

The Far-Right Pipeline

Introduce myself

- History PhD
- Former Academic Librarian, specializing in African American Studies
- Founding member of the Critical Race Theory Collective – an international cohort of scholar-activists
- Editor of the Collective’s official blog, the Bell Ringer
- Currently authoring a chapter on race & racism in American far-right propaganda, edited by researchers at the University of Sussex

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize strategies of the far-right
- Apply strategies of resistance

What Do These People Have in Common?

Charlie Kirk, Candace Owens, Vivek Ramaswamy, and Ben Shapiro

What do these people have in common?

If you said Prager University, you’re correct

They are all “graduates” of PragerU

- Each created “educational” content for PragerU
- Each Used the exposure of PragerU to boost their public profiles, gain political influence through speaking tours, book and podcast deals, and booking appearance on Fox News

In Charlie Kirk’s own words – Dennis Prager is his mentor. This is why PragerU’s propagandist tactics are visibly employed in Kirk’s college tour series.

Prager University

PragerU is a registered 501c3 that promotes far-right politics under the guise of free online education and “occupies a central position within the right-wing media system” – uniting different conservative factions – including Reaganites, NewCons, Tea Partiers, Trumpists, and those even further right

The organization’s deceptive branding as a “university” is one of the many tactics to misinform and manipulate the American populace into far-right radicalism

PragerU’s media platform produces “educational” content for distribution on YouTube, Facebook, and more recently TikTok, specifically appealing to teen and young adult audiences

Within the last couple of years, PragerU's attention has expanded their target audience to include young children and their parents, by providing alternative educational content in the form of children's books and cartoon shows

With an annual budget of \$50 million, PragerU reach has surpassed 5 billion views since 2012

Each year, PragerU spends \$10 million dollars promoting their videos online– so there is a good chance you've encountered PragerU content without realizing it

Today, PragerU content is now integrated into the US public education system and is an approved education vendor in Idaho, South Carolina, Louisiana, Arizona, New Hampshire, Montana, Oklahoma, Texas, Florida

Who is Dennis Prager?

Dennis Prager was born in 1948 to a Russian-Jewish family in New York

- After college, Prager was an Israeli operative in Russia during the 1970s
- Following his return to the US, Prager toured the US and the world to speak on his experiences as an Israeli operative
- His public speaking tours led him to a career in radio

Since 1982, Prager has hosted a syndicated radio personality discussing religion, society and politics and promotes Judeo-Christian values

In the 1990s, due to the success of his radio show, Prager became affiliated with the Heritage Foundation, the right-wing think tank behind Project 2025 and a large supporter of PragerU

During his career, Prager has published numerous books, all which articulate Prager's social and political stances that form the ideological basis for PragerU content.

PragerU Playbook

As propaganda, PragerU's content seeks to drive children, teens, young adults, and parents to far-right political thinking and action, with these goals in mind:

- Create a white Christian nationalist political regime that supports Zionism and Israeli occupation of Palestine
- Dismantle public education
- Elect far-right political candidates
- Re-implement racial segregation

To that end, PragerU stokes the fears and prejudices of its viewership around the topics of immigration, race, gender, sexuality, and religion

Far-right ideology is presented in a way that seems reasonable, logical, and legitimate on the surface. This draws you into deeper content, featuring more extreme rhetoric, ideas, and arguments.

The first step in combating propaganda is learning to recognize the tactics of manipulation

Chances are, you've encountered PragerU content without even knowing it

Let's look at some of PragerU's tactics...

Tactic No. 1- Relentless advertising

Each year, PragerU expends significant funding to put content in front of their target audiences

From PragerU's \$50 million budget, \$10 million is spent on advertising and promoting content across social media platforms – specifically Facebook, Youtube, and more recently TikTok

PragerU's content has evolved to engage more effectively with their ever-expanding audience; Charlie Kirk's target audience for Turning Point USA similarly focuses high school and college-age students. His podcast, The Charlie Kirk Show is ranked #35 on the Podcast Chart and is produced by Salem Media Group – the same media conglomerate behind Dennis Prager's syndicated radio show.

PragerU's content is based around 5-minute videos circulated on YouTube and Facebook. These short videos “strip complex topics down to the bare essentials” and offer viewers distilled versions of far-right arguments and central talking points

The short 5-minute videos hook viewers in, eventually leading them to more extremist ideas promoted through long-form videos, podcasts, and books

Topics are not always overtly political, which works to pull viewers in without them necessarily realizing the true nature of the content. In fact, until last year, PragerU had no videos explicitly discussing or promoting Donald Trump and the cult of MAGA. Now, you can find videos of Dennis Prager celebrating Trump's election and interviews with Laura Trump and Trump cabinet members.

Viral (Monetized) Content

If indoctrinating America's youth into the far-right through alternative “educational” information is the goal – and it is -- then high-virality content is the method.

If a video goes viral – not only does it reach more viewers, PragerU benefits from the monetization of those views. On YouTube, video thumbnails are designed with vivid colors, dramatic graphics, and sensational titles. As advertised content, if you're searching

YouTube for a politically-relevant topic – you will not need to scroll very long to find a PragerU video.

These “expert” presenters, clean graphics, and high production values create a veneer of legitimacy and entice viewers to share, like, and follow for more.

In recent years, PragerU’s strategy has shifted to “man-on-the street” style clips and streamer- and podcast-style videos geared specifically for TikTok audiences. You no longer need to search for PragerU content, like or comment on the right things and the algorithm will plaster PragerU content on your FYP. You might not even realize its PragerU, as they’ve stripped back organizational branding – yet another deceptive technique to get you to consume PragerU content without knowing it.

Charlie Kirk uses the “man on the street” approach on his college tours, where he challenges college students to “prove him wrong.” These are not good-faith debates. Rather, his goal is to create viral videos of him “owning the libs” – if you step up to the mic, you will be recorded, the crowd and Kirk will interrupt you so that you can’t speak, and Kirk will dominate the conversation – twisting it whichever way he likes until you elicit the desired emotional reaction, get flustered, maybe even agree with him, and second-guess your own knowledge, experiences, and values.

Creating Misinformation

According to scholars of far-right propaganda at the University of Sussex, PragerU indirectly encourages viewers to embrace and defend orthodox ideology and reject supposedly radical and deviant leftist politics, thus pushing viewers further right

How so?

- Mythologizing history through a far-right narrative as the ONLY legitimate telling of America’s past
- Individualizing history to erase the successes of collective action
- Fear-mongering about the supposed deviant left

Scholars refer to this as “moral panic,” which PragerU contrives to drive Americans to push for far-right policies. Here is one example of moral panic:

After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, PragerU posted a video called “What is Critical Race Theory” on April 26, 2021. Since then, the video has collected over 2 million views on YouTube alone. For months, PragerU continued to create and push new content on CRT.

Before long, there was national panic among Republicans and the far-right. Taking their cues from PragerU, Fox News and far-right politicians made panic over CRT a mainstream issue. Soon, opponents of CRT expanded the parameters of this moral panic to include DEI.

Today, in 2025, anti-DEI policies are going into effect nationwide. Just last week, Chancellor Bob Jones and Provost John Coleman distributed a campus-wide email outlining University Administration's plans to "review and update website content and digital resources" and "identify and review selection criteria" for scholarships, awards, and events.

The DEI panic didn't start during this last election cycle. Anti-DEI as a legitimate Republican political rallying point has been in the making since early 2021 and can be traced back to PragerU.

In 2017, PragerU filed a civil rights lawsuit in the State of California against YouTube and Google, which had demonetized and added age restrictions for videos deemed for violating content guidelines. In 2017, when the lawsuit was filed, 44 videos were impacted – specifically those videos depicting violence, spreading misinformation, and using hate speech. As of today, there are over 200 videos demonetized and/or restricted on these platforms.

Note: restriction does not mean removed or unavailable. One just has to work a little harder to find them.

Here are a few examples:

- Was the Civil War About Slavery?
- Do White Americans have White Privilege?
- Is Islam a Religion of Peace?
- What's Wrong with Socialism?
- Israel's Legal Founding
- The World's Most Persecuted Minority: Christians
- Calling Good People "Racist" Isn't New
- Born to Hate Jews

Dog-Whistles

CRT is also an example of a dog-whistle, another common strategy of PragerU and far-right propagandists. According to Jason Stanley, author of *How Propaganda Works*, a dog-whistle is political message that appeal to "the racial biases of Americans without explicitly and obviously violating the social-political norms of race after the Civil Rights Movement."

The term gets its name from the high-pitched whistles used to train dogs. The sound is not audible to humans – only dogs. Similarly, political dog-whistles are a form of code switching, using innocuous sounding key words, phrases, or slogans with alternate meanings or connotations.

You may be familiar with some already:

- Woke
- The Welfare State
- State's Rights

- The Gay Agenda
- America First
- Traditional Family Values
- Transgenderism
- Barrack Hussein Obama
- Illegal Immigrants
- Hamas

Dog whistles allow far-right propagandists and politicians to “say the quite part out loud” while maintaining plausible deniability. Dog whistles are always changing because, according to Stanley, “politics involves a constant search for words that do not appear to be slurs but prejudice political debate.”

Tokenized Influencers

In the early days of PragerU, most of the organization’s content was focused on American history and Judeo-Christian morality. Most of the presenters were white, who also presented content on race.

In 2019, PragerU curriculum shifted to race-focused content presented by a new cadre of Black and Brown presenters. Between 2014 and 2018, PragerU had published only 31 videos on race. But in 2019 alone, PragerU’s race-focused content surged to 48 videos and steadily increased over the following years.

The surge coincided with the 2019 election cycle and nation-wide activism against police brutality. The intention was to debunk things like “systemic racism” and “white privilege” and argue that those who see, discuss and challenge racism in society are actually racist. Meanwhile, white people are the real victims because of reverse racism – a very real thing according to PragerU.

To uphold PragerU’s veneer of legitimacy, race-focused content denouncing Black Lives Matter was filtered through Black voices – like Candace Owens, Larry Elder, and Burgess Owens.

In 2021, Amala Ekpunobi entered the chat. A self-proclaimed former leftist organizer with a Black Lives Matter tattoo who came to see the err of her ways. Yet, Ekpunobi’s digital footprint before 2021 is non-existent. She was seemingly plucked from obscurity, like many of her PragerU colleagues, who wanted to make a name for themselves. As Candace Owens, Charlie Kirk, and Ben Shapiro can all attest – a gig with Prager can open doors and make your career.

Legitimation of Extremist Ideology

By platforming political influencers like Charlie Kirk, Candace Owens, Dinesh D’Souza, Vivek Ramaswamy, Ben Shapiro, PragerU functions as a legitimizing hub for the American far-right.

At PragerU, institutionally mainstream conservatives – like conservative economist Thomas Sewell – are presented alongside far-right talking heads like Charlie Kirk, Candace Owens, and Ben Shapiro. PragerU gives them the same platform – thus legitimizing far-right influencers who often lack scholarly expertise and political experience.

As legitimized PragerU presenters, far-right influencers are pushed into the center of the conservative stage, with multiple presenters appearing as pundits on Fox News, starting national-level political organizations, and seeking political office.

Take for example:

- Larry Elder: 2021 California Governor; 2024 Presidential Candidate
- Vivek Ramaswamy: 2024 Presidential Candidate; 2026 Ohio Governor Candidate
- Burgess Owens: Sitting member of the US House of Representatives, representing Utah

In 2016, when Charlie Kirk joined PragerU – he was a disgruntled college drop out and West Point reject. Now he is a MAGA wonder kid – advisor to Donald Trump and considered a “kingmaker” for Republican candidates.

Face-Focused Content (2014-2022)

After gathering data on PragerU’s videos from the official PragerU website, we can see how race-focused content a core component of the organization’s content until 2019.

In that year, over half of PragerU’s videos directly or indirectly discussed race. The trend towards race-focused content continued through 2022.

As PragerU increased its race-focus content, the organization also increased its representation of BIPOC commentators to present said content. This is interesting considering PragerU’s stance on race in the United States.

According to PragerU:

- Colorblindness is the definition of antiracism
- Racial identity is meaningless; national and religious identity matters
- Systemic racism and white privilege do not exist; only reverse racism or anti-white racism exists

Visualizing the Pipeline

These charts by the Frames Project at the University of Sussex help us visualize the Prager University and its propaganda pipeline:

1. On the left, the PragerU Content Funnel illustrates how the pipeline works to reach mass audiences, grab their attention, and encourage them to further into the pipeline by engaging with more extreme arguments and ideas

2. The Prager Universe (on the right) illustrates PragerU's centrality with the conservative political arena, drawing together different factions of the Republic political base and legitimizing alt-right or far-right ideology

You're Not Immune to Propaganda

Many of us have consumed PragerU content without even knowing it. Many more of us have encountered the moral panics, dog-whistles, and far-right arguments dumped into mainstream political discourse through PragerU.

Propaganda is not exclusive to the far-right. It can be found anywhere on the political spectrum. However, PragerU and Charlie Kirk are representative of a particularly pernicious type of propaganda – demagoguery – which, according to Stanly, “has a high likelihood of leading to tyranny and the end of liberal democracy.”

- Propaganda is aimed at those who are its targets; it is the means by which the highly privileged group in society controls negatively privileged groups.
- It presents non-experts at an epistemic authority
- It exploits free speech protections to erode reasonableness in public debate
- It uses intimidation and dog-whistles to exclude, silence, and dehumanize marginalized groups

So, how can we protect ourselves from getting drawn into the web of demagogic propaganda? How can we resist?

Resisting Propaganda: Critical Information Literacy

One of the best things we can do is practice Critical Information Literacy.

According to the President of the American Library Association, Emily Drabinski:

- CIL is a theory and practice that considers the sociopolitical dimension of information and the production of knowledge and it critiques the ways in which systems of power shape the creation, distribution, and reception of information

So, to practice CIL, here are some actionable steps to take:

1. Learn Critical Theories
 - a. Enroll in classes that will expand your realm of knowledge and introduce you to critical theories
 - b. Self-educate by reading books by Paulo Friere, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Derrick Bell, to name a few
2. Practice Self-Reflection
 - a. Information is not neutral; consider how you discover, interact, and share political information in your day-to-day life
 - b. Examine your beliefs and ideas about race, gender and sexuality, and class – does the scholarship of critical theories make you uncomfortable? Why is that?

3. Strengthen Your Information Literacy Skills
 - a. Critically evaluate your information sources
 - b. Attend information literacy workshops at the library
 - c. Refer to the Association of College and Research Library's Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education
4. Wash, Rise, Repeat
 - a. Information literacy skill that must be practiced and honed
 - b. Education is a life-long journey

Resisting Propaganda: Microresistance

In our day-to-day lives, there are small actions we can take to combat misinformation and propaganda:

1. Learn to recognize dog-whistles
 - a. Be cognizant of political rhetoric with double meanings and how it can be used to signal the dehumanization of marginalized groups
 - b. Ask yourself – is there subtext to this text?
2. Avoid undemocratic debate
 - a. Don't fall for Charlie Kirks "prove me wrong" debates on the quad
 - b. There is nothing you can say to change his mind, and his goal is to elicit an emotional reaction
 - c. He takes control of the conversation and the crowd, so that you will trip up, get flustered, agree with him, and question yourself
3. Maintain empathy and humanity
 - a. Do not lose sight of your empathy and compassion for other people – especially marginalized groups
 - b. Call attention to dehumanizing rhetoric that seeks to erode your empathy for others
4. Be in community
 - a. Get off campus; join a local organization
 - b. Learn from the lived experiences of local community members
 - c. Be accountable to others

Resources for Resistance

As a librarian, I can't end a talk without providing some tools and resources.

Media Bias/Fact Check

This is an open database with nearly 10,000 media sources, journalists, and politicians.

It is an independently funded project, supported by membership fees and small donations

Their website provides transparent information about funding and methodology for bias and credibility ratings

Dennis & Charlie's Ratings

In case you were wondering, here are the ratings for PragerU and Turning Point USA:

PragerU:

- On a scale of 1 to 10, PragerU received a bias rating of 8.7, placing it at the far-right end of the political spectrum
- On a scale of 1 to 10, PragerU received an 8.3 in factual reporting, resulting in a low credibility rating
- Overall, MBFC determined that PragerU is a questionable source based on extreme right-wing bias, the promotion of propaganda, the use of poor sources, failing multiple fact checks, and the promotion of misleading information regarding immigration and climate change.

TPUSA:

- On scale of 1-10, TPUSA received a 7.5 towards the right – placing it at the far-right end of the political spectrum.
- On a scale of 1-10, TPUSA received a score of 8.0 for factual reporting – placing it in the Low credibility category
- Overall, MBFC determined that TPUSA is a right biased and questionable source based on propaganda, conspiracy theories, and numerous failed fact checks.

The Framework

The ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education is a free online guide, created for librarians, but available to anyone.

The Framework is available in multiple languages – Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Persian

The framework presents 6 core concepts for information literacy:

- Authority is constructed and contextual
- Information creation as a process
- Information has value
- Research as inquiry
- Scholarship as conversation
- Searching as strategic exploration

You can practice critical information literacy by pairing the framework with critical scholarship, in order to better understand the sociopolitical dimensions of information

Shareables

I've synthesized this presentation into a 1-page zine. I have a few copies with me, which you can take and share. Or you can print copies to distribute freely.