



CENTER FOR IMMIGRATION STUDIES

Founded in 1985 by [John Tanton](#), the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) has gone on to become the go-to think tank for the anti-immigrant movement with its reports and staffers often cited by media and anti-immigrant politicians. CIS's much-touted tagline is "low immigration, pro-immigrant," but the organization has a decades-long history of circulating racist writers, while also associating with white nationalists.



EXTREMIST GROUP INFO:

SPLC Designated Hate Group

Date Founded: 1985

Location: Washington D.C.

Ideology: [Anti-Immigrant](#)

While CIS and its position within the Tanton network have been on the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) radar for years, what precipitated listing CIS as an anti-immigrant hate group for 2016 was its [repeated circulation of white nationalist and antisemitic writers](#) in its weekly newsletter and the commissioning of a policy analyst who had previously been pushed out of the conservative Heritage Foundation for his embrace of racist pseudoscience. These developments, its historical associations and its record of [publishing reports that hype the criminality of immigrants](#) are why CIS is labeled an anti-immigrant [hate group](#).

CIS reports have been widely criticized and [debunked](#) by groups such as the Immigration Policy Center and the CATO Institute. Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at CATO, said in early 2017: "Oh, I'm convinced that [CIS executive director Mark Krikorian is] wrong about all the facts and issues. They're wrong about the impact of immigrants on the

U.S. economy and on U.S. society.” Speaking about CIS to Univision in August of 2017, Illinois Rep. Luis Gutierrez stated: “Their research is always questionable because they torture the data to make it arrive at the conclusion they desire, which is that immigrants are criminals and a burden on the U.S. and our economy. It is the worst kind of deception, but politicians, the conservative media and some Americans eat it up because it always looks somewhat legitimate at first glance.” CIS has also defended the usage of “[anchor babies](#)” and released a report on “[terror babies](#),” popular concepts among the nativist movement.

While capable of appearing as a sober-minded policy analyst in some settings, longtime CIS executive director Mark Krikorian’s contributions to the immigration policy debate rarely rise above petulant commentary dashed with extremist statements. Often, these statements are highly revealing.

At his perch at *National Review* and on Twitter, Krikorian has [asked](#), “How many rapists & drug-dealers are the anti-deportation radicals protecting?” and argued that Mexico’s “weakness and backwardness has been deeply harmful to the United States.” Krikorian has [called](#) Mexican American journalist Jorge Ramos a “white-Hispanic ethnic hustler” and [riffed](#) that if the U.S. were a police state, as Chelsea Manning claimed, then “this mentally ill traitor would have been dumped in a shallow grave years ago.” In [one exchange on Twitter](#), Krikorian tried to whitewash the role eugenicists played in the 1924 Immigration Act, only to stop responding when Harry H. Laughlin’s role in advancing the legislation was mentioned. Laughlin was the most prominent eugenics advocate prior to WWII and went on to co-found the racist pseudoscience-promoting [Pioneer Fund](#), which Tanton had close ties to through the 1990s.

More recently, CIS has been in the headlines for its connections to former Trump Administration adviser Stephen Miller, a man who in college [collaborated with white nationalist Richard Spencer](#) to bring another white nationalist, [Peter Brimelow](#), onto campus for a debate on immigration. Miller was instrumental in pushing for anti-immigrant policies in the Trump White House, regularly drawing from CIS. In early 2017, Miller made the rounds on national media defending the Trump administration’s Muslim ban by citing the CIS. “First of all, 72 individuals, according to the Center for Immigration Studies, have been implicated in terroristic activity in the United States who hail from those seven nations, point one,” Miller said on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” Fact-checkers at *The Washington Post* [debunked the talking point](#), which collapsed several categories of crimes related to terrorism to reach a higher number, and awarded it “Three Pinocchios.”

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"We send out a weekly roundup of immigration commentary from all sides, including people we don't agree with. I include *The New York Times*, and their editorials on immigration are usually things we completely disagree with, and we include a pretty broad range, including some sites that publish other material that frankly I find kind of objectionable. But if they are important sites of immigration news, we include them because the whole point is, see the broad spectrums of views and judge for yourself." – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian on C-SPAN defending the inclusion of white nationalist group VDARE in CIS's weekly newsletter, [2019](#)

"Am I a bad person for thinking it was already a holiday?" – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian commenting on a story about the major Islamic holiday Eid al-Adha falling on Sept. 11, [2016](#)

"Obama's Justice Dept has been doing everything in its power for 7.5 yrs to foment race war. Happy now?" – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian on Twitter, [2016](#)

"It's ironic – it's illegal for them to work, but they're working for the immigration service in a sense. ... I don't have any problem with it in principle. The question is: Is it run well?" – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian on private detention centers with "volunteer" work programs that pay undocumented immigrants \$1 to \$3 a day for cleaning, cooking and other jobs, [2015](#)

"The diminution of sovereignty engineered by the EU is bad enough for some share of the population, but many more will object to extinguishing their national existence à la *Camp of the Saints*." – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian referencing the [racist novel](#) published by John Tanton's white nationalist publishing house [The Social Contract Press](#), [2015](#)

"We can expect a disaster. In sum, we'll witness the unmaking of America." – CIS senior policy analyst Stephen Steinlight commenting on the prospect of 2014 immigration reform passing, [2014](#)

"Send him back to Liberia so it's on their dime." – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian on a Liberian immigrant who was diagnosed with Ebola in Texas, [2014](#)

"We have to have security against both the dishwasher and the terrorist because you can't distinguish between the two with regards to immigration control." – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian on anti-Muslim conspiracist [Frank Gaffney's](#) radio show, [2014](#)

"There's no court that will stop Obama from doing anything. And we all know, if there ever was a president that deserved to be impeached, it's this guy. Alright? And I wouldn't stop. I

would think being hung, drawn, and quartered is probably too good for him.” – CIS senior policy analyst Stephen Steinlight at a Tea Party meeting, [2014](#)

“You don’t know how long it will be here before the political activists get engaged in [the Mexican] community and foment something that will look like the civil rights movement for African Americans, but I can promise you it will be a lot bloodier.” – CIS senior policy analyst Stephen Steinlight on the prospect of Mexican immigrants attaining U.S. citizenship, [2013](#)

“Tomorrow is Ash Wednesday. ... It’s a season of repentance, prayer, and self-denial, to prepare the believer for the commemoration of Christ’s suffering and death and for the celebration of his resurrection. And a group of Evangelical grandees has decided to mark the holy season by prostituting scripture for political ends.” – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian in response to a group of evangelical leaders calling for immigration reform, [2013](#)

“My guess is that Haiti’s so screwed up because it wasn’t colonized *long enough*.” – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian after the 2010 Haitian earthquake that killed 160,000 people, [2010](#)

“That means the children and grandchildren of immigrants are committing a lot of crime, making this a long-term problem. That’s much worse news.” – CIS research director Steven Camarota arguing that the children of immigrants are prone to criminality in response to research showing that immigrants commit less crime than the native U.S. population, [2008](#)

“Perhaps the simplest way to approach [skills-based immigration] would be to admit anyone who scores above 140 on an IQ test.” – CIS executive director Mark Krikorian advocating for an IQ test component in a draconian immigration policy regime, *The New Case Against Immigration: Both Legal and Illegal*, 2008

“There are real differences between groups, not just trivial ones that we happen to notice more than we should. Race is different in all sorts of ways, and probably the most important way is in IQ. Decades of psychometric testing has indicated that at least in America you have Jews with the highest average IQ, usually followed by East Asians, and then you have non-Jewish whites, Hispanics and then Blacks. These are real differences. They’re not going to go away tomorrow, and for that reason we have to address them in our immigration discussions.” – CIS contributing writer Jason Richwine, during a panel about Krikorian’s book, [2008](#)

HISTORY

The Center for Immigration Studies, like the rest of the organized anti-immigrant movement we see in America today, was founded by the late [John Tanton](#), a Michigan ophthalmologist turned population-control alarmist whose racist beliefs stirred him to create a network of organizations with a simple agenda: heavily restricting the immigration levels to the United States in order to maintain a white majority. As Tanton wrote in 1993, “I’ve come to the point of view that for European-American society and culture to persist requires a European-American majority, and a clear one at that.”

Tanton founded his flagship organization the [Federation for American Immigration Reform](#) (FAIR) in 1979, an organization that was for years supported by the eugenics promoting Pioneer Fund. Soon after founding FAIR, he was eager to enhance the legitimacy of the anti-immigrant policies FAIR was proposing. To do that, Tanton needed an independent think tank, which came to fruition in 1985, called the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS).

Tanton donated his correspondences to the University of Michigan and among the conversations with Klan lawyers and white nationalists, his role in establishing CIS is made clear. In a letter dated Sept. 16, 1985, Tanton [spelled out the need for creating CIS](#) and explicitly confirmed that it would start as a project of FAIR. “After a careful and prolonged study, the FAIR board has concluded that a ‘Think Tank’ on the scale of the Worldwatch Institute is needed. For credibility, this will need to be independent of FAIR, though the Center for Immigration Studies, as we’re calling it, is starting off as a project of FAIR.” The next day, Tanton wrote to Gregory D. Curtis in Pennsylvania where he again [described CIS as a “project,”](#) writing, “We’re in the process of setting up independent projects both the Center for Immigration Studies, and the Litigation Program.”

Scholar Steven Gardiner describes in his 2005 paper, “[White Nationalism Revisited](#),” “There are also organizations, the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) for example, that in their push for mainstream acceptance vehemently denying racist motivations, even while playing to radicalized fears and allying themselves with doctrine white nationalists.” The same can be said of CIS despite the best efforts of Tanton and others to play up its independence from FAIR and Tanton himself.

CIS became independent in 1986, but the relationship with Tanton and FAIR was far from over. In another memo also written in 1986, Tanton [talked](#) about the need to get CIS fully funded and properly functioning, “To expand our fund-raising market, we created the Center for Immigration Studies last year. We need to get CIS fully funded and entrenched as a major Washington think-tank, one that can venture into issues, which FAIR is not yet ready to raise.”

In another 1986 memo to a file kept for the purpose of eventually writing an autobiography, Tanton described CIS as an organization over which he had direct control, as opposed to others that he said were "one level removed from our control." Eight years later, in 1994, Tanton wrote that he was still setting what he called "[the proper roles for FAIR and CIS.](#)"

In 1989, Tanton recorded his [oral biography](#), where he discussed how FAIR donated board members to CIS and also discussed hiring the man who served as the think tank's first executive director. Tanton stated: "We actually donated several of our board members and donors to the Center for Immigration Studies as it was called – Gene Katz became one of their important donors. Liz Paddock left the main FAIR board and went over to the Center for Immigration Studies board. We subsequently hired a retired foreign service officer, David Simcox, to run CIS." Tanton also remarked, "Forming [Immigration Reform Law Institute] and CIS were part of an effort to develop a balanced program – a neatly rolled rug!"

Otis Graham – Tanton's friend and confidant at CIS

A look at the FAIR and CIS boards today shows that not much has changed. CIS and FAIR share one board member, Frank Morris, and two people who have served on FAIR's [advisory](#) board currently sit on the CIS [board](#): Peter Nunez and William Chip.

The man Tanton recorded his oral biography with was a close friend, Otis Graham, who helped grow CIS during its early years before the arrival of its current executive director, Mark Krikorian, in 1995. When Tanton started CIS as a FAIR project in 1985, Graham was a member of the FAIR board. But Tanton's correspondence makes clear that he was able to get Graham to leave the FAIR board in order to run CIS, a job he did until Krikorian took over. Graham did hold the role of executive director and others that were not specified.

Tanton frequently wrote Graham revealing letters. In 1991, he told him about former Klan leader David Duke's campaign for governor of Louisiana that year, which he described as based on "the excesses of affirmative action and illegitimate pregnancy." [Tanton told Graham](#) that "there is a lot going on out there on the cultural and ethnic (racial) difference" front and added, in a hopeful tone, that it was "all tied to immigration policy. At some point, this is going to break the dam."

A 1994 Tanton letter also shows that he was critical to raising funds for CIS. Although Tanton said he played a "behind-the-scenes role" at CIS, he revealed that key backers of his other organizations had ponied up millions for CIS. Those large donations were key because CIS does not do direct-mail fundraising.

Krikorian hired and Tanton revisionism

In 1995, another CIS transfer from FAIR occurred, this time in the person of Krikorian. Krikorian [worked](#) at FAIR as a newsletter writer and then working at a few newspapers before joining CIS. His stint at FAIR is not mentioned on his [bio](#) page at the CIS website. Within a few weeks of his appointment, Tanton sent Krikorian a [letter of congratulations](#), telling him, “If there is anything I can do to help out at any point, please let me know.”

It was around this time, too, that the historical revisionism around the founding of CIS began. Though there is no explicit evidence of collusion between Tanton, Krikorian and [Dan Stein](#), FAIR’s president, all three have attempted to change the narrative, attempting to put some distance between FAIR, Tanton, and the think tank. The crux of the tale is that Tanton simply raised money for CIS and nothing more. In his letter congratulating Krikorian in February 1995, Tanton wrote, “I have tried in particular to help with fund-raising through the years, and have been able to steer some small amounts of money toward CIS.” Less than a year before Krikorian joined CIS, [Dan Stein was recording his own oral biography with Tanton](#). When CIS came up, Stein admitted that both organizations shared office space but also stated, “Yes, CIS was never a project of FAIR, but it was a bit of a spin-off.” This is a bit of a whitewash of the facts contained in Tanton’s memo almost 10 years earlier where he specifically states that CIS was starting off “as a project of FAIR.”

In a correspondence sent to the SPLC as well as testimony before Congress, Krikorian has also pushed this narrative. “We’ve never had any institutional relationship,” Krikorian told the SPLC in an email in 2009. “He’s never been on our board or served as an employee, he’s never even been in our offices.” He said Tanton “had some role back in the mid-80s in helping rustle up money for CIS,” but added that he and Tanton had no “personal relationship.” Krikorian sounded a similar note in 2004, when he [testified](#) before an immigration subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee. “He wrote us a check, I think it was a year ago,” he said of Tanton. “It was the first check I have seen from him in nine or 10 years. ... We have no institutional relationship.”

The narrative about CIS’s independence, especially from a white nationalist like Tanton, is key to the organization being seen as credible in the Beltway. As Stein put it in his oral bio: “Well, yes, there has always been an important role for CIS with its research-oriented profile and greater appearance of objectivity. Its reports have been accepted by the media and some members of Congress as authentic research; it’s certainly as authentic as anything that the Urban Institute or any of the Ford Foundation groups have put out. So it plays a very valuable role, and has continued to develop as an independent organization and perform much of the mission it was originally designed to carry out.”

Despite Krikorian’s having no “institutional relationship” with Tanton, it is clear through Tanton’s correspondences that the two men stayed in touch over the years. Tanton would

send Krikorian suggestions and also included him in letters penned to white nationalists. In 1997, Tanton [invited Krikorian and others](#) to participate in the annual “Writers Workshop” event put on by his racist publishing house, the [Social Contract Press](#) (TSCP). TSCP has published a number of racist texts, including an English language translation of the French novel [Camp of the Saints](#), a book penned by Frenchman Jean Raspail. The novel depicts an invasion of France by immigrants from India who are painted as sexually voracious savages who destroy the country and rape white women. The book gained more notoriety during the 2016 election campaign after [reports](#) that Trump’s senior adviser and then-Breitbart executive Stephen Bannon was a major fan of the novel.

TSCP also publishes a quarterly journal, *The Social Contract (TSC)*, which has routinely published nativist screeds authored by influential white nationalists including the late [Sam Francis](#), Patrick Buchanan and Peter Brimelow. *TSC*’s longtime editor is white nationalist [Wayne Lutton](#), a man described by Gardiner in his 2005 paper as one of the “intellectual theorists of white nationalism.” While Tanton hobnobbed with white nationalists and shared their beliefs, Lutton has a long track record of directly working for white nationalist groups. For a number of years, Lutton was on the editorial advisory board of the *Citizens Informer*, the publication of the white nationalist group [Council of Conservative Citizens](#) (CCC), which Charleston shooter [Dylann Roof](#) credited with being his gateway into white nationalism. Before working for Tanton, Lutton wrote for and sat on the advisory board of the [Institute for Historical Review](#) (IHR), one of America’s longest-running Holocaust denial organizations. In 2002, Lutton joined the editorial advisory board of the antisemitic [Occidental Quarterly](#) publication.

Both Krikorian and his staff are [regular](#) attendees at the TSC Writers Workshop, which also attracts white nationalists, and their writings regularly appear in *TSC*. In 2016, CIS [fellow](#) John Miano [spoke](#) at the gathering, while Krikorian [did](#) the year before, and Jessica Vaughan, CIS’s director of policy studies, [spoke](#) in 2012. Krikorian has four pieces [published](#) in *TSC*, and Steve Camarota, the CIS director of research, is [published](#) there three times. CIS fellow [Don Barnett](#) and CIS board members [Frank Morris](#), and [William Chip](#) as well as [former](#) member [Vernon Briggs](#) are also published in *TSC*.

Racism in CIS Reports and Speeches

In an [interview](#) with NPR in early 2017, in response to the SPLC listing CIS as a [hate group](#) Krikorian stated: “Our work is out there. We have published and spoken, myself and my staff, millions of words and there is nothing in there that you’re gonna be able to say that is based on a sort of using a religious or racial or ethnic criteria in running our immigration policy. It’s just not there.” Despite its efforts to “vehemently deny racist motivations” as Gardiner points out in the case of FAIR, the group is capable of “playing to racialized fears.”

Among the millions of words both written and uttered by CIS staffers, including Krikorian, are a litany of examples of attacks on Latinos, Muslims and immigrants in general.

[Hired](#) in 2005 by Krikorian, CIS's senior policy analyst Stephen Steinlight perhaps best epitomizes the organization's general distaste of modern, that is to say largely nonwhite, immigrants. In "The Jewish Stake in America's Changing Demography," a report Steinlight wrote for CIS four years before he joined the organization, he painted American Muslims as Jew haters, writing: "For reasons that appear simultaneously self-evident and self-serving, spokespersons from the organized Muslim community regularly cite the figure of six million Muslims. The number is chosen because it constitutes both a form of demographic riposte to the hated figure of the six million Jewish victims of Nazism that Muslims believe confers vast moral and political advantages on Jews and, secondly, it allows Muslims to claim they have already achieved numerical parity with American Jews." Krikorian, for his part, called Muslims a "vicious people," [writing](#) in *National Review* in 2011, "Well, I'm afraid that in the Islamic world democracy faces the problem of a vicious people, one where the desire for freedom is indeed written in every human heart, but the freedom to do evil." In July of 2017, as tensions mounted in Jerusalem, Krikorian [tweeted](#) that Palestinians want to "exterminate the Jews."

At a Tea Party event in 2014, Steinlight was filmed calling for the hanging of then-President Obama. Speaking at the Highlands Tea Party in Florida, Steinlight [stated](#), "We all know, if there ever was a president that deserved to be impeached, it's this guy. Alright? And I wouldn't stop. I would think being hung, drawn and quartered is probably too good for him." Krikorian's response to the incident, which was widely covered in mainstream press was to [tell](#) HuffPost, "Steve sometimes has used impolitic language and I admonished him to choose his words more carefully in the future," and put a reprimand in Steinlight's personnel file.

No such reprimand occurred when Steinlight, [speaking](#) at a Tea Party gathering in Texas in 2013, said the following about Mexican immigrants: "Within a few years, I promise you, and I love it when they say, 'Oh, those people don't care about political rights, they just care about jobs.' Do you know how long they will be here before the political activists get engaged in that community, and foment something that will look like the civil rights movement for African Americans, but I can promise you it will be a lot bloodier." At another Tea Party event in 2014 in Texas, Steinlight anticipated President Trump's Muslim ban by [calling](#) for the return of something similar to the McCarran Internal Security Act, which excluded communists and fascists from immigrating to the United States, but applied to Muslims. He stated, "If I had my druthers, we would bring back something like the McCarran Act, in the '50s which barred communists and fascists on the grounds that they believe in things that are subversive to the Constitution. Muslims believe in things

that are subversive to the Constitution.” Steinlight conducted an [interview](#) in 2013 with the conservative *Washington Times*, stating, “Hispanics don’t exemplify ‘strong family values.’” He also warned in 2004 that immigration [threatens](#) “the American people as a whole and the future of Western civilization.”

Krikorian also has a long track record of racist remarks. Perhaps his most vile came in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Haiti in 2010, that killed an estimated 160,000 people. Writing in his regular column on the conservative *National Review* website nine days after the natural disaster, Krikorian [remarked](#), “My guess is that Haiti’s so screwed up because it wasn’t colonized *long enough*.” (His emphasis).

He has also routinely attacked influential Americans of color. In 2017, he [described](#) civil rights leader John Lewis as “Like a grown man who won the big game in high school and never stops talking about it.” After Justice Susan Sotomayor was appointed in 2009, Krikorian took to *National Review* to [say](#) that Americans should not be “giving in to” the “unnatural” pronunciation of her last name.

The new case against immigration: Both legal and illegal

In 2008, Krikorian wrote a book on immigration restriction, *The New Case Against Immigration: Both Legal and Illegal*. Krikorian says today’s immigrants “look” a lot different than immigrants from 100 years ago. Explaining that Europeans previously accounted for the majority of immigration, he laments most immigrants today come from the “third world.” He believes this is the main issue with immigration today. These immigrants, he claims, have intense difficulties with assimilation such as learning English, transnationalism, and “affirmative action for immigrants.”

A hallmark of Krikorian’s argument is to exploit the plight of black Americans. “Today’s ‘systematically different’ immigrants are simply continuing the traditional pattern (common among the Irish and Italians and others in the past) of trying to climb over the backs of black Americans to achieve assimilation” he says. He adds, “Hispanics and Asians are simply the latest immigrant groups trying to use their location on the nonblack side of the divide as an assimilation tool.” And despite otherwise never advocating on behalf of black Americans, he takes advantage of their position in society to serve his argument. “Bridging this basic divide in American society between black and nonblack – bringing our black countrymen into full membership in the American nation in every respect – is our most urgent long-term domestic concern,” he claims.

Krikorian believes many of these immigrant communities make America vulnerable and the threat “isn’t confined to radical Islam.” In fact, he says America is also susceptible to threats from North Korea, “Communist China,” and Colombia. He adds that Colombian

communities in the United States would “serve as a base of operations for FARC attacks in the United States in the event of war.”

On Mexicans he says, “It could well be that there are cultural or other reasons that Mexican immigrants are especially deficient in institution building, but they nonetheless reflect a broader trend in modern society.” Krikorian adds, “But Mexico, already the eight-hundred pound gorilla of immigration policy, is the eight-thousand-pound gorilla with regard to sovereignty, due to its domination of the immigration flow, its proximity, and the historical resentments that many of its people harbor toward our country.”

Krikorian’s book cites his own organization, CIS, and Krikorian himself over 50 times, while also citing white nationalists Peter Brimelow, Steve Sailer and Patrick Buchanan.

Failing studies and bad stats

CIS reports and blog pieces have also been widely discredited and debunked by such groups as the Immigration Policy Center and CATO Institute, which [criticized](#) CIS in 2015 for exaggerating immigrant welfare use. But a number of publications also contain bigoted language demonizing immigrants from all walks of life and making a mockery of CIS’s “pro-immigrant” tagline.

In a 2008 blog, Jessica Vaughan [decried](#) the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program, which provides relief for thousands of individuals who have fled war-torn nations and countries dealing with natural disasters. Vaughan wrote, “One legacy of TPS has been its contribution to the burgeoning street gang problem in the United States.” A 2008 [report](#) authored by CIS fellow David Seminara referred to immigrants as “Third-World gold-diggers.” In the same report, he wrote, “The use of fraudulent marriage petitions is prevalent among international terrorists.”

In 2010, another CIS fellow David North [attempted](#) to blame teenage obesity on immigrants in a piece titled, “Farfetched? Does Illegal Immigration Facilitate Teenage Obesity?” Also in 2010, following the BP oil spill, then CIS writer Phil Cafaro [attempted](#) to blame immigrants for the spill, writing, “Population makes a difference – and immigration levels make a difference to our overall population,” before concluding, “In the long-term, regarding efforts to create a sustainable society, these demographic trends loom a lot larger than whether or not BP or Halliburton made some greedy, foolish decisions to cut corners in the Gulf.”

CIS reports are a big hit with white nationalists, for which immigration is their “most important’ issue, as Gardiner accurately points out. One white nationalist who has routinely cited CIS figures is [Jared Taylor](#), one of the most prominent white nationalists of

the past quarter century. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Taylor [wrote](#), “Blacks and whites are different. When blacks are left entirely to their own devices, Western civilization – any kind of civilization – disappears” – a comment indistinguishable from Krikorian’s following the Haitian earthquake in 2010. Taylor’s columns in his now-defunct *American Renaissance* journal and AMREN website cites CIS at length. Krikorian, in a recent Reddit AMA, attempted to distance himself from Taylor, [writing](#), “Sorry, I never ‘promoted’ him. He came to a public event once and asked a question. You could’ve done the same – would I be promoting you?” But again, Krikorian’s swift dismissal doesn’t tell the whole truth. Taylor has actually [asked](#) questions at [multiple](#) CIS events, and both men have attended Tanton’s Writers Workshop events in the past. [Tanton was a big fan of Taylor’s](#) and helped fund the *American Renaissance* journal when Taylor launched it in 1990.

CIS staffers cozying up with racists

The Taylor-Krikorian connections don’t stop there. CIS circulates a weekly email to its supporters that contains articles on immigration written by people from across the political spectrum. A [study](#) conducted by the SPLC and the Center for New Community (CNC) found that CIS circulated over 2,000 pieces of material from racist websites or penned by white nationalists, including three pieces published on the AMREN website.

Over 1,700 articles circulated by CIS in its weekly email came from [VDARE](#), a racist website that serves as a hub for white nationalists, antisemites and nativists. VDARE stands for Virginia Dare, the supposed first white child born in the Americas. VDARE was founded by English white nationalist [Peter Brimelow](#), a former *National Review* contributor who now is seen as a key player in the racist “alt-right” movement. Brimelow’s relationship with CIS dates back decades, when Tanton would write to him and Krikorian. Krikorian wrote a [review](#) of Brimelow’s infamous anti-immigrant book *Alien Nation*, calling it a “flawed jewel.” CIS also [published](#) Brimelow in a 1998 colloquy titled “What, Then, Is the American, This New Man?”

Brimelow wrote 51 pieces circulated by CIS. Other VDARE authors CIS circulated include antisemite [Kevin MacDonald](#), a former psychology professor at California State University, Long Beach, who published a trilogy that supposedly “proves” that Jews are genetically driven to destroy Western societies. CIS staffers have also written articles for VDARE throughout the years. CIS fellow John Miano has written [dozens](#) of pieces for VDARE, dating back to 2001, and in 2016 [attended](#) VDARE’s Christmas party.

Kevin MacDonald was far from the only antisemite circulated by CIS to its supporters. One article CIS circulated was authored by Holocaust denier [John Friend](#), who has [described](#) the Holocaust as a “manufactured narrative, chock full of a wide variety of ridiculous claims

and impossible events, all to advance the Jewish agenda of world domination and subjugation.”

Another piece CIS circulated is from [Rense.com](#), a site full of Holocaust-denial material which published a birthday ode to Adolf Hitler in 2015 including lines like, “You NEVER built Jewish gas chambers,” and “You removed Jews and their Zionist agenda from positions of power in banking, media and politics, but only after World Zionism declared World War on Germany In 1933 and proved their hatred for the German people.” The piece refers to Jews as “predators” and includes lines including: “How come that the Jews are so rich? Only Jews are offended by the question because they are too arrogant and insecure to recognize [sic] that every stranger, not necessarily a Jew, is being asked from time to time who is he and what makes him tick.”

Six articles written by the notorious Norwegian anti-Muslim blogger Peder Are Nøstvold Jensen who writes under the name “Fjordman,” were also circulated by CIS in its weekly emails. Fjordman was [cited](#) over 100 times in the manifesto of racist mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway in 2011.

In 2008, CIS circulated a Taki’s Magazine article by white nationalist [Richard Spencer](#) – the face of the alt-right movement – and two pieces from Spencer’s old white nationalist website [AlternativeRight.com](#). CIS also distributed one piece by William Regnery, the founder of the National Policy Institute (NPI) the white nationalist think tank Spencer now runs. Regnery also founded the Charles Martel Society, the publisher of the racist and antisemitic journal [Occidental Quarterly](#).

In 2007, Krikorian accepted an invitation to speak at Michigan State University from its chapter of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), a conservative college organization. This chapter of YAF, however, was not like many of its sister chapters across the country. The chapter was led by one of Richard Spencer’s friends, white nationalist [Kyle Bristow](#). The MSU-YAF had been widely covered in the media for a series of nasty stunts – staging a “Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day,” holding a “Koran Desecration” competition, and posting “Gays Spread AIDS” flyers across campus. Krikorian was part of the same speaker series that included Nick Griffin, a Holocaust denier who heads the extremist British National Party, and Jared Taylor (whose speech was later cancelled). Bristow is now the white nationalist movement’s [go-to lawyer](#).

A number of CIS reports have also appeared reprinted in the *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, published by [Roger Pearson](#), a white nationalist who has been active on the far right since the 1950s. In 1958, Pearson founded the Northern League, a “Pan-Nordic cultural organization” dedicated to convincing Northern Europeans to recognize “their

common problems and their common destiny,” and to come to “an appreciation ... of the threat of biological extinction with which we [i.e. Nordics] are threatened.” The members of this new group included Nazis. In 1957, Pearson wrote, “If a nation with a more advanced, more specialized, or in any way superior set of genes mingles with, instead of exterminating, an inferior tribe, then it commits racial suicide, and destroys the work of thousands of years of biological isolation and natural selection.” In total, three reports published by CIS were reprinted in Pearson’s journal, [two](#) back in [2002](#), and one in [2009](#). The civil rights group Center for New Community [contacted](#) Pearson about the 2009 reprint, and his response was, “If I remember correctly, it was reprinted with the permission of Center for Immigration Studies.”

On [multiple](#) occasions CIS staffers have [granted](#) interviews with another antisemitic outlet, [American Free Press](#) (AFP). AFP was founded by now-deceased antisemite [Willis Carto](#), who like Pearson was active on the radical right for over half a century. AFP carries stories on Zionism, secret “New World Order” conspiracies, and thinly veiled vilification of American Jews and Israel, something that could be learned by conducting a simple Google search.

Mainstream credibility

Tanton described in his oral biography that CIS “has gone on to be quite successful” and that most certainly is the case in part due to the group working hard to distance itself from its founder, while at the same time fostering relationships with elected officials and government agencies. This was a key goal of Tanton’s, first described in a memo he [wrote](#) back in 1986. Under the subheading “Infiltrate the Judiciary Committees,” Tanton wrote: “This is a long-range project. We should make every effort to get legislators sympathetic to our point of view appointed to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, and their Immigration Sub-Committees. Think how much different our prospects would be if someone espousing our ideas had the chairmanship! If we secure the appointment of our people as freshmen members of the committee, we will eventually secure the chairmanship. Remember: we’re in this for the long haul.”

Later in the memo, Tanton wrote about the need to “develop strong relationships with the [U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service], and with the Bureau of Consular Affairs in the State Department (which supervises the issuance of visas). Here I’m speaking of not just the people in Washington, but the workers in the field. We should recruit field people to membership, and get their ideas on how to change things, drawn from their perspective of daily work with the problem. The Departments of Labor and Education also have a piece of this pie, and we should get to know them as well.”

Steinlight and other CIS staffers have not been shy about promoting their strong ties with agencies now under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a department formed long after Tanton wrote his strategic memos.

The CNC detailed the relationships between CIS and these agencies at length in a 2015 [report](#) titled “Blurring Borders: Collusion Between Anti-Immigrant Groups and Immigration Enforcement Agencies.” Speaking specifically about CIS, it reads, “In a July 2014 appearance on the internet radio show Cotto & Company, CIS Senior Policy Analyst Stephen Steinlight admitted that a recent CIS publication that inspired multiple Congressional inquiries could not have been done “without our ongoing good connections with whistleblowers in agencies like Immigration and Customs Enforcement.” As recently as March 31, 2015, CIS’s Jessica Vaughan published analysis based on, as she opaquely phrased it, “DHS statistics, which have not been released to the public, but were obtained by the Center.”

CIS has [also worked with Border Patrol in the past](#), most notably during border tours that the group organizes on both the U.S./Mexico and U.S./Canada borders.

While members of Congress are comfortable working with FAIR, CIS currently has the monopoly when it comes to testifying before Congress. In total, CIS staffers have testified over 100 times, and 11 times since the beginning of 2016. FAIR has not testified before Congress since 2012, according to its website.

While CIS routinely hosts panel discussions featuring nativist members of Congress, including Rep. [Mo Brooks](#) of Alabama and Rep. [Lou Barletta](#) of Pennsylvania, a more blatant example of CIS’s deep relationships with elected officials occurred during the last major push for comprehensive immigration reform in 2013. CIS director of national security policy Janice Kephart left the organization to take up of special counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee. During the heated debates over the bill in the Senate, then-Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama, a longtime ally of the anti-immigrant movement, was the key spokesperson on the Senate floor in opposite to the bill. During Sessions’ rebuttals Kephart could be [seen](#) sitting behind the senator.

In early 2014, as the prospect of comprehensive immigration measures diminished, CIS again relied on leaks from its friends in DHS to publish two reports. The first [claimed](#) that ICE “released 68,000 aliens with criminal convictions” in 2013 and the second cited internal DHS metrics [claiming](#) that 36,000 immigrants awaiting the outcome of their deportation proceedings were released by DHS under President Obama’s watch that same year. The 36,000 number [promoted](#) Rep. Lou Barletta, a close ally of the anti-immigrant

groups, to write an op-ed citing the first CIS report where he claimed its release was “the day immigration reform died.”

Following the [tragic shooting death of Kate Steinle](#) in San Francisco in July 2015 by an undocumented immigrant, CIS and other anti-immigrants used it as an opportunity to attack so-called “sanctuary cities.” CIS published a [map](#) of sanctuary jurisdictions on its website that prompted a [backlash](#). In July 2017, Mark Krikorian published a piece on the two-year anniversary of Steinle’s death, using it to push for anti-sanctuary policies. A week earlier, Steinle’s father, who was with her on the night she died, provided quotes in a piece in the *San Francisco Chronicle* [titled](#), “Leave Kate Steinle Out of the Immigration Debate.” “I don’t know who coined ‘Kate’s Law,’” Jim Steinle stated, “It certainly wasn’t us.” In 2015, Steinle said in an interview that his family is not opposed to sanctuary policies.

History of attrition through enforcement

Since its inception, CIS has been advocating for some form of “attrition through enforcement.” Various CIS writers have advocated for this policy, from David North to Jessica Vaughn.

What began as a reflection of IRCA in 1987 has evolved into CIS’s core policy. David North explains in his 1987 article that immigrants need to be treated as poorly as possible so that they themselves choose to leave, alleviating the work of immigration enforcement. “Being arrested as one heads illegally over-the border, and then being sent back to the nearest port of entry, is a nuisance, and little more. Being arrested in illegal status in New York, and being sent home to Lima or Sydney is a major disincentive, and the individual either will not try again, or will not try again quickly,” he [says](#).

Attrition through enforcement was formalized in the anti-immigrant movement in 2005. The United States needs to “shrink the illegal population through consistent, across-the-board enforcement of immigration law,” Krikorian [proclaimed](#). Krikorian says in denying immigrants access to jobs, identification, housing and “in general making it as difficult as possible for an illegal immigrant to live a normal life here,” undocumented individuals would “self-deport.”

Kris Kobach, former Kansas secretary of state and counsel for the Immigration Reform Law Institute (IRLI), a legal department of FAIR, an SPLC-designated [hate group](#), is responsible for some of the most anti-immigrant legislation, particularly attrition through enforcement. Kobach has also [attended](#) a TSC Writers Workshop.

Kobach first began experimenting with this policy on a smaller scale, helping to draft and then defend legislation like Ordinance 5165 in Fremont, Nebraska, which barred

undocumented individuals from renting property. These ordinances were then rolled into bigger omnibus packages which were introduced in Arizona as SB 1070 and then in Alabama as HB 56. Both bills allow law enforcement to racially profile individuals when there is “reasonable suspicion” they are undocumented.

In 2008, Kobach authored *Attrition Through Enforcement: A Rational Approach to Illegal Immigration*, in which he touts the Legal Arizona Workers Act (LAWA), which requires all employers in Arizona to use E-Verify, as a successful example of attrition through enforcement.

E-Verify

E-Verify is an integral component of attrition through enforcement according to Krikorian. In 2015, Pew published a [report](#), “More Mexicans are Leaving Than Coming to the U.S.,” which found a net decline in immigration from Mexico from 2009 to 2014. Working off the results of this report, Krikorian accounted this decline to attrition through enforcement. He says the Pew report [suggests](#) that if the U.S. implements nationwide E-Verify, tracks and punishes individuals who overstay their visas, prosecutes “border infiltrators” and deports every “illegal arrested by local police,” then the “illegal population will shrink considerably.” However, no analysis or evidence is provided to substantiate this claim. The Pew report Krikorian cites actually says family reunification is the top reason for leaving.

Advertised as a free system for employers to verify if employees are documented, E-Verify is [estimated](#) to cost almost \$1 billion to implement nationwide. An audit published by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in 2009 estimates it would cost the federal government \$635 million, an additional \$10 million in compliance costs, and at least \$200 million to the private sector alone.

In addition to the cost of implementation and maintenance of this program, E-Verify often wrongly presumes workers guilty and forces individuals to defend their documented status. This affects all people – not just the undocumented. E-Verify has an [almost](#) 1% inaccuracy rate for wrongly identifying legal workers as unauthorized.

The ACLU [estimates](#) there are 154 million workers in the United States, and if the E-Verify system fails just 1% of the time, it will keep 154,000 people from working. These 154,000 people can be denied by the system for a number of reasons, but the cause is rarely obvious. The E-Verify [system](#) compiles data from 20 different databases, and the effort to clear the system error can be not only rigorous, but costly as well.

Across two administrations: Trump to early Biden years

Donald Trump's rise to power brought CIS and the rest of the nativist movement closer to the White House and closer to shaping immigration policy than ever before.

Krikorian [bragged](#) to Reuters in October 2016 that the Trump team had received requests for research and studies during the campaign. In August, Trump [released](#) a campaign ad that specifically cited CIS. Also in August, Krikorian met with Trump officials in New York, where he was asked to be a campaign surrogate, a position that he turned down.

Trump's major national security [speech](#), also delivered in August 2016, contained a call for an "ideological screening test," similar to the one used in the Cold War and touted by Krikorian in December 2015. In his *National Review* column he [wrote](#), "The narrowest solution would be to restore the principle of 'ideological exclusion' to U.S. immigration law. With the end of the Cold War – which too many imagined to be the End of History – we eliminated the legal bar to enemies of America who were not actual members of terrorist organizations or card-carrying members of totalitarian political parties."

Trump's victory resulted in nativists obtaining top jobs in the administration and DHS and Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions was appointed Attorney General. Aside from working hand in hand with Kephart in 2013, Sessions has endorsed the work of CIS and [participated](#) in a panel discussion event the group organized in 2006 and spoke on a CIS teleconference in 2013. During the 2016 campaign, Sessions spoke at a reception for guests invited to a CIS conference. Stephen Miller, a Sessions staffer-turned Trump adviser and speechwriter, served as the [keynote](#) speaker at a CIS awards ceremony in 2015. In 2017, CIS staffer Jon Feere [left](#) the organization and took up a position at the DHS. Former FAIR executive director Julie Kirchner also was hired for a [position](#) at USCIS.

In 2016 CIS began commissioning Jason Richwine, a [disgraced former Heritage Foundation analyst](#), to write reports and blogs for the organization. Richwine's racist views were exposed in 2013 after he co-authored a major Heritage Foundation report on the "costs" of the most recent comprehensive immigration reform bill. Journalists, as well as civil rights groups such as the [SPLC](#) and the [Anti-Defamation League](#), reported on a the racist nature of Richwine's Harvard dissertation in which he claimed, "No one knows whether Hispanics will ever reach IQ parity with whites, but the prediction that new Hispanic immigrants will have low-IQ children and grandchildren is difficult to argue against." Richwine's beliefs in IQ differences between the races are prevalent not only in anti-immigrant circles, but also white nationalist ones. He authored pieces for the white nationalist website [Alternative Right](#), founded by [Richard Spencer](#).

But five years prior to this, Krikorian was exposed to Richwine's views on race and IQ in a [panel](#) discussion organized by the American Enterprise Institute to discuss Krikorian's

book, *The New Case Against Immigration*. With Krikorian sitting on the same panel, Richwine stated: “There are real differences between groups, not just trivial ones that we have to notice more than we should. Race is different in all sorts of ways, and probably the most important way is in IQ. Decades of psychometric testing has indicated that at least in America you have Jews with the highest average IQ, usually followed by East Asians, and then you have non-Jewish whites, Hispanics and then blacks. These are real differences. They’re not going to go away tomorrow, and for that reason we have to address them in our immigration discussions.”

Present

With the election of Joe Biden, the anti-immigrant movement, including CIS, found itself at an inflection point. The previous four years represented a recent high-water mark of the nativist movement’s ability to influence federal immigration policy. However, with the Biden administration’s promise to reverse former President Trump’s draconian immigration agenda, CIS and other anti-immigrant hate groups shifted from a proactive strategy to one centered on preserving the anti-immigrant status quo they helped usher in.

As part of the effort to defend its policy victories over the last four years, CIS has welcomed several former Trump administration officials to its staff, some of whom had worked at CIS in years past.

One former Trump administration official who joined CIS is Robert Law. From 2017 to 2021, Law worked at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), first as senior policy adviser and subsequently as chief of the Office of Policy and Strategy. Law, who prior to joining the Trump administration had held multiple positions at FAIR, reportedly helped draft President Trump’s executive order that temporarily blocked the issuance of new green cards in April 2020. Currently, Law serves as CIS’s Director of Regulatory Affairs and Policy.

Jon Feere is another former Trump administration official presently working at CIS. Since 2002, Feere has worked at CIS on and off, in a variety of positions. During his time in the Trump administration, Feere served in ICE as the senior adviser to the director and as ICE’s chief of staff from January 2017 to January 2021. Feere was a political appointee of the Trump administration, meaning his nomination did not require Congressional approval. At CIS, Feere is the director of investigations.

CIS is currently focused on using a state-centric strategy to protect the anti-immigrant policy remnants of the Trump administration. In a Dec. 6, 2021, report, CIS Director of Policy Studies Jessica Vaughan noted the importance of a state and local government-led blueprint that reiterates CIS’s commitment to an extreme slate of “self-deportation”

policies, which are long proven failures for the states and communities that have adopted them over recent decades.

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