

Introduction

Failed reconstructions make for bad neighbors

But is diversity our strength? The less we have in common, the stronger we are? Is that true of families? Is it true in neighborhoods or businesses? Of course not.

Tucker Carlson¹

Each weekday evening at 8 p.m., a tightly cropped shot of a boyish figure with a full head of brown hair fills Fox News viewers' screens. The show's host, Tucker Carlson, displays a semi-permanent scowl. The morose tone of his voice waffles between incredulity and scorn as he berates viewers about looming threats to the "traditional" ways of American life, which range from complaints about gun control² to being "disenfranchised" as a voter because Democrats have imported "more obedient voters from the Third World."³ He is excitable, frequently interrupts his guests, and looks visibly astonished when they challenge his summary of current events.

It is no exaggeration to say that Carlson's eponymous show has tapped into a particular cultural zeitgeist – *Tucker Carlson Tonight* sits atop the wasteland of cable news programs, outpacing the other offerings from Fox News and those from left-leaning CNN by a wide margin. Setting aside the show's weak grasp of history and creative interpretation of current events, his program is nevertheless a useful barometer within conservative grievance machine punditry. Tucker's talking points generally reflect the frames used by his peers to discuss salient political issues, which, over the last decade, increasingly link explicit racial and religious prejudices to democratic decline.

¹ Carlson, Tucker. 2018. *Ship of Fools: How a Selfish Ruling Class Is Bringing America to the Brink of Revolution*. Free Press.

² Carlson, Tucker. April 9, 2021. "Biden want to take your guns, but leave criminals with theirs." *Fox News*. Retrieved from: <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/tucker-carlson-biden-gun-control-disarm-trump-voters>

³ Carlson, Tucker. April 12, 2021. "The truth about demographic change and why Democrats want it." Retrieved from: <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/tucker-carlson-immigration-demographic-change-democrats-elections>.

Consider the evolution of Carlson's oeuvre. In early 2004, Tucker gave an interview to NYTV about his upcoming PBS show, *Tucker Carlson: Unfiltered* – an early trial balloon for his current program that lasted only two short seasons. When asked what he envisioned the show might contribute to ongoing political conversations, Carlson was clear that he wanted it to be a space where people could express socially passé views. Pressed for a clarifying example, he responded, "I was thinking this morning: 'Diversity is the strength of our country.' Oh yeah? How's that? Why don't you explain that to me? I don't see that. I mean, is diversity the strength of the Balkans? No."⁴ Those statements drip with ethnocentrism and are brought into sharper relief several years later in 2008, when Carlson appeared on a Tampa-based radio program titled "Bubba the Love Sponge Show."⁵ In the middle of a wide-ranging discussion about the state of party politics in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election, Carlson noted that "Everyone is embarrassed to be a white man...I don't think of the world in those terms...but white men have contributed some...like creating civilization and stuff."⁶ Later, he'd double down on this statement, saying in 2014 that white men had done "a lot" for the country and advocating for "an older white-guy appreciation day."⁷

These ideas resurface later without the veneer of tongue-in-cheek humor, explicitly linking whiteness to Americans' national identity. In March, 2017, Carlson hosted U.S. House Representative Steve King (R-IA) on his Fox News program. Prior to this point, King was something of an enigma within the Republican Party, a right-wing crank long on racist conspiracies about immigrants.⁸ But after the election of Donald Trump in 2016, his fringe views became louder, and, on this occasion, he was facing mounting public pressure about tweets

⁴ Hagan, Joe. May 12, 2004. "Newly Dovish, Tucker Carlson Goes Public...Kimmel Writer Ribs Times. Retrieved from: <https://observer.com/2004/05/newly-dovish-tucker-carlson-goes-publickimmel-writer-ribs-times>.

⁵ The show's titular host, Bubba the Love Sponge née Todd Alan Clem, is an interesting figure in popular culture lore. During 2012, he secretly filmed his wife having sex with former professional wrestler Hulk Hogan. The public release of the resulting sex tape on Gawker.com's website eventually resulted in a massive lawsuit that ended with the sale of Gawker Media.

⁶ Audio clip retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/embed/static/clips/2019:03:05:64607:btls-090308-hour1-s-1>.

⁷ Carlson, Tucker. "November 2 edition." *Fox & Friends Sunday*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/tucker-carlson/fox-host-we-need-older-white-guy-appreciation-day>.

⁸ Gabriel, Trip. January 15, 2019. "A Timeline of Steve King's Racist Remarks and Divisive Actions." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/15/us/politics/steve-king-offensive-quotes.html>

defending right-wing Dutch politician Geert Wilders (“Wilders understands that culture and demographics are our destiny. We can’t restore our civilization with somebody else’s babies.”⁹) After giving King the floor to expand on those remarks, which were largely retreaded white nationalist talking points, Carlson echoed his support, telling King that “Everything you said, I think, is defensible and probably right.”¹⁰

These ideas began to take a more functional form in mid-2017, where Carlson increased the steady flow of anti-immigrant content on his show. From ranting about migrants “invading” Europe,¹¹ to arguing in support of then-president Trump’s Muslim travel ban,¹² to coming unglued over the prospect that immigrants were bringing “sharia law” into the United States,¹³ the plumbline connecting these public displays of white nationalism is an abiding belief that social diversity threatens the unity, stability, and goals of American democracy. Indeed, according to Tucker, striving for diversity eventually brings about “civil war”¹⁴ because a “flood of illegals” will eventually translate into “a flood of voters.”¹⁵

These overtures to white nationalism – a loose “ideology” centered on the alleged cultural inferiority of nonwhites – culminate during this period, where Carlson began floating ideas about the looming dangers of “demographic replacement” to his viewers. This phrase and

⁹ King, Steve. *Twitter*, March 12, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.npr.org/2017/03/13/519975423/rep-steve-king-stands-by-controversial-tweet-about-somebody-elses-babies>.

¹⁰ Carlson, Tucker. “March 13, 2017.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/tucker-carlson/tucker-carlson-defends-rep-steve-kings-racist-tweet-everything-you-said-i-think>.

¹¹ Carlson, Tucker. “April 17, 2017.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/video/2017/04/17/foxs-tucker-carlson-rants-about-invasion-refugees-are-changing-europe-s-demographics/216055>.

¹² Carlson, Tucker. “June 26, 2017.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/video/2017/06/26/tucker-carlson-trumps-muslim-ban-doesnt-ban-muslims/217043>.

¹³ Carlson, Tucker. “July 10, 2017.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/video/2017/07/10/foxs-tucker-carlson-says-he-doesnt-know-what-term-white-nationalist-even-means/217200>.

¹⁴ Carlson, Tucker. “September 18, 2017.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/video/2017/09/18/tucker-carlson-striving-diversity-what-gets-you-civil-war/217968>.

¹⁵ Carlson, Tucker. “December 20, 2017.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/video/2017/12/20/tucker-carlson-democrats-want-demographic-replacement-flood-illegals-create-flood-voters-them/218922>.

others like “You will not replace us!”¹⁶ and “Blood and soil!”¹⁷ are grounded in a simple, basic premise. The United States is historically a nation for white citizens and extending the franchise to nonwhites, like Blacks or immigrants, involves certain political death by deluding the power of the white vote. As Carlson put it, “Our leaders are radically and permanently changing our country, wholly on the basis of their faith that diversity is, in fact, our strength.”¹⁸ Or as popular guest and occasional fill-in host of *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, Mark Steyn, said in terms that reveal an anxiety about the political ramifications of these changes, Democratic leaders prefer “illegal immigrants...over American citizens.”¹⁹ In the end, Carlson argued that such developments would mean a total destruction of the democratic order. Immigration would “devalue your political power as a voter,” he told viewers in April 2021, going on to lament that it would “subvert democracy itself.”²⁰

In a vacuum, these comments might be dismissed as little more than the ravings of a lone, animated pundit looking to score cheap points with the home crowd. But given the prominence of Tucker Carlson in right-wing politics today, these statements are not simply mean or crass expressions.²¹ They are instead an explicit admonition that *democracy in the United States is best*

¹⁶ The slogan’s origins are somewhat unclear. Nathan Damigo, the founder of a white-nationalist group, used the phrase in response to a performance art project spearheaded by actor Shia LeBeouf and artists Luke Turner and Nastja Rönkkö, which included the phrase “He will not divide us.” The project was intended as a rebuttal against Donald Trump’s divisive rhetoric. However, the phrase closely hews to ideas found in French writer Renaud Camus’ *The Great Replacement*.

¹⁷ An English rendition of the Nazi chant, “Blut und Boden!” The phrase links patriotism to native national identity and is grounded in virulent anti-Semitism and racism. Despite serving as a key component of Adolf Hitler’s “Lebensraum” program, the phrase has been used by members of the American alt-right.

¹⁸ Carlson, Tucker. “January 18, 2018.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/video/2018/01/18/tucker-carlson-attacks-ethnic-diversity-radically-and-permanently-changing-our-country/219105>.

¹⁹ Carlson, Tucker. “January 18, 2018.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/video/2018/01/18/tucker-carlson-guest-defends-white-supremacists-and-claims-hispanics-arizona-represent-end-american/219106>.

²⁰ Carlson, Tucker. “April 5, 2021.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/tucker-carlson/tucker-carlson-number-immigrants-currently-america-devalue-your-political-power-and>.

²¹ They also travel widely. The shooter responsible for murdering 10 people at a Tops supermarket in Buffalo, New York on May 14, 2022 left an apparent manifesto dripping with overtures to white replacement theory. See: Collins, Ben. May 14, 2022. “The Buffalo supermarket shooting suspect allegedly posted an apparent manifesto repeatedly citing ‘great

left to whites; that democracy becomes unmanageable if its citizenry is socially diverse. Thus, according to Carlson, the social movement Black Lives Matter, which rose in prominence after several high-profile murders of black youth by white police officers, was “poison” that needed to be defeated if the country was going to survive.²² Elsewhere, he would argue that the worst attack on American democracy in the last several decades was not, in fact, a violent insurrection in the halls of the United States Congress in January 2021, but, instead the Immigration Act of 1965 because “that law completely changed the composition of America’s voter rolls, purely to benefit the Democratic Party. That seems like kind of an assault on democracy, a permanent one.” According to Carlson, multiracial, religiously plural democracy is a nonstarter. The greatest danger to American democracy comes not from its ossified institutions, which artificially cede disproportionate power to one party,²³ nor its leaders, who have whipped up the masses with fairytales about stolen elections,²⁴ nor its people, who violently surged into the halls of Congress to protest election results.²⁵ Instead, the pressing threat comes from the demands of nonwhite, non-Christian, and non-native people who demand equal treatment.

This is not the first-time segregationist or white nationalist logics have been loudly championed by political elites in defense of democracy. These refrains are philosophical cousins to the ideas that sustained the chattel slavery during the antebellum period in American history, the logics used to prohibit certain immigrants from arriving at America’s shores, and even the chorus of voices describing Islam as a religion incompatible with the American way of life in the

replacement' theory.” *NBC News*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/buffalo-supermarket-shooting-suspect-posted-apparent-manifesto-repeate-rcna28889>

²² Carlson, Tucker. “September 10, 2020.” *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediamatters.org/tucker-carlson/tucker-carlson-black-lives-matter-poison-and-if-were-going-survive-country-we-must>.

²³ Republicans have not represented a numerical majority of Americans in the Senate since the mid-1990s, despite enjoying majority control of that body for several periods throughout the past 30 years.

²⁴ From state leaders to the sitting president, Republicans spent much of their time in the aftermath of the 2020 election talking about how the results were “rigged” and the election “stolen.” There is no evidence of any rigged votes. See: Cassidy, Christina A. and Marc Levy. December 15, 2021. “Election Reviews Persist Despite No Evidence of Rigged Vote.” *Associated Press News*. Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/article/elections-pennsylvania-voting-donald-trump-presidential-elections-62d6c10553c94d27398103f370fe4226>.

²⁵ To some, the insurrection that took place on January 6th, 2021 could be described not as a “threat” to American democracy, per se, but an honest (though woefully misguided) attempt to “save” it. Davis, Nicholas T, Keith Gaddie, and Kirby Goidel. 2022. *Democracy’s Meanings: How the Public Understands Democracy and Why It Matters*. University of Michigan Press.

aftermath of September 11, 2001. In fact, the irony in Carlson's words is the normalcy of their tenor throughout American history. Multiracial democracy in the United States has always been an aspirational goal, and the antagonists who have fought against extending the demands of democracy to all citizens regardless of race or creed have a stronger track record of success than those who envision a more diverse and equal society.

This book argues that the social prejudice that motivates individuals to envision such narrow definitions of democracy, like the one increasingly endorsed by right-wing pundits and elected officials, involves a toxic combination of ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination. If living peacefully in a community requires bargaining over or compromising among competing values and demands, then social prejudice destroys the neighborly goodwill necessary to bind together different people under common democratic goals. What is less clear, however, is the relationship between social prejudice and democratic support among ordinary Americans. Social groups stratify politics across many dimensions. Party, race, class, and gender contribute to deeply held differences of opinion about the outputs of democracy. What happens to sympathies about democratic access and deliberation, however, when groups of people are unwilling to interact with out-group others? How do segregationist impulses, underwritten by racism, nativism, and religious discrimination shape the value attached to the democratic experiment? When citizens reject their neighbors, the processes that give democracy its meanings become difficult to reconcile with one's social prejudices. Does that intolerance affect the democratic attitudes of ordinary citizens?

A chronically ailing democracy

These questions seem particularly poignant during a moment in time when political leaders distinguish between "Black Americans" and "Americans,"²⁶ attempt to close polling locations in areas previously protected by the Voting Rights Act,²⁷ and warn that immigrants will "invade" the United States.²⁸ These sentiments are not far removed from the circulation of conspiracy

²⁶ McConnell, Sen. Mitch (R-KY). January 19, 2022. Comments made after debate of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021 (H.R. 4). Retrieved from: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4997722/user-clip-mitch-mcconnell-voters-color>.

²⁷ For a recent review of the relationship between race and polling closures, see: *Democracy Diverted: Polling Place Closures and the Right to Vote*. The Leadership Conference Education Fund. Retrieved from: <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/reports/Democracy-Diverted.pdf>.

²⁸ Trump, Donald J. *Twitter*, June 24, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1010900865602019329>. Rhetoric about immigrants

theories about the birth certificate of a Black presidential candidate,²⁹ claims that a federal judge should be disqualified because of his “Mexican heritage,”³⁰ and praise for participants at a white supremacist rally as “very fine people.”³¹ Yet, to fully appreciate the nature of the relationship between social prejudice and support for democracy requires more context than simply one or two presidential cycles or the grift of one cable news pundit. The social prejudices that people come to hold today do not merely spring forth from the ground as if by accident, and the way in which citizens tie them back to expectations about and for democracy involves a longer historical context that incorporates the way that democracy has fostered and frustrated those prejudices. Social prejudice in American political history runs deep, and to tell this story requires careful attention to the cracks in the foundation of this country’s commitments to democratic principles.

When people speak about democracy’s merits, they usually land on some version of a common refrain: Democracy is beloved because it allows citizens to select their leaders in free and fair elections. However, while equality is often included in the list of virtues assigned to it, democratic self-rule doesn’t necessarily embody enlightened values like egalitarianism and inclusion.³² While democracy in the United States begins with a set of aspirational ideas about self-determination, the ironies written into the Constitution about equality are difficult for the modern reader to take with a straight face given the benefits of both historical hindsight and the experiences of the present. “All men are created equal” is a tough pill to swallow when only white landowners are bestowed access to democratic levers or polling locations disproportionately make voting difficult for minority voters.

Still, these ideas about access and equality function as an important yardstick by which to gauge the ebbs and flows of this country’s democratization. That word is chosen deliberately. Democracies do not appear fully-formed. Instead, they evolve. American democracy, of course, emerges from the undemocratic, monarchical rule of the English in the late 18th Century. It

invading the country date as far back as the early 1870s. One example from the San Francisco Chronicle reads “THE CHINESE INVASION! They Are Coming.” See: August 27, 1873 edition. *San Francisco Chronicle*.

²⁹ Serwer, Adam. “Birtherism of a nation.” *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/birtherism-and-trump/610978/>

³⁰ Tapper, Jake. June 3, 2016. *Donald Trump full interview – CNN* [Video]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDxIMelzl10>.

³¹ Trump, Donald J. Press conference on August 15, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-infrastructure/>.

³² Davis, Nicholas T., Kirby Goidel, and Keith Gaddie. 2022. *Democracy's Meanings: How the Public Understands Democracy and Why It Matters*. University of Michigan Press.

survives bouts of gout ranging from bitter constitutional conventions, to several geographic expansions, a bitter Civil War, and the half-hearted reconciliation that followed. Despite the nearly 100 year interim of a separate-but-equal doctrine, the democraticness of the United States eventually reaches a tipping point with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

These three stages, (1) emergence, (2) survival, and (3) deepening of democratic commitments, are all a part of what scholars call “regime evolution,” and they hint at an important point.³³ Democracy involves more than the presence of any election and is judged, instead, against whether a public enjoys the fullness of democratic promises. Democracies can be more or less democratic, but a basic test that a democracy must pass is simply the extent to which the whole mass public has access to its most basic lever of power. If large chunks of a public are barred from voting – say, women prior to the 19th Amendment or African Americans until the passage of the 24th Amendment – then the functional nature of democracy is weak. At best, such a democracy is a “partial,” remaining firmly lodged between survival and expansion – enduring, but neither thriving nor growing.

The tendency in casual discussions about American democracy is to paper over these dynamics. To many, the United States’ classification as a constitutional democracy begins with the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. But that is hardly satisfactory to the millions of Americans who were born, lived, and died under the racial authoritarianism that characterized the American South until passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Nor is such a definition of democracy much comfort to Asian-Americans who experienced a nativist panic that interred thousands of such citizens during the Second World War. What sort of democracy sustains Jim Crow or callously rounds up citizens by virtue of their forebears’ ethnic background?

Despite the reasonable contemporary concern that the United States is at significant “risk of democratic collapse,” these dire warnings have an awkward relationship to democracy’s track record in the United States. To talk about democratic collapse today as a unique and particularly troubling development is to cede, in some way, that a dark youth of disenfranchisement was a normal, functioning period in democracy. To some extent, diagnoses of this current sickness fail to ground the symptoms of democratic dysfunction in a profoundly undemocratic history.

³³ Welzel, Christian. “Theories of Democratization.” In Eds. Christian Haerpfer, Patrick Bernhagen, Christian Welzel, and Ronald F. Inglehart, *Democratization* (Oxford University Press), 22.

Because democracy was originally designed to exclude many from the polity on the basis of arbitrary, but deliberate demographic features, it is difficult to argue that it functioned poorly. In fact, it operated in ways perfectly compatible with its design for almost two centuries. These (un)democratic institutions worked “fine” until, ironically, they were asked to manage full democracy in the aftermath of the Second Reconstruction. To a significant degree, the United States has lived and endures in a perpetual crisis of democracy in the sense that extending suffrage to all Americans has neither cured its institutions’ nor citizens’ undemocratic impulses. Its neighbors have never fully reconciled.

Not my neighbor: Social prejudice and democratic commitments

The central theme of this book involves the ways in which dysfunctional democratic attitudes are sustained by Americans’ social prejudices. While racism is inescapably embodied in those prejudices, nativism, or anti-immigrant sentiment, and religious intolerance are also powerful sources of out-group discrimination. And, in important ways, these views also often *intersect* – it is difficult, for example, to pull apart religious discrimination involving Islam from ethnic prejudices against Muslims. Our basic argument is that to appreciate why many Americans seem critical of democracy today requires understanding how social prejudice continues to poison the wellsprings of democratic goodwill, which we chiefly tie to these three sources: racial authoritarianism, nativism, and religious discrimination. While we trace the unique political histories of these components of social prejudice in later chapters, we can nevertheless briefly review how the underlying mechanics of these social prejudices all work in somewhat similar ways to conspire against democratic values.

Humans are “social” creatures³⁴ and they place significant value in the groups to which they belong.³⁵ While people naturally admire “important” groups with which they identify, they also place value in belonging to more trivial groups like sports teams or arbitrary groups in

³⁴ Caporael, Linnda R. 1997 “The evolution of truly social cognition: The core configurations model.” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 1(4), 276-298.

³⁵ Crocker, J., & Luhtanen, R. 1990. “Collective self-esteem and ingroup bias.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(1), 60–67. Given the near automatic tendency to make status comparisons between groups, humans use group memberships to bolster their sense of well-being and collective self-esteem.

laboratory settings.³⁶ The natural tendency to protect one's in-group is not without costs, however, and it inevitably produces a certain amount of social conflict.³⁷ Emotional and material resources are scarce in nature, and group members will fight – sometimes quite literally – to ensure that group needs are met.³⁸ This arrangement can often take on a zero-sum quality in politics, where members of some groups view the prospect of power-sharing as threatening to the safety and stability of the status quo.³⁹ Despite the promise of new elections and the prospect of changing a group's electoral fortunes in the future, for example, the uncertainty generated by democratic self-rule can induce significant anxiety about the loss of status, power, and material resources. When viewed in this way, the democrat may be perilously close to the authoritarian when provoked.

Mechanistically, individuals do not require much information to sort people into groups because stereotypes help speed social judgements. These evaluative tendencies can be benign; for instance, knowing how one doorknob operates allows children to generalize that all doorknobs must work in a similar way. In the context of social interactions, social psychologist Gordon Allport's work implies that a similar social categorization process happens nearly automatically, helping sort people into in and out-groups.⁴⁰ But unlike doorknobs, which come in a limited number of forms and nearly always work the same, these automatic social evaluations can lead people astray given that visual cues and labels are a poor substitute for *who* people are.

In part, these social categorizations occur because individuals develop and find significant value in group memberships.⁴¹ When individuals shift their thinking and begin to see themselves as part of a collective group rather than only as an individual, this “social identity”

³⁶ Frank, Mark G. and Thomas Gilovich. 1988. “The dark side of self- and social perception: Black uniforms and aggression in professional sports.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(1), 74–85.

³⁷ Brewer, Marilynn B. 1999. “The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love or outgroup hate?” *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(3), 429-444.

³⁸ Levin, Shana, Peter J. Henry, Felicia Pratto, and Jim Sidanius. 2003. “Social dominance and social identity in Lebanon: Implications for support of violence against the West.” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 6(4), 353-368; see also: Bai, Hui and Christopher M. Federico. 2021. “White and minority demographic shifts, intergroup threat, and right-wing extremism.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 94, 104-114.

³⁹ Parker, Christopher Sebastian. 2021. “Status threat: Moving the right further to the right?” *Daedalus* 150(2), 56-75.

⁴⁰ Allport, Gordon W. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.

⁴¹ Tajfel, Henri. 1982. “Social psychology of intergroup relations.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 33(1), 1-39.

becomes the lens through which they interact with the world.⁴² The reasons are simple: these social identities fulfill several basic human needs, including things like belonging,⁴³ self-esteem,⁴⁴ and certainty.⁴⁵ Critically, they also shape how people perceive and evaluate others.⁴⁶

In a vacuum, these dynamics do not seem inherently problematic. In fact, they can be healthy, binding individuals to communities and stealing them against outsiders who would do them harm. Yet, in the context of democracy, these identities can create sectarian divisions that undercut commitments to diversity. One of James Madison's greatest fears was that *factions*, loosely understood as *groups*, would destroy the sort of democratic goodwill necessary to achieve pluralism. When citizens bind themselves to groups, they lose track of common commitments to the general, rather than specific welfare. Put another way, group memberships can strip away the neighborliness that underwrites democratic exchange by placing a group's wellbeing ahead of the wellbeing of the larger community. To be a neighbor is to live in community. A neighbor cuts across these group boundaries in a way that allows people to live shoulder to shoulder with others.; and living in community requires honoring the values that make that community possible. In our story, then, actively rejecting neighbors who look, think, or believe in different things functions as a form of social prejudice. And, if democracy extends access and power to people who are viewed as undesirable neighbors, then it may follow that democracy is not so attractive after all.

These ideas find a home in the political theorist Nancy Rosenblum's book, aptly titled *Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America*.⁴⁷ About this concept of

⁴² Brewer, Marilynn B., and Wendi Gardner. 1996. "Who is this 'We'? Levels of collective identity and self-representations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71(1), 83-93.

⁴³ Brewer, Marilynn B. 1991. "The Social Self: On Being the Same and Different at the Same Time." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17(5), 475-482.

⁴⁴ Tajfel, Henri and John Turner. 2001. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." In Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams (Eds.), *Intergroup Relations: Essential Readings*, 94-109. Psychology Press.

⁴⁵ Hogg, Michael A. 2011. "Subjective Uncertainty Reduction through Self-categorization: A Motivational Theory of Social Identity Processes." *European Review of Social Psychology*, 11(1), 223-255.

⁴⁶ Ashburn-Nardo, Leslie, Corrine I. Voils, and Margo J. Monteith. "Implicit Associations as the Seeds of Intergroup Bias: How Easily do They Take Root?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81(5), 789-799. Van Bavel, Jay J., and William A. Cunningham. 2009. "Self-categorization with a Novel Mixed-race Group Moderates Automatic Social and Racial Biases." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 35(3), 321-335.

⁴⁷ Rosenblum, Nancy L. 2016. *Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America*. Princeton University Press.

neighborliness, she writes that, “[t]he democracy of everyday life rises from the ground of day-to-day reciprocity and neighbors’ responses to ordinary kindnesses and ordinary vices... We give and take favors and offense; we assist, speak out, monitor, scold and rebuke, and rally others to enforce ‘what anyone would do, here’; we live and let live.” Despite recent interest in *citizenship*,⁴⁸ neighborliness is essential on its own merits. “Something is lost if the democracy of everyday life is overlooked or flattened out, or seen as valuable only insofar as it instantiates public democratic principles and practices.” In other words, where citizenship’s priority primarily involves the reinforcing of democratic values for political sake, neighborliness makes no assumptions about political ends. It is the quiet domain, a precursor to politics. Where neighborliness fails, democratic citizenship is unlikely to follow.

Indeed, it is not difficult to overlay a lack of neighborliness onto the history of partial democracy in the United States outlined above. Native peoples promised agency and independence by federal treaties in the newly formed Republic were routinely dispossessed of ancestral lands and material goods. Saunt’s (2020) *Unworthy Republic* traces this ignoble period in American history and ties this mistreatment to a failure not just of federal policy but of ordinary people failing to exhibit the basic standards of care and conduct necessary to live in community and peace with those who are “different.” Throughout slave and free states, white Americans mistreated and occasionally killed indigenous persons in their quest to lay claim to the resource rich new world, culminating in, but certainly not ending with the genocidal Trail of Tears.

The failure of reconstruction after the Civil War is a failure of neighborliness. The Jim Crow regime in the American South involved white Americans viewing Black freedmen as separate and unequal members of local communities. Lynchings – murder performed by hanging a person from a tree – were common during this period, and often involved entire communities participating in the extrajudicial killing of Black citizens.⁴⁹ Throughout the Old Confederacy, millions of Black Americans feared for their safety as white neighbors shut them out of politics, society, and the economy.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See, for instance: Wallace Goodman, Sara. 2022. *Citizenship in Hard Times: How Ordinary People Respond to Democratic Threat*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁹ Wood, Amy Louise. 2011. *Lynching and spectacle: Witnessing racial violence in America, 1890-1940*. University of North Carolina Press.

⁵⁰ Dray, Philip. 2003. *At the hands of persons unknown: The lynching of Black America*. Modern Library.

The Muslim ban instituted by the Trump administration in late 2017 banned travel to the United States from seven predominantly Muslim countries, including Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, and suspended the resettlement of Syrian refugees. A policy baldly xenophobic and racist in origin, the executive order was a classic failure of the demands of being a good neighbor. The Syrian resettlement dimension, in particular, is difficult to fathom given the horrors of war from which these immigrants were fleeing. The decision to halt resettlement is one that fails the international standards of care to help the oppressed.

Taken as a whole, these three brief examples are bound together by a common thread: at each turn, individuals refused to engage in the conduct demanded of good neighbors. Why? Our argument is that the failure of neighborliness is one that is motivated, propelled, and encouraged by *social prejudice*. And that prejudice forms a very specific rebuke of the pluralism necessary for democracy to flourish. The rest of this book is devoted to understanding the conditions under which this sort of social prejudice – operationalized as a rejection of undesirable neighbors – produces these weak commitments to democracy.

Outline of book

In chapter 1, we take up the nature of prejudice and its relationship to the pluralism that lies at the heart of democracy. Prejudice, as social psychologist Gordon Allport famously argued, involves a negative reaction to something that is grounded in “a faulty and inflexible generalization.”⁵¹ In other words, people may possess a rigid, unfair, or negative mental image toward a group of people that colors the lens through which they subsequently evaluate members of that group. Because social prejudice is difficult to disentangle from the historical, institutional, or discursive context in which it occurs, even well-meaning people may display an unconscious reaction to others grounded in the automatic cognitive processes that are born from the contexts in which they live.

For our purposes, we explore social prejudice through the lens of neighborliness: whether people willingly accept or reject living next to someone from a racial, ethnic, or religious out-group. In a vacuum, there are few reasons why someone should willingly exclude someone from a particular religious or racial group from their immediate social space. There are certainly rational reasons of solidarity involved in wanting to live next to one’s kin. And social structures

⁵¹ Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 9.

may conspire to sort and reproduce racial homophily.⁵² But, at the individual-level, attitudes involving the exclusion of out-group neighbors on the basis of immutable characteristics like the color of one's skin or on other social group memberships like religion, clearly constitute a thorny form of social prejudice. In our view, thinking about these attitudes as a form of social prejudice not only also sidestep some of the controversy regarding the peculiarities of longstanding measurement protocols of various forms of, say, racial bias, but has clear application to democracy.

In fact, if prejudice involves an unwillingness to fraternize with others – a disinterest in living shoulder to shoulder with others as neighbors – then it is cancerous to democracy, which requires a willingness to engage with, much less cede power to groups that one dislikes. Prejudice, in turn, frustrates the good-faith assumptions necessary to “do” the business of democracy, and American political history is riddled with episodes where social prejudice boils over, limiting the rights and freedoms of Americans who are entitled to them. From the violent, post-Civil War failures to protect Black citizens' voting rights, to the ethnic discrimination baked into a century of stagnant, often harmful immigration policy, and to the abuse faced by Muslim citizens in the twilight of 9/11, the socially prejudiced in America today are the children of several failed reconstructions. This chapter lays out our theory for how those failures can have severe consequences for democratic commitments.

Chapter 2 takes this theory and applies it to three historical examples, exploring how the failures of neighborliness lead to democratic breakdown in three sorrowful scenarios in American history. In these case studies, social prejudice overwhelms the impulse toward neighborliness, violating both standards of reciprocity and demands to live and let live, leading to catastrophic episodes of authoritarian behavior where democratic citizens exhibit a stunning disregard for the rules of the game.

We begin by retelling the story of the dispossession of indigenous people in America during the 18th and 19th Centuries, focusing in on the expulsion of native peoples from the southeastern United States. We then fast-forward to the early 20th Century, to the days after the failure of Reconstruction to a moment within the Jim Crow period where African Americans in Tulsa, Oklahoma experienced one of the darkest events in civil rights history. Nominally known as the Tulsa City Massacre, this event centers on “Black Wall Street,” one of the most profitable

⁵² Sampson, Robert J., and Patrick Sharkey. 2008. "Neighborhood selection and the social reproduction of concentrated racial inequality." *Demography*, 45(1), 1-29.

geographic areas of Black wealth in the United States at that time. Despite living in relative peace with white neighbors, white residents of the city would eventually burn the entire neighborhood surrounding Black Wall Street to the ground in a stunning repudiation of democratic values. Finally, we conclude by examining the treatment of Sikh Americans after September 11, 2001. In the period of profound anger and turmoil after the bombing of the World Trade Center, Sikhs were the victims of violent racial and religious discrimination. The resulting attacks reveal how quickly bias and (mis)categorization can result in democratic breakdowns among neighbors who formerly lived in harmony.

Taken together, these examples cut across racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice, and reveal how deeply “normal” *herrenvolk* democracy – a democratic system where only a specific ethnic group enjoys the fullness of democracy’s promises – has been in the United States. In recounting these stories, we show how prejudice grounded in ascriptive, categorical features like race, ethnicity, and religion lead to catastrophic democratic breakdowns.

Chapter 3 empirically demonstrates how social prejudice (anti-neighborliness) is related to democratic attitudes. We begin by investigating the ways in which scholars have studied democratic support and find two curious gaps in this literature. First, race functions as a central organizing feature of American mass politics, yet few studies have connected views about minorities to democratic beliefs. To be sure, there are massive literatures about the racial attitudes of Americans and how those attitudes shape political attitudes, but they are almost wholly disconnected from the specific study of democratic beliefs. Second, much of the focus in studies of public opinion about democracy involves whether citizens like democracy or would prefer authoritarian alternatives. Unfortunately, there is no coherent framework for studying democratic values. Despite lengthy and well-regarded works of political theory that discuss democratic virtues, polling about commitments to the things that give democracy its meanings is haphazard.

We speculate why this may be the case and outline an approach for measuring democratic commitments that contextualizes the depth of democratic support. We explore both World Values Survey data and a new, nationally representative dataset that collects Americans’ views about democratic values, support for democracy, and beliefs about the rule of law. Our results are discouraging. We begin by introducing several ways of operationalizing social prejudice, which we define as discriminatory attitudes toward individuals from racial and religious groups outside of the white, Christian “mainstream.” This baseline category is chosen for good reason – since the 1980s, a growing, revisionist history has developed surrounding the social, cultural, and religious

conditions of the American founding.⁵³ This “white Christian nationalism” is a powerful ideology that harnesses identity, race, and religion to construct a mythologized, cultural-ethnic political identity. Within this framework, white, Christian Americans were responsible for the creation of democracy in the United States and, as such, are the primary beneficiaries of this historical development. While this identity is not necessarily explicitly racist, it nevertheless constructs an imagined community by underwriting ordinary expressions of identity that distinguish out- from in-group by indoctrinating “a people” to produce “the people.”⁵⁴ As we suggest earlier in this chapter, this phenomenon contributes to normalizing “whiteness” as the predominating political category in the United States. We find that social prejudice among white Americans – not wanting people who belong to a racial, ethnic, or religious outgroup – consistently predicts low democratic support. Triangulating among measures of democratic commitments, this finding is both consistent and robust various ways of measuring democratic support.

Chapter 4 builds on the ideas raised in chapters 2 and 3 by evaluating whether environmental social conditions are related to the democratic values of ordinary citizens. Given the connection between “local” geography and neighborliness, we might expect that the immediate social context of an individual shapes their professed support for democracy. If the rejection of out-group neighbors is associated with less love for democracy, then to what degree does being exposed to social diversity in one’s daily life affect individuals’ support for democracy?

To test this notion, we connect survey data from the massive Nationscape project involving democratic attitudes to various measures of social diversity taken from the Census. Linking demographic data to survey data allows us to assess whether citizens embedded in local environments with high levels of diversity exhibit poorer democratic attitudes, as our findings might expect. Social diversity generates competing demands on the distribution of material power and access to resources, which naturally strains the neighborly goodwill essential to make democracy work. In turn, white American citizens embedded in areas of high social diversity are particularly susceptible to these dynamics.

⁵³ Whitehead, Andrew L. and Sameul L. Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. Oxford University Press

⁵⁴ Backhouse, Stephen. 2011. *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Christian Nationalism*. Oxford University Press, 2-8. Because nationalism “prioritizes the abstract notion of the ‘compatriot’ over the concrete reality of the ‘neighbour,’” its relationship to democracy is particularly fraught.

Chapter 5 introduces experimental evidence to test how social prejudice affects democracy under different conditions. Here, we focus on the neighborhood context and inter-neighbor relations to assess whether and how out-group neighbors affect views about democracy. We use several different survey experiments to test these ideas. Our goal in this research design was to construct a set of plausible interventions to test (1) whether prejudice grounded in the concept of neighborliness can be primed, and, (2) how exposure to “threatening” neighbors affects democratic attitudes. Study 1 explores the neighborhood context and whether racial, ethnic, and religious diversity can sufficiently threaten white Americans such that they exhibit weaker democratic commitments. Study 2 builds on these ideas, but pivots to the more intimate next-door neighbor concept. This experiment tests whether priming explicit racial or religious cues can also decrease support for democracy. Finally, Study 3 is designed to analyze whether emphasizing similarities (dissimilarities) can ameliorate (exacerbate) the effects of out-group threat on white Americans’ democratic attitudes.

Despite much research involving racial attitudes, our focus on neighborliness – or, more specifically, a lack of neighborliness – allows us to sidestep some of the baggage accumulated in the study of white Americans’ racial attitudes. By triangulating our interventions using racial, ethnic, and religious cues, we are able to test the robustness of different forms of social prejudices. Irrespective of the out-group, it appears that white Americans scoring high on social prejudice are especially sensitive to the prospect of out-group neighbors. When individuals willingly exclude potential neighbors from their sacred social space based on race, ethnicity, status, or religious beliefs, they renege on an important piece of the social contract that makes democracy possible, which these experiments catch.

Finally, these findings raise related question about the extent to which the relationship between social prejudice and democratic support “works” elsewhere. Concern about public support for democracy is not isolated to the United States. As political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt warn, countries across the democratic West face serious questions of democratic legitimacy. Not only do many of these countries have historical problems involving structural racism of their own, but religious extremism and immigration are frequent anxieties that nativist populists stoke to fan the flames of nationalism.

While the results of the preceding chapters bring into relief the contours of how social prejudice undercut public support for democracy domestically in the United States, chapter 6 raises the prospect that similar dynamics may be present in other, western democracies. We

introduce several case studies, aided by public opinion data, that hint that the pressures of social diversity aggravate public commitments to democratic values abroad, as they do in the United States. We then compare and contrast how social prejudice affects mass support for democracy in these countries. Taken collectively, these results illustrate the strength of the relationship between social prejudice and democracy.

Conclusion

Full, inclusive democracy is a relatively recent innovation, particularly in the United States, where elites have historically been reluctant to extend the benefits of citizenship regardless of race, status, or creed. In fact, despite early commitments to a remarkable enfranchisement after the Civil War, a renewed, nasty bout authoritarian gangrene descended upon the American South for the next century.⁵⁵ In the interim, examples of dispossession, nativism, racism, and religious discrimination unbecoming a democracy of the United States' stature are not difficult to uncover.

Even today, examples of social prejudice are not uncommon. From calls to violently police minority protestors exercising their constitutional rights, to callous depictions of migrant laborers, and to mean accusations of religious loyalties, American politics is brimming with the language of social prejudice. Political leaders and mass murderers alike are drawn to it. This book suggests that an ongoing narrowing of the public imagination toward democracy is partially sustained by the failures of citizens to practice being good neighbors. For citizens who exhibit social prejudice, full democracy is threatening. While democratic institutions are only as strong as the commitments of the elites bound to them, public support for democracy remains a vital pillar of the legitimacy necessary to sustain democratic self-rule. American citizens in the 21st Century are the children of several failed reconstruction projects, and the social prejudice underwriting those failures remains a significant danger to citizens' democratic commitments.

⁵⁵ Mickey, Robert. 2015. *Paths out of Dixie*. Princeton University Press.