

JUSTUS AND KARIN ROSENBERG SUMMER 2017 INTERNSHIP

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Background

During winter break of my sophomore year at Bard, I was desperate for something to do. One month was too short to get any kind of job other than seasonal work, and I did not have a burning desire to work in a kitchen again. Being a sophomore, I was anxious to get started on my professional life, but I did not know where to start. Snow was falling outside as I sat at a wooden table in a cafe cupping a mug of black coffee, searching online for jobs. After a considerable amount of scrolling, I noticed a listing from an organization called Political Research Associates looking for volunteers. I emailed Gabriel, the Program Coordinator, inquiring as to whether or not I could volunteer for a few weeks. They emailed me back saying yes, and asked me to come in the next day to fill out some paperwork. Political Research Associates office might as well be a time-capsule from the 1980s. Nestled on the second floor of a small brick building, it is populated with filing cabinets, tenderly watered plants, wooden desks, computers, and posters from various activists and social justice organizations, such as [Black and Pink](#) of Boston, a prison abolition group that connects prisoners to pen-pals in the “free world.” On my first day, the Program Coordinator led me into a small library filled with NRA merchandise, evangelical conspiracy maps, hand-written diaries of neo-nazis, VHS tapes, numerous books and political pamphlets. Resting along the walls are locked drawers that are marked with the words “COINTEL-PRO” in black sharpie on top of worn down masking tape.

Having loved my time volunteering in the winter, I wanted to do more work with PRA. Since then, I spent the past summer doing a full-time internship with PRA, fact-checking, filing, and assisting with research. Four days a week for ten weeks I would wake up early, pack a lunch into a tupperware, and commute about an hour into Somerville. When I got there, I would

immediately make myself a cup of coffee in the communal kitchen, then, sit down at my fact-checking computer between two other interns named Caroline and Liam.

My time this summer was split between three tasks: fact-checking, research assistance, and interviewing/researching for my Rosenberg internship. Most notably, I compiled data for a research project on Right-Wing sheriffs affiliated with the [Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association](#) (CSPOA), an organization loosely affiliated with the Oath Keepers¹, which are both ideologically consistent with the Patriot movement², which was popularized in the U.S. in the 1990s³. Posse Comitatus, a far-Right social movement that existed primarily in the 1970s and 1980s, provided ideological framework for the Patriot and CSPOA belief that the highest power comes on the level of the county⁴. The CSPOA⁵ is an association of sheriffs and law enforcement officers who feel that they should stay true to the oath that they took upon being elected sheriff to “uphold” the constitution and “defend” it against any infringements from state

¹ See “Board of Directors”. <https://www.oathkeepers.org/board-of-directors/>. *Oath Keepers*. Accessed September 7, 2017. The CSPOA is listed under the section on the right of the web page as one of the “Friends of the Oath Keepers”.

² *Shooting for Respectability: Firearms, False Patriots, and Politics in Montana*. Montana Human Rights Network. 2003. 8. “As with other social movements, the “patriot” movement encompasses many different themes. The movement itself is decentralized, meaning that beliefs may vary from group to group and individual to individual. However, there are common threads that bind it together. One central theme is an ardent distrust of the federal government. “Patriots” attempt to justify this antagonistic view through conspiracy theories which inevitably involve secret cabals that intend to subvert the American people. The usual suspects behind these one-world government conspiracies are the federal government, the United Nations, the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, etc. “Patriots” believe they will have to ultimately fight off an invasion by these “New World Order” forces. Therefore, the Second Amendment is seen as the last line of defense against a tyrannical government.”

³ Spencer Sunshine. *Up In Arms: A Guide to Oregon’s Patriot Movement*. Political Research Associates. 2016. v.

⁴ *Shooting for Respectability: Firearms, False Patriots, and Politics in Montana*. 9. “Latin for “power of the county,” the Posse combined racism, anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, and paramilitary organizing. Its paramilitary organizing scheme centered on the belief that adult residents of a county were empowered to defend their interpretation of the Constitution, using violence if necessary. The Posse believed citizens were not subject to state or federal authorities, holding that the county sheriff was the highest legitimate law officer. The group swore to use force to prevent the seizure of property to pay “illegal” taxes and also to oppose encroachment by federal institutions.”

⁵ See PRA’s profile on the CSPOA: “Profiles on the Right: Constitutional Peace Officers and Sheriffs Association”. <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2013/11/22/profiles-on-the-right-constitutional-sheriffs-and-peace-officers-association/#sthash.TGQWXMIZ.dpbs>. Published November 22, 2013. Accessed September 2, 2017.

or federal agencies who seek to violate the constitution⁶. CSPOA is invested in working through the power of a network of sheriffs across the country to "uphold" the constitutional values that they hold dear, which are based on a very specific interpretation of the Constitution. Many of these men are Christian Patriots, who believe that the U.S. Bill of Rights is akin to scripture, passed down to them by God because He intended America to be the promised land for white men. Christian Patriots view the amendments that follow the first ten, which include abolishing slavery and giving white women the vote, as man-made, deviating from the path provided by God in the first 10 amendments.⁷

For this project, I created a large spreadsheet of over 600 sheriffs across the United States who had any affiliation with the CSPOA, including signing any of their [surveys](#) or [resolutions](#). For example, in response to multiple executive orders⁸ detailing gun control signed by Obama in 2013, many of the CSPOA sheriffs signed a petition saying that they would 'stand up' to gun control measures, that is, not enforce federal gun control legislation in their county⁹. Many are seeking to gain powers for county law enforcement so that they might act as ICE agents and arrest and detain people who are undocumented¹⁰, such as David A Clarke Jr., former Sheriff of

⁶ "Vet Your Sheriff". *Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association*. <http://cspoa.org/vet-your-sheriff/>. Published 2016. Accessed September 2, 2017. "The Sheriff is identified as the CLEO, or CHIEF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER, of his/her county. As an elected official he/she is the ultimate protector of the people providing a check and balance locally for any state or federal agency that may infringe the constitutional rights of the people...A constitutional Sheriff, in reference to their OATH, their citizenry, and the constitution is dedicated to UPHOLD – DEFEND – PROTECT – SERVE."

⁷ I would like to thank Kenneth Stern for emphasizing this point to me in personal correspondence.

⁸ Rick Ungar. "Here Are The 23 Executive Orders On Gun Safety Signed Today By The President". https://docs.google.com/document/d/14vLOMHVjmoK_ZszX0NBbxy-53sEnfbuj9stX0Cinp_c/edit. Forbes. Published January 16, 2013. Accessed September 8, 2017.

⁹ "Growing List of Sheriffs Saying 'No' To Obama Gun Control" Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association. <http://cspoa.org/sheriffs-gun-rights/>. Published 2013. Accessed September 2, 2017.

¹⁰ Daniel Bice. "Bice: Letter details Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke's plan for Immigration enforcement". <http://www.jsonline.com/story/news/investigations/daniel-bice/2017/03/16/bice-milwaukee-county-sheriff-david-cla-rke-releases-letter-seeking-immigration-authority/99235420/>. Journal Sentinel. Published March 16, 2017. Accessed September 2, 2017.

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, who may soon be taking a position in the White House¹¹. Clearly, the desires of sheriffs to not uphold federal legislation that they find violates the constitution based on their personal interpretation of it, or which does not align with their Right-wing beliefs poses a significant threat to the populations that they are supposedly protecting in their respective counties. For example, the board of Milwaukee county, Wisconsin decided not to participate in the Secure Communities, a federal program defunct since 2014, which would involve local law enforcement in identifying undocumented immigrants to deport.¹² Undocumented people living in Milwaukee county, Wisconsin had been detained in local jails for longer than the 48 hour hold for state charges with the intention of handing them over to ICE agents at former Sheriff David Clarke's instruction.¹³ In March of 2017, Clarke wrote a letter to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, seeking to gain federal authority for his deputies and correctional officers to act effectively as ICE agents, allowing them to interview, arrest, and detain anyone that they suspect might be undocumented.¹⁴ Clearly, Right-wing sheriffs who act in a manner similar to former Sheriff David Clarke in their respective counties pose a significant threat to the safety and security of undocumented people and other vulnerable populations living there.

¹¹ Andrew Restuccia, Josh Dowsey, and Eliana Johnson. "Outgoing sheriff Clarke expected to take job in Trump Administration". *Politico*. <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/31/david-clarke-trump-administration-sheriff-242234>. Published August 31, 2017. Accessed September 2, 2017.

¹² Bruce Vielmetti. "Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke prevails in immigration jail records dispute". <http://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2017/02/24/supreme-court-backs-sheriff-clarke-jail-records-dispute/98272192/>. Journal Sentinel. Published February 24, 2017. Accessed September 8, 2017.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Daniel Bice. "Bice: Letter details Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke's plan for immigration enforcement". <http://www.jsonline.com/story/news/investigations/daniel-bice/2017/03/16/bice-milwaukee-county-sheriff-david-clarke-releases-letter-seeking-immigration-authority/99235420/>. Published March 17, 2017. Accessed September 8, 2017.

The exhaustive nature of the fact-checking process provided me with an opportunity to learn about Right-wing figures, networks and movements. I am immensely grateful for the kind of working environment that I encountered at Political Research Associates. As a non-binary transgender person, never in any of my other jobs have I had my pronouns respected by any of my co-workers. Immediately upon starting at PRA, I was asked my pronouns and they were respected for the entire duration of my time there. Any time that I was not feeling well, had stayed up all night due to my insomnia, or anything of that nature, my boss Gabriel would tell me to take the day off and to make sure that I took care of myself. I was always allowed a lunch break, during many of which I was joined by my co-workers who were nothing but kind, friendly, and interested in my life and career. I was never given more work than I could handle or asked to work extra hours or anything of that nature. I was financially compensated for my work, even if it was only a small stipend, and always thanked when I completed any task I was given. All of the staff that I interviewed took time out of their busy schedules to talk to me for 30 minutes to an hour. Beyond all of this, the Program Coordinator Gabriel and the LGBTQ researcher Cole were always sending me supplemental materials such as articles, reports, and podcasts to help me along with my research for the Rosenberg internship. This was my first internship, and it will be hard to compete with how well I was treated there. PRA does not only practice social justice values in the research that they do, but also in the work environment that is clearly present in the office.

II. Ideology

In the time that I did not spend working on assignments from Gabriel, the Program Coordinator, I would research for my internship with the Justus and Karin Rosenberg Foundation. Tarso Luís Ramos, the Executive Director of PRA, gave an orientation for all new staff that gave an overview of PRA's history and organizational focus that I will be drawing from to write this section. I skyped in to the orientation session. PRA's [mission statement](#) reads: "Political Research Associates is a social justice think tank devoted to supporting movements that are building a more just and inclusive democratic society. We expose movements, institutions, and ideologies that undermine human rights."¹⁵ Founded as Midwest Research in Chicago 1981 by the late Dr. Jean Hardisty, Political Research Associates (PRA) is an independent social justice think-tank dedicated to analysis and research on the U.S. Right, including overseas influence.

Tarso noted that initially, PRA had its roots in the academy much more than is currently true; in the "About" section of the website, it says, "Cite Everything: We back up everything we say with documentation and *avoid rhetoric or inaccessible language*¹⁶." Indeed, one of the first aspects of the language of PRA's reports and articles is that there are no words like epistemology, ontology, microaggressions, or critical theory, inaccessible and alienating academic language that I often encounter in my courses at Bard College. I will attribute this to something that I heard from many of the staff at PRA: that first and foremost, PRA's analysis

¹⁵ "About". <http://www.politicalresearch.org/about/#mission>. Accessed August 25, 2017.

¹⁶ Id., emphasis added.

and research on the Right is intended to be *supplemental* to social justice organizing and activism. Meaning, much of the work that we do is intended to be distributed to activists and organizations and then circulated among their movement bases. We rarely produce prescriptive pieces, that is, telling the reproductive justice movement what the next steps must be.

It is important to note the socio political conditions out of which Political Research Associates emerged: Ronald Reagan taking office in 1981¹⁷ for two terms, the subsequent rise of neoliberal policies in the U.S.¹⁸, declaration of war on drugs and surge in mass incarceration¹⁹, as well as organized Right-wing activity such as the “pro-family” movement²⁰. Entering the 1990s, PRA also had to interact with an explosion of organized Right-wing militias in the 1990s, such as the Patriot Movement, which, “In the 1990s...galvanized millions of Americans around the idea that the most dire and imminent threat to their freedom and safety came from their own federal government”²¹. By the mid-80s, PRA began to develop a [taxonomy](#) of the Right-wing, with the understanding that *it is not a monolith*, and that there are different ideological schisms,

¹⁷ “Ronald Reagan”. *WhiteHouse.gov* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/1600/presidents/ronaldreagan>. Accessed 28 August 2017.

¹⁸ See Dean Spade, *Normal Life*, 50. “Neoliberalism has been used to conceptually draw together several key trends shaping contemporary policies and practices that have redistributed life chances over the last forty years. These trends include a significant shift in the relationships of workers to owners, producing a decrease in real wages, an increase in contingent labor, and the decline of labor unions; the dismantling of welfare programs; trade liberalization (sometimes called “globalization”); and increasing criminalization and immigration enforcement. Neoliberalism is also associated with the rollback of the gains of the civil rights movement and other social movements of the 1960s and 70s, combined with the mobilization of racist, sexist, and xenophobic images and ideas to bolster these changes. Further, the emotional or affective registers of neoliberalism are attuned to notions of “freedom” and “choice” that obscure systemic inequalities and turn social movements toward goals of inclusion and incorporation and away from demands for redistribution and structural transformation.”

¹⁹ See Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*.

²⁰ See Margot Hornblower, “‘Pro-Family Push’: Political Mine Field”. Hornblower notes that this movement is comprised of “...groups like Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum, Howard Phillips’ Conservative Caucus, Paul Weyrich’s Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress and Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, which alone claims a half-million paying members.” Further, Nancy Theriot says on page 4 in *Nostalgia On The Right: Historical Roots of the Idealized Family* that, “...the New Right argues that “The Family” is good for society, good for its members, and worthy of protection against unnatural cultural forces that weaken it—such as women’s studies programs and sex education—and against deviant individuals—such as feminists, homosexuals, liberals and single mothers—who plot its demise.”

²¹ Spencer Sunshine. “Up In Arms: A Guide to Oregon’s Patriot Movement” Political Research Associates. 2016.

disagreements, and competitions between various sub-groups. By far, this was one of the most important ideas that I gathered from my time at PRA: in order for my criticism of the Right to be legitimate, I must account for all the nuances in order to fully understand the ideology of the Right-wing and the threats they pose to human rights. This understanding allows for nuanced criticism that extends beyond the idea that all Christians are the enemy, which was a common idea for many on the left in the 80s and today, especially those coming out of the queer and women's liberation movements. Further, we documented with great care the professionalization of the Right: PRA released a 30 year anniversary timeline, which notes that, "The Left and other progressives seemed to dismiss the New Right as a band of "hillbillies" and rednecks." PRA knew them to be White, middle-class business people, who were also excellent political strategists. Jean Hardisty once quipped, "In those first few years, people didn't know the difference between a Nazi and a neoconservative."²²

III. On the "Hate Frame"

As part of the internship, I was required to conduct interviews about once per week with various staff at Political Research Associates. Initially, I was intimidated by this task and slightly resentful at Kenneth Stern for having us do this because I admired the staff at PRA, of whom many come from a background in social justice organizing, and are extremely accomplished as well as hard-working individuals (who are also a great deal more experienced and well-read than I am!). I would enter into a quiet space with each staff member that I interviewed, and would

²² "PRA Anniversary Timeline". Political Research Associates.
<http://www.politicalresearch.org/pr-anniversary-timeline/#sthash.AXXLqvam.dpbs> Accessed August 25, 2017.

then ask the following questions of each of them (with slight variations depending on their position or their answers).

- 1) How do you imagine hatred (in general)? What frames are useful, methodologies, etc.?
- 2) How do you imagine the hatred on which you are currently working?
- 3) What kinds of academic research do you read regarding hatred?
- 4) Are your decisions of what to do and what not to do based more on what seems like a strong response to the problem (PR, support base in mind) or are they from a different calculus?
- 5) How much of what PRA does is driven by the need to fundraise?
- 6) Do you see part of your job as helping your supporters think more clearly about hatred?
- 7) What additional scholarship would be helpful in order for you to do your job better?

Immediately upon hearing about what kinds of questions I would be asking for the interviews, the Program Coordinator Gabriel printed and stapled a piece by Kay Whitlock that PRA published in 2012 titled “Reconsidering Hate: Policy and Politics at the Intersection”²³, which they said encompasses a great deal of how PRA imagines the concept of hate. Indeed, many of the staff that I interviewed referenced the piece when I asked them about their notions of hate. Whitlock notes how often, violence is understood through the “hate frame”, which focuses on hate crime legislation and anti-discrimination ordinances, and works to “...blame violence on criminal misfits, loners, and crackpots,” and fails to “challenge the unspoken public consensus that permits broader cultures and *structures of violence* to exist.”²⁴ That is, these kinds of laws fail to address systemic racism, transphobia, xenophobia, homophobia, and the like. She goes on to say that, “It is compelling and appealing precisely because it delineates “us,” the non-haters,

²³ Kay Whitlock. “Reconsidering Hate: Policy and Politics at the Intersection”. Political Research Associates. 2012.

²⁴ Id.

from “them,” the haters, permitting “us” to deplore, denounce, and distance ourselves from virulent and open expression of bigotry.”²⁵

Indeed, Whitlock and PRA insist that we understand systemic violence is perpetrated by U.S. society and perhaps most violently by our state and federal governments, and to individualize it to a scenario that involves a biased or hateful perpetrator and an innocent victim misunderstands the ways in which racism, sexism, and the like work.²⁶ To look at an incident involving a transgender woman of color being murdered by the police as simply a problem of a “few bad apples,” or a rogue and hateful police officer misses the idea that there are innumerable structures ingrained into our society that place transgender women of color into a precarious and vulnerable position in society, including but not limited to law enforcement and the criminal punishment system as a whole. Whitlock remarks, “We are seldom encouraged to recognize that conscious hatred and bigotry are not required in order for structures of oppression to inflict violence on marginalized communities.”²⁷ For example, when a transgender person who has state and federally issued identity documents that “do not match their self-understanding or appearance” can “face heightened vulnerability in interactions with police and other public officials, when travelling, or even when attempting to do basic things like enter age-barred venues...or conform identity for purposes of cashing a check or using a credit card or a public benefits card.”²⁸ PRA has a frame of analysis that insists that this is also a form of violence.

It is not just about a few bad apples with some bad ideas; the whole damn tree is rotting.

Whitlock notes that,

²⁵ *Id.* 4

²⁶ Dean Spade. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. South End Press. Brooklyn, New York. 2011. 84.

²⁷ *Reconsidering Hate*. 4.

²⁸ *Normal Life*. 146.

While the hate frame may be powerful in terms of increasing awareness of and mobilizing opposition to the threatening, violent actions of individuals and small groups directed against targeted communities, it also, paradoxically, obscures the relationship of such violence to its systemic underpinnings. That is to say, despite the good intentions of its many supporters, the hate frame focus on individuals and groups considered to be “extreme” in their political views and actions actually draws attention away from structural inequalities, exclusions and violence....However inadvertent, the result is that the punishment of individuals in highly publicized cases of hate violence often allows communities to avoid addressing state-sanctioned, institutional injustice and violence, and provides political cover for many.²⁹

The kind of systemic violence that Kay Whitlock points out in her piece guide PRA’s analysis, though they are not bound to this systemic framework, they do work heavily with this framework in mind. Indeed, when I interviewed Tarso Ramos, the executive director of PRA, he noted that PRA does not use “hate” as a guiding framework of analysis, because ideologically, phenomenons like violence on the street directed at transgender women of color are not ideologically inconsistent with what is already occurring at a systemic level, such as mass incarceration having high rates of violence directed at transgender prisoners. Tarso showed concern about the hate frame specifically because it focuses on what is in the heart of the individual involved in an incidence of a hate crime or discrimination in employment or housing...rather than on systemic issues that provide the soil for these ideas to prosper in. However, Tarso noted during our interview that using the hate framework does come from an understandable desire to lessen the impact of violent individuals; for example, enhanced penalties for bias crimes is an understandable response when you are working within structures that are already in place (criminal punishment system); but it is an inadequate response because it does not deal with the root causes of violence.

²⁹ Id. 2

With all of this in mind, Political Research Associates uses the language of “organized bigotry” to describe the kinds of violence we research coming from the Right-wing. PRA works across a wide spectrum of Right-wing activity that targets a range of communities. Depending on which section of the right any given report or article is focusing on, how PRA understands organized bigotry varies. Tarso cemented for me that there is not one “cookie-cutter” framework that PRA would apply to all types of organized bigotry. PRA has a broad set of commitments to the human rights of all people, and strives to find overlap in the kinds of demonization coming from the Right. For example, an essay by Eric K. Ward, who has done much work in civil rights and currently works as a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center, was published by PRA in June of 2017. “Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism” highlights the idea that contemporary antisemitism serves as the driving force behind White Nationalism³⁰. Ward observes,

Contemporary antisemitism, then, does not enable racism, it also *is* racism, for in the White nationalist imaginary, Jews are a race--the race--the presents an existential threat to Whiteness. Moreover, if antisemitism exists in glaring form at the extreme edge of political discourse, it does not exist in a vacuum; as with every form of hateful ideology, what is explicit in on the margins is implicit in the center in ways we have not yet begun to unpack. This means the notion that Jews long ago and uncontestedly became White folks in the U.S.--became, in effect, post-racial--is a myth that we must dispel.³¹

We work to build large multi-issue coalitions through identifying first the ideological overlap between different types of bigotry coming from the U.S. Right. Certain types, namely

³⁰ *The Public Eye*.

http://www.politicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/08/PE_Summer2017_web.pdf. Political Research Associates. Summer 2017. 9. “American White nationalism, which emerged in the wake of the 1960s civil rights struggle and descends from White supremacy, is a revolutionary social movement committed to building a Whites-only nation, and antisemitism forms its theoretical core.”

³¹ *Id.* 11

antisemitism and anti-black, but also anti-immigrant and anti-transgender, are ascendant and being mainstreamed in the contemporary moment, and we must locate the ways in which there is overlap so that we might better understand points of intervention on the part of social justice activists. Ward remarks, “Antisemitism, I discovered, is a particular and potent form of racism so central to White supremacy that Black people would not win our freedom without tearing it down.”³² Ward’s piece exemplifies the ways in which PRA strives to genuinely understand the ideology of the Right-wing, regardless of how appalling it might be. To guide research, PRA is constantly asking: How does this form of organized bigotry function? How are these various expressions of supremacy being mainstreamed? How can we intervene? How can we equip activists to respond to them?

During my interview with L. Cole Parke, the LGBTQ and Gender Justice Researcher who has an extensive background in social justice organizing, they described their job as providing a “30,000ft view of how the Right is working for activists on the ground”. Indeed, this seems to be the job of PRA as well as of all of its researchers. Further, what PRA does is not limited to publishing the Public Eye, reports, or articles. PRA researchers and staff will provide commentary and panels surrounding specific events. For example, Tarso told me about how he flew out to Oregon to speak on the May 26, 2017 Portland stabbings, in which two people were stabbed to death and another was seriously injured by Jeremy Christian, a white man who was spouting anti-Muslim hate speech on a light-rail train in Portland, Oregon³³, to remind activists

³² *Id.*

³³ Amy B Wang. “Final Act of Bravery: Men who were fatally stabbed trying to stop anti-Muslim rants identified”. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/05/27/man-fatally-stabs-2-on-portland-ore-train-after-t hey-interrupted-his-anti-muslim-rants-police-say/?utm_term=.6a699ad737ee. *The Washington Post*. Published May 27, 2017. Accessed September 7, 2017.

that this is not a problem that is unique to Portland, but rather symptomatic of a culture rooted in white supremacy and organized bigotry from the Right-wing.

Political Research Associates published a report in 2016 by PRA Associate Fellow Dr. Spencer Sunshine titled *Up In Arms: A Guide to Oregon's Patriot Movement*. The report details how the Patriot Movement, which emerged in the 1990s and had a resurgence after the 2008 election of Barack Obama, encountered the perfect conditions for growth, particularly the paramilitary aspects of the movement, in Oregon³⁴. The report is 187 pages long. Sunshine does not simply cast the actions and ideology of the Patriot movement as “hateful”, rather, he dives deep and makes, even going as far as to infiltrate facebook pages and profiles of members of the Patriot Movement. No matter what we think of people in the Right-wing on an ethical level, it is necessary that we understand their ideology in order to effectively ameliorate the problems that arise from it. Here is a short excerpt from the report:

In general, the Patriot movement seems to operate with an “inside/outside” strategy: some parts of the movement work inside of established government structures to change them, while at the same time other parts work outside the system to undermine it. The most dangerous elements of their political toolbox involve an obsession with armed political action and threatening their political opponents.³⁵

Further, PRA inserted a piece titled “Ground Rules & Tips For Challenging The Right” at the end of the report that I have encountered several times during my internship:

Avoid slogans, name calling, and demonizing members of the Right. Slogans and sound bites have their place, but they are not sufficient as an organizing strategy. Simple anti-Right slogans do not help people understand why the Right sounds convincing but is wrong. And responding in kind to being called names weakens your position with some of the listeners you are trying to convince. Phrases like “religious political extremists” are labels, not arguments, and will often backfire on the neighborhood and community level.³⁶

³⁴ Spencer Sunshine. *Up in Arms: A Guide to Oregon's Patriot Movement*. Political Research Associates. 2016. v.

³⁵ *Id.* 38

³⁶ *Id.* 132

IV. Funding

PRA's style of deep dive research on systemic oppression and organized bigotry allows it to reach depths that would not be possible if we examined the Right-wing through the "hate frame", but I have observed that this approach can sometimes alienate PRA from mainstream discourses surrounding 'hate'. However, I am of the opinion that this is what allows for PRA to maintain its integrity and conduct research on systemic issues that will be more useful for social justice activists and networks looking to ameliorate issues that stem from U.S. Right-wing influence in government, media, and social spheres. As a non-profit, theoretically, none of the work that PRA puts out is driven by the need to fundraise, however of course PRA needs to raise money to stay operational. I received a wide spectrum of responses on this subject during the interviews that I conducted with each of the staff members. For example, the Development Director, Jennifer Worden, expressed to me that although PRA maintains their integrity when it comes to funding, we do have some constraints placed on us in terms of what we are able to research due to the need to fundraise. Tarso, the Executive Director of PRA, informed me that PRA maintains a loyal support base of individual donors that make regular small donations, which allows a high degree of flexibility that would not be afforded if we relied heavily on large foundations to make grants. When I volunteered over the winter, one of the tasks I was given was to file checks from donors. Thumbing through a large box of files, I noticed that each of these checks was usually under \$500, and almost all were from average people, some activists, some scholars, some loyal supporters of PRA. The large quantity of small donations with no

specific use attached to them allows PRA to conduct research in areas that we are interested in, not just what the donors want.

Initially, I thought that the alienation that I noticed PRA had from mainstream discourses surrounding hate (i.e. the Southern Poverty Law Center) might be a major point of criticism that I could use for my Rosenberg internship essay about PRA. As time went on, and I talked to the staff more, I realized that there is no necessity for PRA to enter a mainstream discourse surrounding hate, because the point of the materials published and the panels given is to educate and inform activists/social justice organizers who then inform their constituents/membership bases. PRA worked with the [Rural Organizing Project](#) (ROP), a grassroots organization based in Oregon, to compile the *Up in Arms* report, which details the Patriot Movement in rural Oregon. Through compiling the report, PRA supported the work of the ROP, which is “...to create communities accountable to a standard of human dignity: the belief in the equal worth of all people, the need for equal access to justice, and the right to self-determination.”³⁷ Through in-depth analysis and research distributed to networks and organizations, PRA provides the tools that social justice organizers might need in order to understand threats from the Right-wing to the human rights of vulnerable people.

V. Criticism

PRA is deeply oriented on a deep dive style of research and providing systemic and institutional analysis of organized bigotry³⁸, however this means that it does not use an easily

³⁷ “Rural Organizing Project”. <http://oregonprogressivenetwork.org/organizations/Rural-Organizing-Project>. Oregon Progressive Network. Accessed September 8, 2017.

³⁸ By “organized bigotry,” I mean organized activity from the Right-wing that actively promotes ideas that are rooted in bigotry and oppression of vulnerable populations.

digestible way of looking at violence and organized bigotry. It is much easier to reduce the organized threats we are facing from the Right-wing to “hatred” and bigotry of a few bad apples. For example, Southern Poverty Law Center, a group that tracks “domestic hate groups and other extremists” located “across the country”³⁹ does some very impressive work in terms of monitoring and providing easily accessible information about “hate groups”, the people in power inside them, networks they belong to, and will sometimes supply this information to law enforcement with the goal of protecting those made vulnerable by these groups. Additionally, SPLC has done amazing legal work⁴⁰ seeking ramifications against White Supremacist organizations; notorious cases include the 1987 *Donald v. United Klans*, in which SPLC shut down the United Klans of America and won a \$7 million verdict against Klansmen involved in the 1981 lynching of nineteen year old Michael Donald.⁴¹ The Center understands hate to be a problem of bias, and operates using the framework of “extremism”, that is, something that operates outside the norms of social and legal structures in the U.S.⁴² SPLC mainly works within the parameters of the law, meaning that they work through lawsuits and police training to get the desired results. On their website, they say, “We monitor hate groups and other extremists throughout the United States and expose their activities to the public, the media and *law*

³⁹ “Fighting Hate”. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate>. Southern Poverty Law Center. Accessed September 2, 2017.

⁴⁰ “Case Docket”.

[https://www.splcenter.org/seeking-justice/case-docket?keyword=&page=1&f\[0\]=field_case_landmark%3A1](https://www.splcenter.org/seeking-justice/case-docket?keyword=&page=1&f[0]=field_case_landmark%3A1). Southern Poverty Law Center. Accessed September 13, 2017. “We have a rich history of litigating important civil rights cases on behalf of the most vulnerable in society. Our cases have smashed remnants of Jim Crow segregation; destroyed some of the nation’s most notorious white supremacist groups; and upheld the rights of minorities, children, women, the disabled and others who faced discrimination and exploitation. Many of our cases have changed institutional practices, stopped government or corporate abuses, and set precedents that helped thousands.”

⁴¹ “Donald V. United Klans of America”.

<https://www.splcenter.org/seeking-justice/case-docket/donald-v-united-klans-america>. Southern Poverty Law Center. Accessed September 13, 2017.

⁴² Unless individual police officers or groups of them are involved in the Klan, the SPLC generally seems to have a favorable view of law enforcement.

enforcement”.⁴³ When I read this, I couldn't help but think of the Right-wing sheriffs and other law enforcement officials that I encountered during my time interning. What would Richard Mack, former Arizona sheriff and founder of the CSPOA, have to say about Right-wing militia activity in his county if SPLC reported it to him? SPLC's general framework of analysis accounts for a neutral perspective from law enforcement, and does not seem to be able to conceptualize of law enforcement officers as in existing as perpetuating violence because they are part of the historically racist, sexist, xenophobic *institution* of the police.

PRA's ability to engage in radical critiques of the prison industrial complex and law enforcement agencies sets it aside from the more liberal frameworks used by the SPLC and other similar organizations. Naomi Braine's "Terror Network or Lone Wolf? Disparate Legal Treatment of Muslims and the Radical Right," which appeared in PRA's Spring 2015 publication of *The Public Eye*, cites numerous statistics that highlight the stark difference in how law enforcement handles Right-wing militia violence versus "homegrown" terrorism from U.S. Muslims and applies a critical lens to this difference in application of the law.⁴⁴ Braine remarks, "Despite the greater prevalence of incidents and deaths resulting from Right-wing violence, U.S. Muslims experience more aggressive surveillance, greater use of informants, more severe charges, and greater use of restrictive confinement once incarcerated."⁴⁵ Seeing law enforcement and the criminal punishment system as being able to enact a form of violence, on a systemic level, both literally and figuratively, onto vulnerable populations in the U.S., due to the historical roots of both the law and the police, and simultaneously seeing Right-wing influence due to

⁴³ "Fighting Hate". Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Naomi Braine. *Terror Network or Lone Wolf? Disparate Legal Treatment of Muslims and the Radical Right*. The Public Eye. Spring 2015.

⁴⁵ *Id.* 6.

politicians, judges, individual cops, and the like provides the 30,000ft view that PRA strives for, and allows for a systemic critique that organizations like SPLC might be missing out on by using the “hate frame”. In the Trump-era, it is ever important that we be able to see expressions of organized bigotry from Right-wing militias, but even more so to pay attention to what PRA founder Jean Hardisty once termed “hidden stories of success by the Right,”⁴⁶ of private Right-wing organizations and networks, but also on the level of government, legislation, and law enforcement.

⁴⁶ Jean Hardisty. “Thoughts From PRA’s Founder”.
<http://www.politicalresearch.org/2012/12/21/thoughts-from-pras-founder/#sthash.GmtmN320.xov8QNFd.dpbs>.
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