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Bard Center for the Study of Hate

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Researching Hate through COVID, protests, and the Black Lives Matters movement

### A Virtual Summer at Political Research Associates

Political Research Associates (PRA) is a left-wing nonprofit social justice think tank that attempts to fight mainstream centre-right views with facts. Since 1981, PRA has been a leading force in the fight against the American right's hate by producing investigative research and analysis to support social justice advocates.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, PRA publishes a journal, *The Public Eye*<sup>2</sup>, quarterly, which reports on specific and current or trends within the Right worldwide, while also producing special reports. PRA was created to expose and fight off the self-described "New Right," who are newly politicized conservative Christians, neoconservatives, and economic libertarians that paved the way for Ronald Reagan's historic election.

From June 3rd to August 11th, I worked as a summer research intern at Political Research Associates. Through this opportunity, I was able to explore how the right is infuriating Black Lives Matter protests. Some of the highlights of my internship were lunchtime zoom

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<sup>1</sup> "Mission & History." *Political Research Associates*, [www.politicalresearch.org/about/mission-history](http://www.politicalresearch.org/about/mission-history).

<sup>2</sup> *The Public Eye*, 2020.

conversations with talented researchers and developing my knowledge of the United States of America's Right. Political Research Associates strives to create an internship program that is mutually beneficial to both parties. Throughout the summer, employees of PRA strived to foster my interests and help me network with like-minded individuals. Although I have gained a lot of knowledge from my academic studies, I have always been interested in getting involved with practical human rights work. I was so grateful for this opportunity to put my academic skills into use. A lot of the theories taught in my Free Speech, Constitutional law, Psychology, and Human Right courses were shown in the research and discussions of PRA.

I rigorously fact-checked articles that discussed a wide range of topics from Ecoterrorism to the right's influence in law enforcement. By extensively fact-checking all work produced, PRA uses truth to fight hate. Fact-checking after rounds of editing and proofreading is required for all reports and The Public Eye articles. As an intern, I had the opportunity to ensure the credibility of PRA's work. By fact-checking every word, Political Research Associates has been able to protect themselves from the right.

Once I set up google alerts for groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, I monitored the activity daily. By the end of my internship, I was able to summarize and organize over seventy-five events. From armed militia storming Louisville<sup>3</sup> to law enforcement showing Proud

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<sup>3</sup> Easley, Timothy D. "Armed Protesters Converge with White Militia in Breonna Taylor's Hometown." *CTVNews*, CTV News, 25 July 2020, [www.ctvnews.ca/world/armed-protesters-converge-with-white-militia-in-breonna-taylor-s-hometown-1.5039128](http://www.ctvnews.ca/world/armed-protesters-converge-with-white-militia-in-breonna-taylor-s-hometown-1.5039128).

Boy merchandise<sup>4</sup>, this data was later applied to a map of white supremacy groups infuriating race protests throughout the United States of America, By tracking current events, I was able to provide raw data to researchers who painted an overall picture of hate in the United States.

Political Research Associates is in the process of creating a map<sup>5</sup> that tracks news reports of paramilitary and other far-right actors who are showing up at protests demanding justice of Black Lives. A lot of paramilitary folks had connections to the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and Boogaloo Boys. The Boogaloo Boys are easily identified by their Hawaiian shirts and have the goal of exploiting unrest in order to start a second civil war<sup>6</sup>. One of the most notable Boogaloo events of the summer was when Steven Carrillo, a 32-year-old US Air Force sergeant from California, was charged with the murder of two officers during the George Floyd protests<sup>7</sup>. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mr Carrillo repeatedly expressed his allegiance to the movement by writing "boog" and "stop the duopoly" with his own blood on the

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<sup>4</sup> Matarrese, Andy. "Deputy Fired over Proud Boys Sweatshirt." *The Columbian*, 20 July 2018, [www.columbian.com/news/2018/jul/20/clark-county-sheriffs-deputy-fired-proud-boys-sweatshirt/](http://www.columbian.com/news/2018/jul/20/clark-county-sheriffs-deputy-fired-proud-boys-sweatshirt/).

<sup>5</sup> "Mapping Paramilitary and Far-Right Threats to Racial Justice." *Political Research Associates*, [www.politicalresearch.org/2020/06/19/mapping-paramilitary-and-far-right-threats-racial-justice](http://www.politicalresearch.org/2020/06/19/mapping-paramilitary-and-far-right-threats-racial-justice).

<sup>6</sup> Pemberton, Nathan Taylor. "What Do You Do When Extremism Comes for the Hawaiian Shirt?" *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 29 June 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/06/29/style/boogaloo-hawaiian-shirt.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/29/style/boogaloo-hawaiian-shirt.html).

<sup>7</sup> Macfarquhar, Neil, and Thomas Gibbons-neff. "Air Force Sergeant With Ties to Extremist Group Charged in Federal Officer's Death." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 16 June 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/06/16/us/steven-carrillo-air-force-boogaloo.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/16/us/steven-carrillo-air-force-boogaloo.html).

hood of a white Toyota Camry<sup>8</sup>. As the first event I tracked, it helped shape my understanding of how violent and complex the right's movement can be.

Another group that wreaked havoc on BLM protests was the Proud Boys. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Proud Boys were, "Established in the midst of the 2016 presidential election by *VICE* Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, the Proud Boys are self-described "western chauvinists" who adamantly deny any connection to the racist "alt-right," insisting they are simply a fraternal group spreading an "anti-political correctness" and "anti-white guilt" agenda"<sup>9</sup>.

During the first weekend of August, the Proud Boys caused violent outbreaks in a multitude of states across America. At the Oregon Capitol in Salem<sup>10</sup>, the armed Proud Boys incited violence including showing Black Lives Matter protesters down the stairs. In Georgia, after hours of mostly peaceful demonstrations escalated in Stone Mountain outside of Atlanta as large numbers of police and Proud Boy members moved in to disperse the crowd<sup>11</sup>. In Michigan,

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<sup>8</sup> Zadrozny, Brandy, et al. "Man Charged in Deputy Ambush Scrawled Extremist 'Boogaloo' Phrases in Blood." *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 12 June 2020, [www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/man-charged-deputy-ambush-scrawled-extremist-boogaloo-phrases-blood-n1230321](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/man-charged-deputy-ambush-scrawled-extremist-boogaloo-phrases-blood-n1230321).

<sup>9</sup> "Proud Boys." *Southern Poverty Law Center*, [www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys](http://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys).

<sup>10</sup> Poehler, Bill. "Scuffles Break out as Opposing Groups Protest at Oregon Capitol Saturday." *Statesman Journal*, Salem Statesman Journal, 15 Aug. 2020, [www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2020/08/15/black-lives-matter-protest-oregon-state-capitol-saturday-covid-19/5589867002/?cid=facebook\\_Statesman\\_Journal](http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2020/08/15/black-lives-matter-protest-oregon-state-capitol-saturday-covid-19/5589867002/?cid=facebook_Statesman_Journal).

<sup>11</sup> Falconer, Rebecca. "Far-Right Groups Clash with Anti-Racism Protesters in U.S. Cities." *Axios*, 16 Aug. 2020, [www.axios.com/far-right-groups-anti-racism-protesters-us-cities-bf0db27e-ef1a-4220-8d92-1f2883f0b75d.html](http://www.axios.com/far-right-groups-anti-racism-protesters-us-cities-bf0db27e-ef1a-4220-8d92-1f2883f0b75d.html).

a planned rally Proud Boys met with counter-protesters, leading to escalating tensions and arrests in Kalamazoo<sup>12</sup>. With over 100 tracked events by PRA, these events are just examples of hate incited by the right during BLM protests.

Hate is conventionally understood as an individual psychological emotion, however, PRA typically views hate as an "affective structure." To PRA, the U.S. Right's hatred is not about individual emotional states, but about constructing a commitment to a cause and belonging to a group. Listed as their values, PRA does not promote hate, but instead actively works to advance understanding. Additionally, they work to defend free speech and other civil liberties, even when the speech itself is hateful. At PRA, they theorize hate through a gate frame as a conceptual path that shapes how people think about an issue.

Through a piece by Kay Whitlock, she explains how hate is mobilized for political purposes and describes the ways that it destroys the possibility for good discourse on structural issues. She writes,

“In U.S. progressive politics the hate frame has four main assumptions: First, that hate is rooted purely in irrational, personal prejudice and fear and loathing of difference. In fact, it's also rooted in ideologies and supremacy, in a historical and cultural context. Second, that hate is hate, and the specificities don't matter. Third, that the politics of hate is about that crazy irrational feeling, which is caused by personal prejudice gone amok. In this view, hate is not about structures, not about power hierarchies, not about institutional practice. Finally, that hate is perpetrated by extremists, misfits, and loners who are

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<sup>12</sup> Spelbring, Meredith. “Police, Far-Right Group Proud Boys and Counter Protesters Collide in Kalamazoo.” *Detroit Free Press*, Detroit Free Press, 16 Aug. 2020, [www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/08/15/proud-boys-counter-protests-kalamazoo/5591553002/](http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/08/15/proud-boys-counter-protests-kalamazoo/5591553002/).

violating agreed-upon standards of fairness, and that hate violence is unacceptable and abhorrent to respectable society”.<sup>13</sup>

While trying to expand my understanding of hate, I spoke to Bard alum Ben Lorber about his work on white nationalism and antisemitism. Throughout his life, he has worked as an organizer, writer, and movement-builder. As a researcher for PRA, he analyzes social media posts, podcasts/videos, articles, and other public statements made by leaders of white nationalist movements, and by organizations. This is in contrast to some other researchers, who dive deep into the chat rooms and message boards of the 'base' of the movement. In PRA fashion, Ben does not see his work as 'combating hate'. In fact, he explained that his work attempts to “combat any personal animus that some group of people might hold in their hearts, and more as understanding the societal conditions and structures in which reactionary political movements and ideologies take root, grow and develop”.

From a young age, Ben has been drawn to social justice work including studying the history of antisemitism in a personal capacity. With the unprecedented election of Donald Trump, his work on antisemitic and alt-right expanded to a new depth. Due to PRA’s wonderful fundraising team, he was able to delve into his own projects.

Ben Lorber has been working on expanding his academic understanding of antisemitism by exploring the Frankfurt School literature on antisemitism, as well as the work of theorists influenced by that school such as Moishe Postone, Werner Bonefeld, and Marcel Stoetzler. Part

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<sup>13</sup> “Beyond the Hate Frame.” *Political Research Associates*, [www.politicalresearch.org/2015/07/27/beyond-the-hate-frame-an-interview-with-kay-whitlock-michael-bronski](http://www.politicalresearch.org/2015/07/27/beyond-the-hate-frame-an-interview-with-kay-whitlock-michael-bronski).

of Ben's job is creating meaningful partnerships mostly with American Jewish progressive organizations such as Bend the Arc and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice.

When speaking to Ben, he discussed the lack of academic scholarship on contemporary forms of extreme-right antisemitism especially regarding conspiracy theories targeting George Soros, cultural Marxism, and Jewish 'globalist elites'. For my own personal growth, it was beneficial to see Bard alumni creating real and lasting change in the world. Ben's work as an expert in Jewish history and identity, Middle East peace, and other justice issues is inspiring.

During my time at PRA, I worked under the supervision of Steven Gardiner. As Political Research Associates' Assistant Research Director, Dr Gardiner has been a leading researcher and writer on the politics of bigotry, violence, and authoritarianism since the early 1990s. The murder of Mulugeta Seraw<sup>14</sup> in Portland, Oregon by neo-Nazi skinheads in 1988 had a huge impact on Steven's understanding of hate. This event led to the formation of an organization, the Coalition for Human Dignity,<sup>15</sup> that played a big role in Dr Gardiner's life as a politically involved person living in Portland.

To better understand hate, Steven uses a long list of resources including Leonard Zeskind's book *Blood and Politics*, Sara Diamond's *Spiritual Warfare*, the works of Theodor Adorno, Paulo Friere, Norman Cohn's *Warrant for Genocide*, the documentary series *Eyes on the Prize* that tells the story of the Civil Rights Movement, and more.

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<sup>14</sup> Oregonian/OregonLive, Bryan Denson | The. "1998 Story: Legacy of a Hate Crime: Mulugeta Seraw's Death a Decade Ago Avenged." *Oregonlive*, 13 Nov. 2014,

<sup>15</sup> "Human Dignity Coalition." *RESIST*, resist.org/grantees/human-dignity-coalition.

When speaking to Steven, he described hate as,

“ So for me "hate" as it is associated with the U.S. Right is not so much about individual emotional states, as it is about constructing and demonstrating a commitment to a cause, promotion of a set of values, and belonging to a group. Which applies not only to the Right but to everyone. The difference is that the hierarchy of values on the Right tends to place a high degree of importance on loyalty and deservingness and to link these to a relatively constricted circle of belonging. Put another way, the Right limits whom they consider is one of them and therefore deserving of empathy. At the same time, they have a heightened (as compared to Center and Left folks) fear of those outside their circle of empathy, assuming that everyone else thinks the same way they do, no matter what they say. In political practice, the narrowed circle of empathy and belonging on the Right can manifest in a variety of ways, but for the sake of simplicity, image two basic types: (1) those who see the individual as the most important unit of understanding, empathy, and identity--and those folks are one sort or another of libertarian, or "conservative"; (2) those who place some group larger than the nuclear family at the center of their politics and belongs, e.g. race, ethnic, national, or religious identity or some combination thereof.”

To combat hate on a larger scale, Steven’s work focuses on providing factual research for folks who are still finding their way in the political spectrum. PRA creates tools for people to recognize the consequences of movements and ideologies that undermine human rights. This approach was designed because research indicates that political positions and basic values are deeply ingrained and difficult to change.

When talking about Political Research Associates’ financial development, Steven discussed his immense gratitude to the folks on staff who fundraise. Although if PRA had unlimited resources, Steven could focus on "pure" research, thinking, having conversations with peers, and less on publishing, training, teaching, and presenting.

To account for COVID, my internship was fully remote. This was the first time Political Research Associates ran their internship fully online. All of my meetings were on Zoom, and I had a google calendar that outlined all my responsibilities. My supervisor was very organized and did an amazing job planning our summer program. At some points having a fully remote internship posed some hardships. However, everything was extremely smooth after I learned how to manage my time, focus during zoom meetings, and build relationships online. To compensate for the lack of in-person communication, Olivia set up lunchtime meetings with different PRA staff and researchers. During these meetings, the staff talked to us about different positions and their paths to human rights research. I was extremely grateful for the opportunity to explore different career paths in the nonprofit world. Before interning at PRA, I was interested in exploring human rights research but now I think I might do better-helping others with direct action.

In the summer, I had the opportunity to produce data and meet with Steven weekly. Through working with Steven, I was able to learn from a leading expert in the field. With Steven, I also read texts to build on my understanding of the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and The Patriot movement. By learning the signs of the alt-right, I identified signs of the right throughout my social media and personal life.

After researching the right's response to the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement, I saw the effects in my own town, Claremont, California. During the middle of the summer, an alt-right group hosted an anti-Trump, all lives matter protest. Part of their signs included Proud Boys symbols that I recognized from reviewing articles. It was very weird

to see my summer work in the heart of my town. To combat hate, PRA recommends community-based strategies that address structures of violence and individual acts. By increasing the capacity of direct action anti-violence coalitions, they are able to locally fight hate throughout communities.

Overall, my summer with Political Research Associates helped me hone my research and analytical skills as well as gave me a better understanding of how non-profit organizations make decisions and fact-check information. I am deeply grateful to Political Research Associates and the Bard Study of Hate for this amazing opportunity. I can confidently say I wouldn't have grown and learned as much as I have at PRA.