The white supremacist movement in the U.S. through the lens of the matrix of race

Abby L. Ferber

The matrix of race

This chapter will examine the “matrix of race” theoretical and analytical lens, discuss its history and contours, and then apply it to one specific case: the white supremacist movement in the U.S. Using the matrix of race framework provides an intersectional analysis that bridges individual and systemic approaches, while focusing on the centrality of white privilege to the maintenance of white supremacy. Additionally, it draws direct connections between systemic white supremacy built into the fabric of the nation and institutionalized throughout society, with the more narrowly identified white supremacist movement that arose later as a defense of slavery and the system of white supremacy it saw as threatened.

The matrix of race analytical lens builds upon a range of advancements in sociological thinking about race, and brings them together into a coherent approach. Institutional and structural approaches to understanding race, research on intersectionality, narrative approaches, including those that focus on color-blindness, white privilege studies, anti-racism studies, and socio-geographical analyses of race, place and space are all brought together here to create a dynamic, historical, multi-level framework for making sense of race and racial inequality (Coates, Ferber, and Brunsma 2018). This comprehensive and fully developed theory distinguishes it from earlier references to racial matrices, and it is the most fully developed iteration of a model that has been developed over time by multiple groups of scholars (Coates, Ferber, and Brunsma 2018, Ferber et al. 2007, 2008).

Coates, Ferber and Brunsma have created this visual depiction of the matrix of race (Figure 14.1).

The inner ring centers the socially constructed category of race. The next ring includes many of our other constructed and hierarchical social identities that intersect with race, producing various forms of racialized identities, both self-defined and ascribed, experience, interpersonal relations, and positionality within the next ring. In the third ring, we see the many overlapping institutions that we live in. They reproduce and advance racism and constructs of race, but also provide spaces where race can be challenged, evolve, and restructured. The outer layer
emphasizes the larger context of history, location, and culture. When and where we are located shapes the specific structures and manifestations of race. The various dominant and alternative cultural narratives produced at that historical moment in that specific setting provide the essential context for shaping, determining, acting, and structuring all of the inner circles. This model connects the micro and macro levels, centering micro level experiences and interactions within macro-level structures.

In this matrix of race, race is centered within the context of our many shifting social identities and systems of inequality. However, this is only one way in which to look at the social matrix. It was created to examine any system of inequality. Gender, religion or any other of the social identities structured by dominance may be placed in the middle. Alternatively, one could simply place “the individual” in the center.
The basic assumptions of this model are that:

1. Race is inherently social
2. Race is a narrative and can also be interpreted through endless narrative lenses
3. Race is relational and intersectional
4. Race is institutional and structured
5. People are active agents in the matrix.

**Race is inherently social**

Scholars across social sciences, humanities, and sciences have demonstrated the constructed nature of race (Desmond and Emirbayer 2010; Ferber 1998; Omi and Winant 2015; Smedley 2016). Race is a product of racism. The creation of “races” occurred at a specific point in time, to further advance specific relations of oppression and privilege already secured by colonialism and Christian dominance. These included both the near genocide of Indigenous people and the theft of their land and resources, as well as the extraction of free labor via the system of chattel slavery. Those who came to be defined as white created the classification systems, which have varied over time, while keeping white superiority intact.

The widely held assumption that race is a biological reality, and that people are born into specific racial groups which do not change over the life course, remains generally intact. Anthropologist Audrey Smedley (2007) identified these key features of the construction of racial classifications: race consists of visible physical differences that reflect inherent internal ones (such as intelligence, morals, work ethic and more); race is inherited and unchanging, determined by nature and/or God; and races are ranked and valued hierarchically (in terms of superiority, beauty, degree of civilization, capacity for moral reasoning, and more). This generally accepted ideology justified white supremacy, and was written into the foundations of our nation and enshrined by our “Founding Fathers” (Feagin 2010, 2013; Painter 2010; Roediger 2008).

**Race is a narrative**

The construction of race required a justifying narrative. The invention of racial groups developed alongside the growing abolitionist movement and threats to the future of the institution of slavery. The myth of race requires a strong cultural belief system to remain unquestioned. Joe Feagin (2010) identifies this as the “white racial frame” which provides a “comprehensive orienting structure or took kit by which dominant racial groups and others are understood, interpreted and act within social settings” (Feagin 2010:13).

Lee Anne Bell (2010) provides a framework for interpreting different narratives of race. She classifies these narratives, or stories as she calls them, into four categories:

1. Stock stories: the predominant stories. They reinforce hierarchy and the status quo.
2. Concealed stories: these have been excluded and hidden from the dominant stories. History is filled with concealed stories, often the voices and experiences of the marginalized, as well as the data and research that challenges stock stories.
3. Resistance stories: these are narratives that directly challenge stock stories in some way. They are rooted in struggles for social justice change.
4. Transforming stories: these are alternative and imaginative stories which can support resistance and guide the construction of a different and equitable future.
Our stock stories of race change over time depending upon the political and economic circumstances (Feagin 2013; Irons 2010; Roediger 2008).

Other scholars have focused on specific racialized narratives. After the Civil Rights Movement, as public attitudes shifted and racism was no longer being publicly embraced, a “new racism” took hold (Hill Collins 2004; Irons 2010) Sociologists have dubbed this new racism “covert racism” (Coates 2011) and “color-blind racism” (Bonilla-Silva 2010).

Color-blindness is the view that one does not see race or ethnicity, only humans, and it informs many of our most prevalent stock stories today (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Gallagher 2003). According to this ideology, if we each embrace a color-blind attitude and just stop “seeing” race it can finally become a relic of the past. This approach argues that we should treat people as simply human beings, rather than as racialized beings because we now live in an equitable society. As a result of this narrative, whites are more likely to believe African Americans are as well off or better off than whites (Bush 2011; Pew 2016).

Bonilla-Silva identifies (2010) four components of color-blind ideology:

1. Abstract liberalism: based on abstract concepts of equal opportunity, rationality, free choice, and individualism; argues that discrimination is no longer a problem; and any individual who works hard can succeed.
2. Naturalization: interprets inequity and inequality as the result of natural group differences, rather than social relations. Segregation is explained as the result of people’s natural inclination to live near others of the same race.
3. Cultural racism: inherent cultural differences serve to separate racialized groups.
4. Minimization of racism: we now have a level playing field, everyone has equal opportunities to succeed, and racism is no longer a real problem.

Color-blind racism maintains and reproduces the subtle and institutional racial inequality that pervades the U.S. Examining color-blind ideology intersectionally, and identifying similar strategic narratives shaping stories about gender and religious inequity, this framework has been enlarged, and coined “oppression-blindness” (Ferber 2012).

While oppression-blindness has remained intact, a loud and growing overt white supremacist voice began to emerge as a backlash to the election of Barack Obama, and has only continued to gain momentum ever since. Donald Trump’s campaign drew out large numbers of white supremacist group members to his campaign events. White supremacist organization gatherings actually decreased during that time because Trump rallies took their place and provided a space for self-declared white supremacists to gather. At the same time, these events brought together not only overt white supremacists, but white people all along the conservative spectrum, and overt racism and other forms of oppressions were given greater legitimacy among a growing segment of the population. This pattern has intensified throughout Trump’s presidency, as he makes racist, sexist, ableist statements, and more. His anti-immigrant rhetoric, policies and practices have spread white supremacist views, and enabled and encouraged people to become much bolder in expressing their own prejudices. This has also opened many white people’s eyes to how much racism lay just below the surface and ready to erupt when unleashed. Nevertheless, color-blind views are maintained at the same time, and reduce the problem of contemporary overt white supremacy to the level of the individual racist.
Race is relational and intersectional

Race and other social identities based on systems of oppression and privilege intersect and shape each other; they are relational and intersectional (Crenshaw 1990; Ferber 1998, 2012; Hurtado and Sinha 2008; Ken 2010; Romero 2017; Vivar 2016). Intersectional theory moved both race and gender scholarship beyond the silo approach which treated each social identity as its own distinct system of oppression and privilege.

Intersectional theories argue that race, gender, and other salient social identities are intertwined and inseparable, and cannot be comprehended on their own (Ken 2010, Case et al. 2012, Ferber 1998). The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1990); however, intersectional theory has a long history, dating back to at least the abolitionist and suffrage movements, and rooted in the work of black women. Many women of color, and some men of color, recognized multiple oppressions, and the inherent limitations of social movements that focused on only one social identity (Combahee River Collective 1986; Cooper 1988; Lemons 2009; Lorde 1984; Robnett 1996; Ruiz 2008; Ruiz 2017; Terrell 1940; Truth 1851).

There is a common misconception that intersectionality means focusing on all social identities at the same time (race, gender/gender identity, sexuality, class, nationality, ability, age, religion, etc.). Instead, intersectional theorizing examines those identities most salient in any given context. Even when examining a specific subject like race, an intersectional lens provides breadth and depth that makes it fully inclusive, more nuanced, and more accurate. For example, simplistic statements about Asian American levels of education and income reinforce the myth of the “model minority”. However, bringing national origins into the analysis provides different insight. Asians from India and Japan are far more successful than those originating from Thailand or Vietnam. And the preference for marriage partners reveals that Asian women are more highly desired by whites than are Asian men.

Another misconception is that an intersectional approach focuses only on multiple oppressions. While early works focused on the “double jeopardy” faced by women of color, scholars have moved beyond that starting point to examine all lives as intersectional, taking into account not only oppressed but privileged identities (Hurtado and Sinha 2008). The matrix of race theory applies to studying intersecting privileged identities as well. There is a growing body of research on white privilege and its interactions with masculinity, Christianity, heterosexuality and more (Hurtado and Sinha 2008). While it is essential to know the history of the concept of intersectionality and its roots in the experiences of African American women’s work, it also proves essential to understanding why organized white supremacist movement is overwhelmingly made up of white Christian men (Blee 2002, 2009; Daniels 1996; Ferber 1998, 2004).

Race is institutional and structural

The sociology of race as a field generally takes for granted that race is rooted in institutional structures. The substantial bodies of scholarship on race, racism and inequity within healthcare, primary and secondary education, higher education, workplaces, families, television and movies, social media, the criminal justice system and more, all examine pieces of the picture of the institutionalization of racial inequity. Everyone lives in and among social institutions. Race fundamentally structures and organizes our lives within society in and amongst overlapping and interconnected institutions. Research documents the ways white supremacist assumptions and white privilege imbue every social institution (Boulware et al. 2016; Coates, Ferber, and Brunsma 2018; Dominelli 2017; Sleeter 2016; Tilley and Shilliam 2018). Within these institutions, dominant racial narratives also structure how they are built and organized,
as well as their practices and policies. Institutions foster and reproduce inequity, discrimination, unequal outcomes, and the system of white supremacy as natural and often invisible.

**We are active agents**

Racial constructs shape our identities, and we continuously reproduce them. Stock stories are often internalized, even by those they fail to benefit. They are processed and made sense of by individuals and groups. Human beings, as active agents, have the potential to question inherited and ever-present narratives. Narratives guide our behaviors and can support the status quo, guide our search for concealed stories, produce resistance, and inspire transformative stories that might produce a more equitable society. If race is socially constructed, it follows that we are active agents that can also construct race differently (Coates, Ferber, and Brunsma 2018; Michael and Conger 2009; Tochluk 2010; Warren 2010).

Understanding how dominant discourses are framed and reproduced by our institutional practices and policies helps us to understand how these patterns are not only maintained or advanced, but also how they can be restructured (Bell 2010, 2014; Bush 2011).

**The organized white supremacist movement through the lens of the matrix of race**

Utilizing the matrix of race theory to understand the organized white supremacist movement in the U.S. provides a fuller and less simplistic understanding of the movement. First, it situates the organized white supremacist movement in a larger cultural and historical context. The U.S. is both a white supremacist nation, and possesses an organized white supremacist movement, or collection of groups, that become more vocal and visible at specific points in history when white supremacy may feel to be threatened or under attack. The white supremacist movement literally arises from the broader white supremacist culture and society that it exists within. It is the tip of the iceberg – sometimes it is the only visible manifestation of racism that many people see; however, it rests upon a much larger and deeper foundation. Continuing the metaphor – the tip is pointed, and may appear dangerous and deadly like the tip of a knife. However, without the entire apparatus of systemic white supremacist history holding it up, it would not exist. How large the tip appears to be varies at specific points in time, depending upon how deep the iceberg is. It is always there, but at times like now, the bulk of the iceberg has been strengthened and the tip is now larger.

Oppression and privilege predated the construction of race. When slaves and abolitionists began revolting and posing a serious threat to the system of slavery, early efforts to divide human beings into classifications called “races” quickened. An ideology of white supremacy congealed, defining whites as superior in a multitude of ways, including intelligence, work ethics, civics, beauty, and more (Smedley 2016; West 1982). Throughout the history of the census, the only category that has remained constant is “whites”, because the construction of race was about defining who is white and has the power to vote, make law, run for office, buy property, accumulate resources, and more. It was about the distribution of privilege. In defining who counts as white, boundaries were established between whites and all others, who were denied these privileges. The U.S. has always been a white supremacist nation that endows all white people with some degree of white privilege. White privilege is the product of white supremacy. The daily operations and benefits of white privilege helps to ensure that white people protect the system of white supremacy.
The organized white supremacist movement overtly fights to protect white supremacy and privilege. When it appears to be threatened, their numbers and activity increase. The Ku Klux Klan was birthed by confederate veterans after the Civil War, afraid of the political power of newly freed blacks. During Reconstruction, whites felt their privilege threatened by the enfranchisement of black men and civil rights granted to all blacks. Approximately 2,000 African Americans were elected to public office during this time. Small Klan groups terrorized the African American community, and white supremacy was again enshrined more deeply in law and policy by the Black Codes, which limited and cut short Reconstruction. Taking land away from African Americans, denying them access to jobs and the vote, and segregating public and private spaces frequently resulted in their total exclusion from existing institutions including schools and hospitals (Du Bois 2017; Holt 1977).

In the 1920s, a widespread white supremacist movement bloomed, no longer limited to the South (Blee 2008). This expansion was fueled by the large numbers of European immigrants that did not already have much presence in the U.S. (for example, the Irish, Italians, Jews and Catholics). These groups were initially identified as non-whites. African Americans were most likely to face rioting white mobs, lynching, and banishments of entire populations from many towns across the U.S., forcing people to abandon any property they had accumulated. These are only some of the examples of what should be rightly labeled domestic terrorism. This second wave of the Klan counted approximately five million members, including many elected officials, with a minority now in the South. Even whites who did not perpetuate violence generally legitimated it. Crowds of white families attended lynchings and officers of the law were complicit. Klan groups no longer had to operate in secrecy.

Kathleen Blee’s (2008) groundbreaking work in Women of the Klan introduced an intersectional approach and was the first to really examine gender differences in the Klan. She focused specifically on the very different ways in which wives supported the movement. The role of women was ignored by scholars up until that point, yet women played an important role in sustaining the work of the Klan through their reproductive and domestic labor.

The third wave of increased movement activity occurred in the 1950s–1970s. During the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, the KKK and other organized white supremacist groups like the neo-Nazis became more visible again to defend against threats to institutionalized white supremacy. The growth in other movements, including the women’s movement, further fanned their flames, and writing and publications of white supremacist groups became more hostile towards women, depicting them either as ideal white mothers reproducing white children for the movement, or race traitors involved in interracial relationships with non-whites. The controlling image of white women being raped or “stolen away” by oversexualized black men was a constant theme. The threat many men felt was posed by the women’s movement was clear in the white supremacist appeal to white men to “reclaim their women” and “reclaim their nation” (Ferber 1998).

The white supremacist narrative remained largely unchanged at its core, but reflected the country’s shift in expanding the category of whites to embrace the immigrants of the previous wave, with the exception of Jews. Jews are defined as the masterminds behind the plot to eliminate whites. This belief has deep, historical roots preceding the creation of the U.S., and remains a core belief in the white supremacist movement. The white supremacist narrative also evolved again as immigration policy did. In 1965, the very tiny quotas limiting immigrants from non-European countries was lifted. Thus, non-white immigrants, and immigration in general, grew as a significant focus for white supremacist groups. Immigrants were added to the list of enemies trying to wipe out whites and take control.
The white supremacist movement today

This brief historical overview has highlighted the importance of an intersectional perspective, a focus on the role of narratives, and changing constructions of race and who counts as white. All of these facets of the matrix of race play an essential role in making sense of the organized white supremacist movement, and its relationship to the larger white supremacist system.

The rise of the current phase of white supremacist movement activity has arisen as a result of many factors. At the top of that list is the explosion of social media and Presidential politics. In 2000 555 hate groups were identified; in 2018 1,020 were identified (a small number are not white supremacist) (SPLC 2019).

This movement consists of a wide range of groups that may give themselves or be given other labels, such as white nationalists, alt-right, militias, etc. The varied organized groups lumped together under this label still share the common historical narrative that white people are inherently superior, should be running the nation, and must protect themselves from threats to their power and privilege. They continue to focus on non-white immigrants, especially those coming across the Southern border, as a threat to the white race and white people’s wellbeing. The image of white women being raped by dark men was invoked by President Trump to further his narrative about dangerous throngs of non-white men crossing the border. The second relatively new villain is the Muslim, another addition to the list of threats to the white race. All Muslims are depicted as terrorists, despite the fact that the vast majority of domestic terrorism is carried out by men with connections to white supremacist groups and/or ideology. The white supremacist stock story does not depict violent extremists as terrorists.

268 right-wing extremists prosecuted in federal court since 9/11 were allegedly involved in crimes that appear to meet the legal definition of domestic terrorism. Yet the Justice Department applied anti-terrorism laws against only 34 of them, compared to more than 500 alleged international terrorists. (Aaronson 2019)

The recent steep rise in visible racism

From the highest levels of our government, vocal attacks as well as policy changes are rolling back rights and threatening the safety of many oppressed groups, including women and transgender people, the disabled, immigrants, people of color and anyone falling under the queer umbrella.

There has been a dramatic rise in hate speech in schools and on college campuses. The alt-right has targeted college campuses in various ways, including leafleting, posting hate filled flyers and posters, funding alt-right speakers, and the creation of alt-right student clubs. For example, Turning Point U.S.A. boasts a presence at 1300 high schools and colleges, with 300 chapters. This is the organization behind Professor Watch, a website created to target and expose faculty that they believe “advance leftist propaganda in the classroom”.

Both hate speech and hate crime have skyrocketed. In the one month period following the 2016 election, over 1000 hate crimes were reported. The greatest number of incidents targeted immigrants, followed by blacks, and then Muslims. In 2016, hate crimes reached a five year high. In the FBI’s recently released annual report, 2017 saw a 17% increase above 2016 (U.S. Department of Justice 2017; SPLC 2018). The number of hate groups rose 7% in 2018, reaching an all time high of 1,020 (Southern Poverty Law Center 2019). The number of killings tied to white supremacists also rose in 2018. The movement growth tied
to the election of Trump has also prompted more vocal and blatant vitriol against women, and LGBTIQ/queer people on top of the continuing anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant obsessions (Southern Poverty Law Center 2018).

Large numbers of white men feel like they are losing their white and male privilege. are increasingly attracted to the belief that white people are losing control of the country, and losing out. They see themselves as victims. Masculinity in the U.S. is very narrowly defined – real men are supposed to be tough, powerful, and in control, a stock story also embedded in white supremacist ideology. Since the legal successes of the Civil Rights, women’s liberation, LGBT, and disability rights movements, in conjunction with the relatively recent vicious vilification of immigrants and Muslims, the Black Lives Matter movement, the rise of MeToo and fear of becoming a minority in the U.S. have all intensified the fears of white men who look at the world as a zero-sum game.

Institutions: social media and the economy

Social media

Social media and the economy are two of the most important institutions necessary to understand today’s white supremacist movement, and its relationship to white supremacy broadly.

Social media has become an essential tool for the movement. Before then, most organized white supremacist groups were isolated, disconnected, and disorganized. They and their members were more easily identifiable as “extremist”. The web provides the security of anonymity while also allowing for greater participation. It allows people to simply read and embrace the ideology. People no longer have to know someone else in the movement, nor wait to receive their latest organizational newsletter in the mail. Online dialogue is 24/7. Now that participants engage and organize online, it is difficult to tell how far their reach has grown. It is common for individuals to be followers of and participate in the dialogues of various websites and varieties of groups even if they do not see themselves as “members”.

The web has also facilitated an increase in white supremacist organizations and is the most powerful recruitment tool. Today one only needs to create a website and start posting. The many websites that serve as aggregators allow stories to be reposted and spread quickly and far. There are now specialized, very well funded websites and YouTube channels such as EAG, College Fix, and Campus Reform that, like Professor Watch, target higher education with the goal of silencing faculty that teach about racism, white supremacy and white privilege (among other topics, such as climate change). The right-wing social media continuum moves stories from these amateur college sites that invent stories, to sites like the Drudge Report, The Blaze and Breitbart, where they then may be picked up by Fox news or other right wing media considered “mainstream”.

The white supremacist movement has traditionally been seen as a fringe movement, which has allowed significant numbers of whites to see themselves as non-racist and to ignore the structures of racial inequality they participate in daily. Manifestations of white supremacy have always existed along a continuum. The fringe is part of the larger fabric. Narratives along the continuum have reproduced the same foundational ideology of race as rooted in nature. More than any other factor, social media today is making visible this narrative continuum.

Many major hate crimes and acts of white supremacist terrorism are carried out by people who follow or contribute to white supremacist social media. In October 2018, a man opened
fire in a Pittsburgh synagogue, murdering 11 people. He previously posted anti-Semitic comments on social media. The March 2019 murderous rampage in New Zealand, carried out by a white man targeting Muslims at a mosque, was also connected to white supremacist beliefs and organizations. The white man charged with the murder of at least 50 people flashed a white power hand signal when he first appeared in court. The manifesto he published online is filled with white supremacist rhetoric, and he also chose to stream his rampage on the internet. Social media allows for the free exchange of white supremacist ideology in a public context where it is available to all, and hard to ignore.

Despite their many differences, white supremacist groups have been joining together, along with the (not so) new “alt-right” (white supremacists who perform under a new, less threatening name, and aim to attract young members). It is the basic white supremacist narrative that works to “unite the right” (one of the recurring chants at the far-right Charlottesville march in August of 2017, in response to the planned removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee). The shared ideology is so strong that it brought together skinheads, neo-Nazis, neo-confederates, alt-righters, neo-fascists, and militia and Klan members. This kind of joint effort had not been seen before and was facilitated by the broader political and cultural context where white supremacist views are becoming increasingly common in public, by people with no association or affiliation with white supremacist groups. We are seeing another era of close convergence between the organized white supremacist movement, and visible manifestations of systemic white supremacy. Not coincidentally, the marchers were almost entirely men.

The economy

Despite feeling victimized, white men continue to rule. They overwhelmingly fill the top seats of power in the government, finance and business worlds. Why do so many white men feel powerless, then? White men feel powerless because they have been losing ground – economically. All but the wealthy white elites are worse off financially than they were in the past. The USA has the greatest levels of income inequality among all G7 nations (UK, Italy, Canada, Japan, Germany and France, in that order), and wealth inequality is at its highest point since the great depression, with the top 1% controlling 22%. Between 1970 and 2016, overall incomes for those in the top 10% more than doubled, compared with those in the bottom 50%. Since 2000, incomes for the 50th percentile decreased 2% and for the lowest 10% income declined by 11%.

The crash in the housing and financial markets during the Great Recession contributed further to declining wealth accumulation. The recession damaged the net worth of all families, across race. Given the lower assets of African American and Hispanic families prior to the recession, however, these groups suffered the most and were more likely to lose their homes. Despite the fact that we have recovered from the recession, the recovery actually widened both the class and racial wealth gaps.

During the first two years of recovery, 100% of gains went to the wealthiest 7% of people, who saw their net worth, as a group, grow from $19.8 trillion to $25.4 trillion (a rise of 28%). For the remaining 93%, their combined net worth decreased 4%, from $15.4 trillion to $14.8 trillion. In terms of race, just after the recession, the wealth of white households was eight times that of black households, and increased to 13 times the amount of wealth by 2013. The amount of income concentrated in the pockets of the top 1% has reached levels not witnessed since the 1920s (Stone et al. 2018).

The majority of whites lost ground financially, and has contributed to white people’s perception that their economic, and therefore many other forms of wellbeing, are in decline.
However, when we bring in an intersectional approach, we see that whites have fared much better than African Americans and Latinx. The majority of whites are not seeing the kind of income growth they could expect in the past, but they still reap the benefits of white privilege. Further, adding in the variable of gender, white men out earn women of every racial group, even when controlling for education and job (Coates, Ferber, and Brunsma 2018).

The overall losses or stagnation faced by the majority of whites are real, but the defenders of white supremacy direct their anger towards people of color, women in the labor market, and immigrants “stealing their jobs”, rather than the tremendous wealth gap in the U.S. Both an intersectional and institutional approach contribute to our understanding of white men’s increasing rage and their readiness to defend white supremacy publicly, and/or to ally with organized white supremacist groups.

At the same time, the white supremacist movement has become extremely well funded, with many alt-right organizations and websites funded by major foundations with names like Devos, Coors and Koch. This money has facilitated the growth of professional looking websites, and very well organized and strategic organizations, like Turning Point USA.

Conclusion

The white supremacist movement is just one manifestation of the white supremacist nation. Movement activism and the daily exercise and defense of white privilege have helped maintain white supremacy and interconnected forms of oppression. From colonization forward, an underlying narrative has been relied upon to justify centuries of violence, terrorism, and the maintenance of extreme inequality. In both numbers and tactics, the movement today is stronger than perhaps at any previous time. As the continuum shortens in length, we witness a range of voices along the spectrum becoming increasingly united, well funded, and highly strategic.

The matrix of race theoretical approach provides a map of key factors necessary for a more complex and comprehensive understanding of both the movement, and its historical relationship to the white supremacist society it is a part of. Many of these characteristics, for example, the essential role of gender and the appeal to masculinity went unrecognized until the 1990s, and is only very recently appearing in analyses and research conducted by male scholars (Ferber 1998, 2004). Combining an intersectional approach with a focus on privilege, probing the social construction of race with other social identities, taking narratives seriously while also exploring the role of specific institutions at specific points in history in specific locations, provides a deeper and more nuanced analysis than many of the past.

References


White supremacy and the matrix of race


