



FULL BIOGRAPHY | Eric K. Ward, Senior Adviser, Western States Center

Eric K. Ward, a nationally-recognized expert on the relationship between authoritarian movements, hate violence, and preserving inclusive democracy, is the recipient of the 2021 Civil Courage Prize – the first time in the award’s history that an American has won the prize, revealing the dangerous proliferation of hate crimes and political violence by authoritarian and extremist movements in the United States. Eric brings over three decades of leadership in community organizing and philanthropy to his roles as Race Forward’s Executive Vice President, Senior Adviser to Western States Center, and member of the President’s Leadership Council for the Search for Common Good. Since Eric took the helm in 2017, Western States Center has become a national hub for innovative responses to white nationalism, antisemitism, and structural inequality, towards a world where everyone can live, love, work, and worship free from bigotry and fear.

Originally from Los Angeles, Eric began his civil rights work when the white nationalist movement was engaged in violent paramilitary activity that sought to undermine democratic governance in the Pacific Northwest. Eric founded and directed a community project to expose and counter hate groups with the Community Alliance of Lane County (1990–1994). With the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment (1994-2002), Eric worked with leaders from government, law enforcement, business, and civil rights groups to establish over 120 task forces in six western states, and successfully encouraged some violent neo-Nazi leaders to renounce racism and violence. Joining the Center for New Community as National Field Director (2003-2011), Eric assisted immigrant rights advocates in addressing the growing influence of xenophobia on public policy. As Program Executive for Atlantic Philanthropies (2011-2014), Eric led grantmaking in immigration and national security and rights. During his tenure as a Ford Foundation Program Officer (2014-2017) he invigorated the field that counters Islamophobia through innovative investments that opened up space for Muslim and South Asian leaders.

Currently Chair of The Proteus Fund, Eric co-founded Funders for Justice with the Neighborhood Funders Group and has served as consultant or adviser to numerous philanthropic institutions including Open Society, Tides, and the Brooklyn Community Foundation. Eric is an Adviser to the Bridge Entertainment Labs, a member of the Pop Culture Collaborative’s Pluralist Visionaries Program, and a former Rockwood Leadership Institute Fellow and OSI New Executives Fund recipient. Past board service includes Revolutions Per Minute, America’s Voice, Windcall Institute, The Moenkopi Group, Social Justice Fund Northwest (A Territory Resource), Western States Center, and McKenzie River Gathering Foundation.

Eric has a special interest in the use of music to advance inclusive democracy. In 2020 he helped to launch the Western States Center Inclusive Democracy Culture Lab which works with musicians to create new narratives that puncture the myths driving our political and social divisions, and invite people who don’t always trust politicians and movement leaders into the safe and trusting conversational space that exists between a performer and their audience.

The recipient of the Peabody-Facebook Futures Media Award, Eric is an aspiring singer-songwriter under the name of Bulldog Shadow. In high demand as a speaker and media source, Eric has been quoted recently in *The New Yorker*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *ESPN*, *Black News Channel*, *NPR*, *BBC*, *Rolling Stone* and numerous other media outlets. The author of multiple written works credited with key narrative shifts, Eric currently publishes regularly on [Medium](#); he contributed to the Progressive Media Project from 2008-14, and published the daily blog *Imagine2050* from 2008-11. Seminal articles include “[Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism](#)” (*The Public Eye*, 2017); “[As White Supremacy Falls Down, White Nationalism Stands Up](#)” (*Pop Culture Collaborative*, 2017); “[The Evolution of Identity Politics](#)” (*Tikkun*, 2018).

Popular recent essays include “[Who Are We, America?](#)” (*Southern Poverty Law Center*, March 2020); “[The Struggles That Unite Us](#)” (*Oregon Humanities*, April 2020); [Authoritarian State or Inclusive Democracy? 21 Things We Can Do Right Now](#) (*Medium*, May 2020); [Winning the Peace](#) (*Medium*, August 2020); [Are We Moving Towards a Better Society or Regressing?](#) (*Moment Magazine*, Sept/Oct 2020); [Conspiracy Theories are Killing Us, America](#) (*Medium*, February 2021); [With Philanthropic Support, Artists Can Help Rebuild American Democracy One Song at a Time](#) (*Chronicle of Philanthropy*, April 2021); [The Hard Work of Democracy: A Case for Leisure](#) (*Center for Effective Philanthropy*, April 2021).