

A social problem is a condition that undermines the well-being of some or all members of a society and is usually a matter of public controversy (Macdonis 4). White Christian Nationalism¹ is one such social problem. WCN, as described in Philip Gorski's book *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*, is a blending of being "white," "Christian," and "American" into this single moral and political ideology (Gorski 6). Modern Christian Nationalist leaders, such as "America First" podcaster Nick Fuentes, pastor of Global Vision Bible Church Greg Locke, and current sitting congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, are utilizing these ideas to push forth their own beliefs on others using the passage of laws, shaping schools' curriculums to include Christian and conspiracy theories (such as in Oklahoma with *former* State Superintendent Ryan Walters), and influencing elections. The relevance of White Christian Nationalism and these ideologies have surged into the mainstream in the last ten years. Increased political polarization, racial tensions, and religious motivated political violence—from church based political campaigns² to the Christian symbols displayed during the Insurrection on the US Capitol on January 6th, 2021 (Belew 244-246; Stewart 221). The emergence of White Christian Nationalism as a significant social problem in modern America as it divides the nation democratically, religiously, and racially.

This social issue, White Christian Nationalism, is not a new phenomenon. In fact, the roots can be traced to the earliest European colonization of the Americas. Howard Zinn, in *A People's History of the United States*, states that Columbus' journals revealed that the motives of greed, domination, and religious conquest, not just obtaining spices as is taught to students in schools. "They would make fine servants [...] with fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we wish" (Zinn 4). The dehumanizing descriptions of the Arawak

peoples reflect on the “ideology of conquest—that those who are different are less than human and domination is divinely sanctified” (Zinn 5-6). In *A People’s History*, the indigenous people were described as “naked as the say they were born” and having “no more embarrassment than animals” (Zinn 5-6), proving that anyone who was not a white European Christian, was lesser—that they were animals. In the 1600s, when the Puritans landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts, they expanded their theology into a national covenant, stating that America was a “city upon a hill” and favored above all else (Hughes 21-24). These narratives show that prior to when WCN would really take hold in the Reconstruction Era, they were there.

During the Reconstruction Era (roughly 1865-1877), the ideology really took hold as formerly enslaved black Americans were gaining minimal rights (such as the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments)³. On Christmas Eve, 1865, in Pulaski, Tennessee six former confederate soldiers gathered and organized the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.⁴ Though, this is considered the first meeting, there are some historians who place the creation of the Klan in 1866 in either late May or early June (Newton 21-22). The Klan blended evangelical Christianity with violence white supremacy. As David Cunningham writes in *Klansville, USA*, the Klan had “cloaked itself in language of Christian morality and patriotic duty,” framing violence as defense of a divine hierarchy (Cunningham 52-54). To combat this, Congress in 1871 introduced and passed the Ku Klux Klan Act (H.R. 320). This law made it a federal crime to deny anyone their constitutional rights and authorized the suspension of *habeas corpus*⁵, to combat violence by groups such as the Klan (US Gov’t). Though, the Klan still continues to operate in present day with various groups cataloged by the Antidefamation League (ADL). The methods for the Klan used (cross burnings and prayer meetings) were used to cause terror throughout the black

population and recast white supremacist violence as a holy crusade—similar to Columbus’s legacy of conquest that brought the indigenous population from some three million to just about 60,000 (Zinn 7).

By the twentieth century, the Christian Right appeared into the mainstream. They were what is now known as the Republican Party and have blended a fusion of religion, race, and patriotism into a party that was backed by major players like Jerry Falwell. Falwell (1933-2007) was a Baptist pastor, televangelist⁶, and conservative activist. He founded the “Moral Majority,” which inspired millions to defend “family values”⁷ against secularism⁸ and used his activism to conduct “spiritual warfare for the soul of the nation” (Stewart 117-119). Along with a mega pastor like Falwell, cultural icon John Wayne (1907-1979) reinforced the masculine idea associated with White Christian Nationalism. In Kristin Kobes Du Mez’s book *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, she discusses how evangelical leaders idealized the aggressive, rugged, patriotic and unyielding characters that Wayne encompassed (Du Mez 4-6). Through the usage of Charismatic Christianity⁹ and evangelicalism, White Christian Nationalism put forth that the only *true* American identity was white, Christian, and patriotic—which, as mentioned, is still used in politics today.

Sociologists define claims-making as efforts by officials, individuals, and organizations to convince others that a particular issue or situation should be defined as a social problem (Macionis 7). Utilizing this framework is central to how White Christian nationalism came to be named in the mainstream.

The most significant turning point was just nine months after Donald Trump was elected to office and seven months after he was sworn in in 2017. August 11-12, 2017, white supremacists, from the alt-right to far-right militias, came together in Charlottesville, Virginia held the “Unite the Right” rally. This rally would become infamous for neo-Nazis and White Nationalists shouting, “Blood and Soil¹⁰” and “Jews will not replace us,” while carrying tiki torches—which were reminiscent of when the Klan would hold cross burnings. The outcome of the event led to the death of counter-protester Heather Heyer, who was run over when one of these supremacists hit her with their car when they ran into the crowd. This death drew the nation’s attention to the major overlap of white identity, religious symbolism and extreme nationalism.

Scholars and journalists began to ask the question: was this demonstration an isolated incident or is this a broader, scarier, cultural movement? Charlottesville “exposed the political theology of Christian nationalism in full public view,” showcasing that religion was being used to consecrate racial and political hierarchy in the US (Steward 182-184). This rally marked the moment when White Christian Nationalism entered the mainstream front and center and become recognized as a social problem, rather than just a fringe ideology on the internet¹¹.

Gorski formalized this understanding in *The Flag and the Cross*, defining White Christian Nationalism as “a deep story about America’s past and a vision of its future” (Gorski 6). From there, Robert Jones, of the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) would later go on to provide observed data linking support for White Christian Nationalist opposition to racial justice movements, immigration and the acceptance of pluralism (Jones 15-16). It was Jones’ surveys following Charlottesville that revealed White Christian Nationalists often perceive racial

equality and secularism as attacks on their cultural identity—similar to how one may see a neo-Confederate claim the Confederate.

flag as their ‘heritatge’ (Jones 23-24).

Pamela Cooper-White, a Doctor of Theology, expanded on these ideas in *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism: Why People are Drawn in and How to Talk Across the Divide*. She explains that White Christian Nationalists thrive on fear, loss, and identity threat, offering a sense of belonging and social change (Cooper-White 11-13). She interprets this as a response to cultural displacement, meaning that White Christians feel marginalized within a rapidly diversifying nation. This sense of loss sounds similar to the “Great Replacement” theory¹² - a conspiracy theory that claims that white Christians are being demographically and politically replaced by “others.” As Jones and Gorski both state, such beliefs are not confined to the extremeist circles, but increasingly are shaping the mainstream political rhetoric (as seen with the numerous ICE raids in various cities) and is strengthening that notion—that America’s “Christian heritage” requires resisting demographic and cultural changes (Jones 24-26; Gorski 130-132). It is these anxieties that framed the ideologies as divine duty, not as prejudice and allows White Christian Nationalism to remake these fears into moral convictions, similar to Falwell in the 1960s and 1970s, which only gives legitimacy to exclusion and hostility. It is this legitimacy that gives power to the White Christian Nationalist Agenda – and legitimacy, as T.M. Sell explains in *An Introduction to Politics*, those are the two main ingredients to giving a government power.

Critics of White Christian Nationalism frame the ideology as exclusionary, the supporters view it as a moral and just patriotic movement to preserve America. The beliefs are not extremeist and are actually expression of moral order and how God favors the country, based on the Founding Father's ideals¹³. It is this idea, this very belief, that the separation of church and state is often interpreted as a distortion of history with secularism being framed as a moral and cultural threat. Those who believe these ideas are of the idea that affirm that Christianity in public life is not domination, but reinstatement to the original morals of the United States (Whitehead 27).

Seidel explains that this worldview relies on a fictitious retelling of the nation's founding, where biblical values and divine favor are viewed as sources of American exceptionalism¹⁴ (Seidel 5-7). Supporters of White Christian Nationalism believe in the breakdown of the public religion, through the removal of prayer from schools, the legalization of same-sex marriage, and growing religious diversity. These perceived fears are reinforced through the conservative media (i.e. Truth Social, NewsMax, One America News, and recently Twitter), churches and political agendas that frame social changes as the persecution of Christians¹⁵.

From a sociological perspective, this can be interpreted as through functionalism, which views religion as a mechanism of social cohesion—providing moral order and unity during a time of change. It is this that supporters see White Christian Nationalism not as divisive but as patriotic and a mission to defend the morality of the nation.

Supporters of White Christian Nationalism will say that it is a moral and patriotic movement, the critics will disagree. Critics will say that it is an ideology and movement that uses

hatred and exclusion to further sow disruption and hatred into the fabric of society. There are scholars across multiple disciplines that state that White Christian Nationalism distorts religion and national identity by linking the divine to racial hierarchy and political power. It is from the conflict theory standpoint that White Christian Nationalism can be understood as a mechanic for maintaining dominance but using religious language to give legitimacy to unequal access to privilege and authority.

The connect can be traced, historically, showing how the postwar white power movements of the 1960s and 1970s fused Christianity and the symbols of it with racial nationalism. It was these groups that viewed racial conflict as a “holy war” to restore God’s order to the United States, by demonstrating how faith can easily excuse violence (Belew 33-34). In a similar vein, it can be seen in “alt-right” organizations and networks, such as the Proud Boys, Oathkeepers and 3%ers, as they invoke Christian identity to justify their anti-immigrant and anti-feminist agendas (Stern 62-64). Both Belew and Stern emphasize that this convergence of whiteness and Christianity morphs religion into an instrument of political extremism—fostering severe hostility to pluralism and dissent.

It is Jones who expanded on this analysis by showing that White Christian Nationalism correlates with opposition to racial justice and democratic inclusion (Jones 15-17). Further, the data revealed that those who follow White Christian National ideology often perceive diversity and secularism as existential threats to America’s “Chrisitan Identity.” It is this idea—this narrative—that echoes the ideology known as the Great Replacement Theory. Great Replacement Theory is the idea—myth really—that there is a demographic “replacement” by

those who are not white and not Christian. This idea of Great Replacement has led to acts of both political and racial violence. (2002: Buffalo Supermarket shooting; 2019: Christchurch Mosque shooting; 2018: Pittsburgh synagogue shooting). Ali Rattansi interprets such ideas as a form of modern racism that disguises inequity to cultural or religious defense (57-59).

It is the symbolic interactionist perspective that shows that the cultural power of White Christian Nationalism lies in its symbols—the cross, the flag, slogans like “God and Country.” These symbols create a sense of belonging, as well as the Us v Them logical fallacy to push a narrative. This excludes those deemed “un-American” by the White Christian Nationalists. Christian nationalist leaders deliberately use these symbols as a way to invoke fear and moral urgency, in a way to enable political mobilization against perceived threats and enemies (Stewart 142-144). So, it is critics, who conclude that White Christian Nationalism functions not *just* as a theological position, but it also a sociopolitical movement that perpetuates the ideas of inequality while undermining democratic pluralism and it gives legitimacy through appeals to divine authority.

White Christian Nationalism, from a sociological perspective, can be understood as a movement that sows more social harm than social cohesion. Using the concept of sociological imagination, as developed by C. Wright Mills, the ideology can be seen as a pattern in which the fears of the individual are of cultural loss and are linked to a larger system of racial and religious hierarchy. It is through this idea that White Christian Nationalism becomes not a defense of moral order, but a social response to demographic change and this Great Replacement’s idea of perceived displacement.

Looking at the reaction that is deeply rooted in fear and identity threat, many White Christian Nationalists experience pluralism as a loss of control—not as an expansion of community (Cooper-White 11-13). It is these ideas that fit well with Rattansi's analysis of modern racism, in which cultural differences are interpreted as danger (Rattansi 57-59). Immigrant and minority communities know that the rise of Christian Nationalist ideas often show up as exclusion from the moral and civic boundaries of "true" American identity. White Christian Nationalism reinforces the idea that national belonging *must* be both. Christian and white, meaning that it is undermining the value it claims to defend. Sociologically, this ideology illustrates that moral conviction, when it is fused with fear and nostalgia, can produce inequity while promoting "virtue."

White Christian Nationalism represents a persistent social problem in the United States because it fuses religious devotion with racial and political hierarchy. While historically rooted in colonial imperialism, the Puritan “city upon a hill,” and post war evangelicalism, it continues to frame a national identity by using a narrow frame of view with exclusionary terms. It is demonstrated in the writings of Gorski, Jones, Hughes, and Littlefield, that White Christian Nationalism is less of a theological belief system and more of a sociopolitical movement that seeks to culturally dominate society using Us v Them fallacies. In sociological views, its existence can be understood as a reactionary demographic change to social pluralism—namely it is to “restore” a perceived moral order while appealing to authority¹⁶. This “authority” being divine as opposed to mortal.

The consequences of this ideology are far-reaching. It deepens the polarization and legitimizes inequity while it is actively eroding trust democratically—and does so by equating citizenship with a very narrowminded view of specific religion and racial conformity, Sociological analyses suggest that addressing White Christian Nationalism require more than political opposition. It is imperative to educate, have interfaith conversation and collaboration, and public discourse that will be used to promote both empathy and shared belonging of peoples. A commitment to pluralism can counter the fears that are used by White Christian Nationalism and can help promote a vision of society that is grounded in inclusion—not exclusion like the White Christian Nationalists want.

1. The term '**White Christian Nationalism**' may be interchanged with 'Christian Nationalism' or 'White Nationalism' throughout this paper; It may also be shorthand to 'WCN.'
2. This is illegal under the Johnson Amendment to the U.S. Tax Code that, since 1954, prohibits all 501(c)(3) organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates. This ranges from charitable organizations to universities and churches.
3. The passage of the 14th and 15th amendments added in 1868 and 1870. The **14th amendment** granted citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States and included former slaves. This granted equal protection under the law and due process in order to prevent states from infringing on individuals' rights. The **15th amendment** prohibits the federal and state governments from denying the right of a citizen to vote based on race, color or previous condition of servitude (slavery).
4. Originally, the Klan was called the **Knights of the Ku Klux Klan** and eventually dropped the term "Knights," though some factions of the Klan still have it in their names.
5. **Habeas corpus** is the principle that protects individuals from unlawful imprisonment. Normally, if the government or authorities cannot show a valid *legal* reason for holding a person, a court must order their release.
6. **Televangelism** was all the rage in the 1960s and 1970s where they saw the rise of Jerry Falwell Sr. (1933-2007), Pat Robertson (1930-2023), and Oral Roberts (1918-2009).

7. These “**family values**” tend to be only inclusive of white, Christian, heteronormative nuclear families.
8. **Secular humanism** being the belief that humanity is capable of morality and self-fulfillment without a belief in God.
9. **Charismatic Christianity** places an emphasis on the direct experience of the “Holy Spirit” and is often seen as these experiences being speaking in tongues, prophecy or faith healing.
10. “**Blood and Soil**” originated under **the Nazi regime** in Germany during the 1930s/1940s. It links **identity (“blood”) to homeland (“soil”)** and is used to justify racism, exclusion and imperialism under the guise of cultural and biological unity.
11. Per Stern’s *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate*, Sedgwick’s *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right*, and Campbell’s *We are Proud Boys*, **these fringes are typically found on websites** such as 4Chan, 8Chan, Stormfront (a Neo-Nazi site), and various Facebook groups used to recruit, radicalize and mainstream their ideas. It was **the help of the anonymity** of the internet that help extend their reach into mainstream (similar to QAnon’s rise).
12. “**Great Replacement Theory**” is the white nationalist conspiracy theory that was written by French author Renaud Camus (1946-) claiming that white populations are being replaced by nonwhite immigrants through migration and declining birth rates. It often uses racist and antisemitic rhetoric to incite fear, division and violence against multicultural society. It has been used in various manifestos of mass shooters in recent years, as referenced in the paper.

13. According to various primary sources the **Founding Fathers** were not Christian at all, but Deists or Atheist. A **deist** is an individual who believes in a creator who may have created the universe, but more than likely did not intervene in human affairs or perform miracles. **Deists** typically rejected organized religion and divine revelation, deciding to lean into reason, ethics and observation of nature to understand the creator.
14. Exceptionalism here means a belief that a nation, group, or ideology is an exception to a usual rule or trend or is exceptional in relation to others of the same kind.
15. “**Persecution of Christians**” can refer to the “**Christian persecution complex**,” which is a belief that Christians are being oppressed or attacked for their faith—even in societies where they hold majority power. It is used to reinforce feelings of victimhood and moral superiority among Christians.
16. **Appeal to Authority** is the logical fallacy where someone claims that something is **true based on an expert or authority figure** saying so.