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BROKEN HEARTLAND

The Rise of
America's Rural Ghetto

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For Mary

My love, my life;
My dove, my wife.

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than county sheriff ("posse comitatus" is Latin for "power of the county"). Adherents believe that they alone are true American patriots, following the original intent of the framers of the Constitution, who, the theory purports, never really advocated democracy as a basis for government. Democracy inevitably becomes "mobocracy," says the far right. What the Founding Fathers envisioned was a "Christian Republic" in which only true patriots (white, Protestant, heterosexual, property-owning men) would rule. It is to the fulfillment of that dream, and to the repression of all those who do not share their vision, that constitutional fundamentalists are dedicated.

The philosophy of the Christian Identity movement—often called simply Identity—is interwoven with the constitutional concerns of the far right. Identity is based on the premise that white Anglo-Saxons, not Jews, are the true descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. According to Identity proponents, Jews, far from being the chosen people, are really the children of Satan. In the world according to Identity, African-Americans do not even rate the human (albeit diabolical) status of Jews; people of color are considered to be members of a subhuman or "pre-Adamic" species and are often referred to in the movement as "mud people."

Although Identity seems to have burst upon the scene in the last decade, its focus on race as the foremost theological issue is not new. Identity has its roots in a mid-nineteenth-century movement called British Israelism, which combined the new scientific theory of evolution with already existing Biblical conjecture about the fate of the ten lost tribes of Israel. According to British Israelites, the lost tribes migrated from Assyria through Asia Minor and into northern Europe—in particular into Scandinavia, Germany, and the British Isles. The key to understanding and fulfilling biblical prophecies, according to the British Israelites, was for northern Europeans to reclaim their "identity" as the chosen people and to then keep their race pure by not interbreeding with inferior types such as Jews and African-Americans.

In modern Identity thinking, the United States is the Promised Land, the site of the New Jerusalem which will be established after an apocalyptic race war, or "end-time." Many Identity adherents have stockpiled weapons and food in anticipation of this glorious and bloody day.¹⁰

The dangers inherent in the combination of constitutional fundamentalism, with its populist appeal, and the Identity move-

ment, with its theological rationalization of racism, are obvious. As Leonard Zeskind, research director of the Center for Democratic Renewal, points out, "Identity . . . plays a dual role: it provides religious unity for differing racist political groups, and it brings religious people into contact with the racist movement."¹¹

Indeed, Identity today provides the lingua franca of the far right, binding together members of the Klan, the Aryan Nations, and smaller unaffiliated groups like the ISEC. Identity ministers spread their racist teachings by working the far-right circuit, speaking at Klan rallies, at neo-Nazi paramilitary encampments, and at the countless basement meetings held across America. They broadcast their theories of racial purity and Jewish conspiracies on many of the country's low-wattage AM radio stations—and increasingly on more mainstream stations as well. (For example, Pete Peters, an Identity minister from Colorado whose services were attended by members of the Order, can be heard Sunday mornings on 21 AM and FM stations in 18 states.)¹²

And like their fundamentalist counterparts, Identity ministers make use of modern technology, videotaping sermons and distributing them through catalog sales as well as passing them hand to hand through the far-right grapevine. Many of these videotapes are amateurishly produced, with sound and lighting quality comparable to the cheapest porno films. But others are as slick as anything on network television. There are, as yet, no Identity tapes that use the state-of-the-art attention-grabbing techniques refined by MTV, but that day may not be far off.

Two of the far right's more determined—and in many ways, most successful—forays into the Heartland political arena have been the election campaigns run by followers of the well-known right-wing ideologue Lyndon LaRouche and those coordinated by the new Populist Party, formed in 1984 by the less familiar extremist Willis Carto.

LaRouche is known to millions of Americans for his quadrennial presidential-campaign television speeches in which he very rationally outlines wild conspiracy theories (Queen Elizabeth and Henry Kissinger run the world drug trade) followed by even wilder high-tech solutions (building thousands of nuclear power plants, a giant pipeline funneling water from the Yukon and McKenzie Rivers down to the southwestern United States). But while LaRouche's ideas are fantastic, more importantly, they are also fascistic, grounded in a culture of authoritarian control and the

eneration of police-state violence. According to journalist Dennis King, the country's leading expert on LaRouche, the very outrageousness of the man's spiel deflects attention from the real totalitarian threat posed by LaRouche.

Chip Berlet, another veteran LaRouche watcher, agrees with this assessment. He says, "I talked with dozens of reporters. I'd send them LaRouche's writings. Then I'd lead them step by step through it on the phone, to show them it was classic fascism. . . . They'd say, 'That's nice,' then turn to their word processors and crank out some quip about Queen Elizabeth."¹³

Lyndon LaRouche started out on the political left during the 1960s, as a Marxist intellectual on the fringes of Students for a Democratic Society. His journey to the far right began when he advocated adopting the tactics of the fascists in order to combat anyone who got in his way, left or right. In 1973, for example, LaRouche sent club-swinging supporters after members of several left-wing groups in a bloody campaign called Operation Mop Up. Soon after, LaRouche dropped the pose of Marxism and became an unabashed fascist, calling for a militarized society led by a supreme dictator. (According to LaRouche, the individual best prepared to don the mantle of dictator is, not surprisingly, LaRouche himself.) As journalist King points out, LaRouche's fascistic mind set is perhaps most evident in his plan for fighting AIDS, a collection of draconian measures including the imprisonment of anyone who may have been exposed to the AIDS virus—especially gays, prostitutes, and intravenous drug users—and the possible execution of those responsible for spreading the disease. LaRouche's plan bears a startling resemblance to Adolf Hitler's campaign against syphilis, outlined in *Mein Kampf*. And like Hitler's, LaRouche's concern for public health has been in reality simply a means to capitalize on existing public fears to further his own political ends. "*New Solidarity* [LaRouche's newspaper] . . . suggests that AIDS might become the springboard for a nationalist revolution," writes King.¹⁴

The social upheaval caused by farm problems presented LaRouche with another potential springboard. LaRouche has made a special effort to rally farmers to his cause, beginning with a 1978 campaign to win over members of the American Agriculture Movement (AAM)—the group which had organized the "Great Tractorcade" on Washington, D.C. The AAM presented LaRouche with a perfect opportunity: here was a group of angry

people who had already committed themselves to political activism. Under the aegis of the AAM, thousands of farmers riding tractors from across the country had descended on Washington to protest U.S. farm policy. They camped out on the Mall while lobbying Congress for a slew of agricultural reforms. They also caused massive traffic tie-ups throughout the city, clashed with the police, and even set an old tractor ablaze on Independence Avenue. All that LaRouche needed to do was align himself with the farmers' interests and, once inside the organization, steer the AAM in his own direction.

Although LaRouche failed in his effort to take over the farm group—the leadership of the national organization eventually realized that beneath the sympathetic words lay a totalitarian agenda and repudiated LaRouche and his political organization, the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC)—LaRouche did manage to recruit from the leadership of several state AAM chapters. His campaign to portray himself as a "friend of the farmer" (LaRouche chose a Mississippi farmer, Billy Davis, as his 1984 vice-presidential running mate) also earned him the loyalty of several other farm activists, including a former Missouri state treasurer of the National Farmers Organization and a former national board member of the National Organization for Raw Materials.

LaRouche's courtship of farmers is part of a well-thought-out political plan of attack. "The fight we're aiming at is to build an urban-rural alliance," LaRouche lieutenant Peter Bowen explained in a telephone interview. LaRouche has for years dreamed of building a potent mass organization composed of the disenfranchised residents of inner-city areas and people of small-town America. To further the urban side of the equation, he has made a significant effort to reach out to the African-American community, visiting black college campuses regularly, forming a National Anti-Drug Coalition, and even sponsoring a Martin Luther King, Jr., birthday march in Washington, D.C.

But for all of LaRouche's ingratiating rhetoric about farmers and African-Americans, he has nothing but scorn for the two groups he claims to represent; they are simply pawns in his grab for power. "Except for a handful of farmers," LaRouche told one audience, "farmers in this country are a bunch of idiots." LaRouche's literature has always been peppered with racist slurs—stating, for example, that black culture is "bestial."¹⁵

The group's most spectacular electoral victory came on March 18, 1986, when LaRouchian candidates Janice Hart and Mark Fairchild won the Illinois Democratic Party's state primary elections for the offices of lieutenant governor and secretary of state, respectively. LaRouche's wooing of farmers had apparently paid off; a study of county-by-county election returns found a strong positive correlation between support for Hart and a high percentage of family farms in downstate Illinois. Although the pair were defeated in the general election, Hart did manage to garner almost 500,000 votes—certainly a significant showing.

LaRouche also ran a total of 16 candidates in Iowa's 1988 Democratic Party primary. Although none of the 14 candidates in contested races won, they averaged 15% of the vote. Ronald Kirk, a LaRouche-supported candidate for the U.S. House, received 30% of the total vote and captured at least 40% of the vote in five of the sixteen counties in the district. LaRouche himself was the largest third-party vote-getter in Iowa in the 1988 general elections, receiving 3,526 votes.¹⁶

Just six days before his December 1988 conviction in federal court on charges of conspiring to defraud the IRS and others (a conviction that resulted in a 15-year prison sentence), LaRouche was still at it, trying to win over disaffected farmers at his international "Food for Peace" conference in Chicago.

"The enemy we face is a Satanic movement," LaRouche told 600 attendees in the giant conference hall at the O'Hare Ramada Inn on December 11, 1988. LaRouche blamed the USDA for the drought then gripping the Midwest, and called for a series of changes in federal policy, including an immediate halt to farm foreclosures, a massive infusion of low-interest loans to farmers, and the abolition of the EPA so that farmers could have access to all necessary pesticides, including DDT. One of LaRouche's many skills has always been his knowledge of which buttons to press, and he was clearly pressing all the right ones for farmers.

LaRouche placed the blame for farmers' problems on a familiar cast of villains: the Federal Reserve System, the Trilateral Commission, and "international Zionist bankers." That LaRouche should point an accusing finger at the same "conspirators" as do other far-right groups is hardly a coincidence (or, if it needs saying, proof of the existence of such a conspiracy). LaRouche had been developing ties with many leading figures on the far right for years, beginning in the mid-1970s with Pennsylvania Ku Klux

Klan leader Roy Frankhouser and Robert Miles, then a KKK leader and now leader of the neo-Nazi Aryan Nations. It was also during this period that LaRouche developed a close working relationship with one of the most influential thinkers on the far right, Willis Carto.

Carto is the founder of a variety of far-right enterprises including the *Spotlight*, a weekly tabloid newspaper with a paid circulation of over 115,000; Liberty Lobby, a Washington, D.C.-based organization; the Noontide Press, a publishing house; the Institute for Historical Review, a pseudo-scholarly organization devoted to proving that the Holocaust never occurred; and, as of 1984, a political party, the new Populist Party.

At the center of all of Carto's enterprises grows a virulent anti-Semitism, a passion which blossomed in the already-right-wing Carto after he met neo-Nazi author Francis Parker Yockey in 1960. Yockey had written a book, *Imperium*, which contained many of the themes that would be close to the hearts of far-right activists over the next three decades—in particular, the themes of the supposed cultural and biological superiority of the Aryan people and the need to rid America of the "Jewish threat." Carto published Yockey's book—which had gone out of print—through his Noontide Press and wrote a new introduction filled with anti-Semitic and racist invectives. Carto wrote, for example, that "Negro equality . . . is easier to believe in if there are no Negroes around to destroy the concept."

Like David Duke and other members of the far right seeking to gain access to the American mainstream, Carto understands it is necessary to speak in code to avoid shocking the general public. Carto claims he is an anti-Zionist, not an anti-Semite. However, a quick look at his book *Profiles in Populism* (a collection of *Spotlight* articles) proves that distinction meaningless.

In the book's glossary, Carto defines Zionism thus:

A secular conspiratorial scheme overtly aimed at ingathering Jews of the world to Israel but in reality a world political engine of massive power which effectively controls all aspects of Western political, intellectual, religious and cultural life. Zionism overlaps substantially into both capitalism and communism. Without Zionist support, neither capitalism nor communism could survive. Zionism is strongly antagonistic to all nationalism except Jewish nationalism.¹⁷

Sprinkled throughout the book are references to the natural superiority of the white race, dire warnings on the consequences of racial "blood mingling," denunciations of "the terminal insanity of contemporary American democracy," and even a quick side-swipe at feminism.

Like LaRouche, Carto has links with David Duke. Overlooked in the controversy arising out of the former Klansman's successful run, as a Republican, for a seat in the Louisiana legislature in early 1989, was the fact that just three months earlier Duke had received 44,000 votes as the presidential candidate of the Populist Party. It is not surprising that this information was rarely mentioned in media accounts of Duke's victory; few reporters had even heard of the party formed by Willis Carto in 1984 to serve as a political umbrella for "anti-Semitic, white supremacist forces . . . looking for a foothold in the political mainstream for a broad political agenda to turn the United States into a 'White Christian Republic.'" ¹⁸

Since its founding, the Populist Party has drawn membership and fielded candidates from every major far-right group in the country, including the KKK, the Posse Comitatus, the American Nazi Party, the Farmer's Liberation Army, the National States Rights Party, the Christian-Patriots Defense League and the Aryan Nations. The Populist Party, which has chapters in 49 states, has also provided a base from which the Christian Identity movement can become involved in political organizing, and some leading Identity figures are also members of the Populist Party inner circle. The party's first chairman, Robert Weems, a former Mississippi Klan leader, is an Identity minister. And Colonel Jack Mohr, who has been described as "the traveling salesman of the Identity movement," is a member of the Populist's Speakers Bureau. ¹⁹

Assuming, as did LaRouche, that desperate Midwestern farmers were ripe for the far right's message of fighting back against the "forces out there," the Populist Party targeted farmers early, and has enjoyed some of its most successful organizing among this group. Carto's *Spotlight* is read throughout the Midwest, and Populist literature calling for a federal policy to help "family farmers but not agri-business corporations or absentee owners" is handed out at farm auctions and farm protest rallies. One indication of the Populist Party's success organizing in the Heartland is the number of Midwesterners who subscribed to the now-defunct tab-

loid the *American POPULIST*. Eight out of the twelve states with the most subscribers are found in the Midwest. ²⁰

While the Populist Party passes itself off as a conservative party of "plaid shirts and polyester suits," the brown shirts and swastikas do show through from time to time. The party's agricultural policy attacks the "criminal Federal Reserve conspiracy" and "big international bankers"—favored far-right code words meaning Jews. The title of the Populist agricultural policy is "A Final Solution to the Problems of Agriculture," echoing Adolf Hitler's euphemistic term for the Nazi's systematic destruction of European Jewry.

Duke's Louisiana victory was a seminal victory for the Populist Party (and for the far-right movement in general) despite the fact that he ran as a Republican. As the party newsletter, *Populist Observer*, explained, "Party leaders . . . would naturally have preferred to see Duke run as a Populist instead of as a Populist-oriented Republican, but his close association . . . is bound to help spur party growth." ²¹

In fact, as the Center for Democratic Renewal astutely pointed out in 1987—almost a year before Duke's victory—the Populists had adopted a "tri-partisan" election strategy, running as Populists where they could, and as Republicans or Democrats where necessary. Recalling the successful 1986 LaRouchian foray into the Illinois Democratic primaries, the CDR asked rhetorically in its *Monitor*, "Will David Duke take up where Lyndon LaRouche left off?" ²² The answer, quite obvious in the wake of Duke's victory, is yes. In one year Duke ran for office as a member of each of the three parties: as a Democrat in the presidential primaries, a Populist in the general election, and a Republican in Louisiana.

The "tri-partisan" path blazed by Lyndon LaRouche and paved by David Duke is sure to see increased traffic in the future. For all its irrational theories about eugenics, the fate of the lost tribes, and the cabal of international bankers, the far right is one of the most pragmatic political formations in the United States today when it comes to mass organizing. And so far that pragmatism has paid off. "In the last several years," says the CDR's Zeskind, "far-right groups have managed to establish a beachhead from which to spread their message of hate."

The success that the far right has had in organizing rural Americans recently is due to several factors. Just like Mussolini's Fascists in Italy in the 1920s and the National Socialists of the 1930s in

Germany, these latter-day totalitarians have taken advantage of the social and economic turmoil of their time and place. As rural communities started to collapse in the early 1980s, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans were responsive to the social and economic plight of these Americans.

But the far right was. Members of the Posse Comitatus and LaRouche representatives could be seen at farm auctions comforting families. While a smiling Ronald Reagan was on TV telling them that it was morning in America, the far right was confirming what rural people knew to be true: that their livelihoods, their families, their communities—their very lives—were falling apart.

The far right went a step further: it provided a detailed analysis of *why* rural communities were becoming rural ghettos. In a sense, it was less important what theories the far right offered than that its people cared enough to include these marginalized Americans in a broader political framework. In the eyes of many, the fact that Lyndon LaRouche and David Duke spoke to the very real problems that were ignored or even denied by mainstream leaders made them the only legitimate game in town. The far right gave the victims of the American nightmare of downward mobility the one thing they desperately needed—hope that the American dream could once again work for them.

The new rural poor were ready to follow almost any leader who offered them that hope, for while the day-to-day struggle to survive while mired in poverty is an embittering experience for anyone, the pain endured by this class of Americans—the inhabitants of the new rural ghetto—is in one way unique. Charles Silberman has rightly pointed out that “American cultural goals transcend class lines, while the means of achieving them do not.”²³ But many of the new rural poor had not only shared American cultural goals—they had achieved them for a time. They had been *in* the middle class, *of* the middle class. They had tasted the good life and then had fallen from it. It is hard enough to watch from a distance as others eat, but it is an even more embittering experience to watch in hunger as others dine at the table where you once sat. The result is resentment and rage.

The far right understands rural peoples’ alienation and exploits it, transforming their bitter desperation into political action that suits the right’s own broader agenda. So what that their tangle of pseudo-legal procedures and quasi-religious doctrines is half-baked? So what that those who follow their advice end up either

off the land or in jail—or dead like Art Kirk? The far right at least offers the possibility of salvation, and to the forgotten farmers and small-town residents that is sometimes enough.

Author James Coates suggests that many Americans have been “softened up” by the rhetoric of new-right leaders—especially by fundamentalist ministers Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson—and made more susceptible to the similar but far more hateful message of the far right. Jerry Falwell’s assessment that Jews are “spiritually blind and desperately in need of their Messiah and Savior,” as well as the preacher’s words to another audience, “A few of you here today don’t like the Jew. And I know why. He can make more money accidentally than you can on purpose,” are embryonic forms of the rabid anti-Semitism of the fanatic fringe.²⁴

And clearly, Pat Robertson has added weight to the Identity call for a “Christian Republic” by saying, “The minute you turn [the Constitution] into the hands of non-Christian people and atheist people they can use it to destroy the very foundation of our society. And that’s what’s been happening.”²⁵

But CDR’s Leonard Zeskind argues that Americans don’t need a Pat Robertson or Jerry Falwell to soften them up with “soft-core” anti-Semitism. “There’s already 1,000 years of Christian history on that,” he explains. The connection between the far right and the new right isn’t causal, rather they both arise from a preexisting and extensive body of anti-Jewish thought. As one theologian has pointed out, “It [is] clear that anti-Jewish ideology is much more deeply rooted in Christian preaching and even in some parts of the New Testament than had once been thought.”²⁶

We like to think of the Midwest as being above such crude passions as anti-Semitism and racism. Probably no region in the country has so benefited—and so suffered—under the process of mythicizing as has the fabled Heartland, where, as Garrison Keillor says, “every woman is strong, every man is good-looking, and every child is above average.” We may laugh at that wholesome characterization, but we trust in its essential validity. Families in New York and Boston advertise in Midwestern papers for nannies for their children. A sperm bank on the east coast pays top dollar for Midwestern sperm because of the assumption that Heartland sperm is sure to be untainted by that “big-city” disease AIDS and, implicitly, by other kinds of corruption.

The Iowa-produced TV documentary “Harvesting Fear” rein-

Chapter 5
The Dying of the Light

1. *New York Times* (1985).
2. *USA Today* (1985).
3. *Time* (1985).
4. *Des Moines Register* (1988t).
5. Christiansen (1986).
6. Newman (1988:8).
7. Bluestone and Harrison (1982).
8. For an in-depth study of the PATCO strike and its effect on the participants, see Newman (1988:144–173).
9. *Des Moines Register* (1986b).
10. National Mental Health Association (1988:16).
11. Iowa State Department of Human Services (1988).
12. *Des Moines Register* (1988v).
13. *Prairiefire* (1988a:24).
14. National Mental Health Association (1988:22).
15. National Mental Health Association (1988:18).

Chapter 6
The Growth of Hate Groups

1. The money for the loans never materialized, and in 1986 Elliot was convicted of theft, fraud, and conspiracy.
2. Quoted in *The Hammer* (1984:27).
3. *Primrose and Cattlemen's Gazette* (1983:19).
4. Van Pelt (1984:3).
5. Trillin (1985:109–110).
6. Zeskind (1987:12).
7. For background information on David Duke see *The Monitor* (1988:4) and (1989:4).
8. Levitas and Zeskind (1986:2).
9. For more on these groups see Flynn and Gerhardt (1989) and Coates (1987).
10. For more on Identity see Zeskind (1986).
11. Zeskind (1986:5).
12. *The Monitor* (1989:5).
13. King (1989:375).

14. King (1989:142).
15. Levitas (1988:9).
16. *Prairiefire* (1988b).
17. Carto (1982:205).
18. Center for Democratic Renewal (1989).
19. Zeskind (1986:6).
20. *American POPULIST* (1986:4).
21. *The Monitor* (1989:5).
22. *The Monitor* (1989:5).
23. Quoted in Harrington (1984:192).
24. Coates (1987:257).
25. Zeskind (1986:30).
26. Baum (1978:x).
27. *Des Moines Register* (1989a).
28. *The Harris Survey* (1986).
29. *The Harris Survey* (1985).
30. Wallace (1925:24).
31. Goodwyn (1978:327).
32. Lynd and Lynd (1929:479).

Chapter 7
The Second Wave

1. *Des Moines Register* (1988r).
2. *Des Moines Register* (1988r).
3. *Des Moines Register* (1988e).
4. *Time* (1987).
5. *Des Moines Register* (1988q).
6. *Des Moines Register* (1988a).
7. Smith (1987:48–50).
8. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service (1988:xiv).
9. Strange et al. (1989:105). The policy of abandonment reached its apogee when a pair of urban geographers at Rutgers University proposed that the nation write off the entire Great Plains region. According to an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, the two advocate that the federal government “start buying back great chunks of the Plains, replant the grass, reintroduce the bison—and turn out the lights . . .” (*Wall Street Journal* [1989]).
10. *Des Moines Register* (1989f).