and as President Reagan's communications director before running for the presidency himself in 1992, 1996, and 2000. Buchanan openly endorsed some of Duke's ideas, saying in 1991:

The way to do battle with David Duke is not to go ballistic because Duke, as a teenager, paraded around in a Nazi costume ... The way to deal with Mr. Duke is the way the GOP dealt with the far more formidable challenge posed by George Wallace. Take a hard look at Duke's portfolio of winning issues; and expropriate those not in conflict with GOP principles. (Buchanan, 1991, as quoted in [Zeskind, 2009, p. 279](#)).

Although Buchanan's open willingness to publicly embrace Duke's positions and his breezy dismissal of Duke's Nazi affiliations surprised some—conservative Newt Gingrich called Buchanan “an extremist who is closer to David Duke than he is to the normal mainstream conservative” (Gingrich, 1992, as quoted in [Dionne Jr., 1992, p. 24](#)) on *Larry King Live* in 1992—he realized the utility of a tried-and-true American political tactic that many of his fellow Republicans also used, albeit less overtly.

One characteristic of the two-party system is that the major parties routinely absorb extreme factions under their umbrella, drawing on aspects of the extremist's positions to attract their voters. An example of this phenomenon is the People's Party, founded in 1876, which had dissolved by 1896 after the two major parties adopted many of its proposals ([LeMay, 2017, p. 22](#)). Still, the idea of absorbing the political positions of a Nazi Holocaust denier and former Ku Klux Klan leader seems questionable at best. After all, Duke's political philosophy was built on prioritizing race over all other factors and on championing White interests over those of all other Americans.

Although more mainstream Republicans may have blanched at Buchanan's statement, they regularly drew on race resentment as a political weapon. For example, Ronald Reagan infamously railed against the “welfare queen” who refused to work and allegedly had as many children as possible to boost her government benefits during his 1976 campaign. Although he never mentioned her by name, he seems to have been referencing the story of a con artist named Linda Taylor (“*Welfare Queen*,” 1976, p. 51). Reagan characteristically misrepresented aspects of Taylor's story, however, and his welfare attacks were a thinly veiled form of race-baiting that bears a remarkable resemblance to Duke's rhetoric 15 years later. Also, as mentioned above, George H. W. Bush and Lee Atwater ran attack ads against Michael Dukakis in 1988 that raised the threat of Black crime in the form of convicted murderer Willie Horton. By focusing on the alleged failings of individual Black people without ever mentioning race, both politicians made symbolically racist arguments that their supporters, and many of their detractors, understood to be a condemnation of Black people in general. Black people, they implied, failed to live up to the American ideal: they refused to work and instead relied on welfare programs and on crime to survive. By extension, both politicians argued that liberal policies, especially on crime and social services, had failed because they enabled and even encouraged these tendencies.

When Buchanan suggested that Republicans should beat Duke by expropriating his “portfolio of winning issues” (without ever explicitly spelling out which of those issues were “in conflict with GOP principles”), he articulated a strategy that establishment Republicans had been using for decades. Buchanan took his own advice, expropriating not only some of Duke's ideas but his lieutenants as well, with mixed results. Buchanan was the focus of repeated scandals when multiple prominent figures within his campaign apparatus were revealed to have ties to Duke. His Florida campaign chair, Susan Lamb, was fired after it was discovered that she was a member of the Duke-founded NAAWP, while Buchanan's South Carolina campaign chair, William Carter, served the same post in Duke's 1992 presidential campaign ([Zeskind, 2009, 431](#)).

Buchanan's participation in the 1992 presidential race doomed Duke's already hopelessly quixotic campaign because Buchanan was able to seize many of Duke's voters. Buchanan argued that this was one of his strengths as a candidate—he presented himself as a sort of antidote to Duke.

During a speech at the University of Oklahoma in March 1992, while Buchanan was celebrating his recent strong showing in the New Hampshire primary, a heckler interrupted by shouting: “David Duke got votes too!” Buchanan responded: “We’re going to take care of David Duke when I get down to Louisiana, my friend.” (Buchanan, March 13, 1992, 5:01). Buchanan attempted to turn one of his political weaknesses—the resemblance between his and Duke’s platforms—into a strength by presenting himself as the best candidate to beat Duke. On May 20th, Buchanan gave a speech at the *Orange County Register* forum taking credit for knocking Duke out of the race, arguing that his handy majorities over Duke in the South Carolina and Louisiana primaries had effectively ended Duke’s “national political career.” Although Duke’s political career was over, credit for this achievement belongs more to the intense opposition he encountered in statewide Louisiana politics, particularly among Black voters, and to the efforts of the Louisiana Coalition against Racism and Nazism. Buchanan went on to characterize support for Duke as an expression of disenchantment with the “Washington establishment” (Buchanan, May 20, 1992, 10:40). Even as he took credit for ending Duke’s candidacy, Buchanan was careful to avoid offending Duke’s voters.

For his part, Duke accepted that Buchanan’s candidacy had ended his own. In his speech announcing his withdrawal from the presidential race in April 1992, Duke began by noting the resemblance between Buchanan’s campaign platform and his own, saying: “He [Buchanan] said many of the things that I have been saying for a long time and he finally put it into the political process” (Duke, 1992, 37:36). He went on to argue that voters had picked Buchanan over him not because they thought he was a better person but because they thought that Buchanan had a better chance at victory. Duke did not endorse any candidate and ended his speech by saying: “I’m sure I’ll be seeing you again one of these days, I think my politics will be the future in America.” (Duke, 1992, 57:10). Duke was right, but he would not be the standard-bearer of these politics. One of those who briefly carried Duke’s brand of politics onward, past what Duke himself was able to achieve, was Buchanan.

Duke was quick to point out the resemblance between his and Buchanan’s positions, especially on immigration. In that same speech he said, “I’ve talked about immigration from the beginning of my political life and now Patrick Buchanan certainly is talking about it” (Duke, 1992, 25:18). It’s true that Buchanan’s rhetoric on illegal immigration bore a strong resemblance to Duke’s. During a May 1992 visit to the border between San Diego and Tijuana, Buchanan denounced “the failure of the national government of the United States to protect the borders of the United States from an illegal invasion that involves at least a million aliens a year” (Rotella, 1992, para. 2). By characterizing the issue as “an illegal invasion,” Buchanan dehumanized the immigrants and invoked fears about the safety and integrity of White America and the threat of replacement felt by much of the White electorate.

This demagoguery on immigration resembled Duke’s rhetoric, especially in its coded racial elements. In an NAAWP mailer, Duke (ca. 1981) recounted his visit to a portion of the border fence near El Paso, Texas. He referred to immigration as “masses of Mexicans surging northwards” and as “floods of Third World humanity.” He raised the specter of White replacement in dramatic terms, writing: “Unchecked, [immigration] will erase from our landscape the most productive and creative people that have walked on this continent” (p. 3). During his 1992 campaign, Buchanan ran ads warning that unchecked immigration threatened to turn America into a “Third World country.” In a line eerily similar to Duke’s talking points, Buchanan positioned himself as a spokesman for White America, asking, “Who speaks for Euro-Americans, who founded the United States?” (Buchanan, 1992, as quoted in Applebome, 1992, p. 26). Both Duke and Buchanan repeatedly characterized immigration as an existential threat to America and its White population.

As early as March 1992, Buchanan admitted that his campaign for the Republican nomination had little chance of success and presented his efforts as an attempt to “go and do battle for the heart and soul of the Republican Party” (Buchanan, 1992, as quoted in *Heart and Soul*, 1992). Herein lies the significance of the ill-fated political careers of both David Duke and Pat Buchanan. In the 1990s they represented the extreme right edge of the Republican Party, even though their rhetoric was often little different from that of the mainstream except in its frankness, hyperbole, and extreme

conviction. Over the next two decades, however, the far-right wing of the Party came to dominate it, in large part because of the increasingly desperate fears of displacement and replacement among the White base. These fears have been motivated partly by ongoing demographic shifts that pointed to a shrinking White majority among the American population. Buchanan and Duke both helped to create these fears in their modern form and exploited them. In doing so, they failed to achieve real political power but did succeed in hastening the Grand Old Party's rightward march. In a sense, then, Buchanan and Duke were ahead of their time. The twin fears of displacement and replacement were not yet influential enough to be exploited for significant political power, at least not by men tainted by the extremist label.

During the 1990s and the early 2000s, neoconservatism, an ideology focused on international affairs and America's perceived role as the leader of the world that was relatively lax on social issues like race, reigned supreme among Republicans. It was not until its culmination and subsequent discreditation with the younger Bush's presidency, followed by the backlash to the election of Barack Obama, that right-wing populism could seize control of the American right. When this did occur, though, the new wave of populist politicians owed much to the rhetoric and groundwork laid by Duke and Buchanan.

The populism of the modern Republican Party owes more to Duke and Buchanan than just its tendency to activate and exploit White racial anxieties. Both men displayed a fondness for conspiracy theories eerily similar to the modern culture of QAnon and Carlson's "Great Replacement" peddling (Rezendes, 1996). Both also faced revulsion mixed with attempts to appease and pander to their supporters by the mainstream Republican Party. The Louisiana Republican Party refused to openly condemn Duke for fear of alienating his voters, specifically the many "Reagan Democrats" who constituted a major part of Duke's base (Zeskind, 2009, 200). In the same vein, President George H. W. Bush moved to the right on some issues to accommodate Buchanan and court his supporters, and he even let Buchanan give a half hour speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention where Buchanan declared a "culture war" and denounced LGBTQ rights and Hillary Clinton's "radical feminism" (Buchanan, August 17, 1992, 18:00).

Ultimately, though, both the national Republican electorate and Party officials proved unwilling to accept either Duke or Buchanan in the 1990s. But in 2016, both the base and the Republican establishment allowed a new populist demagogue, Donald Trump, to dominate the Party. Buchanan and Duke's candidacies reveal the nascent tendencies of the White Republican voting base that propelled Donald Trump to office decades later and ultimately led those establishment Republicans who had formerly scorned Trump to embrace him wholeheartedly or leave the party.

By looking back at the politics of the 1990s, we can see the early signs of the Republican Party's hard rightward shift. Duke's insistence that affirmative action constituted anti-White racism and Buchanan's dire warnings of a "culture war" for the soul of America and the "invasion" at the southern border read as extreme to many Republican voters in the 1990s, but not to all of them. Duke won office in Metairie and came extremely close to becoming the governor of Louisiana, while Buchanan secured almost three million votes in 1992, nearly 30% of the Republican primary votes (Our campaigns). What few could have predicted at the time, especially those who labeled Buchanan "the last angry white male" (Grady, 1995) was that, just two decades later, the extremist ideas represented by these two men would come to permeate the same Republican party that had failed to reject them emphatically enough in the 1990s.

Buchanan and Duke paved the way for Donald Trump, the man most responsible for this coup. Buchanan and Duke tapped into the same deep wells of discontent and resentment that rankled many White Americans, motivated in part by fears of replacement and displacement, that Donald Trump tapped into. In the decades since the 1990s, demographic shifts, the export of jobs overseas and the accompanying economic dislocation, ongoing political race baiting—especially the reaction to Barack Obama's presidency—and the profound delegitimization of neoconservatism brought about by the lies and excesses of the second Bush administration have helped to spread this resentment and fear throughout White America. As a result, Trump was able to win the presidency on a platform similar to that espoused by Duke and Buchanan — "Make

America Great Again” is nothing if not a promise to return the United States to a mythical past of White dominance.

A siege mentality prevails among right-wing White Americans, and it has brought with it a raft of outlandish conspiracy theories, some of which are just the newest expressions of very old ideas. Chief among them is the “Great Replacement.” Besides the election of Donald Trump as president, the endorsement of these theories by highly influential Republicans like Tucker Carlson is the best evidence for the extent to which extremist racial ideology has permeated and come to dominate the collective imagination of the American right. It would be hard to overstate Carlson’s influence on conservative politics in America; a recent *New York Times Magazine* article argued, “Carlson doesn’t report the news for American conservatives; he creates it” (Zerofsky, 2021). His show, “the most-watched in cable news,” according to Forbes, has an audience of 2.8 million viewers (Joyella, 2021). Besides his massive viewership, there is plenty of evidence that Carlson’s views are popular among Republicans—a December 2021 Associated Press poll that found that almost half of the Republican respondents agreed with the idea that: “There is a group of people in this country who are trying to replace native-born Americans with immigrants who agree with their political views.” The same AP poll found that Fox viewers were significantly more likely than the average American to agree with “replacement theory,” surpassed only by respondents who watched the ultra-conservative networks One America News and Newsmax (Bump, 2022). Carlson’s endorsement of replacement theory was celebrated by David Duke in an October 2021 episode of Duke’s podcast, where he expressed support for Carlson’s argument and claimed to have foreseen the “demographic threat” facing White America as far back as 1991. Duke then used the similarity between Carlson’s and his own rhetoric to claim legitimacy, asking, “How could I be an evil guy” if influential commentators like Carlson were making the same arguments (Duke, 2021, as quoted in Press-Reynolds, 2021).

Neither Duke nor Buchanan created the “Great Replacement” theory, which takes its name from a 2011 book by the French author Renaud Camus. The significance of their political careers lies in the fact that both men articulated a vision of American society and politics in which the White majority was under threat from every direction, on the verge of being overwhelmed by nonwhite immigrants invited, and abetted, by a sinister political elite. This vision draws on deep roots in American politics in the form of the long-running discourses of White displacement and replacement, of which the “Great Replacement” is merely the newest version. By reviving these discourses and applying them to the modern political context, Duke and Buchanan introduced many White Americans to a conspiratorial worldview that seemed to line up well with the symbolically racist rhetoric that mainstream Republicans had used for decades. In the 1990s, the voters that embraced that worldview were the minority. But in the decades since, ongoing demographic shifts, coupled with growing minority representation in the media and politics and increasingly alarmist warnings of White decline have all contributed to a growing mentality of grievance and desperation among many White Americans, priming them for the rise of new demagogues with a similar message.

Carlson and Trump, two of the most prominent of these demagogues, consistently deploy rhetorical methods reminiscent of those used by Duke and Buchanan. When Carlson positions himself as the spokesmen for “native Americans” who are in danger of being replaced by immigrants from the Third World, he is practicing ethnic claims-making as a dog whistle to his viewers who understand that “native Americans” is a euphemism for White people of European ancestry (leaving little room for the millions of nonwhite Americans whose families have lived here for generations, not to mention the indigenous peoples who were here long before Europeans even knew the continent existed). When Donald Trump announced his presidential candidacy with a speech referring to Mexican immigrants as “rapists,” he was deploying symbolically racist rhetoric to paint all Mexicans as a foreign threat and drawing on longstanding stereotypes of nonwhite men as a danger to White women. Both men are much better at disguising their dog whistles than Duke or Buchanan were, however, and both have benefited from a polarized political environment in which truth itself has become a matter of dispute. Still, the similarities in their language are stark, and they both would likely have been denounced as dangerous extremists by the GOP establishment in the 1990s along with Duke and Buchanan.

Of course, those more “moderate” Republicans that denounced Duke and Buchanan, and denounced Trump until he seized control of their voter base and their Party, are culpable in this shift—their ongoing use of symbolically racist rhetoric and ethnic claims-making since the 1960s has conditioned a large subset of the American population to be receptive to the more overt version pushed by today’s demagogues. Indeed, when many voters’ express admiration for Trump’s “honesty,” what they really mean is that they find his open expression of commonly understood but rarely expressed Republican beliefs refreshing and empowering. An August 2020 YouGov poll found that 96% of Trump supporters, and 62% of registered voters, agreed that “Donald Trump says what other politicians are afraid to say” (Blumenthal, 2020, para. 5). In reality, Trump is one of the most dishonest politicians in American history—one Washington Post tally totaled the lies he told during his presidency at 30,573 (Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2021)—but what his supporters mean when they praise his “honesty” is that he openly expresses opinions that they (and many more mainstream Republican politicians) largely share but are generally too afraid of social sanctions to express. Duke and Buchanan did the same thing, in the process contributing to the radicalization of the mainstream American right that culminated in Trump’s 2016 election to the White House.

At the same time, the triumph of White displacement and replacement politics have not translated into electoral success for yesterday’s extremists. David Duke ran for the Louisiana seat in the U.S. senate again in 2016. Despite his attempts to highlight the similarity between Trump’s politics and his own, and his insistence that “of course” Trump voters were his voters (Domonoske, 2016), Duke gained only 3% of the votes in the Louisiana primaries, according to Ballotpedia. The reasons for this are several. Most importantly, blatant racism has only become more taboo in the decades since the 1990s, and Duke has done a poor job of hiding his true beliefs since he left politics in 1992. Decades of symbolically racist rhetoric have allowed many White Americans to believe, or at least to pretend, that the Republican Party and candidates like Trump are not racist, but just victims of media smear campaigns. Trump’s inconsistent political past makes denials of racism far more convincing than former Grand Wizard Duke’s. In fact, Trump is less racist and less extreme than Duke, which makes him a more palatable candidate. Finally, Duke undoubtedly undermined his own political viability by defrauding his supporters for gambling money in the late 1990s, an offense for which he went to prison in 2002 (Associated Press, 2002).

While modern Republicans have not gone so far as to elect Duke, recent political events—especially the attempted coup at the Capitol building on January 6th, 2021—have demonstrated that the American right is desperate and willing to go to extreme lengths to achieve its ends. A major source of this desperation is the fear among White Americans that they are simultaneously being displaced by nonwhite people in the United States and replaced by nonwhite immigrants from abroad. A 2021 poll found that about 48% of White adults say that White people face “at least some” discrimination in America (Daniller, 2021). White anxieties over their own displacement in American culture is further reflected in the widespread movement against the teaching of so-called “critical race theory” in schools, a euphemism for attempts to prevent schools from teaching children about America’s racist history and its lingering effects today.

Further research is needed into the symbiotic exchange of ideas between the increasingly radical Republican base, radical right extremists, and the Party’s leading lights. In the modern era of mass media and internet radicalization, it has never been more important to understand the complexities of our overcrowded political discourse. To what extent do figures like Carlson directly influence, and take ideas from, the most extreme fringe of right-wing political activism? If Carlson and other commentators and politicians are taking ideas directly from rightwing extremists, how do these intellectual exchanges occur and through what medium? What are the best methods to deradicalize the large numbers of Americans that have fallen under the sway of dangerous conspiracy theories like the “Great Replacement?” All of these questions invite further investigation.

In the area of history, there has been a profusion of studies into the American far right since January 6th, 2021, but much more work is needed in this area. We still understand far too little about the historical factors that have made such a large percentage of Americans vulnerable to radicalization today. Further research is also needed into the covert penetration of extremists into police forces, security services, the military, and local and national politics, much of which began in the 1990s

and continues to this day. In the same vein, more work is needed on the reaction of the far right to the government crackdown that occurred in response to the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing.

The nefarious impact and spread of ideas like the “Great Replacement” theory is illustrated by the fact that several mass shooters, including Peyton Gendron, who shot and killed ten Black people in a Buffalo supermarket on May 14th, 2022, have incorporated the “Great Replacement” theory into their manifestos. Gendron characterized an intentional effort to replace White Americans, which he believed to be orchestrated by Jewish people, as the main rationale for his act of terrorism, claiming to be “simply a White man seeking to protect and serve my community, my people, my culture, and my race” (Abbas et al, 2022, para. 1). We need more research to understand and counter the very real threat of right-wing terrorism, encouraged and enabled by the rhetoric of Republican politicians at the highest levels, that has become an enduring reality of our daily political life.

As long as White Americans remain fearful of displacement and replacement, those fears will continue to be potent political tools when used by the right candidate. And if the last two decades are any indication, these fears will only grow more extreme and will spread to more White Americans, as America continues to grow more racially diverse, the ongoing refugee crisis worsens, and irresponsible racial rhetoric and predictions of a nonmajority White America continue to be peddled without the necessary context.

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