

# **Armed and Dangerous: The US Far Right in the Trump era**

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**I**n the aftermath of the 6 January 2021 capitol insurrection in Washington DC, a large number of books have been published examining the background to the event and warning of the dangers that still lie ahead. This review looks at only a handful of these books, all of which are well worth reading and provide disturbing accounts of the trajectory of politics in the United States. The far right is on the march across much of the globe in a way that we have not seen since the 1930s and nowhere better illustrates the dangers we face than the situation in the United States. Is the USA going down the same road as the Weimar Republic? Can the country survive, or are the divisions so deep that a breakup is inevitable? Whatever one concludes, no-one can deny that in the United States today we have a far right that is both Armed and Dangerous.

## **'The Trump insurgency in the United States'**

**I**n *They Want To Kill Americans*,<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Nance describes the scene at the Michigan state capitol building in April 2020, after Governor Gretchen Whitmer ordered a Covid lockdown and mandated the wearing of masks:

right-wing Michiganders went nuts. They placed the state capitol building under siege as thousands of screaming protesters forced their way into the statehouse. The scene was filled with typical Trump supporters and hundreds of TRUMP 2020 and American flags.

Many of the protesters were

wearing mismatched camouflage and tactical body-armor vests. Most came armed with AR-15 assault rifles and pistols. One group of heavily armed young men wore short-sleeved Hawaiian shirts under their body armor. These were the Boogaloo Bois militia. The mass pushed their way into the statehouse, only to be stopped by a line of state police. There they screamed, threatened, and spat in the face of the police officers, demanding the Democrats and the governor be brought out to be killed.

In Michigan, incredible as it might seem, it is perfectly legal for anyone to take

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Nance, *They Want to Kill Americans: The Militias, Terrorists, and Deranged Ideology of the Trump Insurgency* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2022), £27, h/b.

firearms, including automatic weapons, into the statehouse. This even includes the public gallery, which 'allowed heavily armed men to hover over the lawmakers and call out threats to the Democratic Party representatives'. President Trump inevitably did his best to incite his militia supporters, tweeting 'Liberate Michigan'. In the aftermath of this episode, a number of the participants 'graduated from militia wannabes into a full-scale American terrorist group'. They planned to kidnap Governor Whitmer, put her on trial for treason and then livestream her execution. (p. 86) One of the conspirators, Barry Croft, a member of the Three Percenters militia group, had helpfully posted online a full list of all those he hoped to execute in the coming American Revolution, a list that included Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and many others. He was eventually sent down for nineteen years and seven months for his part in the plot.

As Nance points out, as early as April 2020 these Trump supporters had shown what they were capable of, but the book offers much more than that. He sets out to explore the history of the US far right in recent years, laying bare the way that the Republican Party, in his words, came to embrace 'openly radical fascism advocating the elimination of democracy'. (p. 35) What has happened is that Trump and his circle (Roger Stone, with his militia connections being a key figure here), the Republican Party and its supporters, the armed militias and the QAnon cult, are all in the process of merging into what Nance calls 'the Trump Insurgency in the United States'. This might either explode or hopefully 'lose steam'. (pp. 6-7) But as he points out, these people 'already have all the firepower of a fledgling insurgency', courtesy of US gun laws. (p. 151)

Of particular interest is his discussion of the heavily armed far right militia groups that are a unique feature of US politics. Following the Oklahoma City bombing (carried out by Timothy McVeigh on 19 April 1995) such groups had been in decline. But they were revived after the election of Barack Obama – who, militia members believed, was a Communist/Muslim foreigner sent to the United States, probably by the Jews, to bring the country down. Variations of this message not only exploded online, but were amplified by Fox News.<sup>2</sup> The armed militia groups began to grow again so that they now exist 'in virtually every county of the United States'. In particular, 'they have exploded in size and composition' since the Black Lives Matter protests and the 2020 Presidential

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<sup>2</sup> It is incredible that, with all the evidence of the danger that Rupert Murdoch's Fox News posed for democratic values in the United States, in Britain GB News is today being allowed to try and take this country down the same road. It will without doubt become the voice of the British Far Right once a Labour government – even a right-of-centre Starmer government – is in power.

election. (p. 107)

He writes about a number of these militia groups, but let us look at what he specifically has to say about the Three Percenters. Founded by Mike Vanderboegh in 2008, various members of the group have been involved in attempts to replicate the Oklahoma City bombing in some way or other, hoping to precipitate an American Revolution. In November 2011, four members were arrested 'for planning to attack cities with the highly toxic biological poison called ricin', inspired apparently by Vanderboegh's book, *Absolved*. Two of those involved were jailed for five years and the other two for ten years. Other members, calling themselves the Crusaders, planned to bomb a Somali mosque in Garden City, Kansas in 2016, in an attempt to 'start a war against Muslims living in the United States'. Those involved are now serving sentences of between twenty five and thirty years, And Three Percenter Jerry Drake Varnell actually planned another massive 1,000 pound bombing in Oklahoma City and in 2019 went down for twenty-five years. (pp. 105-106) The danger has increased since 6 January.

Nance writes about the far right information bubble and how it has spurred people into action. By mid-2021, an opinion poll showed that no less than '15 percent of the country believed "the government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global sex trafficking operation"'. (p. 171) The pervasive nature of this QAnon conspiracy culture saw Alpalus Slyman, the father of five children, become convinced in June 2020 that his wife was going to hand their children over to be 'raped, and eaten' by Hillary Clinton and others. The result was a 110 mile an hour car chase, with Slyman appealing to Trump and QAnon to come to his assistance, before the police were finally able to rescue the kids. (pp. 165-166) Nance also tells us how in June 2017, Alex Jones had former US Marine and CIA officer, Robert David Steele, on his 'Infowars' show.<sup>3</sup> They talked about a colony of kidnapped child slaves on Mars, who were being harvested for their bone marrow and other body parts. After which, NASA actually felt the need to issue a statement clarifying that none of it was true! As for Steele, he was a 'rabid anti-vaxxer' and Covid denier right up until he 'died from complications of the disease in August 2021'. As Nance points out, Steele was a man 'of education, valor, and intellect' who had nevertheless suddenly come to 'adopt the most inane and outlandish beliefs'. (pp. 122-123)

There is so much more in this book. This reader was somewhat shocked by

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<sup>3</sup> As Alex Jones proudly proclaimed: 'When I think about all the children Hillary Clinton has personally murdered and chopped up and raped, I have zero fear standing up against her. Yeah, you heard me right. Hillary Clinton has personally murdered children. I just can't hold back the truth anymore.' (p. 181)

the scale and extent of the far right terrorist activity carried out by both individuals and groups in recent years. All of which culminated in Trump's attempted coup on 6 January 2021. Trump was initially convinced that he could rely on the courts to invalidate the result of the Presidential election: after all, he had appointed so many federal judges, including three to the Supreme Court. Surely 'they owed him'. When this failed to materialise, he tried other methods, with Sidney Powell and Michael Flynn repeatedly urging him to declare martial law and proclaim

a "salvation" government. Trump supporters were ecstatic when that idea was floated. They were openly advocating for Trump to use the Insurrection Act. Many prepared for civil war.

In the event, he seems to have pinned his hopes on Vice President Pence refusing to accept the result, while his supporters occupied the Capitol, whereupon he would establish 'a Trump dictatorship'. (pp. 21-22). And among those involved in the 6 January Insurrection was

an alliance of Proud Boys street fighters, armed Oath Keepers, Three Percent militia members, and fanatical Q-Anon extremists. All were in contact with Roger Stone just before the insurrection. The Oath Keepers acted as his personal bodyguards. He claims to know none of them. (p. 229)<sup>4</sup>

The attempt to overthrow the election result failed, but Nance presents a convincing case that the danger is very far from over.

### **'The Tree of Liberty Must Be Replenished from Time to Time with the Blood of Commies'**

Luke Mogelson,<sup>5</sup> a journalist who had covered the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and the Ukraine, was in Paris when the scale of the opposition to the Covid lockdown in his home state of Michigan prompted his return to the United States. Once back home, he visited Owasso, a town in Michigan, where a 77 year old barber, Karl Manke,<sup>6</sup> had announced that he was opening for business regardless of the lockdown. The local Home Guard militia had made clear that

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<sup>4</sup> Nance describes Roger Stone as one of Trump's 'top henchmen' and a 'professional trickster'. (p. 18) He points out Stone's role in stopping the Florida recount in the 2000 Presidential election. In 2018 he was involved in another attempt to stop the count in the midterm Congressional elections in Broward County, Florida. According to Nance, the Broward episode was 'a testing of the playbook that would be used in the 2021 insurrection'. (pp. 228-229)

<sup>5</sup> Luke Mogelson, *The Storm Is Here: America on the Brink*, (London: riverrun, 2022), £25, h/b

<sup>6</sup> Such was the ideological confusion around the opposition to the Covid lockdown, Karl Manke, descended from German immigrants, saw himself as resisting Governor Whitmer's attempt to take Michigan down the Nazi road to tyranny.

they would prevent any attempt at arresting him and there were armed men and women, including some Three Percenters, standing guard outside his shop. Customers drove hundreds of miles to demonstrate their support for his stand. Fuelling this armed protest was the conspiracy milieu with 'several anti-lockdowners' telling Mogelson that it was George Soros 'who had engaged Anthony Fauci to concoct the virus'. Soros had replaced the Rothschilds 'as the Jewish financier of elaborate schemes to subjugate white Christians'. (p. 30) What came to dominate Mogelson's investigation into the state of US politics was the right-wing militia.

He looks at a number of these militia outfits. The Boogaloo Bois, for example, 'believed violent revolution was necessary and inevitable, and that it was their civic responsibility to help bring it about'. They were banned from Facebook after one member, Steven Carrillo, a serving USAF sergeant, carried out gun attacks in Oakland (29 May 2020) and in Santa Cruz County (6 June 2020), that left a security guard and a deputy sheriff dead and a number of others wounded. The suspicion was that the attacks were intended to be a kind of 'false flag' and blamed on the Black Lives Matter movement and on Antifa. Initially Fox News did just that but Carrillo was apprehended on the day of his second attack (6th June, as mentioned). However, this did not prevent Vice President Pence from using his speech at the August 2020 Republican National Convention to try and muddy the waters. He made specific reference to the murders, linking them to the widespread violence against law enforcement personnel (i.e. that allegedly carried out by 'the left'), but did not mention the already-in-custody perpetrator, nor his links to far-right militia.<sup>7</sup> After he was convicted, Carrillo was sentenced to 41 years in prison for the killing in Oakland and life without parole for the killing in Santa Cruz County.

Mogelson goes on to look at the Proud Boys he met in Portland, Oregon, at the end of September 2020. Several of them were 'wearing RWDS – "Right-Wing Death Squad" – hats and patches; others had on T-shirts with images of bodies being thrown from helicopters [. . . .] One Proud Boys shirt declared PINOCHET DID NOTHING WRONG.' He saw another wearing a T-shirt that proclaimed that THE TREE OF LIBERTY MUST BE REPLENISHED FROM TIME TO TIME WITH THE BLOOD OF COMMIES. The Proud Boys did not deny Pinochet's torture and murder of the Chilean left, but instead celebrated it and apparently hoped to emulate him under Trump's leadership. When Trump publicly endorsed the Proud Boys during his debate with Joe Biden in September 2020, telling them to 'Stand back and stand by', they responded with T-shirts calling for

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<sup>7</sup> <<https://shorturl.at/ekqy8>> or <<https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/vice-president-pence-patrick-underwood-boogaloo-white-supremacy-oakland-protests-blm-rebecca-kaplan/>>

people to STAND BY. (pp. 145-147, 158).

There were a number of trial runs for 6 January that Mogelson complains were 'almost entirely overlooked by journalists, editors, pundits, politicians, regular citizens, the Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI'. These were the MAGA rallies in Washington DC on 14 November and 12 December 2020 that showed what was coming. And, of course, right in the thick of it was Roger Stone. The day before the Capitol Insurrection, a 'TV crew filmed Stone celebrating with Enrique Tarrio, the Proud Boys chairman'. Providing security for Stone at this time was Kelly Meggs, head of the Floridean chapter of the Oath Keepers. This same Kelly Meggs had earlier 'posted a map of the city and suggested potential routes for smuggling in weapons' and that same day as he was bodyguarding Stone, he 'booked three rooms at a Comfort Inn [hotel] across the Potomac River from D.C., in Ballston, Virginia'. According to Mogelson, 'Hotel security cameras recorded several Oath Keepers hauling gun cases and what appear to be rifles wrapped in bedsheets'. (p. 224) Maggs got twelve years for his part in the Insurrection while Stone, of course, remains at large.

It was not just the likes of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers who stormed the Capitol building. There were unaffiliated individuals like Riley June Williams, a 22 year old, who led the way into Nancy Pelosi's office and stole her laptop. A video of her giving the Nazi salute and pledging allegiance to Hitler later emerged. There were also a number of Republican Party officials and office holders involved as well. Doug Mastriano, a member of the Pennsylvania State Senate and a staunch supporter of the Christian Right, 'had crossed the perimeter of barricades'. He subsequently won the Republican nomination for the Governorship of Pennsylvania, deciding to stand after God and Trump told him to, although he lost to a Democrat.

Mastriano was not alone: a member of the West Virginia House of Delegates, 'livedreamed himself barging past police, yelling Trump's name' and a county commissioner from New Mexico warned on social media that next time 'Trump supporters might return to the Capitol armed' and 'there's gonna be blood running out of that building'. (p. 280) There were also police officers there: 'Half a dozen members of the Seattle Police Department travelled to D.C., among them a lieutenant with the Major Crimes Unit and a detective from the vice squad'. Once again, they were not alone. A retired New York City police officer 'was filmed beating a member of the Metropolitan Police with a metal pipe, calling him a "fucking piece of shit" and "fucking commie motherfucker" and digging his thumbs into his eyes'. (p. 265)

As far as many of those taking part were concerned, they were counting on Trump to act. His failure to do so left them exposed to the full force of the law,

even though they believed they were acting on his behalf, indeed even following his orders. Stewart Rhodes of the Oath Keepers, for example, was 'flummoxed by . . . Trump's failure to impose martial law'. (p. 247) They were not trying to seize power; rather they were trying to assist Trump in staging a coup. His failure to declare martial law and proclaim himself President saw Rhodes sent down for eighteen years.

One other point that Mogelson makes that is of particular interest, concerns a review of political violence since Trump's inauguration carried out by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. It found that 'left-wing terrorists' were responsible for a dozen attacks and right-wing terrorists for more than ten times as many. Only one American has ever been killed 'by someone professing an antifascist agenda', while in the past twenty-five years, right-wing extremists 'were responsible for more than 320 deaths'. As he points out though: 'These . . . were mere facts'. (p. 116)

### **'In God We Trust'**

**B**radley Onishi's excellent *Preparing For War*<sup>8</sup> looks at the way that the US Christian Right prepared the way for Trump and the extent of their participation in the events of 6 January. Being 'a former White Christian nationalist who is now a scholar of religion', he is particularly well-equipped to explore this dimension of the fight over America's future. He broke with right-wing evangelicalism in 2005 after seven years in the ministry, having finally recognised that it was 'a movement thoroughly entrenched in American nationalism, White supremacy, patriarchy and xenophobia'. Now he was left wondering whether there were 'people I used to sit next to in church storming the Capitol'. Indeed he actually asked himself: 'Would I have been there if I had not left the movement?' When he watched the storming of the Capitol, he saw many of the rioters 'carrying "Jesus 2020" flags and wearing "Faith, Family, Freedom" shirts'. It was clear that 'busloads of White evangelicals were indeed among the rioters'. (pp. 7, 11, 14). He writes of 'the pervasiveness of Christian imagery, symbols, rituals at the insurrection'. He goes on:

Some of the most violent perpetrators wore vest patches with a portion of Psalm 144 that read "Blessed be God, My Rock Who Trains My Hands for Battle, My Fingers for War." [. . .] Some rioters went the extra backbreaking mile to cart around statues of Mary and Jesus as they paraded in and around the Capitol.

And the gallows erected for Mike Pence had 'God Bless America' and 'In God We Trust' inscribed on it. (p. 170-171) All this was the culmination of over fifty

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<sup>8</sup> Bradley Onishi, *Preparing For War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism - and What Comes Next* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2023), £18.99, h/b.

years of 'patriotic Christians preparing for combat'. (p. 15)

Onishi provides an excellent account of the early role of the John Birch Society in the development of the Christian Right. He compares the movement that got behind Barry Goldwater's bid for the Presidency with 'Trump's unexpected rise in 2015'. The parallels are 'too striking to ignore'. (p. 57) For this reader, however, his account of the role of Paul Weyrich was particularly interesting. He describes Weyrich, one of the founders of the Moral Majority movement in 1979, as 'the godfather of the New Religious Right', but then goes on to look at how he began regularly visiting Russia in the 1990s. He writes:

There he trained activists and saw in Russia a chance to reraise Christendom [. . .] For Weyrich, remaking the United States as the city on the hill would require foreign help from Russia [. . .] Always the visionary, Weyrich saw, by the turn of the millennium what his comrades on the New Religious Right wouldn't until a decade later: Russia is a model for the type of pure nation that White Christian Nationalists want. (p.125)

The enthusiasm with which the Christian Right came to regard Putin fed into their support for Trump. They wanted an autocratic strongman to restore white Christian America with democracy very much destined for the bin. Viktor Orban was another favourite. This is a vital discussion. The book also explores the relationship between the Christian Right and QAnon. As Onishi points out, 'many White Christians became ardent supporters of QAnon'. (p. 143)

He recalls his own experience as a minister, watching the growing concern among parents regarding the 'demonic impact' of the Harry Potter books. Most startling, however, was his revelation that 'throughout the eighties and early nineties, the FBI, TV hosts, and members of Congress all investigated the claim that a ring of satanic actors were trying to corrupt American children and in extreme cases hold them prisoner as sexual slaves'. The FBI investigation lasted almost a decade and he quotes Megan Goodwin to the effect that the Bureau 'spent almost a million dollars trying to prove that some sort of global satanic conspiracy was attacking mostly white women and children'. (p. 150)

Another revelatory discussion is his account of the American Redoubt movement. Here he chronicles the attempt by elements of the Christian Right to turn Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and parts of Oregon and Washington State into a white Christian stronghold, encouraging people to move there in preparation for the coming 'Second Civil War'. Here in the Redoubt an authoritarian theocracy will be established after the great cataclysm. Among the adherents of this movement is Doug Wilson, who founded Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. Christ Church has its own day school, college and a media centre that spreads



the message. Wilson has celebrated slavery as some sort of benevolent welfare regime and also operates a homeschooling network. And there is so much more. (pp. 205-211).

Even though the 6 January insurrection failed, the danger is far from over. At the time some 80% of Republican supporters condemned the attempted overthrow of the election result, but by the summer of 2021 more than 50% had come around to supporting it as 'an act of patriotism' and by September some 78% believed that the election had been stolen. (p. 192) He likens the 'Stolen Election' myth to the 'Stab in the Back' myth that undermined the Weimar Republic and helped bring the Nazis to power. As he somewhat grimly concludes: 'The question is not if there will be another attack on our democracy. The question is when.' (p. 187) The election of Mike Johnson, a hard right evangelical theocrat and Trump supporter, as Speaker of the House of Representatives, and consequently President if Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris both die, shows the continuing crisis in US politics.<sup>9</sup>

### **'So, what the hell happened?'**

**Wesley Lowery**<sup>10</sup> reminds us that, at the time, Barack Obama's election as President towards the end of 2008 seemed to indicate a decisive break with America's racist past. As he asks: 'So, what the hell happened?' (p. 5) In practice, Obama provoked a massive upsurge in racism. By the time he left office, no less than 55% of white Americans believed that it was they who were subject to racial discrimination. It was this that led to the election of Trump, 'a white racial demagogue to the White House'. (p. 13)

The signs of a 'Whitelash' were there right from the very beginning. Within hours of Obama's victory being declared, 'three white men poured gasoline inside and around the Macedonia Church of God in Christ, a predominantly black congregation in Springfield, Massachusetts and set it ablaze'. In Staten Island, New York, white teenagers were out 'beating up black strangers while chanting "Obama"'. Within a week of the election result there were 'hundreds of incidents of racial violence and vandalism. There would be much more horror to come'. And 'at least two prominent white supremacist organizations – Stormfront and the Council of Conservative Citizens – saw their websites crash due to the flood of online traffic that came their way following Obama's victory'.

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<sup>9</sup> Incredibly, Johnson has had the faces of the 6 January insurrectionists blurred on all the footage of the event that the House of Representatives is releasing in order to help protect them. Some would say this clearly makes him an accessory.

<sup>10</sup> Wesley Lowery, *American Whitelash: The Resurgence of Racial Violence in Our Time* (London: Allen Lane, 2023) £25, h/b.

(pp. 16-17)<sup>11</sup>

While there is a great deal of useful material and discussion in this book, of particular interest is Lowery's account of what he calls 'three archetypes' into which racial violence can be broken down. First there are the 'thrill seekers such as teenagers who paint swastikas on lockers . . . in order to bask in the glory of having done something edgy'. Next, there are the 'reactive attackers, who lash out suddenly at perceived enemies such as immigrants or LGBTQ people'. These reactive attackers often have a contradictory consciousness, are not consistently racist, are not absolutely gripped by prejudice and hate. They might even have black and Latino friends, but in the wrong circumstances can still become involved in incidents in which people are killed. And then there are the 'mission-oriented attackers, the avowed ideologues who carry out calculated attacks in order to send a specific message or in pursuit of specific political ends'. This last group is certainly the most dangerous, ranging 'from Dylann Roof in Charleston to throngs of white supremacists in Charlottesville'. (pp. 58-60)<sup>12</sup> And in a climate where racism, homophobia and authoritarianism are growing, whipped up by the likes of Fox News and co, people increasingly progress from one archetype to the other. Of course, there are also some who realise and reject this line of travel.

One additional complication is that those 'mission-oriented attackers, the avowed ideologues' include not only the likes of the Boogaloo Bois, the Proud Boys and others, but also the 'lone wolves'. On 13 April 2014, for example, Frazier Glenn Miller, a seventy-three year old man, decided to strike a personal blow for 'Freedom. [. . .] for the preservation of my people and for the future of white children' by attacking the Jewish Community Centre in Kansas City. He proceeded to shoot dead three people: a grandfather, William Lewis Corporon and his fourteen year old grandson, Reat Griffin Underwood, outside Jewish community centre, and a fifty-three year old woman, Terri LaManno, outside a Jewish retirement home. He was heard shouting 'Heil Hitler' while carrying out the attack. When he was subsequently arrested, Miller told the arresting officers that he was 'an anti-Semite. I hate goddamn Jews' and asked 'How many'd I get?' None of his victims actually were Jews; he had killed two Methodists and a Catholic. A one-time member of the John Birch Society, a former Klansman and

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<sup>11</sup> For a really good account of the impact of Obama's election see John Amato and David Neiwert, *Over the Cliff: How Obama's Election Drove the American Right Insane* (Sausalito [CA]: PoliPoint Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Dylann Storm Roof was the twenty-one year old racist gunman who opened fire on the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston on 17 June 2015, killing nine African Americans. His online immersion had convinced him that there was a Jewish conspiracy to replace white people and he hoped his massacre would help provoke all-out race war.

avowed Nazi, Miller had, as Lowery puts it, for most of his life 'bathed in the filthy waters of bigotry, drenched in dark ideologies that preached hatred and spite'. He might have acted on his own in April 2014, but his actions were inspired by the far right milieu that he had inhabited – and been extremely active in – for many years. Lowery's account of Miller and his actions together with the incredible response of Mindy Corporon, who had been in the car with her husband and grandson when they were killed, is extremely powerful and demands reading. (pp 139-165) As for Miller, he remained totally unrepentant and at the end of his trial gave the Nazi salute and shouted out: 'Death to the Jews'. He was sentenced to death on 10 November 2015, but died in prison of natural causes on 3 May 2021.

As well as the 'lone wolves', there are what Jason Van Tatenhove, a former Oath Keeper, calls the 'hang-arounds'. He gives the example of Jerad and Amanda Miller who on 8 June 2014, after being expelled from the Bundy ranch garrison for being too extreme, proceeded to a pizza parlour where they shot dead, 'execution-style' two police officers having a meal, draping 'the two officers with a swastika and a Don't Tread on Me flag'. They told other customers that the revolution had started. They then went to a Walmart where they killed another victim before being cornered by the police with Jerad shot dead and Amanda shooting herself.<sup>13</sup>

The America Whitelash led to the election of Donald Trump as President in 2016 – albeit with a minority of the popular vote, we must always remember. Even with Trump defeated in the 2020 election, Lowery nevertheless concludes that 'it's hard to look at the horizon and not see more horrors to come. [. . . .] we can expect additional bursts of white racial violence, the horrific calling card of our era of American Whitelash'. (p. 236)

### **'They Wanted Violence'**

In his *We Are Proud Boys*, Andy Campbell<sup>14</sup> casts a forensic eye over one of the many far right militia groups in the United States. As he makes clear, the Proud Boys are 'one of the most dangerous and influential extremist groups in America'. (p. 9) What makes his book of particular interest is not just his relentless chronicling of their violence, but also their links with the Republican Party, and inevitably, as we have already seen, with Roger Stone. Indeed, Stone was actually a member of the Proud Boys, having joined the organisation early

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<sup>13</sup> See Jason Van Tatenhove, *The Perils of Extremism: How I Left the Oath Keepers and Why We Should be Concerned about a Future Civil War* (New York: SkyHorse Publishing, 2023), p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Andy Campbell, *We Are Proud Boys: How a Right-Wing Street Gang Ushered in a New Era of American Extremism* (New York: Hachette Books, 2022), £24.90, h/b.

in 2018. According to Campbell, in February of that year the Proud Boys 'posted a video on YouTube, appearing to show Stone getting his first degree initiation. He wore a suit and looked into a camera held by members as he took the oath: "Hi, I'm Roger Stone. I'm a Western chauvinist. I refuse to apologise for creating the modern world" . . . A Proud Boy off camera shook his hand and thanked him for the address'. Soon after, they provided protection for Stone when he spoke at the Dorchester Conference, an annual Republican event in Oregon. He was photographed 'drinking and smiling with members of the Proud Boys after the event'. (p. 123)

The Proud Boys were established by the Canadian, Gavin McInnes, who launched the organisation on *Taki's Magazine*, a rightwing webzine, in September 2016.<sup>15</sup> He denied that they were racist or that they were violent, but rather announced them as a pro-Trump young men's drinking club. He was, apparently, always very concerned with deniability. In fact, the organisation from the very beginning gloried in violence. It had four levels of membership with one way of earning the fourth level being the committing of 'a significant act of political violence'. They have been described as 'fascist hipsters'. The Proud Boys also had a 'no wanks' policy, something that McInnes was somewhat obsessed with, although one wank a month was permitted if absolutely necessary. He was not alone regarding this particular obsession, with the 'no wanks' mantra being pushed across the United States 'by right-wing pundits and so-called men's rights activists'. According to McInnes, not masturbating had given him 'superhuman strength', made him 'smarter than ever before' and 'led me to raping my wife more, which has improved our marriage tenfold'. (pp. 48-49) Campbell's account of McInnes and his celebration of violence and hyper-masculinity is absolutely indispensable.

The Proud Boys quickly made their mark because they 'weren't satisfied with standing around, holding a flag, and exercising free speech. They wanted violence'. They were 'a street gang, motivated almost entirely by political violence and bigotry' and were on a 'fascist march through the country, attacking their political opponents in the street, destroying property and committing mutinous crimes, all in the name of Trump and McInnes'. Campbell insists that there was not 'any act of far-right violence at a political event during Trump's presidency' that the Proud Boys were not involved in and had often instigated. (pp. 7-9)

One particular battleground was Portland, Oregon where the Proud Boys –

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<sup>15</sup> The far right online *Taki's Magazine* was launched by Taki Theodoracopulos in March 2007 with the US neo-Nazi Richard Spencer as its editor into 2009. McInnes was a regular contributor. Theodoracopulos was a vocal supporter of the Greek fascist party, Golden Dawn, and has had a regular column in *The Spectator* since 1977.

with an affiliated outfit, Patriot Prayer, a violent far right Christian group – held pro-Trump rallies and meetings week after week throughout his presidency. These rallies resulted in ‘an explosion of right-wing violence’ that led to Portland becoming ‘the ultimate rallying point for extremists all over the United States’. (p. 83) Among the individuals whom Campbell introduces us to is Jeremy Joseph Christian, a ‘hang-around’, who on a rally and march in April 2017 was ‘chanting the N-word and throwing up Nazi salutes’. Shortly before the rally, he had posted online his hope that Trump was ‘the Next Hitler’, pledging his support and looking forward to all ‘Zionist Jews’, all the wrong sort of Christians and ‘All Jihadi Muslims’ being either sent ‘to Madagascar or the Ovens/FEMA Camps’.<sup>16</sup> A few weeks after the rally, he was threatening two teenage girls, one black and one wearing a hijab on a train. When other passengers came to their defence, he stabbed two of them, Taliesin Namkai-Meche and Ricky Best, to death. (pp. 84-85) Both the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer tried to distance themselves from him. Not so with Ethan Nordean, who on 30 June 2018 was filmed punching a counter-protester unconscious during a far right rampage in Portland. Nordean became ‘Proud Boy of the Week’ and the video went viral. Alex Jones celebrated the punch on ‘Infowars’, regularly showing the video and on one occasion actually interviewing Nordean while replaying it on a loop. Jones’s coverage led to a dramatic increase in Proud Boy recruitment. McInnes himself seriously described the punch as the ‘greatest punch in the history of Trump’s presidency’. (pp. 62-65) As for Nordean, he went on to become one of the leaders of the Proud Boys. One last point about Portland is the extent to which the local police acted in support of the Proud Boys, attacking local people protesting against the fascist interlopers who were regularly turning their city into a battleground. As Campbell eloquently puts it: ‘The first time you see a line of armored police officers standing in defence of a group of extremists and firing “less-lethal” munitions at their own citizens, your blood runs cold’. (pp. 147-149)

On 21 November 2018, McInnes, apparently fearing FBI investigation, broke with the Proud Boys and Enrique Tarrio – a one-time FBI informant! – took over as leader. He continued McInnes’ strategy of aligning with Trump and the Republicans, and seems to have been particularly close to Roger Stone. The two men have ‘appeared together on numerous occasions dating back to 2018, and they make no secret of their mutual respect. [. . .] Stone boosts the Proud

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<sup>16</sup> FEMA is the Federal Emergency Management Agency, effectively the disaster response agency for the United States. It is a particular belief amongst the ‘Patriot’ movement that FEMA has been building secret internment camps – seemingly for more than twenty years – in readiness to imprison non-compliant citizens. See, for example, <<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2010/fear-fema>>.

Boys and attends their events'. (p. 139). And Trump's urging them to 'Stand By' was another great boost. Campbell goes on to chronicle their involvement in Trump's efforts to overturn the result of the 2020 Presidential election, their increasing calls for civil war and insurrection, leading up to 6 January 2021. The Proud Boys were the 'de facto leaders of the march toward the Capitol' and one of their number, Dominic Pezzola, was the 'first person to breach the US Capitol'. (pp. 239, 254). They put themselves on the line for Trump and he effectively hung them out to dry. Enrique Tarrio got 22 years in prison for his part in the insurrection alongside other leading figures such as Ethan Nordean, who got 18 years, Joseph Biggs, who got 17 years and Zachary Rehl, who got 15 years. Dominic Pezzola got 10 years. Not so much Proud Boys as Really Stupid Boys. One suspects that they must be torn between bitter feelings of betrayal and at the same time a desperate hope for Trump's re-election and the possibility of a Presidential pardon, their only hope of release. Despite the locking up of many of their leaders, Campbell still sees the Proud Boys as becoming even 'more of a threat'. (p. 257) He presents a compelling case.

### **'Like Most Cops I Voted For Trump'**

This brings us to the story of Michael Fanone, as told via  *Holding the Line*.<sup>17</sup> One of the policemen injured during the 6 January insurrection. He describes himself as 'a moderate conservative' and said, 'like most cops, I voted for Trump with enthusiasm in 2016'. Looking back, he wonders why he did not see 'Trump's corruption or racism' earlier and is still puzzled by the way that 'so many cops and vets fawned over a coward and draft dodger'. (pp. 7, 76-77) Fanone was one of some 850 Metropolitan police officers who went to the assistance of the Capitol police during the insurrection, and it nearly cost him his life. He provides a graphic account of being pulled off his feet into the rioting crowd, beaten and kicked, and then 'lifted to my feet and violently frog-marched into a raging mob. [. . .] A bearded man with a skull on his shirt took a swing at my head. The pole of a Blue Lives Matter flag crashed into my shoulder'. He remembers his way being blocked by 'a very large dude' who was wearing 'an olive military vest with a patch for the Three Percenters . . . . On his left upper arm, he had a QAnon patch'. Then he was tasered a number of times with the call going up to 'Kill him with his own gun'. (pp. 106-107) What saved him was his desperate plea that he had kids. A number of rioters actually gathered around him to save him from further injury, possibly even death, and returned him to the police lines. He was speedily hospitalised having suffered 'a traumatic brain injury and a heart attack'. (p. 2) In the aftermath of the

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Fanone with John Shiffman,  *Hold the Line: The Insurrection and One Cop's Battle for America's Soul* (New York: Atria Books, 2022), £28, h/b.

Insurrection, four of the men who attacked him were to be arrested by the FBI, including the 'MAGA-hat-wearing loser' who tasered him, Daniel Rodriguez. He was reported as having 'pro-Trump, anti-Muslim, right-wing memes' on his Facebook page and to have on an earlier occasion 'allegedly assaulted a wheelchair-bound Black Lives Matters [sic] demonstrator'. As far as Fanone is concerned, all those involved in the Insurrection deserve 'many, many years in prison. But we shouldn't stop there. Anyone who engaged in sedition on January 6<sup>th</sup> should be arrested and charged. Including Trump.' (pp. 139, 142, 149)

While his firsthand account of the Insurrection is certainly very useful, what is particularly interesting are his later interactions with Republican politicians. He describes a meeting with Lindsey Graham, the Republican Senator, who first of all said that the police should have opened fire on 6 January: 'You guys should have shot them all in the head', but then objected to any criticism of Donald Trump. On another occasion, he confronted another Republican 'spineless fuck', Representative Andrew Clyde, who rushed off rather than engage with him, leaving him both amused and angry: 'I had risked my life for a man who wouldn't even shake my hand, let alone thank me'. As Fanone points out, the same day that Clyde refused to shake his hand, 'he was one of just fourteen congressmen to vote against making Juneteenth a national holiday to recognize and remember the horrors of slavery'. Clyde later described the Insurrection as nothing more than a 'normal tourist visit'. (pp. 158, 160-161, 173). To Fanone's shocked amazement, Republicans, like House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who had initially supported the police, who had been protecting them as well as the Democrats, soon changed their tune and rallied behind Trump. The Insurrection was minimised, played down, even altogether denied and Trump's role was effectively suppressed by the Republicans and the likes of Fox News. Even worse than that was that his union, the Fraternal Order of Police, of which he had been a member of for twenty years, gave the police officers injured and traumatised during the Insurrection no real support. The reason 'sickened me: The union supported Trump'. His continual campaigning on the issue led to him being ridiculed and attacked on Fox News by the likes of Tucker Carlson and Laura Ingraham. It also caused him problems within the Metropolitan Police where he found himself 'ostracized, treated like a leper' – not, it has to be said by black officers who gave him 'handshakes and hugs' – but by his fellow white officers. Too many police 'prioritized their allegiance to Donald Trump over their oath to the United States Constitution . . . . That's a fucking scary thought'. (p. 206) He finally resigned effective from 31 December 2021. His last thought on the Insurrection and its aftermath: 'how fragile our democracy is'. (p. 213)

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His latest book is *Chosen by God:*

*Donald Trump, the Christian Right and American Capitalism,*  
published by Bookmarks. <<https://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk/>>