

# INVENTING THE ENEMY

Ideological foes sometimes find it necessary to exaggerate the threats posed by their adversaries. In some cases, they may sincerely believe the worst about their foes, and conclude that it is not unethical to engage in a little hyperbole. Or they may do so because they want to make money by ginning up their base, hoping to cash in on their false narrative. There are also times when they get so creative as to come close to inventing an enemy.

Two current examples of this propagandistic ploy can be seen in the writings of those who are issuing dire warnings about Christian nationalists and white supremacists. The former is a clear example of inventing the enemy, and the latter is a gross exaggeration. But this hasn't stopped left-wing authors and organizations from their bogeyman thesis.

Hardly a week goes by without some pundit claiming that the United States is being taken over by Christian nationalists. Accusations are being made that are completely without foundation, and few in the media are taking them to task.

Proponents of this view like to point to the presence of a few Christian signs that were evident in the Jan. 6 Capitol riot. This has had almost no effect on most Americans, and with good reason: those who stormed the Capitol were men and women who came to express their anger at the American ruling class. It was not an exercise in Christian nationalism. But to those who distrust white Christian patriotic Americans, the signs were proof that Christian nationalists are on the march.

No one beats Samuel L. Perry, a sociologist at the University of Oklahoma. He said, "The Capitol Insurrection was as Christian nationalist as it gets." His baseless charge was endorsed by the likes of Thomas B. Edsall of the New York Times and Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Merely asserting that culpability belongs to Christian nationalists is all that matters these days. No proof is required.

Robert P. Jones is another author who is sold on the threat of Christian nationalists. Looking at the Capitol riot, he is convinced that “a significant number of the attackers on Jan. 6 were Christian nationalists and white supremacists.” He said he spotted a Christian flag at the event, adding that “Many people may not be familiar with it.” Good point: We took a poll of our Catholic League staff and no one had ever heard of it.

If the presence of a little-known Christian flag is enough to convince some activists and pundits that Jan. 6 was a Christian nationalist uprising, then it should follow that the burning of the American flag at Black Lives Matter and Antifa rallies—it happened regularly—is overwhelming proof of their anti-American agenda. They are the real threat to peace and safety, not Christian nationalists, whoever they are.

Author Katherine Stewart also maintains that Christian nationalists are a menace to society. In March last year, she cited evidence that Christian nationalists are “running the country.” Her proof? A remark made by President Trump that “by Easter” the Covid crisis would ease. That was all the evidence she needed—his dropping of the “E-word.”

Andrew Whitehead is a sociologist at Indiana University-Perdue University Indianapolis who wrote a book on Christian nationalists with Samuel Perry. Two years ago he said that Christian nationalists “think you have to be Christian to be truly American.” He did not quote anyone to that effect. Quite frankly, as one who runs in Christian circles, I never heard anyone make such a stupid comment.

Perry and Whitehead are quite the dynamic duo. They argue that if someone believes the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are divinely inspired documents, that proves they

are Christian nationalists. The bar is obviously not set very high.

According to Perry, no one epitomizes the mind-set of Christian nationalism better than evangelical pastor Greg Locke. Edsall was so impressed by Perry's observation that he cited Locke's book, *This Means War*, as the definitive source of this dreaded movement.

Having never heard of Locke, I bought the book, which was published last year before the election, and searched in vain for anything Locke said about Christian nationalism. He never mentions the term. The best I could find was one throw-away sentence near the end of the book where he says, "When it comes to an election, you'd better be a Christian first and a Christian last."

That was it. Most of the book is comprised of Protestant musings on the need for Christians to stand fast against challenges to our Judeo-Christian heritage. If this is supposed to be Exhibit A in the arsenal of those convinced that Christian nationalists are about to take over the nation, they had better retire before more people find out about their fairy tales.

The lies about Christian nationalism have real-life consequences. Three months ago, Anthea Butler, who teaches religious and African studies at the University of Pennsylvania, accused white evangelicals of posing "an existential crisis to us all." She said their ideas "may end up killing us all." It is this kind of incendiary comment that should be challenged with regularity, but never is. That's because Butler is black and white liberals don't have the guts to confront her.

Just as unnerving is the spectacle of states bent on adopting a new curriculum wherein teaching the truth about our Judeo-Christian heritage is considered taboo.

In Florida, one of the items deemed problematic for 7th graders holds that students should "Recognize how Judeo-Christian values influenced America's founding ideals and documents." Also found objectionable is the requirement that "Students will recognize the influence of the Protestant work ethic on economic freedom and personal responsibility."

Both of these declarations are indisputably true. The problem is with those who object to them, not those who applaud them.

Christian nationalism is not only a myth, it is a pernicious lie. We should be celebrating patriotic Americans who are Christian, not castigating them.

White supremacists do exist, but they are few in number and pose little danger to the Republic. This hasn't stopped those with a left-wing agenda from inflating their power. Wild generalizations about white people are being made with regularity, and not simply by radical authors.

Let's face it, white people, in general, have a difficult time defending themselves against racist comments. That's too bad because their reticence begets more attacks on them.

In his inaugural address, Joe Biden singled out white supremacy as a force to be reckoned with. He did not define what he meant by this term, nor did he offer any examples, though many reporters noted that he was referring to the January 6 Capitol riot.

David Horowitz, the former left-wing activist turned conservative, slammed Biden's remark as a "monstrous lie." The evidence supports him.

Are white people a threat to safety? The latest FBI statistics reveal that blacks, who are 12.5% of the population, comprise 58% of all murder arrests and 40% of all violent crimes. In New York City, whites are 33% of the population but account for only 2% of shootings. Blacks, who are 23% of the

population, commit 75% of all shootings.

Christian Picciolini was a leader in the skinhead movement for a quarter century, so he should know who the white supremacists are. "It's the average American. It is our mechanics, it's our dentists, it's our teachers, lawyers, doctors, nurses and unfortunately that's the way it's turned into the last 30 years."

What is really unfortunate is the bigoted swipe at virtually every white person. If what he said were true, then, to take one index, we should expect that the rate of violent crimes committed by whites would be very high, but it isn't. That's because the "average American" is not a white supremacist.

New York Times columnist Charles Blow is also guilty of making wild generalizations. In his piece on August 16, he says that the latest census figures are "terrifying" for "white nationalists." He does not explain who these people are, nor does he provide a scintilla of evidence that the "white power acolytes"—whoever they are—are terrified about the census.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which was founded to combat anti-Semitism, but has more recently evolved into a left-wing activist organization, is leading the way with charges of white supremacy killings. It offers as an example of white supremacist violence the shootings at a Parkland, Florida high school, the Tree of Life synagogue killings in Pittsburgh, the shootings at the Poway Chabad in California, and a violent attack at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas.

The ADL's analysis is sophomoric and misleading.

Nikolas Cruz, 22, killed 17 and wounded 17 others at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland in 2018. He had been expelled from the school for disciplinary reasons and was a known racist, but he was not active in white supremacist organizations. When he was jailed, he attacked an officer.

In 2018, Robert Bowers entered the Tree of Life Synagogue and yelled "All Jews must die" as he opened fire on the congregants. When the National Council of Jewish Women issued a statement about the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in American history, they cited his anti-Semitism but said not a word about him being a white supremacist.

The Poway synagogue shootings in 2019 were committed by John Earnest, a young man who hated Jews and Muslims. The San Diego ex-nurse, who killed one woman, had no criminal record and had no connection to any white supremacist group.

Patrick Crusius killed 22 people at a Walmart in El Paso in 2019. He said his targets were "Mexicans." He was known for his anti-Mexican rants and most of those whom he killed had Spanish surnames.

These four tragedies were the work of very sick men, all of whom were bigots. But if we are to call every white racist shooter a white supremacist—when there is no evidence of ties to any such group—then we are not dealing with reality. Klansmen are white supremacists, and they are not your "average American."

To be sure, there are violent white supremacists, but to slap the label "white supremacist" on every white bigoted thug is positively absurd. Those who do so are furthering a political agenda, and are not interested in telling the truth.

What is perhaps most disconcerting about this contrived scare-mongering about Christian nationalists and white supremacists is the relatively little attention given to Antifa and Black Lives Matter. They were responsible for over 600 riots last year, resulting in death and destruction. Yet we only hear about calls to investigate the Jan. 6 riot, and not these serial acts of violence. This is pure politics, having nothing to do with a sincere interest in law and order.