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From New York Times' opinion, this is the Ezra Klein Show.

Hey it is Ezra.

I am on book leave, but our guest this week is my colleague, The Times' opinion columnist David French, whose work I have learned a ton from and whose just way of comporting himself in public life I've often quite admired.

He began his career as a lawyer, he has deployed with the U.S. military, he's the author of many books including *Divided We Fall*, *America's Secession Threat* and *How to Restore Our Nation*. And I'm excited to see what he does here behind the mic.

I hope you enjoy it too.

One more thing today.

So I am doing the annual Jefferson Memorial Lecture for UC Berkeley, which I'm excited about as a kid who grew up in California, idolizing and then getting repeatedly rejected by UC Berkeley when I applied there.

And it's going to be the first time I try to work through the ideas of the book in public with an audience, in conversation with someone else who knows what they're talking about on these issues, Amy Lerman in this case.

And if you'd like to join and hear what I've been thinking about, you can.

At first glance, the U.S. Senator J.D. Vance, Catholic integralists and bigoted right wing influencers might not be so obviously connected, but they've all been associated with the New Right, an umbrella term for a range of subcultures and schools of thought that are generally critical of traditional conservatism and embrace illiberalism.

Today I want to help you understand the New Right, both the ideological movement emerging in the conservative establishment and the fringier, extremely online subculture of edge lording that seems to loom over it.

I've called the men who occupy the space, and yes, it's mostly men, the lost boys of the American right.

They've made headlines for openly flirting with white supremacy, anti-Semitism, ethno-nationalism and nakedly authoritarian politics.

And to me, they represent one of the strangest and most troubling aspects of contemporary politics.

Why are these voices emerging?

What is their worldview?

How dangerous are they?

To help answer these questions, I've turned to Stephanie Slade, a senior editor at Reason.

I can't think of anyone who's done more original reporting on the New Right than Stephanie.

She's been to their conferences, she's read their books, and she knows their culture.

Stephanie is going to be our guide into a dark world.

As always, the show's email is ezraclineshow at nytimes.com.

Stephanie, welcome to the Ezra Klein Show.

Thank you so much for having me on.

So Stephanie, we're here to talk about the New Right.

Not just to talk about the New Right ideologically, but also to talk about the New Right culturally and why it matters.

How, Stephanie, would you define what the New Right is?

And let's just start ideologically, ideologically, what is the New Right?

In American politics, we have a tendency to mostly, first and foremost, think about the left versus right distinction.

But what we're talking about when we talk about the New Right is a sort of different axis, AXIS, which would be the liberal versus illiberal distinction.

And of course, it runs across both the left and the right.

You could have four quadrants.

And on the right, you can have a sort of liberal conservative or liberal right, which strikes some people as an oxymoron, but it's not.

It's classical liberalism is sort of what you think of when you think of Reagan-Skyler, old school, fusionist conservatism, a commitment to limited government and individual rights and rule of law.

And then there's this schism that's opened up, I call it the liberalism schism.

And on the far side, you have the illiberal right.

And these are folks who kind of think that that stuff is pretty outdated or maybe ideologically and philosophically wrong and always was.

And so they reject the idea of limited government and individual liberty to a greater or lesser extent.

And part of this as well is that the distinction here is that on the sort of classically liberal side, there's a pretty strong continuing commitment to what might be considered like the Martin Luther King Jr. approach to race relations, which says, what should matter is the content of your character and not the color of your skin.

But on the far side of that divide, there is more willingness to say, no, in fact, identity groups matter, ethnicity matters, and maybe in some cases to flirt with the idea that certain races or identity subgroups are superior to others or that we should care about the purity or lack thereof of our society.

That stuff is happening on the far side of that schism.

And the new right would be made up of a whole bunch of different sort of factions and different groups and individuals and currents.

And they're not all synonymous with each other, and they don't even always all play nicely with each other.

So I think that the new right is an umbrella term that contains a whole bunch of different, I mean, they are legion, as you might say.

So who would be the politicians?

Again, let's talk sort of ideology.

Who would be the politicians of the new right?

The people, if they're going to look and they're going to say, OK, these are the people perfectly or imperfectly who best embody what we're trying to do in the body politic.

I think there are three members of the US Senate who fall into this category.

First and foremost would be J.D. Vance, brand new senator in his first term, who ran explicitly to be a part of the vanguard in the face of the new right.

And he says things like, my voters hate the right people.

And there is no longer a distinction between the public sector and the private sector in America.

He's a militant and it's pretty radical.

It's quite populist.

And he's very explicit about this.

He wanted to be the face of the new right.

I think Josh Hawley is another one.

And we all remember the famous image of him raising his fist on January 6th before the actual insurrection activities began.

But he cares a lot less about things like individual liberty and free markets than old-school Reaganite conservatives would.

And then another person who's kind of gone on a journey would be Marco Rubio, who I think started definitely as much more of a Reaganite, fusionist, old-school,

classically liberal conservative, but has adopted what he calls common good conservatism.

And this is definitely part of the lingo of the new right, which is freedom is not enough.

Individual liberty free markets are not enough.

We need, again, muscular government that's willing to pursue our goals as conservatives, including potentially through interventions into the marketplace that conservatives in the past have been skeptical of.

And in some cases in the social sphere, a willingness to use the power of the state to sort of impose virtue on people or forcibly reorient society to the common good as they understand it.

And then in the presidential race, probably the paradigmatic example of the new right would be Ron DeSantis.

Yeah, Ron DeSantis is interesting because he is a hybrid of the two.

And in many ways he came up as very much a free market guy, right?

Yeah.

A limited government guy.

But in the last few years, he has absolutely adopted the rhetoric of the culture warrior.

He's clearly responding to the influence of the new right.

And again, when it comes, if you're thinking about what is a paradigmatic example of willing to use state power to prosecute the culture war, to reward our friends and punish our enemies, as they might say, DeSantis going after Disney would be the perfect example.

Right.

So DeSantis, all Disney did was essentially raise its voice in opposition to Florida state laws that were restricting education on sexual orientation and gender identity in K-12 schools. Disney objects to that.

And then Ron DeSantis takes strong and decisive action against Disney, eliminating an improvement district of state entity that had been built around sort of the Disney property, then replacing it with a new state entity who then take action against Disney on the basis of trying to essentially punish Disney for its more progressive ideas.

Would you say that of the sort of the political figures, DeSantis has been most successful at actually translating the new right vision into actual policy as compared to a JD Vance or a Josh Hawley or a Marco Rubio who really don't have policy wins to point to.

But DeSantis actually has concrete policies that look like what the new right wants.

Yeah, that's a fair to say.

It's easier to do when you're the governor of a state.

You have more leeway to implement your will.

And in the past, that's just not been a thing that most Republican governors have said they wanted to do or an agenda that they have pursued of again, exercising their will and imposing their will on their state.

But that is something that DeSantis has been very clear that he sees no problem with.

And I think in the Disney case, to be clear, this is problematic from a classically liberal perspective for two reasons, sort of in two dimensions.

One is that it's an intervention in the marketplace.

It's saying the state should be able to tell businesses how they run, what views they're allowed to express, and so on and so forth.

So it's a challenge to the, again, the old fashioned idea that Republicans are pro free market or pro business even.

But I think the much more disturbing part of this, and of course you've done amazing work elucidating why this is, is that it's a challenge or a violation of the rule of law

by using the power of the state to enact retribution against a private entity,

whether an individual person or private business or whatever it may be.

When the government uses power to punish somebody retributively for their political speech, that is a true violation of the rule of law, as far as I'm concerned.

So I'm going to read something that you wrote, or actually you read a quote that you quoted in a piece that you wrote.

And this is when in 2022, you went to NatCon 3, the sort of the convention for national conservatives, and there was a speech, a segment that you highlighted.

Here's the key language.

The institutional left does not intend to leave anything of the old Republic behind for us to salvage.

Constitutionalism, scientific inquiry, individual liberty, civil society,

volunteerism, patriotism, parental authority, free expression, free enterprise, religious pluralism, cultural diversity, they're coming for everything.

So national conservatism must come for them.

I think that that's one of the best distillations of sort of that view of the world that I've read, and it seems to cut across all of the strands of national conservatism or the new right, whether it's Catholic integralism or national conservatism.

It is this idea of wielding the power of the state in a punitive way, not just in a way that's advancing a particular set of policies, but also in a way that's designed to destroy

political opponents, to end their influence in American life.

Is that a fair summary?

Yes, and so that's why I have tried to coin the term will to power conservatism as an alternative to common good conservatism, which I think is pretty self-serving and obviously doesn't tell us anything, because of course, I believe in the common good very much as well.

We have different ideas about how to go about pursuing the common good.

What differentiates us is that they have that will to power.

They want power and they want to wield it to destroy their enemies and to reward their friends.

And that phrase, to use power to reward friends and punish enemies is an explicit quote from that conference and from some of these self-identifying national conservatives.

They say that that's what they're for, but I would draw something else out from the excerpt from the speech that you were just mentioning, which is really important, I think, to understanding what's going on here, which is that it is reactionary.

It is a reaction against what they perceive as egregious violations of the rule of law and of classical liberalism from the left.

So they say the left is not abiding by the bargain that we had where we don't try to destroy you and you don't try to destroy us and we coexist peacefully.

The left is unwilling to play by those rules, and so we must respond in kind.

Because they have kind of a point in some cases, they're not completely imagining that.

It means that they are able to hold their heads up high and believe that they have the moral high ground, while even as they succumb or give in to their temptations to use power in this way.

Yeah, I think the free speech arena is a good place to locate some of these differences.

So for example, I litigated First Amendment cases for most of my career.

I've only been a journalist for only eight years and I was a litigator for more than 20.

So I'm dating myself right now.

But one thing that I litigated for more than 20 years were university speech codes.

In other words, universities were enacting policies that were designed to sort of cleanse the university space from so-called hate speech.

But these speech codes have been struck down in court repeatedly.

And it has seemed to me that that First Amendment context has been where it's most acute, whereas the classical liberal defense to an illiberal speech code was open up the marketplace of ideas. The new right defense to a speech code is, no, no, no, our speech code instead of your speech code. So that would be, for example, the Ron DeSantis Stop Woke Act, which limits speech even in higher education, classroom speech in higher education regarding race, for example.

Or in many of these states where you've seen bans on, for example, drag queen events or bans on events related to drag queens, that, no, no, we're going to use the power of the state to target expression that we don't like. It seems to be as a way of showing the different ways that state power should be exercised. Yeah. And they openly explicitly reject

liberal neutrality. So they would say, this idea that we can have a state that just calls balls and strikes and doesn't throw its weight behind one side or the other, that that's a fantasy, that it never happens that way in practice, what really happens is that the state is constantly throwing its weight behind the left. This is the story they tell themselves. And so we should stop even aspiring to any kind of neutrality or any kind of impartial adjudication by the state and say, nope, we're going to use that power the way we want to use that power to

impose our will against them. Okay. So that's the ideology. It's a very state-centric ideology it's designed to exercise state power on behalf of right-wing ideas with the goal to ultimately eradicate or dominate your opposition. But the cultural part of it to me, Stephanie, is almost more salient. The way in which the new right interacts with its ideological competitors, the way in which the new right interacts with each other really gives a flavor for sort of the kind of people that they want exercising power. So if you're talking about pulling more power into human beings in government, it becomes quite fair to ask, okay, well, who are these human beings? What is the culture of this movement that wants to exercise so much power? I find that there's insufficient attention paid to the culture. You've been in that con three, you have been reading these folks for years and years. How would you sort of sum up the culture of the new right? In a word, angry, aggrieved, right? I want to go back to something I said, which is that there are a whole bunch of different factions and currents that are sort of coexisting under the banner of the new right. And so actually the folks on stage at the National Conservatism Conference, if you can believe it, are the most respectable faces of this movement. What's happening in the shadows and mostly online

is many of the same themes, but amped up on steroids and dialed up to maximum inflammatory-ness, right? And so it depends a little where you're looking. If you're looking at where the self-proclaimed public intellectuals of the new right and the NatCon movement are and what they're saying, you're going to see one thing. And if you go to 4chan or even, you know, corners of Twitter, you're going to see something that's similar, but again, worse. So it depends a little about which part of the culture you're looking at, but they're angry. They, again, they feel like what characterizes the Reaganite conservative consensus or right of, you know, classically liberal conservatism was weakness and an unwilling to treat politics for what it is, which is to borrow a phrase, war and enmity. And so they just think that those of us sort of on the other side of the divide are weak and unwilling to see reality for what it is. And so it's angry and it's militant and it's extremely self-consciously and sometimes comically, almost in a caricatured sense, masculine. Right. Okay, we're going to drill down on that for a minute, but I want to talk about the anger for a moment. The anger that I have seen isn't just an ideological anger. In other words, it's not just I'm angry about ideas and sort of angry that this idea is still advanced and I believe doesn't work. They're angry at people. They're very angry at individual conservatives. So for example, there was an essay written several years ago called Against David Frenchism. So not just sort of against classical liberalism, but against very specifically me and my brand of classical liberalism in it, that essay went viral and it turned into a debate in Catholic university that got pretty heated. It's also very personal. And so here's the question that I've long had. Part of this feels like a legitimate intellectual exercise. In other words, the role of the state in a large, diverse, multi-ethnic society is a matter for debate. The extent and the scope of the First Amendment is certainly a matter for debate. And we can have good faith debates about this all day long. But what's happening in the new right is it seems to be taking place against the backdrop of personal animosity. And what I am having difficulty parsing out is how much of the personal animosity is driven by ideology and how much of it is driven by quite literally a desire to sort of tear down one set of people and stand in their place. In other words, this is a combination of personal ambition and ideological enmity. And it strikes me that there's a lot of very personal beef that is attached to this ideology. Yeah, it's tribal for sure. And so an example, this is a little bit less personal. I haven't had anybody right against Stephanie

Slatism yet. But what you saw in the second half of the 20th century was the idea that in order for conservatives to succeed, you have to build a big tent, right? Bring a bunch of people under the same tent and come together and create some sort of a functioning coalition. That is definitely not the approach here. Instead, it's like, if you speak out against us on even one thing ever, you are the enemy. Even if you are actually quite close to us ideologically, if you don't pledge allegiance to us and to our tribe, you are just as much the enemy as the far left is. And so somebody coming at this from the libertarian camp, I definitely see that they perceive me as an enemy because I am consciously attempting to stand in the way of their desire to use power against the left. Not because I agree with the left, but because I disagree with using power in that way. But so I'm seen as an enemy. And so they have no compunction, they have no sense of like, let's build a coalition or let's get ahead by making friends. It's much more about purity in tribal allegiance. All right, now let's talk about masculinity because I'm so glad you brought that up. That is a pervasive theme here. So it is not just that our ideology is subdued, they would say, not just that their ideology is more superior to progressive ideologies or classical liberalism to all the competitors. They also make some very specific claims about the masculinity of their views. In other words, that the movement, both as an ideological and cultural matter, is an authentic expression of what real masculinity is. And it seems like a largely male dominated space. Nat Khan doesn't strike me as nearly as gender diverse as even CPAC, for example. What are you seeing as you're looking at this phenomenon? Because it has been an absolute, I'm not going to say undercurrent, it's often the main current.

I think it's absolutely right. And it's even more heightened if you move again off the stage at Nat Khan where they've made at least some effort to at least showcase diversity or give the perception of diversity. And if you go into these online spaces, which is where most of the ferment is actually happening, it's overwhelmingly male. It's young men on the right that we're talking about here. Overwhelming. There are very few women. There are few and far between who are seduced by these ideas. On the other hand, even if we were to take a step back and just talk about the Trump phenomenon, which of course was both men and women who lined up behind Donald Trump and

who swept him into office in 2016, if you were to ask them why they supported him, why line up behind Donald Trump, why is he your man? And if you expected them to give some sort of an ideologically

coherent answer, you would be disappointed. The answer was he fights, right? That is the way that they would characterize what he has that other people don't is he fights. So that's kind of the theme here.

Hi, I'm Tracy Mumford. I'm an audio producer at the New York Times. The New York Times has reporters all over the world covering all the big stories. And we are always trying to figure out new ways to bring those stories to you. That's where our show, The Headlines, comes in. The headlines brings you three top stories every weekday morning, all in 10 minutes or less.

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So that's actually a perfect segue. So you have a lot of personal animosity.

You have a lot of commitment to this ideology as a matter of masculinity. So this is going deep into identity. And then let's bring up the race angle of this. And this is where you're going to start to see where a lot of this starts to get really, really grim. And what you've begun to see is a lot of people online dabbling in explicitly anti-Semitic language, dabbling in anti-Semitic dog whistles, sometimes not that dog whistly, sometimes just like referee whistly, very loud.

So you see an anti-Semitic strain. You've seen a strain talking about the virtue of ethnicity, of defending particular ethnicities. You'll see things, for example, like Charlie

Kirk tweeting, for example, about how great it is to be white. And you see this real racialization of the movement. You hit on a word reactionary, reactionary. And whatever you see the left latch onto as an issue, the new right is going to latch onto in sort of an equal and opposite way.

And one of the ways we've seen this is in the matter of race. As the left gets more anti-racist, there seems to be a pull in parts of the new right to flirt with, if not jump into outright racism, often it appears to be as a troll or a troll that turns genuine. What's going on?

I think there's two parts of this. One is the more intellectual part of it. And in this case,

I don't mean that as a compliment. And the other part is the more populist groundswell component of this. On the intellectual side, there are people who, and they coin terms like race realism and human biodiversity, and they're making a case for why in some cases, in the most extreme cases, for why some races are superior to others. And they want to call upon race and IQ science, and they want to compare crime trends, and they want to make build an intellectual case for why we ought to care about keeping America pure in some sense, racially pure in some sense. And then that trickles down, of course, into their policy preferences of low or no immigration and very aggressive policing in inner cities, you know, in black communities and that sort of thing. That is actually the more intellectual, it's probably

actually the more disturbing part. But that is the part that is where they're attempting to put a veneer of science on top of what they're doing. I think there is this other thing, which is a little closer to what you were talking about, which is that there's just a lot of people out

there who did not start out caring about this. If anything, they came up again in that paradigm of ideally races irrelevant. We ought to care about the content of your character and not the color of your skin, that that being the ideal that we are striving towards in America, and that that's a worthy ideal. I think most people, even the vast majority of people on the right of center,

start there. But as it seems like identity becomes the only thing that the left wants to talk about, and as they tend to approach, the left is seen as approaching this in a sort of zero-sum way,

where advances or achievements on behalf of previously marginalized groups come at the expense of the status of other groups, then it heightens the salience of those identity characteristics, and it creates a backlash. So there's a lot of people that I think they're not reading the race and IQ stuff. They're not reading the literature on this and putting together an intellectual case for racism. They're just saying race is becoming more salient in our politics. The other side is injecting race into our politics, and so we are going to react in the natural way, which is to think more about race as an important part of our identities as well. I think it's somewhat of a natural backlash that's happening, which isn't a defense of it, but I think that the bigger phenomenon here actually is that sort of stuff that's bubbling up from the bottom as a reaction

against among the grassroots, as opposed to the people who are reading these blog posts and doing the intellectual stuff. However, the intellectual stuff has now come out from the shadows recently, and that is disturbing. The fact that these folks feel that they can talk openly about this and that people who have dabbled in this stuff are finding their ways into positions of influence in our mainstream politics, that's the thing that has changed.

Yeah, and then you also add on to one final layer, which is actually taking delight in the anger or misery of your enemies. So you're going to enjoy, if you're a member of the new right on this culture, when you make people angry. So you're going to want to press boundaries, you're going to want to go a little further than you're, quote, supposed to go. If you're pushing the discourse to the edge and beyond, if you are advocating ideas that were previously considered to be unspeakable, that that is what they would call based. It demonstrates that you don't care what people think of you. You have the strength, you have the strength of will, etc. That is what sort of this dynamic that says we're actually trying to hurt your feelings for lack of better term. We're actually trying to make you angry as part of this culture. Yeah, it's transgressiveness as the source of social capital. And it's especially the case, again, in these online communities. So to the extent that we're focusing on this young men online, which is aware a lot of this stuff is happening, but it's not, you know, I can't go to that conference and report on it. So we're not going to be naturally, we're not going to be focusing on it as much. And because up until recently, those folks also were not in positions of influence in our country. It was easy to overlook that and focus on what's happening in the more intellectual levels. But yes, transgressiveness,

being intentionally provocative and even inflammatory, dancing right up to the line and crossing it and daring someone to call you out for it and then laughing at them for being a snowflake, if they do, it's irony. The culture of these spaces is what defines them, not the ideas.

Yeah. And let's make it kind of concrete. There's a lot of examples of individuals who, it's been a consistent pattern, Stephanie, really since 2016, which is a young, usually male figure on the right, gained some notoriety, almost always initially on Twitter, with some very edgy rhetoric, really kind of pushing the boundaries of what's within the overton window, which is kind of a term for the zone of acceptable conversation.

They're always sort of right on the edge of that. And then you find out that in private, they've been saying even worse things. And then as their public voice evolves, it gets worse and worse and worse. And to the point where sort of the private starts to merge with the public. And then when they're called out or when it's exposed, sometimes they'll say, hey, that's not me. Sometimes they'll just say, hey, don't even try cancel culture on me.

And almost like it's, baptizes their expression. Their expression is, the worst sin is not their expression. It's the imposition of cancel culture. And so, thinking of example, like a young man named Pedro Gonzalez, who rose to prominence in the last five or six years. And when I say prominence, I mean sort of like Twitter prominence, not, not a famous person, but rose to Twitter prominence so much so that he was considered a DeSantis influencer earlier in the campaign. And his cycle was basically this. So he's very overtly aggressive in his Twitter persona. One of this, one of his trademarks was, when he saw somebody he hated, he would put a picture of them, a particularly unflattering picture of them and talk about their physiognomy. And he got called out for doing this because at one point he did it to a Jewish economist and he called that the Rothschild physiognomy,

which has, it's not just subtly anti-Semitic, it's like really anti-Semitic. But then his defense was, well, I'd say that about everybody, Jewish and tile. Like, you know, I'm not anti-Semitic, I'm just hateful in general, I guess, is the defense. Then later on, it emerges that a lot of the things that he'd said in private messaging groups with people who are also in the new right were not just subtly or anti, or dog-wistly anti-Semitic, but extremely aggressively and also with a lot of racist content. And then as this comes out, he said this really interesting thing to the Free Beacon, the Washington Free Beacon. He attributed their remarks to his dissent and to what he described as an online Trump world that embraced absurd rhetorical extremism. What starts off as joking can very quickly become unironically internalized as an actual belief, he said, adding that I said those things and I take responsibility for them and I apologize for them and ultimately it's on me. And he said he had a change of heart since becoming a father. He said, you develop a kind of revulsion for the immaturity that defines these extremely online movements, a kind of performative bigotry that's a feature of it. So here he was being pretty self-aware, I would say. And I think the really key element here is this statement, what starts off as joking can very quickly become unironically internalized as an actual belief. And the way I describe it is from trolling to conviction. And I have seen this pattern time and time and time again. I have a piece where I wrote and I had example after example after example of that. And it's as if the trolling develops in a momentum all its own, that it can't be ironic anymore. It has to be a matter of conviction or you're not really with the team. Yeah, you are what you pretend to be, right? So a lot of these conversations, because he's, of course, not the only young right-wing activist who has been outed in this way in the last few months. And often the conversation turns to trying to parse whether or not the things that were said or done reflected the sincerely held belief of the person. If you incorporate Nazi imagery in a campaign video, does that make you a Nazi, for example? And some of those conversations may be worth having. But ultimately, I think what you're pointing to is why that conversation is kind of irrelevant. Because ultimately, you are what you pretend to be. And these young men who play act or another phrase that I've heard used is larping live action role playing, which is a sort of gaming word, right? They're play acting or they're larping as neo-fascists or choose your adjective. But maybe they start out as play acting. But at some point, they're also spreading those ideas to other people. And Pedro Gonzalez has like 150,000 followers on Twitter. So I would always prefer to receive an apology than not and to hear somebody express some regret. But the damage is continuing to be done. Whether or not they believe what they're saying, they're spreading the ideas and the fallout from that can potentially be enormous for the, especially because we're talking about the culture that the next generation is being steeped in. I think your point about you are what you say is particularly salient because the common pushback that you get is sort of how dare you believe that what I said was what I actually meant. So you had this DeSantis staffer who has the Sononrad, a Nazi symbol that's between two lines of troops. So not exactly subtle, right? And one of the defenses is, no, he obviously doesn't believe that. Or this is a person who had said before about Nick Fuentes, who's one of the most notorious just out and out white supremacists in the United States that in many ways Fuentes was a better model for conservatives than say Ben Shapiro. Time and time again, there's this argument that, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. You don't think we're actually fascists, do you? I mean, this is, you can't hold this against us. But how is anyone supposed to know that your true beliefs, your true self is somehow fundamentally opposed to what you say? Such an important point. And I'm glad that you

brought up Fuentes. He is in some ways, I hate to elevate him like this, even rhetorically, but he is in some ways the man behind the curtain for a lot of this stuff. Among the young men that I talk to, college age and just out of college, I mean, this is who they're looking to. He's such a huge influencer online. He's like, I think he's the self-proclaimed king of the dissident right. And he has this huge following. He puts out these videos, and he has said explicitly that the use of jokes and irony are important for giving a lot of, quote, cover implausible deniability for our views. So he's admitted this openly, that they're using irony to make it so that you can never hang anything on them. They can say what they believe or what they don't believe. How could we possibly know the difference? And then they can always have deniability by keeping it light and ironic and jokey. And a lot of people have learned that skill from Nick Fuentes, including the young man you were referring to who lost his job on the DeSantis campaign after using this Nazi imagery. Yeah, it's a really remarkable the level to which this guy, Nick Fuentes, keeps coming up. I mean, then to say that he's irrelevant, well, he had a meal with Donald Trump and he is a model for a lot of, again, mainly young men, which is remarkable.

All this is interesting. All this is disturbing in many ways.

But how pervasive is this? How much does this matter? Or is this just sort of interesting only because, oh, it's always fascinating to find out about really obscure and dangerous subcultures. But they're not. How dangerous are they really?

It's a hard question because it's a live debate right now. The sort of future of the conservative movement of the Republican Party, all of this is being actively litigated in real time. And we don't know which of the factions or which side of the liberalism schism, as I called it, is going to come out on top, is going to actually sort of define the future of this movement. Once we expand the lens from this sort of more intellectual new right or what I earlier called the more respectable new right into the dark corners of the internet where people are watching Nick Fuentes videos and exchanging anti-Semitic and misogynistic messages in their private group chats that we can't see, then you actually start to see even other disturbing things. So Nick Fuentes has hosted events. In fact, I was at CPAC in 2022, which was in Orlando, Florida. And the night before, he hosted a rival called AFPAC, America First PAC. It was a rival. I essentially described it as CPAC for people who think CPAC isn't racist enough. Marjorie Taylor Greene was there. She spoke at AFPAC at the Nick Fuentes event. And then the next day, she was on the main stage at CPAC.

So there's definitely bleeding of the lines between this stuff. What starts out, again, in the dark corners of the internet and you think, well, how important could this 25-year-old kid really be? Then you start to see these ideas and people associated with these ideas showing up in the actual halls of power. All of that said, I think it's really important to recognize that I do not think that the average American voter, even the average Republican primary voter, is even aware of most of this stuff. To the extent that they are in any way buying into any of this, it is entirely what I described earlier as the sort of bubbling up from the ground up of just saying something has gone wrong in the left. There really is illiberalism on the left as well, a willingness to use state power to enforce their will upon us. And we don't want to take it anymore. And we want somebody who will fight back against that. But it's not very well thought out. And I do think, when it comes to the racial stuff, that the way forward is a return to sort of color blindness or an approach in which we say it

should be irrelevant what the color of your skin is. What we care is about who you are on the merits and what's inside. And that, I think, is a winning message even among most conservatives now.

But there is definitely an open question about which direction the movement is headed. And since there are people articulating these two paths, one of which is really ugly racist, race realist stuff, then we have to care about whether it's going to go down that path, whether the movement is heading that direction or not. Yeah, I would put it like this. I would say, if you dive into the intellectual aspects of this, like we did at the very start, and you run them by your average Trump supporting Republican, say, where I live in Williamson County, Tennessee, they would look at me like, come again, what are you talking about use of power for the common good to punish enemies and reward for what that would not compute. There's still a lot of sort of background level, Reaganism, limited government, fighting against socialism, et cetera, et cetera, although there is a lot of animosity towards the left. So they're very willing to hear the fight, fight, fight message. But there's a couple of aspects here. One is, Trumpism is kind of an ideological void. What is Trumpism besides the ambition of Donald Trump? And into that ideological void, a lot of people are pouring a lot of different things. We've talked about the intellectual new right. Well, there's also this sort of pop culture Christian right, like the Michael Flynn, Seven Mountain Dominionism, very sort of Christians are destined to rule this country kind of strain that gets poured into this. But here's where Stephanie, I think that the young new right has an advantage over all of these other streams trying to put some sort of flesh and bones on Trumpism, is that they tend to be highly educated and many of them living in D.C. And so therefore are going to be disproportionately staffing the next Republican administration. And they have been hardcore in institution building mode in the last two years. So they're launching new online journals and they're standing up organizations that helped seek out college students who subscribe to these views and funnel them into internships on Capitol Hill in the Senate. Or wherever they're putting a lot of thought and effort in a really sophisticated way into how do we take our ideas and translate them into actual exercises of power? They said that that's what they believe in, they're trying to do it. And there's another example of this phenomenon being Catholic. I try to keep an eye on what's going on in this sort of Catholic integralist space. I can't emphasize enough that the average Catholic in the pews has never heard of Adrian Vermeul, who is the sort of leading Catholic integralist intellectual in America today. He's a Harvard Law professor. He's written a book on this. People who are paying attention to the intellectual currents are reading Adrian Vermeul. The average Catholic in the pews has never even heard his name, let alone the word integralism. They're not buying into this. However, what I am hearing from people who would know is that the young men studying to be Catholic priests, the seminarians, are paying attention and they are buying into these ideas. And so even if Catholics today are not interested in this, if the next generation of Catholic priests have bought into these ideas, that is scary. That is a scary thought. That is a potential vector in which we could see this incredibly fringe set of ideas actually enacted in real ways in the real world. You used a term and I've used a term and I just realized we probably haven't defined it very well. Catholic integralism. What is integralism? So this is one of the strains of the new right, one of the currents that's under that umbrella category. And I think it's probably the most fringe of all in terms of the actual number of people who believe in it, but it has gotten a lot of attention because it has these high profile advocates such as

Adrienne Vermeule. It's a rejection from a Catholic perspective of the separation of church and state.

And so they say that church and state ought to be integrated. That doesn't mean that they should necessarily be the same thing, but depending on who you talk to actually a lot of times what they'll say is, well, we need a civil government and we need the church government, the church hierarchy,

but if they're ever in conflict with each other, the civil government ought to be subordinated to and take its cues from and in fact could be ordered around by the Pope, by the Catholic hierarchy, because the Pope, the church is concerned with our eternal salvation, which is a higher order good than our mere temporal salvation, which is what the government is in charge of. And so civil government exists to do the will of the church if needed. Again, this is like a very wonky thing that not a lot of people are buying into, but it does have historical antecedents, right? Because if you think about medieval Europe, this is closer, this is sort of the ideal theory for what they were attempting to accomplish in medieval Europe. And so these are people today who are saying, well, maybe we didn't do it perfectly back then, but that's still what we ought to be striving for.

So we're going to get into some of the weeds here because, but it's important to get into these weeds because these kinds of debates and arguments really are animating a lot of the most politically motivated young men on the right. There's this kind of fantasy world in which, and I'm sure you've seen this, Stephanie, where people will extol, for example, the experience of the medieval peasant as a substantially superior way of life than what we have now, the rise of what are called the rad trads, in other words, a radical traditional Catholic perspective. So this is all percolating in subcultures, but again, hyper politically engaged subcultures. But what's the difference between Catholic integralism and Christian nationalism writ large?

There's some overlap, but as a general matter, as I understand it, Christian nationalism tends to be a Protestant phenomenon and it's nationalist. It's explicitly and self-consciously saying, we are an ethnic body. We ought to be trying in some sense to maintain our homogeneity as a people,

as the American people, and that the important characteristic is that we are a Christian people and a Christian nation. And so that leads to policy preferences like limiting or ending immigration from non-Christian countries and non-Protestant countries. And Catholic integralists tend to not be as concerned about the nationalistic side of things, in part because the Catholic Church is a universal church. In fact, more immigration from Latin America would probably increase our Catholic character as a country. So there's not really any reason in principle for a radical Catholic to be opposed to immigration. That doesn't mean that every radical Catholic is in favor of open borders, but in terms of the theory here, it's more universalistic and it's more about subordinating all the countries of the world to the one true leader in the pope, right, and the one true faith. So there are definitely theoretical differences. In practice, there's a lot of overlap in terms of preferences, in terms of domestic policy that people in these camps would be for. Maybe not so much on the international side, but domestically, they're going to be talking about things like making it harder to get a divorce, requiring stores to be closed on Sundays, perhaps bringing back prayer and Bible reading to public schools. There's more and less radical versions of this. So the more radical versions might be re-establishing a test in which you have to affirm your faith in God or to a particular church in order to be able to

run for office or serve on a jury, or even the most illiberal and most troublingly illiberal versions of this would say, we're going to ban mosques in this country. This is a Christian country. You cannot practice a religion that isn't the religion of the country. There are very, very vanishingly few people would even think about defending that, but they are out there and they are publicly articulating these views. And because, as we talked about earlier, the culture of these online new right communities, you gain cultural capital, but by being as transgressive and edgy as possible, then flirting with these ideas becomes a way forward. It becomes a way to gain status within your online community. Well, and also it's tied to your masculine strength, right? So you see this in the pro-life community is right now torn apart by debate between sort of traditional pro-life advocates and what are called abolitionists. And abolitionists strongly believe in prosecuting women who have abortions. That is a core element of abortion abolitionism. And one of the ways in which they engage in this conversation or engage in this fight is by essentially attempting to bully anyone who is in disagreement, that you don't really want to protect babies. You don't really believe babies are a human life equivalent to other human lives. And in this kind of pattern of, I'm going to stake out the most extreme position, and then anyone who's one inch to my left is woke and has to be fought viciously, if necessary. It is the pattern here. What can be done? Is this the future of the right? Or what is it that can be done to pull people back from this precipice? I really do think this is a live debate. It's a live question. Where is the conservative movement going to go? What is the future of the Republican party going to look like? And anybody who thinks they know for sure what the answer to that is, it has to be fought out at the level of ideas and at the level of, again, practical institution building. So I don't know the answer about what the future looks like. I like this question, though I'm a little bit apprehensive about the answer I want to give. I think we ought to remember the difference between fault and responsibility. Of course, the people adopting these horrifying views, they are to blame. And I would never in any, even the slightest way want to sound like I am justifying or excusing them. But I do think that there are ways in which our approach, among libertarians, among classical liberal conservatives, and on the left as well, approach to advocating for social change can make it more or less likely that the more radical elements of the new right will be successful. And so if we treat social change as zero sum, if we act as if any advance toward justice for one group of people comes at the expense of another group, that is going to provoke backlash and that is going to empower the worst voices that we've been describing. There is an alternative to that approach of social change as zero sum. We can talk about it as positive sum. And if you look at the ways that, for example, gay rights activists in the 1990s and early 2000s advocated for the change that they were in favor of, they did it in an inclusive way. They did it by humanizing their cause. They did it by talking about equal rights under the law and liberal values like that. And in some cases, even in appealing to conservative values, family values, family formation, right, lifelong commitment. So they achieved an incredible feat really in terms of, if you look at the polling data about how quickly public opinion changed on support for gay marriage, for example, it was rapid and it was dramatic. And that is the kind of activism success story that there are going to be textbooks written about. And I think if we're being honest with ourselves, we compare that to the kinds of activists in the gender politics space today or really any kind of social justice space today. We find that they have adopted a very different approach to pushing for the things they believe in which it is much more militant and much more

retributive against anyone, not just we want equal rights under the law, but we want to punish you if you do not line up behind our views. I think that is a huge mistake. It is definitely empowering the worst voices on the right and making it much harder for people like us to counter them because then they can point to us as enablers of the cultural rights defeat. So I would call upon folks who are on the center left, on the left of center as well and thinking about not in any way how they are at fault for this phenomenon. But what can they do? How can they contribute to stopping it? Which I think I hope we can all agree is the most important thing here.

All right. Three books, Stephanie. I'm eager to hear what three books I should be reading that I'm not.

I would recommend The Book Radicals for Capitalism by my Reason Magazine colleague Brian Doherty.

It is a freewheeling history of the modern libertarian movement. So anybody who may be wondering what is libertarianism all about, this is the book to read. It is long and thorough, but is also thoroughly entertaining, Radicals for Capitalism. Charles Taylor's The Ethics of Authenticity is a short work of political theory that I really love because it is the model of the kind of thinking through of ideas and approach to ideas that I aspire to in my own work, which is to say he does not say the answer is black or white, which is sort of the way so many people nowadays can't help but approach every issue. So he's talking about individuals and expressive individualism and authenticity and these things that many people on the right seem to think are completely at odds with other goods like transcendent truth and objective morality and tradition.

And instead of saying one or the other of these two positions is the right one, he says, let's figure out what the productive synthesis is between them. So The Ethics of Authenticity.

And then because I'm a huge fiction reader and I especially love big books of fiction,

I would recommend one of my favorite novels of all time, which is War and Peace. It's a huge investment of time and it's absolutely worth it. Thank you, Stephanie. And thank you for the yeoman's work you've been doing for years diving into this movement, into this emerging movement and understanding it from the inside out. And thank you for sharing your insights with Ezra's listeners. Very much appreciated. Thank you for having me on. I really enjoyed it.

This episode of the Ezra Klein Show was produced by Kristen Lin, fact checked by Michelle Harris. Our senior engineer is Jeff Geld. Our senior editor is Annie Rose Strasser. The show's production team also includes Imitha Agawu and Roland Hu. Original music by Isaac Jones, audience strategy by Christina Samuelski and Shannon Busta. The executive producer of New York Times opinion audios Annie Rose Strasser and special thanks to Sonia Herrero.