

Research Article

The #BuddhistCultureWars: BuddhaBros, Alt-Right Dharma, and Snowflake Sanghas

Ann Gleig

University of Central Florida

Brenna Grace Artinger

Independent Scholar

While often associated with a liberal demographic, the increasing online visibility of rhetoric such as “snowflakes,” “politically correct,” “postmodern identity politics,” and “cultural Marxism” demonstrates the presence of right-wing sentiments and populations in American convert Buddhism. This article situates these sentiments largely as a reaction to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in these communities. We chart this backlash across a broad right-wing spectrum that spans from “reactionary centrism” to the alt-right. We illuminate the ways in which participants both de-legitimate DEI as political rather than Buddhist and naturalize their own position as Buddhist rather than political. Next, we show how American convert Buddhist lineages have become a site of the “culture wars,” longstanding clashes between religious conservatives and progressives, that are playing out in multiple contexts across the US. Finally, we locate these reactionary right-wing forms of American Buddhism in relationship to modern and postmodern forms of global Buddhism.

Keywords: American Buddhism; racism; racial justice; socially engaged Buddhism; right-wing Buddhism; Alt-Right Buddhism; The Culture Wars

In September 2018, seventy Soto Zen Buddhist priests gathered for the eighth biennial conference of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA) held at Zen Mountain Monastery in upstate New York. After opening the conference with an indigenous land acknowledgement, Tenku Ruff, SZBA’s president at the time, shared that SZBA’s board had originally planned to focus the conference on a canonical Zen text, but then “the world shifted:” President Trump signed an executive order that left refugees stranded at airports across the US; swastikas appeared in public spaces; and



thousands of women shared their experiences of sexual violence as #MeToo went viral. As protests against the anti-immigrant policies began, one friend wrote to Ruff to ask “Where are all the Buddhists?” Another teacher asked her how the SZBA, which is 95% demographically white, was welcoming and relevant for African American practitioners. For Ruff, these were essentially questions about what it means to fully live out the Bodhisattva vow—after all, she explained, “we vow to save *all* beings not *some* beings.” She decided, therefore, that the conference would be dedicated to exploring how Zen monastics could come together as “one Buddha body to save all sentient beings.”

Under the theme of “Interconnecting: One Soto Zen, Many Expressions,” the next four days were dedicated to exploring the relationship between Zen and racial justice, the #MeToo movement, and power and privilege (Atwood 2018). The conference ended with a Full Moon Ceremony, in which SZBA priests chanted their bodhisattva vows following the tradition of the Buddha and his monastic sangha who collectively renewed their precepts on a full moon. It was preceded by a ritual expression of a “Statement of Repentance and Recognition” in which members named the specific suffering caused by sexism, racism, colonialism, and capitalism and pledged to overcome this suffering “for the benefit of all sentient beings, victims as well as perpetrators” (Franz, Fischer, and Snyder 2018). Written collaboratively by three white male priests, the statement had been inspired by the public apology from US Army veterans to Native elders at Standing Rock. After beginning with an acknowledgment of the colonized “unceded ancestral land,” on which Zen Mountain Monastery was built, the conference ended, then, with one vision of a decolonized American Zen.

The post-conference survey demonstrated that SZBA priests were deeply inspired by the exploration of the relationship between Zen Buddhism and racial, gender, sexual, and economic justice. Anonymous respondents enthused about how “powerful” and “vulnerable” the discussions of racism and #MeToo were and committed to making Zen more inclusive and accessible for marginalized populations.¹ While there was no reported dissent from the SZBA members, however, public denouncements were soon delivered from other American Zen Buddhist quarters. In stark contrast to the conference attendees, popular Zen teacher and author, Brad Warner, for instance, derided the conference as “The Marxist Take-Over of Buddhism” on his public Facebook page. Echoing Warner, Titus O’Brien, a novice Soto Zen priest, published a blog lamenting that Zen had been “hijacked by American communists” (2018b).

The distinctive politicized critiques made against the 2018 SZBA conference were repeated just a month later. In October 2018, the San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC) temporarily suspended long-term teacher Ed Brown after a student made a complaint about what they felt was a transphobic comment by Brown (Cutts et al. 2018). Across Facebook, outraged Brown supporters rallied against what they claimed was a hysterical “politically correct” overreaction by SFZC. Defenders linked Brown’s “persecution” to attacks on masculinity and the “supreme court hysteria” over Brett Kavanaugh. At the forefront was Warner, who published a video called “Zen Safe Spaces” in which he belittled both racial and transgender inclusivity initiatives in American Zen (2018a). One commentator under the video bemoaned: “That is so sad. What I want by way of a ‘safe space’ is a

¹ Tenku Ruff, personal correspondence, 12/13/2018.

space safe FOR Zen and safe FROM noxious post-modern victim politics.”² Another concluded: “Maybe it’s time to tell the snowflakes to suck it up or go elsewhere.”³

While often associated with a left-wing demographic, politicized conservative rhetoric—such as “snowflakes,” “victimhood,” “postmodern identity politics,” “cultural Marxism,” and “politically correct”—demonstrates the increasing visibility of right-wing sentiments and populations in American convert Buddhism. This article situates these sentiments, in large part, as a reaction to the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in American convert Buddhism, particularly around racial justice and transgender inclusivity. We chart this reactionary backlash across a broad right-wing spectrum that spans from “reactionary centrism”—namely, “someone who says they’re politically neutral, but who usually punches left while sympathizing with the right,” (Huertas 2018) to the alt-right. We pay attention to the ways in which participants combine Buddhist and political discourse to both de-legitimize DEI as political rather than Buddhist, and to naturalize their own position as Buddhist rather than political. Next, we argue that this spectrum shows American meditation-based convert Buddhist lineages have become a site of the “culture wars,” longstanding clashes between religious conservatives and progressives that are playing out in multiple contexts across the US and beyond. Finally, we locate these reactionary right-wing forms of American Buddhism in relationship to modern and postmodern forms of global Buddhism.

Method: Netnography and Virtual Autoethnography

The reactionary backlash against Buddhist diversity, inclusion, and equity (DEI) initiatives is taking place across both virtual and real contexts. In this article, we will limit ourselves to an exploration of the virtual landscape. We have loosely adopted the approach of netnography, an online ethnographic research method rooted in participant observation in which research data is gathered through following naturally occurring online public conversations (Kozinets 1998).

There are advantages and disadvantages to this methodological choice. One advantage is that it reflects the nature of the backlash itself. As Angela Nagle (2017) has shown, ranging from the Intellectual Dark Web (IDW) to the alt-right, an “online culture war” focused primarily on delegitimizing social justice has been taking place on the Internet. Much of the backlash to American convert Buddhist DEI initiatives mirrors this wider phenomenon in that it is playing out heavily on social media and is engaging the range of populations that Nagle identifies. A second advantage is that the fluidity between users on the Internet enables one to track patterns across American Buddhist lineages and populations that a focus on one site only would miss. Following Warner’s audience on social media platforms, for instance, led us to discover a whole network of participants who raise similar objections but explicitly embrace right-wing identities as extreme as alt-right Buddhists.

One disadvantage is that the Internet flattens the subjectivities of the participants reducing them to the religio-political rhetoric that they promote. In informal Zoom conversations with three

² October 9, 2018, public comment on Warner (2018a).

³ October 9, 2018, public comment on Warner (2018a).

participants who identified on the center right-wing spectrum, we found their biographies provided much more dimensionality to their religio-political stance than an analysis of their online rhetoric. Another disadvantage is that it is difficult to ascertain the scale and veracity of the phenomena. One user, for example, could be responsible for multiple Twitter accounts. Similarly, it is difficult to know how online critiques against social justice translate to on the ground impact in American Buddhist communities. To fully understand how right-wing perspectives and populations are impacting American convert Buddhism, therefore, additional qualitative research is necessary. Our more modest goal here is to offer a springboard for such research by mapping some of the emerging landscape and identifying relevant populations.

We should also add that in restricting our research to the virtual we join a number of scholars who have focused on the significant role that online platforms are playing in both the construction and contestation of contemporary Buddhist concerns and communities. Beverley Foulks McGuire (2018), for instance, offers a rich analysis of the scope and impact of Buddhist blogs on the formation of Buddhist practice and identities. Others have focused specifically on the operations of power and authority in the Buddhist virtual landscape. Sociologists of religion, Emma Tomalin, Caroline Starkey, and Anna Halafoff (2015) have highlighted how online Buddhist spaces function as sites in which both normative and new forms of Buddhist authority are negotiated. Similarly, Scott Mitchell (2016) demonstrates how Buddhist online activity is often directed at challenging dominant Buddhist discourse. As he explains, “These online communication spaces, in turn, often function as a platform for Buddhist discourses of dissent” (2016: 168).

Research Location and Orientation

Finally, it is necessary to flag our own location and orientation as online researchers. Just as virtual space blurs boundaries between research populations so it blurs boundaries between researcher and research populations. As Christine Hine notes, “There is an emergent strand of online ethnography that focuses on the embodied experience of the online researcher as an important source of insight in its own right. . . . Autoethnographers are often full participants in the situations that they recount” (2017: 9). Part of the postcolonial turn in anthropology, autoethnography is a research method in which the personal experience (“auto”) of the researcher is systematically analyzed (“graphy”) in order to understand the cultural experience (“ethno”) under analysis (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). Gleig’s scholarship on DEI initiatives in American Buddhism has generated significant right-wing reactionary backlash.⁴ Both of us have had uncomfortable encounters from contentious exchanges with anti-social justice Buddhists to being blocked on Twitter and Facebook by them. Gleig identifies these increasing blurred boundaries between scholars and practitioners as a feature of American meditation-based convert Buddhism in a postmodern age (Gleig 2019a: 16).

⁴ Ann Gleig, “Why Are White Buddhists So Angry? White Rage and Buddhist Studies Scholarship,” *The Shiloh Project* May 2 2021 <https://www.shilohproject.blog/why-are-white-buddhists-so-angry-white-rage-and-buddhist-studies-scholarship/>

In terms of research orientation, the article is both descriptive and normatively critical. It is descriptive in mapping out the anti-social justice Buddhist landscape, identifying the main cultural influences that are shaping it, and situating it in relationship to Buddhism in and beyond modernity. It is normative in that we take a critical perspective on these reactionary anti-social justice forms of American convert Buddhism. First, we critique the manner in which right-wing Buddhists, from reactionary centrists to the alt-right seek, in various ways, to naturalize their own social and political positionality. We interrogate this naturalization by identifying the ways in which they selectively read the tradition and by illuminating the historic and cultural situatedness of their own interpretations of Buddhism. Second, we critique these reactionary articulations of Buddhism on the grounds that they reinforce and reproduce normatively gendered and racialized dynamics that are harmful to marginalized populations, particularly Buddhists of Color and transgender Buddhists. In this sense, we align ourselves with what Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2006) calls “the ethics of witnessing” in which ethnography is undertaken with an intentional commitment to vulnerable populations.

We must clarify, however, that we are not critiquing these forms of reactionary Buddhism from a normative theological or “buddhological” perspective. That is to say, we are not making claims that they are not “real” or authentic articulations of Buddhism. For us, Buddhism is simply *what Buddhists do* and historically this has included assimilating to and advocating for a range of sociocultural and political positions. Here we adopt Chrissy Stroop’s perspective on Christianity for Buddhism: “Christianity is what Christians do in the world, and that this in turn is subject to communally mediated interpretation, leading to a multiplicity of competing ‘Christianities’” (2021). We are wary of any attempts to recover an essential or true Buddhism given the history of sectarian violence, ethnocentric arrogance, and racial erasure that such claims have often been rooted in. Hence, we agree with Paul Fuller (2021), who sees both progressive and ethnocentric forms of Buddhism as engaged Buddhist articulations despite their radically different social and political agendas and consequences.

American Convert Buddhism: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives

Our research is focused on developments within American meditation-based convert Buddhist lineages. These communities began in the 1960s and 70s, but derive from the modernization of Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism that began in Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the conditions of colonialism (McMahan 2008). The first wave of scholarship on these lineages distinguished them from both Asian American Buddhist heritage communities and American Buddhist convert lineages that were racially diverse (Nattier 1997). American meditation-based convert communities downplayed the merit-making, ritual, and cosmological aspects of Buddhism and focused on meditation practice and the goal of liberation. They were individualistic, with participants showing little interest in community building. Demographically, participants were overwhelmingly white, middle to upper-middle class, and tended to be politically liberal (Prebish 1999; Coleman 2002).

More recently, Gleig (2019a) has traced the significant impact of demographic and generational shifts within these meditation-based convert Buddhist lineages. One major area of development has

been racial diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. For over two and a half decades, POC practitioners have been tackling whiteness and racism within their communities. Such efforts include raising awareness of racism in Buddhist communities through literature, implementing diversity and inclusion trainings in Buddhist meditation centers, establishing PoC Affinity Buddhist sitting groups and retreats, and designing teacher training programs focused on increasing racial diversity. Propelled by the Black Lives Matter movement, racial justice initiatives have increasingly come to the forefront of mainstream American convert meditation-based Buddhism (Hase, Meadows, and Budge 2019; Gleig 2019a, 2020).

Another recent DEI development in these communities has been the emergence of a transgender Buddhist network and trans* inclusivity initiatives. In 2014, a group of transgender Buddhist practitioners produced a booklet called *Developing Trans*Competence: A Short Guide to Improving Transgender Experiences at Meditation and Retreat Centers* to inform Buddhist centers on ways to be trans* friendly (Krempasky, Renson, and Schubert 2014). In 2019, Kevin Manders and Elizabeth Marston published *Transcending: Trans Buddhist Voices*, an anthology in which over thirty trans, genderqueer and nonbinary practitioners shared their experiences of “empowerment and healing” as well as those of “isolation and transphobia” in American Buddhist sanghas (DeMaioNewton 2020). In 2019, the first Buddhist residential retreat for the transgender community brought together fifty transgender and gender queer practitioners, 55% of whom were BIPOC with two retreats with similar racial diversity following in 2020 (Vitorino 2019).

While the last few years has witnessed an increasing embrace of DEI initiatives in mainstream American Buddhist convert lineages and the mainstream American Buddhist press, it is important to note that teacher, leadership, and practitioner demographics are still overwhelmingly white. In 2015, for instance, 84% of retreatants at IMS identified as white and less than 5% identified as Black (Hase, Meadows, and Budge 2019). Similarly, in a 2018 report, the Soto Zen Buddhist Association estimated that their membership demographic was 95% white. They also recorded that only 20% of younger members (under age 55) identified as women.⁵ Hence, there remains a significant gap between the ideals of racial diversity within convert lineages and actual diverse demographic representation. This gap is important to keep in mind as we examine reactions to these initiatives that opponents claim have “taken over,” “invaded,” and “infected” American Buddhism.

“A Scary Postmodern Virus Has Infected American Buddhism”: Online Backlash

The backlash to issues of race and racism in American convert Buddhism has a long history on the Buddhist blogosphere. One early platform that raised issues of race and racism in mainstream American Buddhism was the collective blog Dharma Folk (2008–2013). One of the co-founders and contributors of Dharma Folk, Aaron J. Lee, launched a new blog titled Angry Asian Buddhist under the pseudonyms Arun and arunlikhati in 2009. Angry Asian Buddhist was groundbreaking in highlighting the erasure of Asian American Buddhism in mainstream American Buddhism, problematizing Orientalist stereotypes, and advocating for racial justice in American Buddhist

⁵ Tenku Ruff, personal correspondence, December 13, 2018.

sanghas (Angry Asian Buddhist 2019). In her careful analysis of Lee's blog, Chenxing Han discusses some of the criticisms, including questioning its Buddhist legitimacy, that white Buddhists leveled at the Angry Asian Buddhist site (2021: 170–184).

A similar backlash can be seen in reaction to American Studies scholar and Buddhist practitioner Funie Hsu's article "We've Been Here All Along," which was first published in *Buddhadharma* in 2016.⁶ Here Hsu shows how Asian American Buddhists have been marginalized in American Buddhism and calls on white American Buddhist converts to confront their racism and cultural appropriation as an integral part of their Buddhist practice (Hsu 2016). As *Buddhadharma's* editor Tynette Deveaux explained, the magazine received an unusually high volume of complaints in reaction to Hsu's article, which included personal attacks on her and claims that her perspective was not Buddhist. In response to these critiques, Deveaux commissioned Ajahn Amaro, a white Theravadin monastic, to write in support of Hsu in which he essentially lends Buddhist authority and legitimacy to her perspective (Deveaux and Amaro 2016).⁷

These examples clearly show that there is over a decade-long history of white convert Buddhist attempts to dismiss and de-legitimate American Buddhist of Color's concerns with race and racial justice as not Buddhist. For purposes of brevity, however, we will focus on the most recent articulations of this backlash, which adopt a range of right-wing culture war rhetoric. Further research could attend more carefully to continuities and discontinuities between the different waves of backlashes and the ongoing development of anti-social justice rhetoric among white convert Buddhists.

The recent online backlash to DEI initiatives in American convert Buddhism has appeared in a number of places. This includes blogs, Buddhist Facebook groups, podcasts, and commentary on literature that promotes racial justice work in Buddhism.⁸ For instance, under Gleig's *Tricycle* article "Buddhists and Racial Justice: A History," one Twitter user announced "Marxists have nothing to teach Buddhists. I refuse to speak this poison and encourage all to reject this denuded hate."⁹ A more thorough denunciation was delivered under an article titled "Expressions of Whiteness in Buddhism" (Hatch 2020). One commentator urged readers to research the concepts of "ideological possession," "Postmodern neo Marxism," and "identity politics" and shared a Jordan Peterson video titled "The Idea of White Privilege is Dangerous." Another enthused, "I am heartened by the resistance I have seen in this thread to this absolutely toxic identity-politics brainwashing happening en mass (sic.) and which seriously threatens the health of the Dharma in the West." A third agreed that "critical

⁶ Funie Hsu practices in the Taiwanese Humanistic Buddhist tradition and is also a student of Shin Buddhism.

⁷ One could compelling argue that the necessity of a white monastic Buddhist authority to legitimate an Asian American Buddhist female perspective enacts as well as counters many of the problematic issues at the heart of these debates, namely who has the authority to define what is and is not legitimately Buddhist.

⁸ We have only used public social media (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) and public blog material for analysis in this paper.

⁹ Buddhas Priest, Twitter Post, July 24, 2020.

race theory infects the Dharma,” and linked Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay’s (2020) book *Cynical Theory: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything About Race, Gender, and Identity*.¹⁰

The backlash to DEI in American Buddhism is occurring across a wide spectrum from center-right to far-right. Demographically, all of the participants under analysis here are white males but in recognition of differences in their views, we have organized them into three distinct categories: (1) reactionary centrists, (2) right-wing Buddhists, and (3) alt-right Buddhists.

Reactionary Centrism and Performative Transcendence

One major category of anti-social justice Buddhists are those who claim to be apolitical while attacking left-wing positions often from a right-wing political perspective. We find Aaron Huertas’s (2018) category of “reactionary centrism” useful here. Huertas defines a reactionary centrist as “someone who says they’re politically neutral, but who usually punches left while sympathizing with the right.” He describes reactionary centrism as an ideology that draws false equivalences between right- and left-wing positions in order to situate itself as the reasonable, balanced, and neutral center view (Huertas 2018). We align reactionary centrism with what we call “performative transcendence,” in which Buddhist practitioners denounce social justice initiatives while denying the social power imbalances such initiatives aim to address under the guise of a non-dual “no preferences” perspective. Performative transcendence functions, therefore, to simultaneously *naturalize* dominant social power hierarchies while marking challenges to such hierarchies *political*. Practitioners who engage in reactionary centrism or performative transcendence de-legitimize DEI Buddhist expressions as political rather than Buddhist and naturalize their own religio-political positions as Buddhist rather than political.

Brad Warner fits neatly into the category of reactionary centrism. Warner (2018d) followed his denouncement of North American Soto Zen as “a far-left Marxist political movement” with a year-long campaign against Buddhist DEI initiatives in a series of social media posts, YouTube videos and blogs for his large online audience. Warner denies that racism exists in American Buddhism. While acknowledging the lack of racial diversity in convert sanghas, he argues that this is a temporal rather than structural issue, and rather than work towards diversity, he is “content to wait for that to happen naturally” (2019c). In a further minimization, Warner compares his own cultural challenges as a white American practicing Zen in Japan with those of American Buddhists of Color without engaging the crucial difference that the latter are practicing in their own country. Warner is equally dismissive of transgender inclusivity. He claims that gender is transcended in the zendo and mocks a transgender student for wearing a binder. In his strident defense of Ed Brown, Warner compares his own vegetarianism with being transgender, suggesting both are “cherished beliefs” that should not be clung to (Warner 2018f). Inexplicably, he concludes that the student who made the complaint

¹⁰ All comments under Kaitlyn Hatch, “Expressions of Whiteness in Buddhism” *Tibetan Buddhism—Struggling With Diffi-Cult Issues* (blog). July 24, 2020. <https://buddhism-controversy-blog.com/2020/07/24/expressions-of-whiteness-in-buddhism/>.

against Brown was not a serious practitioner, but had merely attended the Zen center for “entertainment” (Warner 2018c).

After naturalizing existing social power hierarchies through denying racial and gender discrimination, Warner derides DEI concerns as “special needs” that are being “demanded” by over-sensitive Buddhists. Further, he argues that the ethic of inclusivity is at odds with Zen. As he puts it, “Zen is not a very warm, welcoming, and inclusive sort of practice for anyone. . . . It is intended to remove us from our comfort zones and present challenges. It is supposed to be uncomfortable” (Warner 2018e). Next, he takes aim at “collective karma,” an engaged Buddhist hermeneutic advanced in racial justice work, arguing not only that it has no precedent in canonical Buddhist sources, but that it is solely a tool of identity politics to shame white male Buddhists (Warner 2019a).

While Warner’s positions on race and transgender issues are clearly locatable on a right-wing spectrum, he claims to transcend politics. As he puts it, “I want nothing at all to do with Marxist political movements, or, indeed, political movements of any kind—this goes for right-wing movements as well as left wing ones (Warner 2018d). Another expression of Warner’s reactionary centrism is found in his admonishments against bringing politics into Buddhist spaces despite his own campaigns against DEI. In one blog post, for instance, he denounced the tweets of an engaged Buddhist teacher critiquing a group of Covington High School students, wearing “Make America Great Again” hats, who appeared to be insulting a Native American elder in video that went viral in January 2019, as “shameful and embarrassing” because a Buddhist teacher should not engage with political issues (Warner 2019b).¹¹ Yet, he made a YouTube video titled critiquing the Black actor Jussie Smollett for lying about being the victim of a racial attack (2019e). Warner (2018b) also shares that he vetoed a sangha discussion about the Brett Kavanaugh hearings because, “I feel like one of the important things a Zen center can provide is a space where we don’t talk about such subjects.” Warner, however, has been anything but silent about such subjects. Between September 2018 and September 2019, he produced fifteen public teachings in the form of blogs and YouTube videos, critiquing racial justice and transgender inclusivity.

The insistence that Zen does and should transcend politics by practitioners who espouse clear right-wing political positions is also characteristic of many of Warner’s social media supporters. In response to my critique of Warner’s diatribes against DEI, for instance, one Twitter user claimed Warner supported inclusivity and was merely critiquing “the extent to which other Buddhists have an unhealthy focus on race, sexual orientation, etc . . .” A glance at this user’s public feed revealed the interweaving of Zen quotes promoting “don’t know mind” and “Our Opinions will be our downfall” with posts celebrating the greatness of America, denouncing Marxism, denying climate change, and declaring Greta Thunberg to be a “prophet” of a “new apocalyptic cult.” When I inquired

¹¹ On January 19, 2019, a group of Catholic High School students from Covington High, some of whom were wearing MAGA hats, were accused of racially harassing a Native American elder at the Lincoln Memorial. Selective coverage of the encounter went viral and resulted in a number of news outlets denouncing the students. The Buddhist teacher tweeted during this coverage period. Later footage emerged, however, that showed that the students had been misrepresented and one of them filed and settled a substantial lawsuit against *The Washington Post*. For initial coverage see, Sarah Mervosh (2019), and for amended coverage see, Sarah Mervosh and Emily S. Rueb (2019).

if he saw any tension between his Zen Buddhist commitment of “not knowing” and his right-wing political views, he denied that the latter were political.¹²

A second example of reactionary centrism is Titus O’Brien. O’Brien was a novice priest who resigned from the SZBA in protest of their Statement of Repentance and Recognition (2018b). In consecutive blog posts, which have since been removed from his public website, O’Brien makes three key arguments against the statement. First, he denies the empirical reality of racism or gender inequities in the sangha. O’Brien disputes the concern that America Zen is “too white,” claiming that his own sangha is representative of New Mexico’s diverse racial demographics. As he explains, “In my experience, Zen hasn’t been missing proportional representation too badly, and it’s been shifting rapidly, as we see in every Buddhist mag or leadership council” (2018b). Further, he argues that Buddhist diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives are not POC led, but rather reflect a white liberal agenda (O’Brien 2018a).

Second, he reduces the SZBA statement to a political rather than a Buddhist document. According to O’Brien:

The Soto statement is a relentless, total indictment of capitalism and American civilization. It explicitly employs the pseudo-academic language of neo-Marxism, not failing to miss one key phrase or notion. And true to the form of contemporary communism, it utilizes race, gender, and resentment as the fulcrum and levers of revolution, with the declared and underscored goal of borderless, global socialism. (O’Brien 2018b)

Third, he theologically discredits this socialist political statement from a Buddhist perspective. In one place, for instance, O’Brien (2018b) questions its compatibility with the tradition, suggesting that such views are “not inevitable, inarguable conclusions drawn from Buddhist teachings.” In another, he places the statement in opposition to Buddhism, declaring it consists of “social views that are at times antithetical to the received spirit of those traditions: prejudicial, tribalist, victimized, scientifically unsound, and vociferously illiberal” (2018a).

Similar to Warner, O’Brien simultaneously advocates for an apolitical Buddhism while advancing specific political preferences. He claims, for instance, that he wants to maintain the sangha as a place for “just sitting,” yet he also mounts an impassioned defense of American individualism and capitalism. Far from “repenting” the suffering produced by capitalism, O’Brien argues “we should live with enormous gratitude and dedication to the success of the incomprehensibly abundant human civilization surrounding us. A modern civilization that continues drawing more people per capita, more rapidly out of poverty and misery around the globe than at any other time in human history” (2018b). While not explicit, O’Brien’s argument aligns canonical Buddhism and the modern Western systems of capitalism, individualism, liberalism, and science, and argues both are under threat from the “radical left political turn in Soto Zen” (2018a).

¹² Ann Gleig, personal Twitter exchange, November 14, 2019.

As Tenku Ruff acknowledged, “The SZBA conference we just completed represents a deep and significant shift in North American Soto Zen Buddhism” (Atwood 2018). In *American Dharma*, Gleig situates such shifts as reflecting the impact of postmodern and postcolonial turns on American Buddhist modernism (Gleig 2019a: 281–298). Warner and O’Brien are correct, therefore, in identifying new developments in American Zen. The problem with their critiques is that they naturalize their own form of modern Zen as apolitical, acultural, and ahistorical. Warner and O’Brien insist that American Zen Buddhist centers are and should be protected as apolitical spaces in which all social differences and power dynamics are transcended. In doing so, they ignore the multiple accounts of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia that demonstrate that Buddhist centers are already cut through with sociocultural and political dynamics. A striking detail in both of their blog posts is the complete lack of engagement with narratives by Buddhists of Color who have shared their first-hand experience of racism in Zen sanghas (Manuel 2015).

Similarly, Warner seems unaware of scholarship that points to the presence of both intersubjective/collective and individual karmic formations in canonical Buddhism (Prueitt 2018; Kachru 2019; Tzohar 2019). This is not surprising given that Warner is not a scholar and Buddhist modernist readings of the tradition focus exclusively on individual karma. More concerning, however, is his failure to acknowledge that collective karma has become a core concept of the much more well-known lineage of engaged Buddhism, which began in Asia in the early twentieth century as Asian Buddhists responded to the forces of modernity. In reducing collective karma to “identity politics,” Warner ignores a now nearly century-old global Buddhist lineage and a rich body of doctrinal literature that carefully considers the relationship between engaged and canonical Buddhism (Queen, Prebish, and Keown 2003; Watts 2009).

Warner and O’Brien’s naïve presentations of American Zen as apolitical also ignore the historic social and political realities of Zen Buddhism (Williams 2005). Such an acultural and apolitical vision is the product of the modernization of Zen that occurred under the influence of colonialism and Japanese nationalism (Sharf 1993). As Stephanie Balkwill (2020) explains, the modern rendering of Buddhism as apolitical reflects a selective reading of Buddhist texts. When Buddhism is looked at historically as a lived tradition, it has always been deeply embedded within social, cultural, and political life.¹³ Further, it is relevant to note that Soto Zen in Japan has undergone its own institutional accountability and reform over practices that fostered both doctrinal and social discrimination against the marginalized Buraku people. As William Bodiford discusses, justice movements within Soto Zen, “discredited the older generation of Soto leaders, who had allied themselves with prewar notions of social hierarchy and class privilege, while helping to empower the younger generation of Soto Zen activists in their attempts to make the sect face current issues of social and political injustice” (Bodiford 1996: 5).

¹³ Engaged Buddhist Joan Halifax incisively notes the collusion between such an ahistorical representation of Buddhism and white privilege (Halifax 2020).

#TheBuddhistRight

While some anti-social-justice Buddhists engage in a performative transcendence, others who hold similar views have explicitly embraced a right-wing Buddhism. One example is Jason Manu Rheume, who has founded a group called #TheBuddhistRight, with over 90 current members.¹⁴ On June 22, 2020, in a public Facebook post, Rheume, a white Californian who briefly ordained as a Theravadin Buddhist monk in Southeast Asia, shared a short essay titled “Why the Right,” in which he argues that conservatism is “the most logical, reasonable and spiritual [political] position” (Rheume 2020). First, Rheume sets out his conservative ideals: namely, the inherent corruption of government, a conviction that individual ethical development is key to a successful society, the belief that people should be judged only as individuals and not as part of a group, the importance of free speech, and the promotion of unregulated capitalism. He wedds these deeply individualistic principles with traditional conservative social ethics: namely, that a country should have a strong military, that the foundation for a strong society is a heterosexual two-parent family, divorce is bad, and illegal immigration leads to vulnerability for immigrants, increased crime, and a strain on medical services.

Next, Rheume (2020) places socialism and the Left as the opposite of conservatism. It is a “utopic” perspective, which apparently claims “if you just have the government balance everything out and put in the right policies everything will be fine.” Rheume rejects DEI initiatives as a liberal agenda that tries to externally force social change, and he suggests that the development of such change can only occur on an individual level. Similarly, he states that “political correctness” is the “antitheses” of freedom of speech. In a departure from the Buddhist ethic of “right speech,” Rheume puts the ethical onus on the listener rather than the speaker. As he puts it, “to be offended is really to not grant someone the benefit of the doubt and shows a weakness in character on the part of the offended” (2020). He claims that “Engaged Buddhism is really leftist politics intertwined with Buddhism” but does not clearly explain why leftist politics are not compatible with Buddhism.¹⁵ His argument seems to rest on the assumption that the Left is focused solely on external social change and Buddhism is focused solely on individual transformation.

In a similar vein, in his public #TheBuddhistRight posts at least, Rheume does not systematically explain why Buddhism fits best with conservatism. He does, however, make some general claims. First, he argues that conservatism is more inherently spiritual in nature than other political philosophies. In support of this, he references what he identifies as the conservatism of the transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. Second, he characterizes all religions as conservative, implying that conservatism is an inherent rather than a historically contingent characteristic of religion. As he explains: “All religions are conservative. For this reason, it always made sense to me that the left despises religion and vilifies Christianity” (Rheume 2020). Further, he suggests that if Theravada Buddhism were not conservative, then it would likely have ceased to exist. Third, he

¹⁴ The group is private on Facebook but Rheume’s posts are public. While this article was in production, Rheume renamed his group Humble Stature and published an online article titled “Critical Race Theory is Corrupting Buddhism,” Humble Stature <https://www.humblestature.com/critical-race-theory-is-corrupting-buddhism> March 26 2021.

¹⁵ Jason Manu Rheume, June 25, 2020, comment on Rheume (2020).

contrasts the apparent leftist faith in external social change with his conservative faith in “nature and karma.” Fourth, he claims that a pro-capitalist conservatism is the best system to accommodate the fact that most humans are driven by the three poisons. As he rhetorically asks: “What system of government works best with imperfect greedy, angry and delusional people? Which system takes these greedy, angry and delusional people, makes them accountable for their own actions so they can learn?” (Rheume 2020).

Rheume’s “Buddhist Right” is a modern Romantic and Protestant highly individualistic form of Buddhism that is coupled with a conservative social ethic and rooted in an abstract and polarized understanding of right- and left-wing politics. The Right is characterized by the individual, personal accountability, freedom, and values religion; the Left is marked by collectivism, the abdication of personal responsibility, external regulation, and “despises” religion. Rheume goes a step further than Warner and O’Brien in not only discarding socially engaged Buddhism but in discounting all forms of progressive and liberal religion. While Rheume’s modern conservative interpretation of Buddhism finds alignment with modern nationalistic forms of Theravada Buddhism, it completely discards articulations of the tradition by influential Theravada monastics such as the Thai teacher Ajahn Buddhadasa (1993), Thai bhikkhuni Venerable Dhammananda (Senauke 2020), and the American Bhikkhu Bodhi (2016), all of whom have developed canonically based forms of socially engaged Theravada Buddhism.

Alt-Right Buddhists

In this article, we place right-wing Buddhism as a center position between reactionary centrism and the Buddhist alt-right. On the public comment thread under his #TheBuddhistRight post, Rheume supports our categorization through his own self positioning. On the one side, he notes that classical liberalism and conservatism are “two sides of the same coin,” which in the current political climate “are now both on the right.”¹⁶ On the other, he shares that he found “interesting” a YouTube interview called “On the Phenomenon of Right-Wing Western Buddhism” and contacted the interviewee, Brian Ruhe.¹⁷ Ruhe is a key figure in the most extreme of the right-wing Buddhists: the self-proclaimed alt-right Buddhists.

One community is Right-Wing Dharma Squads, a podcast which started in April 2019 and currently has 200 Twitter followers. Released every two weeks, each episode begins with the chanting of the three refuges in Pāli, and consists of four main participants who are referred to only by their aliases—Dharmakirti, Storm King, Kagyu, and Aura—discussing topics ranging from Buddhist nationalism to Buddhist philosophers such as Nāgārjuna. In the first episode, entitled “This Podcast Respects U Wirathu,” the four participants discuss how they came to embrace alt-right belief systems (Dharmakirti et al. 2019a).

¹⁶ Jason Manu Rheume, June 22, 2020, comment on Rheume (2020).

¹⁷ Jason Manu Rheume, June 22, 2020, comment on Rheume (2020); Reynolds (Paññobhāsa) and Ruhe (2020); During the period in which this article was being produced, Rheume created a new YouTube channel (also called Humble Stature in line with his Facebook group) and has thus far interviewed Paññobhāsa Bhikkhu three times: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC79H1ugWp-XKckzURgs4mQQ>.

Their transition to conservative values is largely attributed to online communities such as the r/PUA (Pick-Up Artist) sub-Reddit, which are aimed at men who are looking for advice on how to attract women. They are part of the Incel (Involuntary Celibate) subculture, which includes other Reddit groups such as r/TheRedPill, communities that are heavily misogynist and often a gateway to alt-right political beliefs (ADLCOE 2018: 5).

In terms of their Buddhist background, participants vary, although two of them share that they came to the tradition through Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*. Dharmakirti practices in a Tibetan lineage, having discovered Buddhism in South Asia. Aura practices in the Thai Forest Tradition, with particular interest in the teachings of Ajahn Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Storm King practices within a Zen lineage but also has interest in Tibetan traditions. Kagyu was exposed to Buddhism through Thich Nhat Hanh and now practices within the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. The four are united in their absolute denunciation of the perceived “shit-lib” (shitty-liberal) nature of Western Buddhism, alternatively dubbed “California Dharma” or “Starbucks Buddhism” (Paññobhāsa 2019). As Aura notes:

The presentation of Buddhism in the West, I realized, was essentially a bunch of counter-cultural folks on the left trying to take this as a spiritual varnish for their worldview. But when you looked at it [Buddhism] as it was presented in its original context, within say the Tibetan tradition, you find a hierarchical, traditional religion that has none of these features of modern liberalism. (Dharmakirti et al. 2019a)

Their divergence with “shit-lib” Buddhists rests in a distrust of democracy and normative Western Buddhist views. The participants in Right-Wing Dharma Squads believe that many facets of engaged Buddhism such as support for the Black Lives Matter movement, gender egalitarianism, and LGBTQ+ inclusivity are external and in opposition to the fundamental teachings of the Dharma. They believe that California Dharma manifests in the stripping down of core Asian Buddhist teachings, particularly through the utilization of commentaries instead of the more authoritative *sutras*. In this way, the participants conflate liberal Buddhism with engaged Buddhism—seeing social justice efforts and DEI initiatives as essentially “liberal” in nature.

Participants in the podcast favor traditional Asian canonical readings of Buddhism, and demonstrate a solid purview of classical Buddhist texts and practices. They confidently discuss texts such as the *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta* in the Majjhima Nikāya and the *Mahāyānottaratantra Śāstra*. A core focus of their textual practice is a hyper-masculine promotion of what they call “tough love,” as shown through the practice of Zen teachers hitting their students with sticks, and the physical abuse that both Naropa and Milarepa faced at the hands of their teachers (Dharmakirti et al. 2019b; 2019c). While the participants suggest that teachers should not be seen as the “gentle lambs” they are often framed as, they simultaneously select only certain example of violence to support their argument (2019c). For instance, they do not consider the maternal metaphors of Śāntideva or texts such as the Simile of the Saw (*Kakacūpama Sutta*) in the Majjhima Nikāya, which are clear to disavow any brutality or resentment, even in thought.

The Dharma Squad see Buddhism as compatible with their alt-right views in a number of ways. They first claim the inherent neutrality and universality of Buddhist religiosity and practice. They see Buddhism in its true form as inherently centrist, in that it is outside the realm of politics, particularly from the perspective of renunciation and the relinquishment of attachment (*taṇhā/trṣṇā*). In this way, they view renunciation in Buddhism as the relinquishing of all views, whether they be political or related to ideas of individuality such as race, gender, sex, and sexuality. However, the Dharma Squad simultaneously contradicts this argument of Buddhist neutrality through their endorsement of extremist and nationalist Buddhist monastics. In a highly contradictory manner, they claim a strict separation between Buddhism and politics even while they advocate for systems of government, such as monarchy and colonialism, that would re-enslave certain peoples.

A second argument the Dharma Squad makes is to claim that Buddhism is maintained and passed on through an elite class. Such an argument is represented primarily through the common alt-right and fascist theory of the Indo-European Aryan Race as racial predecessors to the superior “white race” of present-day Europeans. This theory allows the participants to claim Buddhism as superior while also endorsing nationalist views both in Asia and in the West. The racial superiority of the Aryans is an idea also perpetuated by fascist philosopher Julius Evola, who utilized the “racial nobility” of Aryanism as a racist trope against the “Jewish Menace” during the second World War (Staudenmaier 2020: 477).

In a similar vein, the Right-Wing Dharma Squad are admirers of U Wirathu, a Burmese monk who has often degraded and incited violence against Muslims, and espouse popular Islamophobic Burmese Nationalist views which paint the Rohingya as ethnically Bengali and foreigners to Myanmar. They claim that Muslims are inherently violent and commit Jihad, and further that the violence committed against the Rohingya is not genocide but “population transfer, at worst” (Dharmakirti et al. 2019a). The Dharma Squad aligns such views with non-harm by arguing that it is compassionate to wish someone well and hope that they no longer suffer, but that it is also compassionate to not let violence be committed against one’s own people, as they perceive is being done by Muslims against the Burmese people (Dharmakirti et al. 2019b).

A second example of online alt-right Buddhist communities is the r/AltBuddhism Reddit group.¹⁸ Its description states:

Western Buddhism is castrated, weak, corrupted by progressivism and rejects the original thoroughly masculine, head-oriented ascetic system advocated by the warrior aristocrat Siddhattha Gotama. Alt Buddhism offers an alternative to standard western Buddhism for those with wisdom and strength to make stronger people stronger. This is a place for promoting fearlessness, self-discipline and austerity with the

¹⁸ While this article was in production the r/AltBuddhism page has become private on Reddit. However, an archived copy of the page can be viewed:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20201101011033/https://www.reddit.com/r/AltBuddhism/>.

acknowledgement that all suffering is self-inflicted. Victimhood is for the weak.
 (“AltBuddhism” 2020)

Two key members of r/AltBuddhism are Brian Ruhe and Paññobhāsa Bhikkhu (David Reynolds). Ruhe, who refers to himself as “The Nazi Buddhist,” is a Canadian meditation teacher and conspiracy theorist who has been part of the alt-right sphere since at least 2015 (Ruhe 2019). Paññobhāsa Bhikkhu is an American Theravada monk ordained in Myanmar who has been writing since 2017 on his blog “Politically Incorrect Dharma.” Common themes in the r/AltBuddhism group include the conspiracy that Jewish individuals are taking over Western Buddhist *sanghas* through their infiltration of higher levels of leadership, as well as discussions concerning the Muslim takeover of countries such as Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Similar to the views of Right-Wing Dharma Squads, the participants in r/AltBuddhism are in favor of right-wing Buddhists, particularly monastics, gaining power in Asia, and consider these nationalist forms of Asian Buddhism to be superior forms of Buddhism.

The perception that Asian Buddhism is superior is based in the idea that Western Buddhism strips down the essential features and practices of more “traditional” Buddhist practice. As Paññobhāsa writes, “Asians have their own ethnic Buddhism, which is based on much more than just elementary meditation techniques and cultural Marxism, and which in their eyes is not a decadent, corrupt cultural aberration which belittles the importance of monasticism and radical renunciation, and in which lax, lukewarm, relatively ignorant laypeople (ignorant of Pali literature anyway) call themselves Sangha” (Paññobhāsa 2019). The view that there is an innate, more traditional form of Buddhism is common within Theravada communities and is similar to the ethnocentric views described by Paul Fuller (2018).

Buddhism Goes to the Culture Wars

In analyzing the backlash to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in American convert Buddhism, it is evident that while advocates claim to be representing “real” Buddhism, their own articulations of the tradition are as interpretatively selective, historically situated, and culturally shaped as those they oppose. We situate such interpretations as part of cultural clashes between conservatives and progressives which are playing out not only across the United States, but also impacting the political landscape of Canada, Europe, and Australia (Sobolewska and Ford 2019; George and Huynh 2009; Wallace 2019; Walker 2020; *The Economist* 2019). Here we offer a brief history of the “culture wars” in their North American context with attention to the relevant issues and actors that are shaping reactionary forms of American Buddhism.

In 1992, Pat Buchanan gave a rousing speech at the Republican National Convention. He declared:

My friends, this election is about more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe, and what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in this country, a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America. (Buchanan 1992)

Buchanan's speech referenced a series of struggles between conservatives and liberals over issues such as feminism, gay rights, affirmative action, multiculturalism, and education that dominated the public sphere during the 1980s and 1990s. As historian Andrew Hartman (2019) notes, however, the "culture wars" began in the 1960s when the Civil Rights movement and the counterculture challenged the white, middle-class normative model of America. On the one side was the "New Left, a loose configuration of movements that included the anti-war, Black Power, feminist, and gay liberation movements, amongst others." It sought racial, gender and sexual equality and freedom. On the other side was a coalition of conservative, neo-conservative, and Christian Right figures who believed the New Left forces of secularism and Marxism undermined the foundational "Judeo-Christian values and beliefs" of the nation (Hartman 2019: 10).

Hartman traces multiple battles between these two sides from the 1960s to the 2000s. Most relevant for the Buddhist culture wars are the issues of race and gender. Despite the gains of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, massive disparities in areas such as education, health, and wealth remained between Black and white Americans. The issue of how to interpret and ameliorate such racial inequities became a major battle line in the culture wars. On the one side, Black academics such as Derrick Bell developed critical race theory, which rejected the assimilation of Black individuals in white institutions as proof of racial equity and showed the persistence of structural racism in supposedly "colorblind" institutions. These figures argued for systemic change as well as affirmative action to ensure adequate minority representation (Hartman 2019: 111). On the other side, conservatives denied the existence of systemic racism and rejected collective efforts to address racial inequality. They dismissed affirmative action as reflecting an ideology of victimhood and proposed that the key to Black American success was individual effort and assimilation to what they insisted was a color-blind meritocracy (Hartman 2019: 126).

Gender and feminism were another key battleground of the culture wars. Christian conservatives, particularly evangelicals who blended their religious and national identities, blamed feminists for increasing divorce rates and transformations of the normative family model. They maintained that sexual difference, expressed through traditional hierarchical gender roles in the family, was God-given and crucial for the stability of the nation. During the 1980s, evangelicals developed a politics of "family values" in reaction to the legalization of abortion, the social acceptability of divorce, and the gay rights movement (Hartman 2019: 77–89).

More recently, the impact of digital culture has resulted in what Angela Nagle (2017) has identified as "the online culture wars." Nagle shows how the online culture wars have drawn from entirely new populations who have engaged in battles around feminism, sexuality, gender identity, racism, and free speech. On the one side, she places the "call-out culture of the left emanating from Tumblr-style campus-based identity politics"; on the other, "the anti-PC brigade, Trumpian trolls and the alt-right" (2017: 8–9). Similarly, Peter Limberg and Conor Barnes observe that the traditional divide between conservative Christians and secular liberals is no longer sufficient to understand the culture wars. They convincingly argue that the bipolar "Culture War 1.0" has been replaced by "Culture War 2.0" consisting of a "multipolar brawl" between a multitude of "memetic tribes" (Limberg and Barnes 2018).

Most relevant for the Buddhist culture wars are those tribes dotted along a center-right to far-right scale: namely, The Intellectual Dark Web (IDW), the Manosphere, Neoreactionaries, and the alt-right. The IDW refers to a group of thinkers, many of whom self-identity as “classical liberals” or “traditional Leftists,” who argue that the Left has become authoritarian and social justice poses a critical threat to the foundational values of liberalism and Western civilization (Weiss 2018). A key IDW figure is Brett Weinstein, a former biology professor, who alongside Heather Heying, his wife and colleague, resigned from and sued Evergreen University for failing to protect them from student protestors in 2017.¹⁹ They have since developed high-profile media personalities as “professors in exile” who are “cancel culture” victims of a totalitarian progressivism they claim has taken over campus culture. With a Twitter following of 434,300, Weinstein hosts the DarkHorse podcast, which is largely dedicated to defending free speech and critiquing critical race theory and social justice activism, such as the Black Lives Matter movement (Weinstein 2018).²⁰

Another influential IDW figure is Jordan Peterson, a Canadian psychologist and best-selling author. Peterson shot into the public limelight for opposing Bill C-16, An Act to Amend the Canadian Human Rights Acts and the Criminal Code, which added gender identity and expression to the Canadian Human Rights Act. Peterson misrepresented Bill C-16 as a “compelled” speech law under which he could be legally penalized for failing to use transgender students preferred pronouns. He framed it as an expression of an authoritarian ideology that undermined the foundational value of Western civilization: namely, free speech. Peterson has also naturalized and defended gender difference and hierarchies, and he has come under intense fire for suggesting “enforced monogamy” was a solution to misogynist violence against women. In a series of viral YouTube videos, Peterson has mounted a campaign targeting what he dubs “Postmodern Cultural Marxism,” which he views as a totalitarian ideology that has taken over universities. Despite lacking historic veracity and being theoretically flawed in conflating the two different and conflicting systems of Marxism and postmodernism, the combination of Peterson’s construction and denunciation of “Postmodern Cultural Marxism” with Jungian depth psychology, and his self-help teachings on individual responsibility have gained him a massive fan base, particularly among young white men (Burgis et al. 2020: 102–104).

Advancing a similar agenda as the IDW is James Lindsay and his New Discourses project. Lindsay first came into public view alongside Helen Pluckrose and Peter Boghossian after they played a successful academic hoax in a bid to discredit the academic legitimacy of the fields of race, gender and sexuality studies.²¹ The trio pejoratively dubbed these academic subfields “Grievance Studies” claiming that they were mired in nonsensical jargon and harmful ideologies. Their basic argument is that the postmodern thought that undergirds these disciplines is an assault on “objective truth” that threatens liberalism and promotes an authoritarian form of social justice activism (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020).

¹⁹ For Weinstein’s own account of Evergreen see McCormack (2019). For the perspective of some of his former colleagues see Fischel, Grossman, and Nelson (2017).

²⁰ Bret Weinstein, Twitter Post, June 30, 2020, 10:08 p.m.

²¹ “What the ‘Grievance Studies’ Hoax Means” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 9, 2018.

Lindsay maintains an active online platform through his website and Twitter account, which currently has 180,000 followers. His New Discourses website contains blog posts such as “The Cult Dynamics of Wokeness,” which denounce “critical social justice,” and he has also intentionally cultivated a vitriolic “anti-woke” Twitter persona. One Tweet, for instance, shreds Buddhist Studies scholar Natalie Quli’s review of George Yancy and Emily McRae’s edited collection *Buddhism and Whiteness*, concluding that “For those of you who don’t know, Critical Social Justice (Wokeness) is even taking over Zen Buddhism, at least in the United States.”²²

While Lindsay’s views on social justice are clearly locatable on the right-wing spectrum, he self-identifies as a “classical liberal” and claims New Discourses is “apolitical.” Similarly, Lindsay identifies as an atheist but works closely with leading conservative Christian evangelicals. Michael O’Fallon who runs Sovereign Nations, a Christian nationalist organization, is a manager and co-owner of New Discourses (Smith 2020). Lindsay is a regular on the evangelical anti-social justice circuit, speaking at conferences and podcasts (Mohler 2020). On Twitter, he confirmed he was voting for Trump, and he has shared conspiracy posts implying election fraud and false media reporting of COVID-19 deaths.

Lindsay’s explicit embrace of Trump and conservatism lends weight to critics who situate the IDW and affiliates as reactionary thinkers whose main concern is to defend traditional power hierarchies. Michael Brooks, for instance, places the IDW firmly within the “center-right and right-wing ecosystem” (2020: 8). He points out that members of the IDW network legitimate capitalism and American imperialism, see themselves as defenders of “Western civilization,” emphasize biological gender difference, and attack critical race theory. As he notes, “Crucially, in all of these areas, the IDW promotes narratives that either *naturalize* or *mythologize* historically contingent power relations—between workers and bosses, between men and women, they are old school reactionaries” (Brooks 2020: 9).

The online blurring of boundaries across liberal and conservatives seen in the culture wars also extends in the opposite direction from the center to the far right. While Peterson has vocally distanced himself from the far-right, he has been embraced by many from the alt-right subculture. White nationalist Richard Spencer coined the term “alt-right” in 2008. As Nagle explains, “The alt-right is, to varying degrees, preoccupied with IQ, European demographics and civilization decline, cultural decadence, cultural Marxism, anti-egalitarianism and Islamification” (2017: 12). Closely related are the “Neoreactionaries”—anti-democratic bloggers Mencius Moldbug and philosopher Nick Land. They developed the influential concepts of the “the Cathedral”—which denotes what they see as the all-encompassing ideology of progressivism—and the “Dark Enlightenment,” a subversive term which rejects of the modern Enlightenment values of liberalism, progress, and democracy (Nagle 2017: 12–13).

Overlapping with the multiple layers of the online right is the anti-feminist subculture commonly referred to as the “manosphere.” Central to both is the concept of “the red pill”—a term borrowed from the movie *The Matrix*—in which taking the red pill means to wake up from the “lies

²² James Lindsay, Twitter Post, March 2, 2020, 8:31 a.m.

purportedly spread by feminists, mainstream media and multiculturalists” (Collins 2017). For anti-feminists, the red pill signifies waking up to the reality of societal misandry and sexual hierarchy. On Reddit’s r/TheRedPill forum, men discuss alpha (superior) and beta (inferior) males, false rape accusations, female-on-male violence, how to increase male “sexual market value,” and how to “game” women (Nagle 2017: 88). The alt-right extends the term to waking up to the reality of racial as well as sexual hierarchy and white supremacy. Red pill rhetoric has crossed over to mainstream conservatism after being picked up by high-profile media personalities such as Candace Owens.

Hartman identifies the countercultural embrace of Asian religions such as Buddhism as a major liberal threat to the Christian Right (2019: 14). What we see in the online culture wars, however, is the shifting of certain demographics, predominantly white men, from American convert Buddhism to the conservative side of the battle. They have explicitly embraced both the rhetoric of and key figures from the broad right-wing spectrum of the online culture wars. O’Brien, for instance, compares the “communist take-over” of Soto Zen to Weinstein’s crisis at Evergreen. Warner has retweeted and affirmed Lindsay on Twitter.²³ Rheume compares his #TheBuddhistRight with Peterson. Matthew, a Canadian Buddhist teacher, hosts a Medium blog titled “Practice Comes First: Buddhism, Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, and positive masculinity,” where he shares how he has combined the teachings of the red-pill manosphere, Peterson, and Buddhism (ur_immeasurable 2018). Dharmakirti names Moldbug as the person he took the alt-right red pill from.

Conclusion: Reactionary Modernism and Postmodern Conservative Buddhism

In *American Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Modernity*, Gleig argues that the multiple developments occurring across American convert Buddhism communities display characteristics associated with the postmodern, postcolonial, and postsecular and can no longer be contained in the framework of Buddhist modernism (2019a: 281–298). One such development is diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, which she sees as applying pressure to a number of core modernist characteristics—individualism, liberalism, and a supposedly “culture-free” Buddhism—and being marked by a postcolonial affirmation of difference, the collective, and cultural particularity (2019a: 173–175). How then should we situate the reactionary right-wing backlash to these initiatives?

In many ways, anti-social justice Buddhists can be seen as a modern Buddhist reaction and resistance to these postmodern and postcolonial forms of American Buddhism. We offer the category “reactionary Buddhist modernism” to describe these right-wing articulations of American convert Buddhism. By Buddhist modernism we refer to the fact that reactionary centrists like Warner and

²³ At one point, Warner was listed as a contributor on the New Discourses website and was also listed as a presenter at “Critical Social Justice in the Age of Subjectivism,” New Discourses Conference in Orlando, Florida October 22–24 2020. <https://newdiscourses.com/test-oct-con/> However, mention of both Warner as a New Discourses contributor and the conference have been removed from the Internet and Warner has publicly denied (on Twitter) being involved with New Discourses. It is unclear as to whether the contributor/conference information was ever correct or why the Warner/New Discourses contributor and conference pages appeared and disappeared on the Internet. One possibility is that it was an Internet prank on Warner. Another is that Warner changed his mind about being publicly associated with Lindsay.

O'Brien hold firm to modern apolitical and ahistorical renderings of Zen. We adopt the term reactionary from political theorist Corey Robin, who sees conservatism as a fundamentally reactionary movement, defining it as a “mode of counterrevolutionary practice” to preserve hierarchy and power (2011: 17). Focusing on the virtual landscape, we have demonstrated the different right-wing reactionary Buddhist arguments against marginalized Buddhist challenges to racial and gender hierarchies. Through such arguments, reactionary Buddhists attempt to preserve the status quo of whiteness and gender normativity within American convert Buddhist sanghas.

We place this reactionary American Buddhist modernism in a lineage of modern Buddhism that has naturalized, assimilated to, and perpetuated dominant and often interlocking power hierarchies of gender, race, and nationalism. Ryan Anningson (2017) shows that racial hierarchies were a key part of the formation of Buddhist modernism. In response to Western colonial claims that Asians were racially inferior to Europeans and that Buddhism was a less evolved religion than Christianity, American Theosophists and Asian Buddhist modernists subversively employed race sciences—“a broad term that encompasses a number of scientific theories from the early twentieth-century that equated racial characteristics to biology and therefore justified certain perceptions of human evolution, intelligence . . . [to] place Buddhism at the pinnacle of evolutionary development” (Anningson 2017: 51–52). They fashioned the historic Buddha as a racially superior Aryan, Buddhism as a superior “scientific” religion, and followers of the Buddhism as racially superior, often contrasting these with the less developed if not degenerate “Semitic” monotheistic religions.

Sri Lankan reformist Anagarika Dharmapala, for instance, claimed Sri Lanka as the island of the Aryan Sinhalese, tasked with preserving Buddhism in Sri Lanka, an island designated by the Buddha as the privileged site for his pure doctrine. While Dharmapala’s rhetoric was employed by the nativist movement of anti-colonial struggle, Sri Lanka has since witnessed intense violence among different ethno-religious groups in part rooted in claims of Sri Lankan Sinhalese Buddhist racial and moral superiority. Dharmapala’s racialized anti-Semitic articulations of Buddhism are echoed in Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka, which claims that Sinhalese Buddhists are the true preservers of the Dharma and is marked by gender hierarchy, and, more recently, Islamophobia (Gajaweera 2020).

Anningson shows that Japanese Buddhists also adopted the hierarchical system of race sciences to assert their own racial and spiritual superiority in defense of charges that Japanese Buddhism was a degenerate form of Buddhism. Influential Zen Buddhist modernist teachers such as D.T. Suzuki combined Japanese Buddhism and nationalism to justify Japanese expansion throughout Asia (Anningson 2017: 60–62). Of note here is the centrality of the masculine warrior figure of the samurai in Suzuki’s nationalist Zen (Benesch 2016). Brian Victoria (2006) has also written on the leading role Zen Buddhist modernizers played in the imperial Japanese military. He identifies Suzuki not only as a supporter of Japanese nationalism but as an anti-Semitic Nazi Party sympathizer (2013).²⁴

²⁴ It should be noted that Richard Jaffe (2014) has argued against Brian Victoria’s reading of D.T. Suzuki as an anti-Semitic Nazi sympathizer. He suggests that Suzuki’s nationalism was typical of his generation and should be treated more generously.

In the American context, the modern concept of the Buddha as an Aryan linked him racially and linguistically to Euro-Americans and helped fashion Buddhism as a scientific religion suitable for white converts. Joseph Cheah traces white supremacy in American convert Buddhism to this modernist racial articulation of Buddhism, which also rests on a distinction between an original “pure” canonical Buddhism and the latter cultural accretions of “superstitious” merit-making and ritual practices. Cheah traces how in the American context this resulted in the “two Buddhisms” typology, which positions white American convert Buddhists as practicing “real” Buddhism and Asian American heritage communities as practicing “cultural baggage” Buddhism (2011: 1–5; 59–60). Extending Cheah, Gleig explore how American Buddhists of Color have attempted to undo the whiteness that characterizes American convert Buddhist modernist communities (2019a, 2019b).

While we find reactionary Buddhist modernism a useful framework, we also see the backlash to DEI as exceeding the category of the modern. As sociologists of religion have traced, the postmodern is marked by two trends in religion (Heelas, Martin, and Morris 1998; Lyon 2000). One is the growth of deinstitutionalized religions that blurred the boundaries between the religious and secular. Another is the global growth of fundamentalist forms of religion, particularly Christianity and Islam (Emerson and Hartman 2006). These forms of fundamentalism blend religious and nationalist identities, valorize a largely reconstructed premodern religious past, and are marked by hierarchical gender roles. The development of Buddhist nationalism in South and Southeast Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, fits well into this category (Fuller 2018; Gajaweera 2020).

One useful model here is political scientist Matthew McManus’s “post-modern conservatism,” which is both a conservative reaction to the challenges of postmodernity and a distinct form of conservatism shaped by the conditions of postmodernity.²⁵ He sees post-modern conservatism primarily manifesting in nationalist, xenophobic politicians such as Donald Trump and Geert Wilders, but it is also visible in reactionary classical liberals such as Jordan Peterson (McManus 2020). Despite being hostile towards what they view as postmodernism and cultural Marxism, such figures actually share many characteristics of the postmodern, such as the adoption of “the rhetoric and symbolism of a reactionary identity” (McManus 2017). Postmodern conservatism is rooted in a hierarchical identity politics and a reverse victimization narrative. They associate with identities at the top of the social hierarchy—be it masculinity, whiteness or “the West”—and claim such identities are under attack by enemies ranging from feminists to Marxists, Black Lives Matter, or Islam. Affectively, postmodern conservatism is marked by a nostalgia for an imagined past and a sense of alienation and resentment at progressive and multicultural change. Postmodern conservatives are highly skilled in using media and technology to promote their political ideology (McManus 2020: 5).

We find the category of postmodern conservatism to best capture the rejection of Buddhist modernism and the reconstruction of a mythic heavily masculinized Aryan Buddhism in alt-right Buddhism. As Adeana McNicholl (2021) notes, alt-right Buddhism offers another form of Buddhism beyond modernity that is not politically left-leaning, that rejects progressivism and inclusion for

²⁵ Ann Gleig wishes to thank Eric Haines for introducing her to the work of Matthew McManus and his model of postmodern conservatism.

masculine militancy. While less amplified, we also see the identification with hierarchical identities—whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality—a concern for a modern reconstruction of “traditional” Buddhism, and the skillful use of media to promote their religio-political positions in the blogs of Warner, O’Brien, and Rheume. Hence, we conclude that just as racial justice and transgender inclusivity initiatives can be seen as the postcolonial extension of engaged Buddhist modernism, reactionary right-wing backlashes to them can be seen as a reaffirmation and postmodern extension of hierarchical gendered and racialized modernist forms of Buddhism.

References

- ADL Center on Extremism. 2018. “When Women Are the Enemy: The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy.” New York: Anti-Defamation League.
<https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/when-women-are-the-enemy-the-intersection-of-misogyny-and-white-supremacy>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Aikin, Scott F. 2019. “Deep Disagreement, the Dark Enlightenment, and the Rhetoric of the Red Pill.” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 36 (3): 420–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12331>.
- “AltBuddhism.” 2020. Forum. Reddit. <https://www.reddit.com/r/AltBuddhism/>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Angry Asian Buddhist* (blog). 2019. <http://www.angryasianbuddhist.com/>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Anningson, Ryan. 2017. “Once the Buddha Was an Aryan: Race Sciences and the Domestication of Buddhism in North.” *Journal of Religion & Culture* 27 (1): 51–70.
- Atwood, Haleigh. 2018. “Soto Zen Priests Discuss Diversity and Privilege at Biennial Gathering.” *Lion’s Roar*. <https://www.lionsroar.com/soto-zen-buddhist-association-conference-examines-diversity-and-privilege/>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Balkwill, Stephanie. 2020. “Is Buddhism Apolitical?” *Ten Thousand Things* (blog). <http://blog.shin-ibs.edu/is-buddhism-apolitical/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Benesch, Oleg. 2016. “Reconsidering Zen, Samurai, and the Martial Arts.” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 14 (17): 1–23.
- Bodhi, ed. 2016. *The Buddha’s Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*. The Teachings of the Buddha. Somerville, MA: Wisdom.
- “Brad Warner.” n.d. *New Discourses* (blog). <https://newdiscourses.com/author/bradwarner/>. Accessed December 6, 2020.
- Bodiford, William. 1996. “Zen and the Art of Religious Prejudice: Efforts to Reform a Tradition of Social Discrimination” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 23 1/2. 1–27.
- Brooks, Michael. 2020. *Against the Web*. Ridgefield: Zero Books.
- Buchanan, Patrick Joseph. 1992. “Patrick Joseph Buchanan, ‘Culture War Speech: Address to the Republican National Convention’ (17 August 1992).” *Voices of Democracy*.
<https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/buchanan-culture-war-speech-speech-text/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.

- Buddhadasa, Bhikkhu. 1993. *Dhammic Socialism*. Translated by Donald K Swearer. Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development.
- Burgis, Ben, Matthew McManus, Conrad Hamilton, and Marion Trejo. 2020. *Myth and Mayhem: A Leftist Critique of Jordan Peterson*. Ridgefield: Zero Books.
- Cheah, Joseph. 2011. *Race and Religion in American Buddhism: White Supremacy and Immigrant Adaptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Coleman, James William. 2002. *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Collins, Cory. 2017. "What Is the 'Alt-Right'?" *Teaching Tolerance*, Fall Issue. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2017/what-is-the-alt-right>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Cutts, Eijun Linda Ruth, Rinso Ed Sattizahn, Fu Schroeder, Brian McCaffrey, and Shinchi Linda Galijan. 2018. "Leadership Statement Regarding Edward Brown." *San Francisco Zen Center* (blog). <https://blogs.sfzc.org/blog/2018/10/11/leadership-statement-regarding-edward-brown/>. Accessed December 6, 2020.
- DeMaioNewton, Emily. 2020. "A Gender-Diverse Sangha." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/trans-buddhist-voices/>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Deveaux, Tynette, and Ajahn Amaro, 2016. "A response to critics of 'We've Been Here All Along,' from the Winter 2016 Buddhadharmā." *Lion's Roar*. <https://www.lionsroar.com/a-response-to-critics-of-weve-been-here-all-along-from-the-winter-2016-buddhadharma/>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Dharma Folk*. n.d. <https://dharmafolk.wordpress.com/>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Dharmakirti, Storm King, Kagyu, and Aura. 2019a. "This Podcast Respects U Wirathu." Mp3. Right-Wing Dharma Squads. Accessed September 7, 2020.
- Dharmakirti, Storm King, Kagyu, and Aura. 2019b. "Compassion." Mp3. Right-Wing Dharma Squads. Accessed September 7, 2020.
- Dharmakirti, Storm King, Kagyu, and Aura. 2019c. "Teachers." Mp3. Right-Wing Dharma Squads. Accessed September 7, 2020.
- Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner. 2011. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 12 (1). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589>.
- Emerson, Michael O., and David Hartman. 2006. "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism." *Annual Review of Sociology* 32 (1): 127–44. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.32.061604.123141>.
- Fischel, Anne, Zoltan Grossman and Lin Nelson (2017). "Another Side of the Evergreen Story," *Huffpost*. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/evergreen-state-college-another-side_b_598cd293e4b090964295e8fc. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Franz, Koun, Norman Fischer, and Greg Snyder. 2018. "Statement of Recognition and Repentance." Soto Zen Buddhist Association. <http://szba.org/wp-content/uploads/SZBA-Statement-of-Recognition-and-Repentance.pdf>. Accessed December 6, 2020.
- Fuller, Paul. 2021. *An Introduction to Engaged Buddhism*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

- Fuller, Paul. 2018. "The Narratives of Ethnocentric Buddhist Identity." *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religion (JBASR)* 20 (September): 19–44.
<https://doi.org/10.18792/jbasr.v20i0.25>.
- Gajaweera, Nalika. 2020. "The Mothers of the Righteous Society: Lay Buddhist Women as Agents of the Sinhala Nationalist Imaginary." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 21 (November): 187–204.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/4147502>.
- George, Jim, and Kim Huynh, eds. 2009. *The Culture Wars: Australian and American Politics in the 21st Century*. South Yarra, Vic: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gleig, Ann. 2019a. *American Dharma: Buddhism beyond Modernity*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gleig, Ann. 2019b. "Undoing Whiteness in American Buddhist Modernism: Critical, Collective, and Contextual Turns." In *Buddhism and Whiteness*, edited by George Yancy and Emily McRae, 21–42. London: Lexington Books.
- Gleig 2020. "Buddhists and Racial Justice: A History." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*.
<https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/buddhists-racial-justice/>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Halifax, Roshi Joan. 2020. "Good Trouble in Buddhism - Part 1." *Upaya Zen Center* (blog).
<https://www.upaya.org/2020/09/good-trouble-in-buddhism-part-1/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Han, Chenxing. 2021. *Be the Refuge: Raising the Voices of Asian American Buddhists*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Hardcore Zen. 2018. *Zen Safe Spaces*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P4dHJkde8s>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Hartman, Andrew. 2019. *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hase, Craig Nicholas, James C. Meadows, and Stephanie L. Budge. 2019. "Inclusion and Exclusion in the White Space: An Investigation of the Experiences of People of Color in a Primarily White American Meditation Community." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 20: 1–18.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3238227>.
- Hatch, Kaitlyn. 2020. "Expressions of Whiteness in Buddhism." *Tibetan Buddhism—Struggling With Diffi-Cult Issues* (blog). July 24, 2020. <https://buddhism-controversy-blog.com/2020/07/24/expressions-of-whiteness-in-buddhism/>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Heelas, Paul, David Martin, and Paul Morris, eds. 1998. *Religion, Modernity, and Postmodernity*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers.
- Herf, Jeffrey. 2003. *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hine, Christine. 2017. "Ethnographies of Online Communities and Social Media: Modes, Varieties, Affordances." In *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods*, Nigel Fielding, Raymond M Lee, and Grant Blank, eds. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

- Huertas, Aaron. 2018. "We Need to Talk About Reactionary Centrists." Medium.
<https://medium.com/s/story/we-need-to-talk-about-reactionary-centrists-f0e6f8c4d58>.
 Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Hsu, Funie. 2016. "We've Been Here All Along." *Buddhadharma*. Winter: 24–31. Republished in *Lion's Roar*, May 17, 2017. <https://www.lionsroar.com/weve-been-here-all-along/>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Jaffe, Richard M. 2014. "Introduction." In *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki*, Volume 1 by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, edited by Richard M. Jaffe. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Kachru, Sonam. 2019. "Ratnakīrti and the Extent of Inner Space: An Essay on Yogācāra and the Threat of Genuine Solipsism," *Sophia* 58: 61–83.
- Kozinets, Robert V. 1998. "On Netnography: Initial Reflections on Consumer Research Investigations of Cyberculture." In *NA- Advances in Consumer Research*, 25: 336–371. Association for Consumer Research.
- Krempasky, Chance, Audrey Renson, and Finn Schubert. 2014. "Developing Trans* Competence: A Guide for Meditation and Retreat Centers." *Trans* Buddhists*. *Developing Trans* Competence in Buddhism* (blog). <https://transbuddhists.org/retreat-guide/about-the-guide/>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Lewis, Becca, and Alice Marwick. 2017. "Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online." *Data & Society*. <https://datasociety.net/library/media-manipulation-and-disinfo-online/>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Lewis, Rebecca, and Alice Marwick. 2017. "Taking the Red Pill: Ideological Motivations for Spreading Online Disinformation." In *Understanding and Addressing the Disinformation Ecosystem*, Philadelphia, December 15–16, 2017, 18–22. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School for Communication.
- Limberg, Peter N, and Conor Barnes. 2018. "The Memetic Tribes Of Culture War 2.0." *The Stoa* (blog). <https://medium.com/s/world-wide-wtf/memetic-tribes-and-culture-war-2-0-14705c43f6bb>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Lindsay, James. n.d. "About New Discourses." *New Discourses* (blog). <https://newdiscourses.com/about/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Lyon, David, 2000. *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. London: Polity Press.
- Manders, Kevin, and Elizabeth Marston, eds. 2019. *Transcending: Trans Buddhist Voices*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Manuel, Zenju Earthlyn. 2015. *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening through Race, Sexuality, and Gender*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- McClernan, Nancy. 2020. "James Lindsay and His Allies - More Shameless IDW Hypocrisy." *Pinkerite* (blog). <https://www.pinkerite.com/2020/08/james-lindsay-and-his-allies-more.html>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- McCormack, Peter. 2019. "What Happened at Evergreen College." *Defiance*. <https://www.defiance.news/podcast/what-happened-at-evergreen-college-bret-weinstein>. Accessed December 3, 2020.

- McGuire, Beverley Foulks. 2018. "The Way of the Blogisattva: Buddhist Blogs on the Web." In *Buddhism, the Internet, and Digital Media: The Pixel in the Lotus*, Gregory Price Grieve and Daniel M. Veidlinger, eds. London and New York: Routledge.
- McMahan, David L. 2008. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McManus, Matt. 2017. "Post-Modern Conservatism." The Philosophical Salon. <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/post-modern-conservatism/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- McManus, Matthew. 2020. *What Is Post-Modern Conservatism*. Ridgefield: Zero Books.
- McNicholl, Adeana. 2021. "Buddhism and Race in the United States," *Religion Compass* (forthcoming).
- Mervosh, Sarah. 2019. "Viral Video Shows Boys in 'Make America Great Again' Hats Surrounding Native Elder." *The New York Times*. US Section. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/19/us/covington-catholic-high-school-nathan-phillips.html>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Mervosh, Sarah, and Emily S. Rueb. 2019. "Fuller Picture Emerges of Viral Video of Native American Man and Catholic Students." *The New York Times*. US Section. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/20/us/nathan-phillips-covington.html>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Mitchell, Scott. 2016. *Buddhism in America: Global Religion, Local Contexts*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Mohler, Albert. 2020. "Critical Theory and the Cynical Transformation of Society: A Conversation with James Lindsay." Albert Mohler: Thinking in Public. <https://albertmohler.com/2020/09/02/james-lindsay>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Mounk, Yascha. 2018. "What an Audacious Hoax Reveals About Academia." *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/10/new-sokal-hoax/572212/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Nagle, Angela. 2017. *Kill All Normies: The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the Alt-Right and Trump*. Washington: Zero Books.
- Nattier, Jan. 1997. "Buddhism Comes to Main Street." *The Wilson Quarterly* 21 (2): 72–80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40259451>.
- O'Brien, Titus. 2018a. "If You Meet the Buddha On the Road, Protest His Privilege: Zen Gets Radical." *Dog Hair in My Tea* (blog). No longer available. <https://doghairinmytea.com/2018/05/02/if-you-meet-the-buddha-on-the-road-protest-his-privilege/>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- O'Brien, Titus. 2018b. "Just Sitting Is the Only Point." *Valley Dragon Zen Sangha* (blog). <https://web.archive.org/web/20181103204847/https://valleydragon.org/2018/10/01/just-sitting-is-the-only-point/>. Accessed December 6, 2020.
- Paññobhāsa, Bhikkhu. 2019. "Liberal Western Buddhism as a White Elitist Movement." *Politically Incorrect Dharma* (blog). <http://politicallyincorrectdharma.blogspot.com/2019/08/liberal-western-buddhism-as-white.html>. Accessed December 3, 2020.

- Pluckrose, Helen, and James Lindsay. 2020. *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody*. First Edition. Durham: Pitchstone Publishing.
- Prebish, Charles S. 1999. *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Prueitt, Catherine. 2018. “Karmic Imprints, Exclusion, and the Creation of the Worlds of Conventional Experience in Dharmakīrti’s Thought,” *Sophia* 57: 313–335.
- Queen, Christopher S., Charles S. Prebish, and Damien Keown, eds. 2003. *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*. Critical Studies in Buddhism. New York: Routledge.
- Rabinowitz, Aaron, and GW Rodriguez. n.d. “Reviewing Cynical Theories with Sam Hoadley-Brill.” Embrace the Void. <https://voidpod.com/podcasts>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Reynolds, David (Paññobhāsa), and Brian Ruhe. 2020. *On the Phenomenon of Right-Wing Western Buddhism*. YouTube Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmj8aXmvXrk>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Rheaume, Jason Manu. 2020. “Why the Right.” Facebook. June 22, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/manu.jason.rheaume/posts/10222307552507207>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Robin, Corey. 2011. *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rufo, Christopher F. 2020. “President Signs Executive Order Abolishing Critical Race Theory.” Blog. *Christopher F. Rufo* (blog). September 22, 2020. <https://christopherrufo.com/president-signs-executive-order-abolishing-critical-race-theory/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Ruhe, Brian. 2019. “Introducing Brian Ruhe.” Forum. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/AltBuddhism/comments/ba0zg7/introducing_brian_ruhe/. Accessed December 6, 2020.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2006. “The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology.” In *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, H. Moore and T. Sanders, eds. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; 506–512.
- Sedgwick, Mark J, ed. 2019. *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Senauke, Hozan Alan. 2020. “From Hearts to Hearts: An Interview with Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni.” *Buddhistdoor Global*. <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/from-hearts-to-hearts-an-interview-with-ven-dhammananda-bhikkhuni>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Sharf, Robert H. 1993. “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism.” *History of Religions* 33 (1): 1–43.
- Sharpe, Matthew. 2020. “Is ‘cultural Marxism’ Really Taking over Universities? I Crunched Some Numbers to Find Out.” *The Conversation*. September 7, 2020. <http://theconversation.com/is-cultural-marxism-really-taking-over-universities-i-crunched-some-numbers-to-find-out-139654>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Smith, Thomas. 2020. “James Lindsay’s ‘New Discourses’ Funded By Far Right Christian Nationalist.” Mp3. *Serious Inquiries Only*.

- Sobolewska, Maria, and Robert Ford. 2019. "British Culture Wars? Brexit and the Future Politics of Immigration and Ethnic Diversity." *The Political Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12646>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- "Sovereign Nations." n.d. Sovereign Nations. <https://sovereignnations.com/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- "Speaking Truth To Social Justice Conference." n.d. Sovereign Nations Events. <https://events.sovereignnations.com/truth-social-justice-conference/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Staudenmaier, Peter. 2020. "Racial Ideology between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Julius Evola and the Aryan Myth, 1933–43." *Journal of Contemporary History* 55 (3): 473–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009419855428>.
- Stroop, Chrissy. 2021. "Stop Trying to Save Jesus: 'Fundamentalism' Reinforces the Problem of Christian Supremacy," *Religion Dispatches*. <https://religiondispatches.org/stop-trying-to-save-jesus-fundamentalism-reinforces-the-problem-of-christian-supremacism/>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- The Economist*. 2019. "Culture Wars, Canadian-Style." <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2019/07/25/culture-wars-canadian-style>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Tomalin, Emma, Caroline Starkey, and Anna Halafoff. 2015. "Cyber Sisters: Buddhist Women's Online Activism and Practice." *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion* 6: 11.13.
- Tzohar, Roy. 2019. "The Buddhist Philosophical Conception of Intersubjectivity: an Introduction." *Sophia* 58: 57–60.
- ur_immeasurable. 2018. *Practice Comes First: Buddhism, Dr. Jordan B. Peterson and Positive Masculinity* (blog). Medium. <https://medium.com/practicecomesfirst>. Accessed December 6, 2020.
- Victoria, Brian. 2013. "D.T. Suzuki, Zen and the Nazis." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 11 (43): 1–22.
- Victoria, Brian. 2006. *Zen at War*. Second Edition. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield
- Vitorino, Martin. 2019. "First Retreat for the Transgender Community." InsightLA. <https://insightla.org/sharing-trans-joy-at-the-first-residential-retreat-for-the-transgender-and-gender-expansive-community/>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Walker, Ben. 2020. "Is the UK in the Clutches of a Culture War?" *New Statesman*. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/polling/2020/11/uk-clutches-culture-war>. Accessed on February 12, 2021.
- Wallace, Chris. 2019. "After Years of Vicious Culture Wars, Hope May yet Triumph over Hate in Australian Politics." *The Conversation*. <http://theconversation.com/after-years-of-vicious-culture-wars-hope-may-yet-triumph-over-hate-in-australian-politics-110887>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
- Warner, Brad. 2018a. *Zen Safe Spaces*. YouTube Video. Hardcore Zen. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P4dHJkde8s>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Warner, Brad. 2018b. "Retreating from Judge Kavanaugh." *Hardcore Zen* (blog). 2018. <http://hardcorezen.info/retreating-from-judge-kavanaugh/6008>. Accessed November 29, 2020

- Warner, Brad. 2018c. "Zentertainment Weakly." *Hardcore Zen* (blog). 2018.
<http://hardcorezen.info/zentertainment-weakly/6037>. Accessed November 29, 2020.
- Warner, Brad. 2018d. "North American Soto Zen Buddhism Is Apparently Now a Far Left Marxist Political Movement." Facebook.
<https://www.facebook.com/brad.warner.zen/posts/10155661405140969>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Warner, Brad. 2018e. "Inclusivity in Zen." *Hardcore Zen* (blog). October 3, 2018.
<http://hardcorezen.info/inclusivity-in-zen/6012>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Warner, Brad. 2018f. "Challenging Cherished Beliefs," *Hardcore Zen* (blog)
<http://hardcorezen.info/challenging-cherished-beliefs/6016>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Warner, Brad. 2019a. "Collective Karma?" *Hardcore Zen* (blog). <http://hardcorezen.info/collective-karma/6217>. Accessed December 6, 2020.
- Warner, Brad. 2019b. "MAGA Kid and American Buddhism." *Hardcore Zen* (blog).
<http://hardcorezen.info/maga-kid-and-american-buddhism/6139>. Accessed December 6, 2020.
- Warner, Brad. 2019c. "Zen So White," *Hardcore Zen* (blog). <http://hardcorezen.info/zen-so-white/6236>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Warner, Brad. 2019d. "Is American Buddhism Really 'Too White?'" *Hardcore Zen* (blog).
<http://hardcorezen.info/is-american-buddhism-really-too-white/6520>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Warner, Brad. 2019e. "Jussie Smollet, Karma, Victimhood and Gill Women." *Hardcore Zen* (video) February 20, 2019. No Longer Available.
- Watts, Jonathan S., ed. 2009. *Rethinking Karma: The Dharma of Social Justice*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Weinstein, Bret. 2018. *Bret Weinstein Testifies to Congress on The Evergreen State College Riots, Free Speech & Safe Spaces*. YouTube Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRIKJCKWla4>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Weiss, Bari. 2018. "Meet the Renegades of the Intellectual Dark Web." *The New York Times*. Opinion.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/opinion/intellectual-dark-web.html>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- "What the 'Grievance Studies' Hoax Means." 2018. *Chronicle of Higher Education*.
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/what-the-grievance-studies-hoax-means/>. Accessed December 3, 2020.
- Williams, Duncan Ryūken. 2005. *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Yancy, George, and Emily McRae, eds. 2019. *Buddhism and Whiteness: Critical Reflections*. Philosophy of Race. Lanham: Lexington Books.