

Plenary Session

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Nationalisms and Their Effects on Jewish-Christian Relations

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The Antisemitic Core of White Nationalism in the United States

Like many Americans, I was horrified by the violence of the August 2017 “Unite the Right” torchlight march in Charlottesville, VA in which a mob of about 100 white nationalists—virtually all male—chanted in intimidating tones, “You will not replace us” and “Jews will not replace us.” Waving Nazi and neo-Nazi flags, shouting “blood and soil,” the marchers clearly intended to intimidate and terrorize. It was a frightening scene, not one I thought I would witness in this country. The marchers’ fusion of racism and antisemitism could not have been clearer, but it was not until sometime later that I understood what “replace” meant—though I suspect many Jews immediately knew all too well. For white nationalists, the “rising tide of color” unleashed by the civil rights movement and immigration, which Jews allegedly control and manipulate, is dooming the white race.ⁱ Jews, they maintain, are guilty of white genocide—though the irony of this accusation seems to elude them.

Then the two synagogue shootings in October 2018 in Pennsylvania and in April 2019 in California chillingly revealed the antisemitism that lies at the core of this demonic amalgam of white nationalism, white supremacy, and, on occasion, Christian teachings.ⁱⁱ While this fusion has precedents in U.S. history, we are witnessing in recent years a more sophisticated and pernicious manifestation of hate and violence that we must work to counter.ⁱⁱⁱ And whatever is peculiar to the American varieties of white nationalism—including a president who is a self-declared nationalist^{iv} and widespread gun violence-- related movements exist on a global scale.

My presentation focuses principally upon the linkage of antisemitism and white nationalism, beginning with a brief review of its history in the United States and offering salient examples from two contemporary nationalist voices. Throughout I will also highlight the linkage between white nationalism and racism and point to some discomfiting examples of “Christian supremacy.” In the concluding portion I will suggest some ways that we who advocate for reconciliation between Jews and Christians (and between the churches and the synagogue) might take up in countering white nationalism. It is my hope that our subsequent discussion will stimulate other strategies.

ⁱ See Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

ⁱⁱ On October 27, 2018 Robert Bowers assassinated 11 members of the Tree of Life-Or L’Simcha congregations in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania dead and on April 27, 2019 John Earnest killed a member of Chabad of Poway, California.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Adam Serwer, “White Nationalism’s Deep American Roots,” *The Atlantic* (April 2019): 84-94. See also the website of the Anti-Defamation League, which has numerous resources on white supremacy, nationalism, and antisemitism.

^{iv} See <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/23/us/politics/nationalist-president-trump.html>

Historical Precedents of White Nationalism in the U.S.

A 1916 book by Madison Grant (1865-1937), *The Passing of the Great Race; or, The Racial Basis of European History*, sowed the seeds of white nationalism in the United States. A xenophobic enthusiast of “race science,” Grant raged against the “suicidal ethics” of immigrants who were “exterminating” his pure, white race. Jews were particularly threatening:

The man of the old stock is being crowded out of many country districts by those foreigners, just as he is to-day being literally driven off the streets of New York City by the swarms of Polish Jews...it is evident that in large sections of the country the native Americans [by which he means white, Protestant Europeans] will entirely disappear.”^v

Grant writes that altruistic ideals and maudlin sentimentalism have made America “an asylum for the oppressed,” thus “sweeping the nation toward a racial abyss.” He continues:

If the Melting Pot is allowed to boil without control, and we continue to follow our national motto and deliberately blind ourselves to ‘all distinctions of race, creed, or color,’ the type of native American of Colonial descent will become as extinct as the Athenian of the age of Pericles, and the Viking of the days of Rollo.^{vi}

In other words, immigration is replacing descendants of the virtuous white colonists with adulterated alien peoples. Grant, while largely unknown in our time, was immensely influential, exercising major influence on key American political leaders of his time (including President Warren Harding and his successor Calvin Coolidge, and many members of Congress). Moreover, Grant’s antipathy to immigrants helped to shape the Immigration Act of 1924, which established quotas for national origin and “codified the fiction of a ‘white race.’”^{vii} The impact Grant and colleagues of a similar persuasion, such as his disciple Lothrop Stoddard, made transcended the United States. Grant and Stoddard were preeminent among the American eugenicists who had a major impact on Nazi Germany.^{viii} Grant had provided him, as Adolph Hitler said, a “bible” for National Socialism.

In the course of civil rights advocacy of the 1960s, pressure to ameliorate the racial exclusions of prior immigration laws resulted in the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act) that abolished the quotas based on national origin. While subsequent acts in 1990 and 1996 have modified the 1965 legislation, the fact that it allowed peoples from all nations to apply for immigration led to a resurgence of white nationalism.

^v Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race* (New York, C. Scribner’s Son, 1916), 81

^{vi} Grant, *The Passing*, 228.

^{vii} See Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), 407-408. According to Lepore, “The immigration restriction regime begun in 1924 hardened racial lines, institutionalized new forms of race-based discrimination, codified the fiction of a ‘white race,’ and introduced a new legal category into American life: the ‘illegal alien.’ Europeans, deemed ‘white,’ classified into their national origins, and ranked according to their desirability, could immigrate in limited numbers; entering the United States as legal aliens, they could become naturalized citizens. Chinese, Japanese, Indians, and other Asians, deemed nonwhite, could not immigrate into the United States legally, were deemed unassimilable, and were excluded from citizenship on racial grounds. More profoundly, the law categorized Europeans as belonging to nations—they were sorted by ‘national origin’—but categorized non-Europeans as belonging to ‘races’—they were sorted into five ‘colored races’ (black, mulatto, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian)

^{viii} See James Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 8.

A Resurgence of White Nationalism

Three factors seem to undergird the resurgence of white nationalisms in our time: the arrival—what Donald Trump calls the “invasion”—of nonwhite immigrants in large numbers, continuing resentment at what disaffected whites perceive as the unfairness of race-based affirmative action, and the ubiquity and power of social media.^{ix} Moreover, social media has made it possible for white nationalists across the globe to share their grievances and strategies.^x Moreover, today’s white nationalists are more sophisticated than previous generations of racists such as the white-gowned Ku Klux Klan members roaming the land to burn crosses and round up victims to lynch. Contemporary white nationalists seek to appeal to a broad audience through coherent discourse, and aim to make inroads in the mainstream conservative movement. That being said, their violence is not always limited to rhetoric, such as at Charlottesville, and the vicious protests by groups such as the Proud Boys and skinheads.^{xi}

Reflecting on the extensive interviews they did with white nationalists, political scientists Carol Swain and Russ Nieli identified two features their interviewees shared. Today’s white nationalists share their predecessors’ belief that white people are intellectually superior to darker-skinned peoples, but differ in their clever—but highly selective and distorted—use of quantitative research regarding race and intelligence. The second factor, which Swain and Nieli found both surprising and distressing, is that white nationalists’ hatred of Jews is more intense than is their hostility toward people of other races. Their antisemitism plays upon assertions that Jews in every generation are the preeminent power brokers in the world. And while white nationalists may depict blacks and other dark-skinned people as animal-like and treacherous, “the Jew is seen as calculating, fiendish, and diabolical.”^{xii}

Among contemporary white nationalists, David E. Duke (b. 1950) is the best known.^{xiii} A former member of Congress from Louisiana and the Grand Wizard of the KKK, Duke has written lengthy works full of vitriol against non-whites, especially Jews. His website (<http://davidduke.com>) contains articles such as “Kushner and the ZioCrazies who Prepare for the Jewish Anti-Christ,” cartoons and memes caricaturing Jews, and numerous videos. In his book *Jewish Supremacism: My Awakening to the Jewish Question*, Duke accuses “organized Jewry” of a war, both cultural and ethnic, against European Americans. At stake, he opines, is the “destruction of the very genes that have made possible all the social, cultural and spiritual creations that distinguish our civilization.” In a chapter on “Jewish Supremacism,” Duke writes:

America is in many ways already occupied similarly to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Jewish Supremacists control the news, publishing and entertainment media, they control our elections

^{ix} See Carol M. Swain and Russ Nieli, ed. *Contemporary Voices of White Nationalism in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

^x See <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/03/world/white-extremist-terrorism-christchurch.html?searchResultPosition=2>

^{xi} See <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/10/13/far-right-skinheads-join-proud-boys-assaulting-protesters-new-york-city-following-gavin>

^{xii} *Contemporary Voices*, 73.

^{xiii} Duke claims on his website (<https://davidduke.com/dr-david-duke-really-believe/>): “I have been interviewed over a thousand times, by the leading journalists of America, and in most nations of Europe and the world. They include CNN, ABC, NBC, MSNBC, CBS, BBC, CBC. There are over 6,000 videos made of my speeches, lectures, debates and interviews that have now been independently made by hundreds of people around the world that now have well over 250 million views and growing. My own video site has over 4.8 million views, and my videos on the internationally accessed YouTube average an over 90 percent approval rating!”

and politicians, and now they are orchestrating a massive immigration into our land that will make us a politically and culturally impotent minority in the same way that the people of Palestine have suffered their fate. They seek to make our country into a tower of Babel in which they will occupy the top floors.^{xiv}

And it is not only the United States that is in crisis. Duke sees that “brethren” in Europe are also on the “road to oblivion” under the spell of Jewish supremacists’ commitment to globalization, which endangers “any sort of ethnic or national pride and cohesiveness that could pose a threat to their hegemony. They [Jews] seek to remake the world into an unremarkable mass of atomistic, deracinated individuals incapable of collective resistance.” Richard B. Spencer (b. 1978), one of the most prominent leaders of contemporary white nationalists, creator of the term “alt-right,” and prime mover of the Charlottesville march, builds explicitly on the work of Madison Grant, whom he regards as a “colossus of pre-war conservatism, eugenics, and the scientific study of race.”^{xv} Highly educated, like Grant, Spencer identifies as a white nationalist or white identitarian—as a “Zionist for white people” who seeks a “homeland for ‘my people’ like the Jews have in Israel.”^{xvi}

White Nationalism’s Pernicious Effect on Jews

Duke, Spencer, and their allies in the cause of white nationalism generally speak and write in reasoned discourse, seeking to influence mainstream conservatives and college students. Grave danger lies when persons who are mentally ill, extremely lonely, alienated from society, or religious fanatics (or some combination of these factors) commit acts of terrorism inspired by white nationalist rhetoric. We need only think of physical menace displayed by the “Unite the Right” marchers in Charlottesville to understand how a Robert Bowers could enter the Tree of Life-Or L’Simcha synagogue to murder 11 Jews because of their connection to HIAS (founded in 1881 as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society that now works worldwide to resettle refugees, whether Jews or non-Jews). By aiding refugees, they had brought in “invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics. I’m going in.”^{xvii} Social media sites such as 8chan promote “free speech,” which allows users across the world to create imageboards to promote child pornography and hate groups. John T. Earnest, the shooter at Chabad of Poway on April 27, 2019, had posted a lengthy manifesto on the 8chan. It included numerous reasons he had decided to attack Jews.^{xviii} Also included in Earnest’s manifesto were

^{xiv} This citation and all others in these paragraphs are taken from David Duke, *Jewish Supremacism: My Awakening to the Jewish Question* (Covington, LA Free Speech Press, 2001), 325-326.

^{xv} From Richard B. Spencer’s Introduction to a new edition of Madison Grant, *The Conquest of a Continent* (Abergele, UK: Wermod & Wermod, 2013), xx. [Original 1933]. Spencer writes: “Hispanic immigrants have been assimilating *downward* towards the culture and behavior of African Americans. Indeed one possible outcome of the ongoing demographic transformations is a thoroughly miscegenated and thus homogeneous and ‘assimilated’ nation which would have little resemblance to the White America that came before it.”

^{xvi} See <https://www.timesofisrael.com/white-nationalist-richard-spencer-tells-israelis-that-jews-are-over-represented/>

^{xvii} See <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/robert-bowers-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooter.html?searchResultPosition=3>

^{xviii} See Michael Davis, “The Anti-Jewish Manifest of John T. Earnest, The San Diego Synagogue Shooter,” MEMRI Inquire and Analysis Series No. 1454 (May 15, 2019): <https://www.memri.org/reports/anti-jewish-manifesto-john-t-earnest-san-diego-synagogue-shooter>

“1. For lying and deceiving the public through their exorbitant role in news media. 2. For using usury and banks to enslave nations in debt and control all finances for the purpose of funding evil. 3. For their role in starting wars on a foundation of lies which have cost millions of lives throughout history. 4. For their role in cultural Marxism and communism. 5. For pushing degenerate propaganda in the form of entertainment. 6. For their role in feminism which has enslaved women in sin. 7. For causing many to fall into sin with their role in peddling pornography. 8. For their

classic New Testament texts that have been used against Jews, including Matthew 27:24-25 (“His blood be upon us and our children”), John 8:37-45 (“You are of your father the devil”), 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 (... for the wrath is to come upon them”), and Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 (“the synagogue of Satan”). Like other white nationalists, Earnest blames Jews for seeking to replace European Americans with people of color.^{xix}

Some Implications

The churches in the United States must draw from their abundant biblical and theological resources to make explicit links between racism and antisemitism (and Islamophobia). An important beginning would be to preach and act consistently against dehumanizing language about the Other. One need not be a Democrat to criticize the President of the United States when he refers to those seeking to cross our southern borders as “animals.” Dehumanization is one of the most salient links between racism and genocide, as Beverly E. Mitchell as documented in her book *Plantations and Death Camps*.^{xx}

We Christians should not assume the moral high ground, but rather grapple with the institutional churches’ complicity in both racism and antisemitism. A great deal of humility is called for, because we are more complicit in our nation’s history than we may acknowledge. It is a source of inspiration that I’ve lived for over a quarter of a century in the city where the Statue of Liberty welcomes those who enter New York harbor. But I’ve also lived in and have deep community connections to the State of Oregon. I’ve heard many stories about those 12 French Canadian Sisters of the Holy Names who set out from Quebec in 1859 to found schools in Oregon. Tellingly, that narrative does not include the fact that Oregon’s state constitution, ratified also in 1859, explicitly excluded anyone who was not white. The Ku Klux Klan was particularly active in Oregon, and my own religious community was notable for its opposition to the Klan’s anti-Catholicism. Less talked about is to what extent we protested the exclusion of non-whites, as Oregon changed its exclusionary laws only in 1926.

Finally, antisemitism is our problem as Christians. I have vivid memories of a Black student in a course on Jewish-Christian relations a few years ago: “I didn’t realize that antisemitism was something I should care about.” The churches bear a special responsibility to speak boldly against white nationalism and the antisemitism at its core—a matter we should passionately care about.

role in voting for and funding politicians and organizations who use mass immigration to displace the European race. 9. For their large role in every slave trade for the past two-thousand years. 10. For promoting race mixing. 11. For their cruel and bloody history of genocidal behavior. 12. For their persecution of Christians of old (including the prophets of ancient Israel—Jeremiah, Isaiah, etc.), members of the early church (Stephen—whose death at the hands of the Jews was both heart-wrenching and rage-inducing), Christians of modern-day Syria and Palestine, and Christians in White nations. 13. For their degenerate and abominable practices of sexual perversion and blood libel (you are not forgotten Simon of Trent, the horror that you and countless children have endured at the hands of the Jews will never be forgiven). 14. For not speaking about these crimes. 15. For not attempting to stop the members of their race from committing them. 16. And finally, for their role in the murder of the Son of Man—that is the Christ. Every Jew young and old has contributed to these.”

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} Beverly E. Mitchell, *Plantations and Death Camps: Religion, Ideology, and Human Dignity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).