

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Publications and Research

Hunter College

---

2023

### Book Review: A Field Guide to White Supremacy

Jessie Daniels  
*CUNY Hunter College*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc\\_pubs/706](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc_pubs/706)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).  
Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

**A Field Guide to White Supremacy, by Kathleen Belew (Editor), Ramón Arturo Gutiérrez (Editor), University of California Press (2021). 424 pages. ISBN: 9780520382527. Hardcover: \$85.00 Paperback: \$24.95**

**Review by: Jessie Daniels, PhD, Hunter College  
Accepted for publication in: Contemporary Sociology**

We, who reside in the United States, live in a swirl of white supremacy; yet many of us are barely able to make sense of it, even as we export it around the world.

The white supremacist violence of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 (168 people killed) is said to have inspired the 2011 attack in Oslo, Norway (77 people killed), which then galvanized the attack on two mosques in 2019 Christchurch, New Zealand (51 people killed), and news of that attack prompted the assault on a Wal-Mart in El Paso, Texas (23 people killed). Domestically in the U.S. deadly white supremacist violence has become a recurring nightmare. In 2015, an attack on Black churchgoers in Charleston left 9 dead; in 2018, an attack on worshippers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh left 11 dead; and in 2022, 10 people shopping for groceries died after an 18-year-old gunman opened fire with an assault weapon. News of white supremacist violence pings around the world via internet servers and accelerates the cycle of destruction and mainstream journalists dither over whether to include the words “white supremacy” in the headlines of their reports for fear of alienating some readers.

Fortunately, *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*, edited by Kathleen Belew and Ramon A. Gutiérrez, has arrived to help us understand the roots of this violence and the world we are living in today. This volume should be of particular interest for journalists covering the far right, as it begins with a preface “Thoughts on the *Associated Press Stylebook*,” by Belew and nine co-authors who are both activists and academics. They write that this recommended lexicon of terms focused on terminology and reporting around race, gender, immigration, and political extremism, is intended to be a “starting point in what we hope will be a longer conversation about how we name and acknowledge white supremacy.” This is an urgently needed intervention and I would like to follow the conversation that follows from it, wherever that might be.

Belew and Gutiérrez, both historians, have compiled an impressive roster of contributions for this edited volume. There are several re-printed pieces, by Doug Kiel (on indigenous land recovery), Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (on the culture of racism), Rebecca Solnit (on domestic violence), Jamelle Bouie (on racial terrorism), Judith Butler (on antisemitism), and Adam Goodman (on deportation of immigrants). Most of these are drawn from popular outlets, like Slate (Bouie) or Guernica (Solnit), and this means that the pieces are written in a fairly accessible style.

The book is organized into four sections: Section I: Building, Protecting, and Profiting from Whiteness; Section II: Iterations of White Supremacy; Section III: Anti-Immigrant Nation; and Section IV: White Supremacy from Fringe to Mainstream. For readers who

are new to thinking about white supremacy, I expect that the first three sections will be most relevant. There are several stand-out pieces that do excellent work on recognizing the complexity of white supremacist ideology beyond simple Black-White binaries and highlight the way that gender-binaries are baked into this violent belief system. For example, Simeon Man's "Anti-Asian Violence and U.S. Imperialism," ties the American historical impulse to acquire, extract resources from, and dominate other nations to the everyday violence carried out against Asian American people in current moment.

In "Homophobia and American Nationalism," Roderick Ferguson challenges the conventional narratives around the Pulse nightclub massacre as the result of either Islamophobia (if the shooter was in ISIS) or a rejected gay identity (if the shooter was a spurned lover). Instead, he writes, "We see the versatility and destructiveness of this social egoism as it attempts to make virtues out of transphobia, homophobia, antisemitism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, and ableism. Rather than relegating a social problem to one region of the world, the killings seem to call attention to how varieties of nationalism around the globe are providing the ground on which fascism might have a brand new and multirouted run," (p.135).

Croix Saffin's piece, "Wounds of White Supremacy: Understanding the Epidemic of Violence against Black and Brown Trans Women/Femmes," is a refreshing and necessary, if harrowing, contribution to the literature for offering a glimpse at the pain behind the disproportionate rates of violence against trans women of color. Saffin rightly calls out the white supremacy in queer communities, where "racism is relegated to the periphery of a white-dominated gay political agenda," (p.142).

The "great replacement theory," seems to be ambient noise for our current political moment, as this talking point of the far right gets repeated regularly by the prominent television host Tucker Carlson and in the manifesto of the attacker in the mass shooting in Buffalo. Those who are enthralled by this theory, and those who are critical of it, would do well to read Leo R. Chavez's contribution here, "Fear of White Replacement: Latina Fertility, White Demographic Decline, and Immigration Reform" (pp.177-202).

For those of us, like me, who have been studying the far right since before the Oklahoma City bombing, the final section, "White Supremacy from Fringe to Mainstream," is the most intriguing. Gutiérrez offers a recent history of white supremacy in the U.S. and Belew makes the case that there are never "lone wolf" actors because they are emboldened by a broader movement. Along with these original pieces by the co-editors are those by Joseph Lowndes (on the nativist turn in right-wing politics), Nicole Hemmer (on the connection between online and offline organizing leading up to Charlottesville), and Joseph Darda (on how race and policing overlap in the U.S.).

While I appreciate the scope of work covered in this edited volume, there are, necessarily, some crucial elements that readers will not find here. This volume is rooted in the context of the United States, even though the white supremacist movement here has been extending its reach globally since at least the 1990s. Only one piece (Hemmer) focuses on the rise of the popular Internet as a crucial element in the

PRE-PRINT VERSION  
DATED: 30 June 2022

expansion of white supremacy. And, even though there is some mention of specific Fox News personalities in one piece (Lowndes), there is no thorough critique of cable news networks in doing the work of mainstreaming far-right talking points.

Still, this is a useful book for undergraduate courses in sociology, social movements, race/racism, right-wing mobilization, or on the present political climate.

In their conclusion, Gutiérrez and Belew offer this observation: “White power has now attacked us all, and we all hold this in common. Perhaps this is the moment when systemic forms of racism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, antisemitism, and transphobia will finally be, if not eviscerated, then profoundly tempered, radically shrinking the space between the egalitarian ideas of the American Creed and the realities of racial inequality,” (p.333).

My hope is that this volume, as well as all the adjacent work by a diverse range of scholars, will help us understand the presence, power and persistence of white supremacy in the United States.