

Hold the (thin blue) line: theorizing white vigilante violence as counterinsurgency

by

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Abstract

Though sometimes understood as novel, racist groups like the “Proud Boys” and right-wing militias like the “Three Percenters” that have emerged over the last decade are emblematic of a longstanding trend in which white vigilante groups act as *de facto counterinsurgency* forces, appearing at protests as intimidating, often armed “counter-protestors” and with the tacit approval of police, while also engaging in broader ideological campaigns to “win the hearts and minds” of recruits and the broader public. From the slave patrols of the southern U.S. colonies, on through to the KKK, White Citizens Councils and John Birch Society of the post-war years, to the actors and networks of today, this project sketches the symbiotic relationship between state and non-state actors working to fabricate and defend racial capitalist social order with both idea and violent deed. Using the Kyle Rittenhouse matter as quasi-case study, the project maps the ways that white vigilante violence has been justified by key members of the U.S. media and broader public and how these discourses rationalize and normalize violence in defense of dominant, racialized notions of private property and public order. Here the “thin blue line” is a potent signifier not just of U.S. police, but one that locates the literal battle zone—cultural, political, material—for those self-deputized subjects who take it upon themselves to violently defend the racial capitalist order.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents Mike and Sheri for their constant support and encouragement. Without them, none of this would be possible.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

May 30, 1921, a black delivery man named Dick Rowland was arrested in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Commonplace in Jim Crow America, news coverage and presumably the word on the street amplified the alleged danger that black men posed to the white community generally and white women specifically. In the case of Rowland, this alleged threat is captured in the *Tulsa Tribune* headline, “Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator.” Inflamed by the report, a white lynch mob gathered outside the Tulsa courthouse where Rowland was being held, demanding that he be released to them. Aware of Tulsa’s history with police complicity in lynching and Klan activity, the community of Tulsa’s historically black Greenwood district sent a group of armed WWI veterans to the courthouse in response (Dyson, Brophy, and Kennedy 2003:63). The veterans offered their assistance to the local sheriff in protecting Rowland but were turned away only to come back later upon news of the growing lynch mob presence outside the courthouse. Tensions between the recently arrived Greenwood residents and lynch mob thus erupted into a brief skirmish in front of the courthouse that was quickly broken up by gunfire. Shortly thereafter, the WWI veterans returned to Greenwood to prepare for further conflict.

Unfazed by the growing white lynch mob, the Tulsa Police Department instead focused on preventing the “negro uprising” in Greenwood (Dyson et al. 2003:79). Fueled by a fear of being outnumbered and false rumors of a call from Greenwood requesting 500 armed reinforcements, the Tulsa Police Department commissioned 250 men, began deputizing members of the lynch mob, and placed a machine gun on the road between the cities of Muskogee and Tulsa (Dyson et al. 2003:84). Amidst this chaos, the National Guard was dispatched to the Tulsa courthouse to ‘quell’ any riot and looting, though they were notably absent from Greenwood where the bulk of the violence would eventually unfold. Just as the National Guard were

disarming potential mob members, local police were distributing arms indiscriminately to the white population whether they were ‘officially’ deputized or not.

With the blessing of police and even police among their ranks, the lynch mob fell upon the Greenwood district, murdering residents, leveling homes and businesses, and looting anything of value. Bombs were also dropped from planes on Greenwood’s neighborhoods, which in addition to the arson taking place on the ground served to destroy most of the district. A.J. Smitherman, founder of the Tulsa Star aptly describes these events in his poem, *A Descriptive Poem of the Tulsa Race Riot and Massacre* (Smitherman 1921).

“At the signal from the whistle
Aeroplanes were seen to fly,
Dropping bombs and high explosives,
Hell was falling from the sky.”

The Greenwood Massacre, lasting two days, resulted in hundreds dead, thousands left homeless, and many others imprisoned in internment camps (Parshina-Kottas et al. 2021). Despite official estimates recording 30 to 50 dead, the toll is likely much higher given the presence of mass graves.

Though stunning, the event in Tulsa is but one of the many outbreaks of white vigilante violence throughout U.S. history. Images and postcards serve as powerful reminders of the destructive capacity and legacy of white vigilante violence as well. In Tulsa, the white lynch mob and police initiated the destruction of Greenwood and blamed black residents for the riot. It was their goal to run successful black Tulsans out of the city, and they were successful. In doing so, they maintained their status as the dominant class over black Americans who had found economic success after the collapse of reconstruction. With the support of the police, the white lynch mob succeeded in its goal.

Two years later in Rosewood, Florida similar events occurred in which a mob gathered by a local sheriff killed multiple black residents and razed the town. In 1943, Detroit, Michigan saw white vigilantes escalate a clash that led to a multi-day riot resulting in 34 deaths, 25 of which were black and 17 of those killed by police. In 1979 a group of left-wing activists in Greensboro, North Carolina were attacked by the KKK, leaving 5 dead, with many defending the action as ‘boys protecting their hometown from communist subversion.’ Even Trayvon Martin, killed as he was by self-deputized security guard George Zimmerman, can be counted among the victims of white vigilante violence. This is by no means an exhaustive list; it merely serves to spotlight the historical prevalence of white vigilante violence across the landscape of U.S. history.

In 2020, the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor again catalyzed nationwide demonstrations against police violence. Though as tradition dictates, demonstrations *against* police violence are often *met* with police violence. What is perhaps unique in 2020 however, is the increased visibility of white nationalist militia and similar groups working in view of or with the blessing of police. On June 14th, 2020, a "law and order rally" organized by the Law Abiding Citizens' Coalition (an organization established just a few days prior in response to the widespread Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests) took place in Miami, Florida. Referencing the BLM protests across the U.S., the founder of the coalition, Evelio Medina, stated, "What we're doing is saying, 'Hey, there's room for everybody.' We don't have an issue with protesting, but when it turns into vandalism, looting, burning, we draw the line right there" (Margol and Solomon 2020). The flyer announcing the rally additionally states, "There is a thin line between Anarchy and Freedom and that line is BLUE." This counterprotest which was organized in response to vandalism of a Christopher Columbus statue highlights a common thread with

demonstrations aiming to counter BLM: they often focus on damage to property and threat to stability as the delegitimizing factor of a BLM protest, and they stand in support of, if not in the direct defense of police. In a similar event, on July 25th, 2020, members of the armed Not Fucking Around Coalition (NFAC) stood in Louisville, Kentucky, supporting demonstrators. The Three Percenters militia group stood in opposition to the NFAC with the stated purpose of supporting the police. In the same week in Weatherford, Texas, BLM protestors and two right-wing militia groups, the Texas Freedom Fighters and the Union of Three Percent American Patriots clashed over the presence of a confederate statue (Griffey 2020). These are but a few of the countless examples of recent militia mobilization often standing in the defense of property and police.

In the tumult of 2020, perhaps nowhere was the rising violence of self-deputized vigilantes aligned with the police more evident than in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on August 25th. Two days prior on August 23rd, 29-year-old Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back by Kenosha police, leaving him paralyzed. The shooting quickly localized the ongoing protests sparked by Floyd's murder to the Kenosha area. In response, Kevin Matthewson, leader of the so-called "Kenosha Guard" placed a call to arms on Facebook, imploring, "Any patriots willing to take up arms and defend out [sic] City tonight from the evil thugs? Nondoubt [sic] they are currently planning on the next part of the City to burn tonight!" (Gunn 2020; MacFarquhar 2020). Matthewson's call was heard, rallying many like-minded individuals to back the "outnumbered" police by standing armed guard over private property and business (Vielmetti, Barton, and Spivak 2020).

Of the many to answer the call was 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse. A young Trump and "blue life" supporter, at 16, he asked his friends and family to donate to the non-profit

“humanizing the badge,” which aims to “... help forge stronger relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve” (Humanizing the Badge n.d.; Mihalopoulos 2020). Prior to its deletion, his social media portrayed a love for the police as well, with profile pictures containing various forms of “blue life” imagery. Considering his explicit and outward support of the police, it should come as no surprise that he eagerly crossed state lines on August 25th. Like many other militia members and “armed friendlies” as police sometimes refer to them, Rittenhouse arrived in Kenosha armed with an AR-15 style rifle (Williams 2020) and on the night of August 25th, he took on a role patrolling the demonstrations with other militia members.

In two separate on-site interviews that night, Rittenhouse laid his claim for being there on supposed violence and injuries in the city in addition to the protection of property as exemplified by his brief interview with Richie McGinnis of the right-wing Daily Caller:

Richie McGinnis: “What are you doing out here? Obviously, you’re in front of this business we saw burning last night so what’s up?”

Kyle Rittenhouse: “So people are getting injured, and our job is to protect this business and part of my job is to also help people if there’s somebody hurt, I’m running into harm’s way that’s why I have my rifle because I need to protect myself obviously, but I also have my med kit.” (Daily Caller 2020).

Additionally, he further alluded to his goals in a separate interview with Podcast/TV host Elijah Schaffer of right-wing news network The Blaze:

Kyle Rittenhouse (KR): “... I just got pepper-sprayed by a person in the crowd.”

Elijah Schaffer (ES): “So you had non-lethal, but you didn’t respond.”

KR: “We don’t have non-lethal.”

ES: “So you guys are full on ready to defend the property?”

KR: “Yes we are, now if I can ask, can you guys step back?”¹

¹ Pulled from: CONTEXT: I Spoke with the Alleged Shooter Earlier in the Night Who Stated He Was There to Protect Property He Did Not Make Racist Comments, Condemn #BLM, or Mention Political Motivations for His Actions He Said That He Was There to Protect Property & Was Carrying a Firearm <https://t.co/ViYUB65tiy>. (<https://twitter.com/ElijahSchaffer/status/1298564220565561346>).

As the night progressed, confrontations between protestors and militia members grew in frequency. Around midnight, demonstrators and Rittenhouse crossed paths at a local gas station. In a heated exchange between militia members and protestors, Joseph Rosenbaum shouted at the nearby militia about their weapons and their intentions on that night. As tensions rose between the demonstrators and militia at the gas station Rosenbaum continued to shout and the crowd grew. It was at this point two shots were fired from an unknown source leading Rittenhouse to turn and take aim at the demonstrators. Rosenbaum, seeing Rittenhouse's action, approached him in an attempt to disarm him. Rittenhouse fired four shots, hitting Rosenbaum in the groin, back, and left hand, killing him. Shortly afterward, Rittenhouse was heard on his phone stating "I just killed somebody." Then, as he fled the gas station, he tripped, with two more gunshots being fired nearby. Anthony Huber caught up to him at this point and attempted to disarm him. Rittenhouse fired one shot through Huber's heart and lung, killing him instantly. Gaige Grosskruetz who was also approaching at that moment was then shot in the arm by Rittenhouse, severing his bicep. With his gun still strapped to his chest, Rittenhouse approached the encroaching police line with many demonstrators shouting to police about the murders he just committed. The police ignored these calls and allowed Rittenhouse to cross their boundaries as they closed in on the protests. He returned home to Antioch, Illinois that night.

The following morning, Rittenhouse turned himself in to the police. He was held and questioned in Antioch until October 30th, 2020, when his request for release was denied and he was extradited to Kenosha, Wisconsin. His bail, which the court set at \$2 million was gathered via public donations raised through the Christian fundraising site GiveSendGo (Wilson 2021). The events in Kenosha and Rittenhouse's involvement in them subsequently served as the focal point for a political and cultural battle over police, protests, and vigilante violence.

The circumstances of the Floyd protests, Blake's shooting by police, the open call for armed defense of Kenosha and ultimately Rittenhouse's violent actions, serve to highlight a historical continuum of legitimized violence, that of both police and private actors towards nonwhite and dissident Americans. Members of police agencies and their supporters, large segments of the U.S. news media, and grassroots "patriot" groups of all kinds coalesce in opposition to what is variously characterized as a liberal, non-white, Black Lives Matter insurgency. These seemingly disparate groups fabricate and legitimate thin blue line imagery through emphasis on property, security, and self-defense above all else. Any challenge to the status quo is framed through its potential threat to these systems, leaving any bulwark against them actively enabled if not outright encouraged. To contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon which I refer to as white vigilante violence, in which self-deputized armed civilians violently protect property and support the police; I begin this project by sketching a history of white supremacy, policing, and their various defenses. With their origins in the slave patrol and a tight-knit relationship to capital, the police have gradually forged an image of a divided world, most clearly represented through the "thin blue line." Media organizations support this division by shifting the discourse of police and vigilante violence away from broader societal structures and on to individual "bad actors." Furthermore, media organizations frame civil unrest in specific ways, emphasizing property, security, and their (non)whiteness. The goal of this is nothing more than to maintain a racial capitalist order, political and cultural leaders may stand in solidarity with protestors, but the ruling class prioritizes things as they are.

With this in mind, I aim to explore the complex ways these behemoths of the culture industry normalize, validate, and legitimate white vigilantes like Kyle Rittenhouse. This project explores white vigilante violence as a function of the police power that is actively aided and

abetted by the culture industry and court system alike. Therefore, it aims to highlight the various ways these powerful structures legitimate white vigilantes who violently uphold racial capitalist order. More specifically, it begins with the following research questions: *In what ways, if any does the defense of Kyle Rittenhouse normalize white vigilante violence? And what was if any does the defense of Kyle Rittenhouse normalize de facto counterinsurgency in response to perceived nonwhite insurgency?*

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The Thin Blue Line

Before sketching a brief timeline, we must first touch upon the contemporary state of U.S. policing through one of its most recognizable signifiers the “thin blue line” (TBL). Police fabricate social order, in a manner that sees them shape and reshape public and private life based upon the demands of political economy (Neocleous 2021). Which is to say, policing has as much to do, perhaps more, with the fabrication of bourgeoisie subjects and markets as it does crime. As such, police determine what falls within and outside of the order they establish. Not unlike what Karl Marx famously states in *The German Ideology*, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (2000:192), in its role, the police ensure that the ruling ideas are maintained, with the dominant system/structure/thought of the era, particularly that which incentivizes a racial capitalist order, serving as the basis by which the police orient themselves. Challenges to this ideological orientation often find themselves on the wrong side of the police, with them punishing dissidents who transgress the order which they fabricate. Through the metaphor of the thin blue line then, we can locate the bleeding contested edge, the literal boundaries of in an ongoing low intensity war for racial capitalist order².

Throughout history, police in their various forms have fulfilled this order-fabrication role effectively. From the outset, they served as an insurance of sorts for the ruling class, most clearly put on display by their commonly associated descriptor the “thin blue line.” The TBL works by dividing society between the civilized and uncivilized, the human and inhuman, with police

² Racial capitalism is the acknowledgement that capitalism is never not racial, it involves the unequal valuing of human life along racialized lines to cultivate a system of capitalist social relations conducive to accumulation (Melamed 2015).

serving as the line by which order is fabricated and maintained (Wall 2020). Those who stand in opposition to or outside the thin blue line must subject to its violence. As Tyler Wall (2020:319) argues, “The idea that life itself ... *is impossible without police* is a ruling idea of capitalist order.” Thus, the TBL is necessary to divide order and chaos, propertied from unpropertied, (and often) white from black. The thin blue line is a means by which the encroaching violence outside civilization is held at bay, and thus creates an imaginary space by which “civil” society operates and police actions are justified in the name of protecting this space of civilization. All who threaten that security are framed as harbingers of civilization’s collapse which the TBL amplifies the drama of for its own gains (Wall 2020).

This dividing line is maintained through the policing of all aspects of society, such as the economic, social, etc. First and foremost, law-abiding behavior is often framed along the lines of established liberal understandings of civil society. As Mark Neocleous (2021) highlights, police played an essential role in the development of a free market liberal society, ensuring that individuals participate in a way that is conducive to a (racial) capitalist order. Thus, the thin blue line has broadened its horizons over time to encompass ever growing aspects of society. As police have evolved beyond their early emphasis on vagrancy (Chambliss 1964) the reach of police power continued to spread. Police do not serve to divide along unanimously agreed upon definitions of “civilized” and “uncivilized” segments of humanity, but rather fabricate the line which divides them based on an allegiance to bourgeois ideals.

The thin blue line then frames the police as preventing humanity’s “regression into a violent, feral nature” (Wall 2020:324) and dramatizes a war for civilization being fought in our very backyard. It is no surprise then, that dissenters against bourgeois modernity are often met with violent repression by police. Groups like the Black Panthers and more recently Black Lives

Matter find themselves at odds with the police and on the outside the thin blue line, opposite the status quo, or what is determined to be the ‘natural order.’ Seeing as the thin blue line provides the means by which often racialized understandings of criminality are filtered, defined, and fabricated, those in opposition to it often find themselves defined as such. These carefully cultivated understandings of security, criminality, and democracy serve to further undermine those in opposition to the thin blue line while simultaneously dramatizing the precarity of social order, the very thinness of the line itself.

Geo Maher (2021:31) shows how police frequently cite examples of their failures as “proof of their own indispensability.” This is a necessary feature of the TBL, their modernization project can never truly be complete as the inherent instability of bourgeois society necessitates its existence (Wall 2020:324). The TBL thus draws and redraws its bounds depending on the challenges of the day, often in the form of racialized claims about a declining society (Linnemann and Medley 2018). So then, protests and demonstrations are framed in a way that legitimates violence against them, using the language of riots and violence to fabricate their threat to racial capitalist order.

This is most visible in the broader response to progressive and civil rights movements, and how police and media alike emphasize damage to property and threat to business above all else. The TBL splits society in half along these often-racialized lines to create a system of legitimized violence that often equates movements like Black Lives Matter to “rabid animals” in contrast to the often-supportive tone used to describe primarily white conservative movements (Ward 2018:171). The resulting dichotomy clearly highlights the thin blue line as standing in the defense of the status quo.

As demonstrated previously, the thin blue line serves a (racial) capitalist order above all else. With that established, we can see this system at work throughout history more generally and the development of the police/white vigilante relationship more specifically. Considering policing's origins in the slave patrol, development alongside the de facto counterinsurgency apparatus, and necessity to the capitalist system, the police have served most clearly as a thin blue line dividing propertied from the unpropertied, secure from the insecure, and often nonwhite from white. In practice, the police fabricate an order which keeps the wheels of capitalism turning. More often than not, this stance necessarily places the police in opposition to progressive movements, people of color, and dissident Americans alike, while aligning police *with* white vigilantes who themselves police the thin blue line as a de facto counterinsurgent force, putting down perceived widespread liberal, progressive, often black rebellion.

White Power in Colonial America

White supremacy has long ordered life in the United States in the form of an institutionalized if obscured power. Rising from its origins as a colonial project and the slave trade, U.S. security tradition, cultural development, and political economy are inextricably bound up with white supremacy. White supremacy itself is no new concept, and there is a large body of scholarship exploring it in detail. Some explicitly highlight whiteness and white supremacy as a structural factor of U.S. history (Allen and Perry 2021; Du Bois 1998; Ignatiev 2009; Roediger 2007) while others tie it most directly to subcultural factors and marginal social movements (Simi and Futrell 2010). The reality is that white supremacy is inherent in the racial capitalist order of the United States, including the development of police and political economy alike. Thus, racial capitalism provides the foundation on which the United States builds its security apparatus.

Historian Sally E. Hadden locates the origins of the slave patrol to 17th century Barbados in her work, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*. In colonial Barbados, privately hired white militiamen, slave catchers and plantation overseers were all employed to control and surveil the growing African slave population. Modeled after the Spanish and Portuguese slave-hunting systems, the control of slaves and indentured servants was gradually institutionalized by the mid 1600's as slave laws and codes were enacted. In fact, it was an aborted rebellion in 1649 combined with perceived incompetence of the privatized slave-catching system that resulted in the 1661 slave codes which expanded the duties of surveilling the slave population beyond the privately employed overseers and slave catchers. It was via these slave codes that the onus was on the white population at large to constrain and limit slave movements (Hadden 2001:11).

This system of control and surveillance did not stay localized to Barbados, however. W.E.B. Du Bois (1998:12) locates the emergence of the U.S. slave patrol in 1704, first arising as a voluntary militia. The whiteness of the patrol was central to its function as well. Colonial landowners long sought out a solution to growing class tensions, and an armed white population was central to legitimizing racial rule (Kelley 2020). Therefore, the slave patrol offered a “psychological wage” of sorts to whites of all social statuses in colonial America, elevating white identity *over* black identity and shoring up a racial capitalist order (Du Bois 1998:700). While this wage was immaterial as far as tangible gains of capital were concerned, the elevation of white identity legitimized anti-black violence by placing poor and working-class whites in opposition to the black slave population.

In their earliest stages, slave patrols lacked formal legal organization. Established to fabricate plantation order in colonial America like police, they prioritized property relations.

Slaves themselves were seen as property, and property served as the basis for capital accumulation. Thus, the patrols concerned themselves with runaways, revolt, and their impact on the slave economy. This concern over runaways did not arise in a vacuum but stemmed from their infrequent occurrence in the Caribbean (Beckles 1984). Thus, supplemental to the slave patroller of the era was the slave catcher (Hadden 2001:10). While the patrollers were occupied with preventing slave escape, slave catchers rounded slaves up and brought back runaways, often abusing or killing them in the process. This somewhat informal system of vigilantism continued to develop as concerns over the growing southern slave population increased.

In the 1730s, the colonial governments expanded the duties of the slave patrol to include policing of white servants (a practice common in Barbados, but new to the colonial United States), and the mere suspicion of illegal activity was deemed enough to punish a slave or servant. Additionally, while the patrols were unpaid, they were allowed to keep any contraband found when engaging in searches of slave and servant quarters, which required no justification outside of patroller discretion (Hadden 2001:22). This extension of legitimacy from the colonial government to the patrol eventually brought material gains at the expense of black slaves and poor whites alike. Any perceived violation of racial capitalist order resulted in the iron fist of the slave patrol, slave catchers, and militias.

Efforts to undermine and curb violations of the law coming from slaves were not always successful though. Slave uprisings did occur and posed a threat to the stability of colonial order. On Sunday, September 9th, 1739, between 50 and 100 slaves revolted in South Carolina. They attacked and engaged in skirmishes with many white colonists on their path to St. Augustine in a bid for freedom. Gradually, as they faced off with militiamen, their numbers dwindled. Many died in battle while the militia relentlessly hunted those who fled, sometimes placing bounties on

escaped slaves. This revolt, which later came to be known as the “Stono rebellion,” left 50 Blacks and 25 Whites dead in its wake (Brucato 2020:128; Hadden 2001:23; Smith 2001:513).

The Stono rebellion did two things: reaffirmed whites’ fears of potential slave insurrection and further institutionalized the slave patrol as a force for fabricating racial capitalist order. In the aftermath, the colonial government placed tighter constraints on the lives of slaves and consolidated more power under its umbrella via the emergency assembly to establish comprehensive slave codes (Hadden 2001:23). The slave codes did not bring increased duties to the patrols themselves (or even pay for that matter). Still, they began the gradual regulation and standardization of the lives of slaves, servants, and ‘disorderly’ persons in the name of security. In this way, actions which transgressed racial capitalist order, be they vagrancy, theft, or poor whites simply associating with slaves, envisaged a dire threat to the security which the dominant class relied on to effectively facilitate property relations (Neocleous 2021:114). The response to this revolt served to legitimate the role of the militia and patrol among whites, framing them as a bulwark against civil collapse as represented by the opening statute of the assembly:

Many late horrible and barbarous massacres have been actually committed, and many more designed ... by negro slaves ... which makes it highly necessary that constant patrols should be established and kept ... for the better preventing any future insurrections or cabals of the said slaves. (Cited in Hadden 2001:23)

In one swift move, the slave patrols were more clearly defined and institutionalized in a way that resembles modern policing. From dividing assignments among jurisdictions to recruitment strategies that shifted away from militias, the slave patrols of South Carolina served as the model that other U.S. states would follow (Brucato 2020:128). This reshaping of the slave patrol occurred alongside urban shifts as well. White residents of townships grew increasingly concerned about the growing slave population, often associating them with violations of law and order (Hadden 2001:53). Thus, townships and urban areas developed city police forces much like

the restructured slave patrol. Beat patrols, jurisdictions, and security were the focus of these city police forces. While their primary focus was policing the black population and “blackness,” they also policed whites assumed to be colluding with blacks and any “depraved persons” found on the street. Those found to violate city ordinance were often placed in jail to await punishment and abuse at the hands of police and patroller alike. This system of township police and rural patrol did not always act as intended though. Slaves frequently evaded these groups and found ways around their structures.

As time went on, propertied whites perpetuated the idea that the slave patrols and police forces were inadequate in maintaining a pacified population. The availability of poor whites for work and common dereliction of duty by well-off whites amplified the misconception that the patrols were dominated by the poor (Hadden 2001:65). This discontent with the patrol led to the establishment of the 1792 “Uniform National Militia Law,” which limited militias to “free white men between eighteen and forty-five” (Hadden 2001:74). This limitation maintained the focus drawn from militia recruitment but brought more significant restrictions on who could serve as well. Necessary industries and professions alike avoided patrol duty, recreating the problem that white elites had with the patrols: a perceived overrepresentation of poor whites.

However, increased institutionalization led the slave patrols to offer a prestige of sorts to their members. As Hadden (2001:77) puts it, taking on the status of the slave patroller proclaimed one to be an agent of the white community. Essentially, this frames the slave patrol as purely acting on behalf of whites, and while this is true, it is only half true. Slave patrols were undoubtedly interested in controlling blacks. They also facilitated property relations, making them agents of *propertied* whites, a narrow segment of the southern aristocracy. Recall Du Bois’

invocation of the “psychological wage,” the patrols were built on a cultivated racial allegiance that served to fabricate a racial capitalist order above all else. And that they did.

The slave patrols emphasized property protection due to wealthy whites’ fears that annihilation might occur with any lapse in state oversight (Weir 1969:483). The system of racial allegiance brought with it an abusive police state that ruled the lives of slaves, freedmen, and vagabond whites alike, though obviously to different extents. Eventually, echoing developments in 17th century Barbados, slaves would be required to carry passes signed by their masters, allowing them to travel, and freedmen had to maintain papers denoting their freedom or risk the wrath of the slave patrol. In addition, the slave patrol prevented poor whites from selling illicit goods to slaves and vice-versa (Hadden 2001:98).

All this to say, the slave patrol is but a small piece of a larger historical continuum. Slaves frequently found themselves the recipients of the state sanctioned violence of the patrol. Male slaves were victims of brutal physical assaults by patrolmen, and female slaves were often victims of sexual abuse (Hadden 2001:115-117). These abuses occurred across the antebellum south and went overlooked due to the authority and status of the slave patrol. Regardless of the “legality” of their actions though, slave patrollers received specialized treatment due to the whiteness of their institution, its perceived necessity to security, and their role in ordering the racial capitalist system.

Slave patrols existed well into the mid 19th century. When slaves sought to challenge the authority of the patrol, the legal system responded violently (Hadden 2001:134). By framing any opposition to the authority of the patrol (and police) as the early stages of insurrection, the patrol further legitimized its rule as a necessary feature of modern society; like many scholars note, the slave patrols existed as a force for counter insurrection (Du Bois 1998; Brucato 2020; Kelley

2020; Hadden 2001). The insurrectionary threat did not have to be real; it only needed to be *implied* for the slave patrol to maintain its legitimacy, not unlike the racialized claims found throughout thin blue line rhetoric.

De Facto Counterinsurgency and De Jure Segregation

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the duties of the slave patrol were taken up by police forces that emerged across the southern U.S., while the victorious union government abolished slavery as an explicit institution and overt economic system, white supremacy still ordered daily life. With the southern economy in ruins, the already decimated labor market now flooded with newly free black labor necessitated a new force to reproduce the profound disparities of racial capitalism. The most prominent and well-known of these white vigilante groups, was of course the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Established in 1866, the KKK held its first official meeting in Judge Thomas M. Jones' law office, claiming to be born of boredom and a good-natured interest in harmless pranks (Trelease 1971:3). Regardless of these claims, the KKK immediately set out a campaign of armed harassment, violence and terror, not so far removed from the slave patrol.

This era marks the transition to a white supremacy less overt than the slave system, but no less violent or exploitative. As Brucato (2020) argues, the slave patrol acted primarily as a counter-insurrectionary force, this mandate became more significant as the southern police took on the duties of the slave patrol, allowing the racial capitalist order to go on largely unhindered with laws established in the Jim Crow era. Additionally, where the law was deemed 'inadequate,' the KKK and other white vigilante groups stepped in and responded violently to perceived black insurgency (Tolnay and Beck 1995). In what is known as the "lynching era" of U.S. history, the KKK diagnoses the symbiosis of police and white vigilantism, both aligned as they were to respond to the threats of newly freed black people. Transgressions against the

violently administered racial order were quickly snuffed out, by police and the Klan, which often, shared members.

From 1865 well into the 1930's, this sort of racial terror and mob violence blighted the U.S. landscape. Riddled with violent reactions to democratic and economic gains made by nonwhite Americans, reconstruction proved to be a no less violent order than the colonial era. The dissolution of the slave patrol did not do away with systemic racism in any sense of the word. The legacy of the slave patrol lived on in policing institutions and the ongoing prominence of white vigilantism. After all, police are the iron fist of the state, and their actions legitimate those they defend and undermine those they do not. Thus, the prevalence of vigilantism in this era and frequent police complicity highlights the importance of both police and self-deputized vigilantism in shaping the United States and its underlying whiteness. Many states experienced white vigilante violence with Kentucky standing out as a particularly poignant example of political, economic, and social repression of nonwhite Americans with the blessing of the police. As we have seen in the grotesque crimes of the "Tulsa massacre," police, whether they stood on the sidelines, allowing mob violence, or engaged in the act of murder themselves, were integral to the continuance of the racial order and racial capitalism more generally.

Kentucky, which was a slaveholding state aligned with the Union during the Civil War stands as an important example of the ways that white vigilante violence operated in the open and often in concert with police during Reconstruction (Wright 1990:2). Due to its alignment with the Union, it did not face the same level of scrutiny that the formerly confederate south did after the end of the war. Rather, once slavery was abolished, the federal government focused on the restoration of "order" to the southern United States, allowing Kentucky to easily maintain its racial order in the absence of slavery. The police, like the KKK, took on the mantle of the slave

patrol as well, with white vigilante violence taking hold in the form of lynching when the judicial structures were seen to fall short, most often to the detriment of black Americans. Thus, the act of lynching served to send a message to the black community at large rather than punish individual criminal acts. In this era, the “legal lynching” as it was referred to, emerged. This form of lynching saw its process take place unobstructed by the law so long as it was done “by the book” (Wright 1990:12-13). Relying on police complicity in the act, legal lynchings sometimes saw direct police involvement in the process. Not always organized by the Klan, they still frequently involved themselves in this process as well, perpetuating claims about supposed inherent violence linked to blackness. These acts of violence were further legitimized via prevailing theories about the inferiority of blacks, whether inherent or lingering effects of slavery (Muhammad 2019).

Of course, should a member of the Klan run afoul of the law, their arrest was handled with great care. Klan activity was frequently ignored by police or received minimal punishment from the criminal justice system. This is because the aims of the Klan mirrored those of the southern aristocracy (Wright 1990:32). Thus, the frequent abuse of blacks and enabling of white vigilantes by the local governments continued to associate “whiteness” with lawfulness and civility while condemning “blackness” to associations of criminality and disorder. Regardless of what a black man was guilty of, he could be lynched, beaten, or have his property destroyed if he violated the racial order. These instances of violence were often referred to as “warnings to all blacks” like in the lynching of black political organizer Samuel Hawkins and his family (Wright 1990:51). In his case, he was murdered by the KKK for his political involvement and empowerment of black and republican voters in Kentucky.

All this serves to highlight the prominence of political repression in this era. From reconstruction onward, black political empowerment often brought republican political leadership. At the time, the democratic political machine stood in opposition to reconstruction, thus, white fear was weaponized to maintain the status quo by suppressing electoral politics. In the 1870's the democratic partisan militia emerged in Kentucky. Made up primarily of white democratic voters, the militia served to suppress black and republican political engagement by force (Lewis 2010). This militia rose out of growing concerns over economic strain resulting from recently freed black labor (Lewis 2010:156). Fear over control of land and economic strain served to unite subproletarian Irish with the white majority, creating a new coalition of sturdy, often violent white men to stand in opposition to swelling ranks of insurgent black labor (Ignatiev 1995).

In addition, the Klan frequently engaged in fearmongering designed to mobilize and agitate complacent whites. They frequently spread rumors throughout white communities about supposed race war and impending "negro domination." Following the passage of the 15th Amendment, often spreading wild claims about the emergence of a "negro Ku Klux" highlighting that their own violence was legitimate, but violence in violation of the racial capitalist order was not (Lewis 2010:158). The structure at the time relied primarily on a white racial coalition that the existence of white republican voters actively undermined. So, with the support of the Lexington Militia, white democratic voters engaged in frequent and violent political suppression of black and white republicans alike (Lewis 2010:160, 164). Police were notably absent from these instances of militia violence, all but explicitly offering their stamp of approval to the repressive and violent actions of the "white man's party."

Police complicity did not end at inaction though. As laws designed to prevent lynching were passed in growing numbers, police forces often refused to identify assailants, stop acts of lynching, and engaged in active character assassination of those who were lynched by the mob (Wright 1990:99-113). The reliance on reformatory legal measures and police to address the deep structural ties to lynching served only to hand police more power, force vigilante violence into more covert practices, and importantly, shift focus away from the structural factors contributing to the prominence of vigilante violence. It was at this point that lynching entered a steady decline and the spectacle of the lynch mob was superseded by murder, with the passage of anti-lynching laws in the 1920's relegating *public* acts of lynching to the margins.

Like many white vigilante groups before them, the Night Riders (who emerged in this era) rose out of frustration with economic competition from newly freed black Americans and a growing corporate interest in tobacco, they targeted and harassed farmers and agricultural workers who were not blessed with membership in local tobacco collectives (Wright 1990:135). As these collectives were often exclusively white, black sharecroppers and farmers were excluded and bore the brunt of the violence of the night riders, often seeing their crops burnt to prevent price competition between them and the collectives. In practice this vigilantism served to further limit the economic mobility of black Americans and maintain a racially homogenous class domination.

As black Americans were especially susceptible to poverty and thus ripe for labor exploitation. When white labor would strike in mines or other laborious jobs, corporations would recruit black laborers as strike breakers, often paying them far lower wages, contributing to racial animus and the association of blacks with economic competition purely against whites. The highly segregated nature of labor unions and the systemic racial problems at large were

effectively exploited by the powerful. This exclusion of black labor from the broader economy coincided with the establishment of “sundown towns” across the United States, where white vigilantes and police alike sought to exclude and punish nonwhite Americans for trespassing on their racially homogenous “utopias” (Loewen 2006). Fueled by economic competition and omnipresent security concerns sundown towns provided a geography by which racial order was fabricated and maintained. These towns saw a synthesis of the ideals of police and white vigilantes in which their goals were one and the same (Wright 1990:145). Sundown towns were built for White people and aimed to secure whiteness against a racialized other, they were founded upon racist utopian ideas about the inherent civility of whiteness and the encroaching jungle of blackness. While lynching was “illegal” vigilante violence ruled the night and proclaimed sundown towns made certain that black Americans were not welcome in the area.

The existence of sundown towns highlights the problem with purely “law and order” solutions to longstanding structurally racist problems. Despite lynching’s illegality and the abolition of slavery, the logic of racial capitalism interned black Americans to a subproletarian existence. In the Jim Crow era, the American economy was ordered in the interests of middle- and upper-class whites. De jure segregation locked nonwhites into subservient and low-wage positions fabricating a class divide between whiteness and nonwhiteness, with the ruling class quashing calls for equality through tactical deployment of red scare politics and a fostered racial apathy among working and middle-class whites alike, the security state also expanded at this time due to fears surrounding internal security amidst global war (Goldstein 2014:24–26). The chaos of the era effectively rooted the longstanding racial divide in the United States. Even in the face of the great depression of the 1930’s racial capitalism still ordered social life, though to a lesser extent. Poor whites and blacks were effectively kept in economic competition with one

another, and the storm of red scare politics became a mainstay of American history. Any challenge to the racial order was positioned as challenge to the very idea of American freedom.

The aftermath of WWII served to further elevate the notion of an equitable U.S. social order. Women had entered the workforce in large numbers and black and white Americans alike served in the military. Gradually, these shifts combined with a growing resistance ate away at the segregationist politics of the American government, no doubt contributing to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that made overt educational segregation illegal. This supreme court ruling however, served to reinvigorate the beast of white supremacy. In response to the 1954 ruling, a group of white Mississippians founded the first of its kind “white citizen’s council” (McMillen 1994:15). Established as a bulwark against integration, its emergence represented a tactical shift away from the violent and militant white supremacy that dominated the past in favor of a more politically engaged platform. Playing on the often-perpetuated fears of insecurity and disorder systematically associated with blackness (Muhammad 2019), the councils targeted traditionally conservative regions of the south to shore up support, emphasizing family values, religion, and “hard work,” entrenching the wedge issue of integration. While the citizen’s councils were commonly found throughout the deep south of Arkansas, Alabama, and Florida, their influence quickly spread and became associated with southern politics more generally, even making some waves nationally (McMillen 1994).

The Citizens’ Councils represented a resurgent white coalition that challenged racial integration of the public spaces of daily life. States like Arkansas which were typically accommodating to laxing Jim Crow laws became dominated by the segregationist politics of the citizen’s councils (McMillen 1994, 2007). It was here that organizations like White America Inc. protested school integration plans and other organizations attempted to resegregate schools, like

in the instance of the Citizens' Committee Representing Segregation in Hoxie Schools in Arkansas (McMillen 2007:127).

Segregationists did not rely on racial fearmongering alone, they presented a security plea as well, drawing upon the age-old tradition of tying blackness with danger, with some going so far as to claim that those in support of integration were, "demanding integration into the white bedroom" and that, "... negro boys would be permitted to solicit the white girls for dances" (McMillen 2007:128, 132). These calls effectively stoked the racial fear among white Americans, the flames of which were further fanned by fearmongering from evangelical religious leaders. In one instance, Reverend J. A. Lovell referred to desegregation as a "... work of Satan" and Georgia's governor administration claimed it would "summon every white man in Georgia to defend our cherished institutions" (McMillen 2007:133), echoing ever-present bourgeois fears of insecurity.

Gradually, the overtly racist and hateful rhetoric cost the Citizens' Councils their support in the broader political arena. This demanded a new strategy in which the councils amplified the anticommunist and ultra-conservative rhetoric already part of their platform. State governments, like that of Arkansas were chiefly criticized by segregationists for failing to establish hardline opposition to integration, especially in the face of claims that integrationist movements were in actuality part of a broader communist subversion. The Arkansas state Citizens' Council also adapted strategies, informing local school districts that integration efforts were tied to communist cells working behind the scenes and that "race mixers" were in actuality, communists in disguise (McMillen 2007:137, 140).

Amid this primarily southern movement against segregation, originally coined as "massive resistance" by Virginia senator Harry F. Byrd, the presidential runs of both Barry

Goldwater and George Wallace elevated this hateful rhetoric to the national level. Even as the citizen's councils declined into the 1960's, both Goldwater and Wallace received their support (Brückmann 2019). In the changing political landscape, the rhetoric began to shift from that of purely ultra-conservatism and segregationist practice to a "law and order" plea. This saw the councils and broader movement divert themselves away from being seen as a racial movement, and instead pivoted towards a "conservative movement" (Brückmann 2019:6).

It was at this point that calls for segregation were less strictly focused on a loudly proclaimed danger of blackness, but instead shifted towards a colorblind racism that emphasized personal freedom. Some of their claims included: the voting rights act was a communist conspiracy, Americans should have the freedom to discriminate against who they choose, and colorblind law and order were of the utmost importance (Brückmann 2019:7). In practice these calls tied progressivism in general, but specifically black progressivism and dissent to the specter of communism, and effectively placed it in opposition to the United States' growing policing institutions and their counter insurrectionary mandate. Though, as the civil rights' movement pressed on, outright segregationist practices began to fall out of political favor. Despite southern support for Wallace among the Citizens' Councils, he lacked national appeal. Though, his political strategy was eventually adapted into Nixon's "southern strategy" (Brückmann 2019:11). What resulted was the eventual demise of the Citizens' Council on the national scale, their coordinated efforts to counter the growing civil rights movement declining as well.

The political legacy of the Citizens' Councils did not end with the collapse of their project, however. Instead, like the Klan's project ever evolving and living on in the councils, their policy goals lived on in a "colorblind" law and order orientation now governing political discourse. Segregationist beliefs and policy were absorbed into more politically viable and

publicly presentable policy with the adoption of conservative talking points. No longer was the primary issue that of segregation, instead, seemingly colorblind issues of ‘freedom’ and ‘law and order’ took center-stage. With the dissipation of their overt political participation, white supremacist rhetoric was gradually hidden under layers of attacks on the welfare state, law and order rhetoric, and a return to militancy following the loss of the Vietnam war.

De Jure Counterinsurgency and De Facto Segregation

Established in 1958 and named after U.S. intelligence officer John Morrison Birch, the John Birch Society (JBS) is vehemently anticommunist and an important figure in understanding the expansion of police throughout U.S. history. Its founder, Robert W. Welch considered Birch the first casualty of the cold war and believed communism to be the single greatest threat facing the United States (Ellington 2010:286). Despite its conspiratorial orientation, the organization found success and influence, peaking around 100,000 members in 1961, benefitting heavily from the presidential run of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and a prevailing red scare climate. At this time, the JBS concerned itself with the internal security of the United States. With the combination of its intense anticommunism and emphasis on internal security, the JBS served the interests of the police quite effectively.

Like the White Citizen’s Councils, the JBS was an effective means to disseminate conservative right-wing rhetoric and policy to the national level. Prioritizing ardent anticommunism where the citizen’s councils emphasized race, the strategies were similar: tie nonwhite and dissident political action to criminality and frame it as a threat to the security of white communities and U.S. national interest alike. Opposition to the status quo was opposition to the U.S. as a whole and thus the very idea of freedom. This strategy drew upon long established plays that placed the police in opposition to anything that might propose even the

most minor of threats to racial capitalist order, and it worked to solidify the political right as the allies of the police.

As Shanahan and Wall (2021) note, groups like the JBS and White Citizen's Councils were part of a larger effort to maintain the traditional power structure that was under pressure in the face of the civil rights and liberation movements of the 1950's and 60's. While racial capitalism still ordered U.S. life, the political power of overtly proclaiming white supremacy continued to wane. The resulting shift saw both liberal and conservative political leaders emphasize security and policing as the issues of the age, bringing to mind Neocleous's (2021:114), efficient reworking of Marx, "... *security is the supreme concept of the bourgeois society.*" Thus, cycling between anti-black and anti-communist security rhetoric until the two are synonymous civil society became something to be secured against impending collapse and warranted a force to do just that.

Entering an age dominated by calls for equality, the notion of divvying society up based on identifiable factors like race/gender/sex continued to decline. So, with a convenient enemy in the form of the U.S.S.R. and the growing influence of communism across the world, security, order, and freedom became the centerpiece of U.S. policy, both domestic and abroad. It was in 1963 the JBS drew upon the Klan playbook and began courting local police (Shanahan and Wall 2021:7). Like the White Citizen's Council, the JBS fearmongered over race, communism, and federal government encroachment and how it might impact departmental discretion and freedom. Thus, between the JBS and pervasive anticommunism, local police were further molded into a bulwark against political dissidents in general. However, the relationship between police and counterinsurgent practice did not stop at the local level. While the JBS itself focused on local police, the U.S. government began to involve the police apparatus in a broader

counterinsurgency practice that saw it tightly bound up in the administration of American empire.

In *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing*, Stuart Schrader (2019) argues police play a central role in the United States' counterinsurgency practice. The era of the Vietnam war was riddled with challenges to racial capitalist order both domestic and abroad. Colonial projects from previously dominant powers like France and Britain were collapsing and new nations with an interest in self-determination were emerging. Unfortunately, the collapse of old colonial rule left a vacuum for other global powers to exert their influence, the United States and U.S.S.R. did just that. First contested through traditional warfare means, places like Vietnam and South America posed a unique challenge to the United States: they lacked legitimacy to the people of the nation and required a pivot in strategy.

So then, American experts and leaders built upon the work of the JBS and similar organizations to divorce the broader police apparatus from the slow and muddled American bureaucracy while simultaneously increasing its involvement in the administration of empire most commonly associated with military and intelligence agencies. In this shift, police officers and policing experts alike directly involved themselves in the training of security forces across the globe (Schrader 2019:111). These counterinsurgency trainings did two things, legitimized racial capitalism in these regions in a way U.S. military occupation could not and prepared the region to resist communist subversion.

By tying civil unrest to the specter of communism, the U.S. counterinsurgency apparatus effectively pacified the population. If political unrest fell under the catch-all umbrella of communist subversion, it was quickly and violently snuffed out by state and private actors alike.

This was a frequent occurrence among U.S. trained security forces and despite concerns raised by activists and academics alike, the U.S. continued training police forces and influencing emerging nations across the globe. Police became central to the ‘countersubversive tradition’ and like a boomerang, violent police actions targeting political and social movements abroad made their way back into United States domestic security practices (Schrader 2019:43).

This is most evident in the subsequent social movements which emerged during and after the loss of the Vietnam war. Anti-war and liberation movements were already prominent across the United States, but the loss of the war brought a slew of veterans and war supporters who felt the loss was tied to a broader decline of the United States as a whole. Particularly in this era, anti-state white power movements rose to prominence with many of them looking to “remasculinize” and return the United States to its former glory (Belew 2018:7; Gibson 1995). These groups, dissatisfied with the prevalent order and the state of U.S. empire resorted to the longstanding tradition of scapegoating nonwhites and communists alike, particularly among the growing population of Vietnamese immigrants fleeing their war-ravaged nation. These Vietnamese immigrants represented a new economic competition for whites across the United States in addition to being linked with an encroachment of communism onto U.S. soil.

As many Americans saw it, Vietnamese immigrants were not ‘true’ Americans, and their economic success was seen as coming at the expense of ‘real’ white Americans. White power movements began to take on a different form in this era, seeking separation from the U.S. government and in some instances showing openly hostility to it. The proliferating factors of economic decline, prejudices brought home from the war, and America’s incessant anticommunist propaganda all served to strengthen disdain for nonwhites, particularly those seen as a political threat (Belew 2018:42). Black Americans, Vietnamese immigrants, and all who

opposed the status quo were portrayed as agents of communism and all working in the interest of undermining America's racial capitalist hegemony.

Much like the Klan, these white separatist movements, including the Aryan Brotherhood and Christian Identity movements sought an ethnostate built purely by whites and for whites (though with varying definitions of what constituted one's whiteness). Regardless though, much of this led to a subcultural movement that lacked the broad appeal that groups like the White Citizen's Council and Klan (in its era) briefly experienced, though this did not stop individuals like David Duke from attempting to return overt white supremacy to the mainstream³ (Belew 2018:35).

The irony of all this is that injustice and economic downturn were still associated with the influx of nonwhite Americans in the collective consciousness. After all, the nation's racial capitalist order was its greatest bulwark against any form of class consciousness, but as nonwhite Americans began to see some form of economic success or political growth, the miniscule piece of the pie left to be divided amongst the laboring many was revealed to its true extent. Instead of looking to capitalism and seeing it for its contradictions, white separatist groups set their sights on the American state and the nonwhite populations to which it was, in their view, subservient.

Following Wilson and Kelling's (1982) infamous broken windows piece, order maintenance and security became even more a central feature of policing efforts. Though as Mark Neocleous (2021:60) argues, police not only maintain order, they fabricate it, by ensuring the security of property relations and a sense of liberal order. Thus, first there must be an established idea for what is and is not order. So, in the broader racial capitalist landscape, threats

³ Referring to himself as a "racialist" Duke followed the tradition of the councils by adopting many conservative talking points in an effort to elevate his antisemitism to the national level.

to property and capital posed significant threats to the order of things. The result of which places police first and foremost in the interest of fabricating the racial capitalist order which ensures its perpetuation. The role of police, much like that of the slave patrols, is focused first and foremost in the interest of propertied elite. It is no surprise then that like throughout U.S. history, antigovernment groups and those in ideological opposition to the American state alike were met with extensive state-sanctioned violence.

As local police fabricated order and worked to counteract potential insurgents, police powers continually expanded (Murakawa 2014). Liberal and conservative leaders alike concerned themselves with order and security in the United States, police proved central to that order. The rising tide of revolutionary violence targeted at the state from white separatist groups and fears over communist subversion both served nicely as justification for gradual expansion of the police power as well, resulting in frequent run-ins with federal and state police across the United States among white supremacist groups. These standoffs culminated in the siege of Waco, Texas in 1993 that saw an extensive show of force by the state and galvanized more white separatist movements against the U.S. state. The fallout from the Waco incident eventually pushed the U.S. government away from engaging with white separatist groups the same way in the future (Belew 2018:236). Instead, the U.S. favored an approach that framed incidents of white vigilante violence as incidents of “lone wolf terrorism” rather than a broader ideological orientation bound up in U.S. history (Hamm and Spaaij 2017).

The U.S. state’s shifting mode of engagement with white separatists came to a head in 1995 involving the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma by Timothy McVeigh. Trying to prove that “white men could still wage war on the state” (Belew 2018:226), McVeigh provides an early glimpse of the era which the state and

white separatist groups both began to refer to these violent acts as “lone wolf” acts of terrorism. This rise in supposed lone wolf acts of violence served the racial capitalist order well in fabricating a state of insecurity among the masses and divorcing white supremacist violence from a broader ideology bound up in U.S. history.

The War on Terror, The Tea Party, and the Contemporary American Militia

Following the McVeigh bombing was a time period of security expansion in the United States and a minor cultural climate of concern about white separatist militias bubbling beneath the surface of American life (Kimmel and Ferber 2000). This era saw American liberals and conservatives alike making their concerns known about what they referred to as radical Islamic extremism in tandem with a resurging American right. Following the September 11th, 2001, World Trade Center attacks security became the name of the game with the federal government passing the PATRIOT Act and starting a war with little to no resistance from politicians. All this to say, the concern was shifted, at least in part, *away* from internal (white nationalist) security concerns and onto the specter of terrorism via the “war on terror.”

It is from this point, between the economic recession brought on by the Bush Administration, and the elevation of Barack Obama to the presidency that a right-wing populism found its resurgence. Spurred in part as a response to Obama and amplified by the disappointing defeat of John McCain, the “Tea Party” emerged as a conservative movement railing against establishment conservative voices seeking to ‘revitalize’ the Republican party (Arceneaux and Nicholson 2012). This movement echoed many of the talking points of the citizen’s councils and white separatist groups alike, often protesting vaguely liberal policy decisions by the Obama administration and patented fearmongering over big government. The emergence of the Tea

Party is important to consider here as it represents a precursor of sorts to the movement which elected Donald Trump to the presidency⁴.

Coinciding with a dissatisfaction with the Obama presidency and a still-prominent anti-establishment attitude among the American right, Donald Trump announced his candidacy for president of the United States and effectively framed himself as the anti-establishment candidate. Running against Hillary Clinton, Trump upended the expectations and won the presidency in the 2016 election. While the years leading up to his election were riddled with unrest, with both the Occupy Wall Street protests, and the emergence of Black Lives Matter preceding him, his term as president saw a notable rise in the prominence of white militias and hate groups on the national stage. The most famous of which was founded by Gavin McInnes in 2016, called “The Proud Boys.” This hate group hardly exists on its own, however, with many others across the United States rising to some form of infamy during the Trump presidency, most often in their presence as counter protestors at BLM demonstrations and their frequent clashes with Antifa.

One event in particular stands out as emblematic of the unrest of the Trump era. On August 11th and 12th of 2017, a white supremacist rally called “Unite the Right” took place in Charlottesville, Virginia. This event was attended by a large number of what can be variously characterized as neo-fascists, neo-confederates, and white supremacists marching in the streets of the city, tiki-torches in hand, chanting “jews will not replace us” and variations of that phrase (Gabbatt 2017). This event saw many clashes between white supremacists and various demonstrators, with one demonstrator killed as a white supremacist drove his car into the crowd.

⁴ Sometimes referred to as “Christian Nationalism” which emphasizes national identity like the Tea Party, with a specific focus on the United States being a fundamentally Christian nation (Whitehead and Perry 2022; Zeskind 2012).

Additionally, the common right-wing rhetoric found among separatist groups, the citizen's councils, and JBS alike were present here. In a Vice Media documentary, journalist Elle Reeve follows white supremacist Chris Cantwell as he makes his way around the event, with him frequently referring to the need for a "white ethnostate" (VICE News 2017).

This is all important to consider as it represents a return of racist rhetoric not seen since the massive resistance and Citizen's Council days (HoSang and Lowndes 2019). The Trump era is riddled with clashes between protestors and militia groups alike, particularly leading into 2020 with the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery dominating the headlines amidst a global pandemic. The mass demonstrations brought on by the deaths of Floyd and Taylor in particular brought many militias and white vigilantes out of the woodwork, with some groups gaining thousands of members in a matter of months (Okoren 2020). These groups appeared with some frequency at BLM associated demonstrations and events, claiming to 'keep the peace' and act as a de facto police force. In the summer leading up to Rittenhouse killing two people in Kenosha, there were at least thirty of these recorded engagements between right-wing militia vigilante groups and BLM demonstrators (Kishi 2020).

What this serves to highlight is a precedent for Rittenhouse's actions in Kenosha on August 25th, 2020. He did not choose to cross state lines and defend property that was not his in a vacuum but was part of a broader movement that rose to prominence in the mass unrest of 2020. This behavior can be found throughout U.S. history and is not exclusive to any given era. In many instances, these groups are tacitly approved by police and implicitly deputized one way or another. Additionally, the goals of white vigilantes, white supremacists, and police are often quite closely intertwined with one another, often aiming to fabricate some racialized understanding of what is at its base, liberal social order. To put it simply, white vigilantism is

part of a symbiosis between state and non-state actors, working to pacify disruptive social movements and fabricate a specific and often racialized understanding of capitalist social relations.

Chapter 3 - Data and Methods

This project is informed by a targeted and purposefully narrow Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide and Schneider 2013) of the Kyle Rittenhouse case, focusing specifically on the defense, validation, and perhaps valoration of his actions. By no means does this project aim to uncover the intricacies of the Rittenhouse trial, nor does it claim to. Instead, by placing his actions in the broader history and context of white vigilante violence undertaken as de facto counterinsurgency, this project pursues a theoretically generalizable understanding of the ways that non-state actors act in defense of private property and the broader racial capitalist order.

While debates surrounding the Rittenhouse matter are ongoing, I concerned myself with roughly one-years' time, from August 25th, 2020 (the Kenosha shooting) to November 19th, 2021 (prior to his trial verdict). I specifically limited the sampling frame to focus on the public facing discourse before a verdict was reached in his court case. Throughout this time, a myriad of content was produced both in the defense and condemnation of Rittenhouse and his actions. Most published works largely toed the typical liberal/conservative divide in the United States, adhering to common arguments surrounding gun laws and 'self-defense,' though with a few outliers in both the liberal media sphere and trial prosecution offering some legitimacy to Rittenhouse and his claims, which I discuss briefly later. While important, the focus here is specifically the broader rationale and apparent logic of those speaking in explicit defense of Rittenhouse and his actions and how they relate to the intricacies of private property and the overriding racial order.

To capture the various venues in which Rittenhouse was discussed in an affirmative manner, I have identified three key discursive fields. These data sources are as follows:

1. **Legal Media:** produced by Rittenhouse's defense in an effort to validate his actions. The most formal of my three sources, the validation of his actions within a court of law provides insight into how the state understands and legitimates white vigilante violence in contemporary society.
2. **Corporate Broadcast Media:** specifically focused on the popular and controversial Fox News host, Tucker Carlson of *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. He is an important figure due to the reach of his brand, and his network's continued not only support, but endorsement of his ideas, Carlson represents a section of the mainstream that shows an interest in validating these actions.
3. **Social or New Media:** focused on the equally controversial Steven Crowder of the *Louder with Crowder*⁵ podcast/talk show. Crowder provides insight into an often overlooked and misrepresented segment of the culture industry: internet content creation. Crowder reaches a significantly different audience than the likes of Tucker Carlson and thus provides insight into the ways Rittenhouse's actions are validated in the "alt-right" media sphere. Additionally, Crowder is part of the podcast network supported by Glenn Beck's "Blaze Media" and thus, also receives some form of corporate backing while portraying himself as part of an independent right-wing insurgency into the internet.

These three seemingly disparate data sources provide important insight into the rise of "far-right" talking points to the mainstream as well as an understanding as to how the behemoths of the culture industry and American legal system normalize and validate violent acts of white

⁵ *Louder with Crowder* is hosted on the StevenCrowder YouTube channel which has 5.68 million subscribers at the time of writing.

vigilantism. I selected these sources due to their role in the defense of Rittenhouse either culturally or legally. Courtroom artifacts and arguments provide a means by which his actions are legitimized to the legal system itself and hold the potential to set precedent for future incidents of white vigilante violence. Tucker Carlson hosts one of the most popular news shows on cable television and thus plays an important role in influencing cultural and political discourse, with the ability to focus or derail the narrative however he sees fit. Finally, Steven Crowder represents the ever-growing space of internet content creation. Through his podcast, YouTube channel, and persona as a right-wing comedian railing against political correctness, he reaches a different audience than the likes of Tucker Carlson and thus provides important insight into the changing landscape of right-wing cultural and political rhetoric.

Each of these fields were analyzed independently in order to build some theoretical distinction and nuance within the broader narrative of Rittenhouse's defense. As Altheide and Schneider (2013:11) explain, ethnographic content analysis (ECA) allows one to "... narratively describe the news visuals by "what was shown," "who was shown," and "what they were doing." Thus, this project takes the same underlying logic and uses it to explore the content produced by Carlson and Crowder alike. So then, in addition to the transcription of content, this project also explored the imaginary spaces conjured up in their analysis and description of the events in Kenosha.

As another note, despite the project's focus on specifically right-wing rhetoric regarding this trial, several accounts from what might be considered opposition/liberal media sources were stumbled upon throughout this research. While these are by no means central to the analysis, an acknowledgement of their support or legitimization of Rittenhouse is nevertheless, important. So then, the discussion engages with a brief exploration of those sources as they relate to potential

future research projects. To put it simply, the liberal media sphere is important to consider, as it helps in understanding the various means by which white vigilante violence and de facto counterinsurgencies are legitimized outside of the expected realms.

Through this work I aim to explore the nuances of Rittenhouse court case coverage. Thus, this project begins by asking, what sort of common tropes are called upon in the defense of his actions, and how are they being broadened beyond Rittenhouse? In their content, how do these media personalities frame the Rittenhouse trial itself in addition to his actions the night of August 25th? This project aims to understand their efforts to piece together the narrative for not only defending but validating white vigilante violence in contemporary society. While white vigilante violence is nothing new, I am operating with the assumption that the argument in defense of it has not only become more nuanced but has shifted focus as well.

The content analyzed for this project is comprised of that which follows:

Legal Media:

1. The opening arguments from Kyle Rittenhouse's trial from November 2nd, 2021,
2. the motion to dismiss counts six and two from his charges, filed on December 1st, 2020,
3. and the motion for mistrial filed on November 15th, 2021, four days before the trial verdict.

Corporate Broadcast Media:

1. An 8-minute interview with Kyle Rittenhouse's former lawyer John Pierce on *Tucker Carlson Tonight* published on August 31st, 2020, just days after the shooting,
2. a 7-minute Tucker Carlson clip in which he analyzes "never before seen footage" of the Kenosha shooting,

3. and the 12-minute Tucker Carlson analysis of the Kyle Rittenhouse trial up to that point published November 11th, 2020.

Social or New Media:

1. the 3-hour recorded livestream in which Steven Crowder and his co-hosts “react” to the opening arguments of the trial from November 11th, 2021,
2. A 3-hour episode of Louder with Crowder in which host Steven Crowder discusses the closing arguments of the Rittenhouse case, livestreamed on November 15th 2021,
3. and the 1 hour 41-minute recorded livestream analysis of KR’s testimony by Steven Crowder.

The data was collected and prepared in a 3-step process. First, video media (when possible) was run through the otter.ai transcription software to automatically generate rough transcripts from the identified videos. Next, video transcripts were cleaned by me, in a process by which I worked to properly attribute text to the appropriate person. Once transcription was complete, in a word document, I began my open-coding phase in which I identified any and all themes or issues called up in their arguments (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011:143). After line-by-line open coding was complete, I performed a second sweep of the document in a focused coding phase that explored the themes based on dominant concepts identified in the open coding phase. After the focused coding sweep was done, one final sweep was performed to identify any dominant themes or concepts I may have overlooked. All while completing this process, I maintained theoretical memos to assist me in drawing out the themes more clearly and building the narrative more explicitly. Once completed, I compiled all the identified themes and concepts together and began exploring how they related to one another.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The analysis reveals a number of recurring themes involved in the defense, validation, and valoration of Kyle Rittenhouse as a cause celebre of white vigilante violence. Some themes conform to common historical tropes found throughout the literature while others present an approach unique to contemporary politics. Upon beginning my examination, three shared themes were identified with a fourth being distinct to Steven Crowder's argument. The shared themes are as follows, the 'good kid,' the 'mad city,' and the right to self-defense. These themes were clearly expressed with frequency among the three discursive sites with the 'good kid' theme additionally tying into an underlying argument that can only be termed as, 'Rosenbaum the predator.' The final theme, which was exclusive to Steven Crowder's line of argument, was that of the 'well-regulated militia.' Below I explore each of these themes, organized within their given research site.

Courtroom Opening Arguments: Good Kid Cleaning Up the Mad City

Given my interest in the specific ways Rittenhouse's case validated and valorized white vigilante violence, his formal criminal defense provides a logical entry point to develop an understanding of these discourse. The statements below are drawn from the opening arguments of the defense of Kyle Rittenhouse, as presented by his attorney, Mark D. Richards, on November 2nd, 2021. Richards' remarks provide important insight into the normalization of acts of white vigilante violence *within* the American legal system. Literally written into the legal and cultural record, statements such as these permit the defense to establish an understanding of Kenosha and American social life more generally within a context that is purportedly in search of "truth and justice." The language with which Rittenhouse's legal team argues highlights three dominant themes, which come to us via their emphasis on traditionally liberal notions of self-

defense and his purported nature as a ‘good kid.’ Coded within the language used by the defense are themes relating to the ‘good kid,’ the ‘mad city,’ and self-defense.

The defense begins by establishing Rittenhouse’s personal connection to Kenosha. This is an important effort for a number of reasons. First, it addresses the pressing question -why Rittenhouse left his home in a neighboring state, to involve himself in the matters of another community. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, once it is established that Rittenhouse has some stake in Kenosha in particular, then jurors and the public might more easily understand how Rittenhouse’s actions were not only in defense of his community, but a generalized understanding of home and community that we all share. This was not a misguided youth looking for trouble, this was a young man answering the call to defend the property of his neighbors, the sanctity of a community in which he once lived, and the very notion of American civil life itself.

Early in his opening statement Richards highlights Rittenhouse’s role in “cleaning up” after the previous night’s unrest, while simultaneously highlighting his deep ties to the city of Kenosha. He argues,

Kyle Rittenhouse was present in Kenosha, Wisconsin on the evening of August 24. He stayed at his friend’s residence, Dominic Black, he saw on the live streams and things like that the events of the 24th. He saw a Car Source Number One as I refer to it, the one that's on the east side of Sheridan Road, burned, all of the automobiles, burned, destroyed. He saw the looting going on, he saw the other businesses burnt down. And the next morning he went down to downtown Kenosha to look at the damage. He stopped and he helped clean up at the old route or high school, I think it's called something else now. But when I was around here, it was called Ruth and before that Bradford, and he saw that he met one of the owners from car source and they talked, and they decided that they would offer their services. Him and Dominic Black and Nick Smith to help protect the property of Car Source. Ladies and gentlemen, the evidence will show in spite of what the media and public statements and things like that have been. The evidence will show that Kyle Rittenhouse had strong ties to Kenosha, his father lived in Kenosha, his mother lived in Antioch, Illinois. Kyle worked here in Kenosha County, at the Rec Plex in Pleasant Prairie as a lifeguard. He went downtown to clean up the graffiti after him and Nick left there. (ABC 7 Chicago 2021)

It is important to consider Richards repeated framing of Rittenhouse as a ‘good kid,’ a rhetorical trick invoking the long-standing “boys will be boys” defense that insists crime or violence is just part of a normal, healthy maturation process. The defense emphasizes that he not only worked as a lifeguard prior to the riots, but following the first night of protests, he stepped in to help clean up his community. It was while cleaning up around the town he was approached by the owner of a local group of businesses known as “Car Source” with the request that he protect his businesses, which had been damaged in the previous night. At this point, Rittenhouse and other vigilantes “offered their services” (ABC 7 Chicago 2021) to protect said businesses. This quote works to paint Rittenhouse in a manner that emphasizes his role in helping his community with the damage brought on by the civil unrest. In offering his services, it is useful to consider Rittenhouse through the lens of police, which are first and foremost concerned with political, economic and aesthetic order (Neocleous 2021). Even if Rittenhouse was not acting in an official capacity, his actions nevertheless performed a key police function. As Maher (2021:19) argues, “...to draw a hard line between the state and its self-deputized enforcers betrays a woeful ignorance of U.S. history, throughout which the police have rarely if ever been distinguishable from the white mob.” Policing the physical landscape, cleaning graffiti, taking up armed watch over private property, Rittenhouse was *de facto* police in Kenosha. He, like other white vigilantes, were welcomed with open arms by the Kenosha police (Maher 2021:20) because in them, police saw not enemies or adversaries, but collaborators and comrades, brothers in arms.

The defense also worked hard to describe Kenosha as a city under siege, a ‘mad city,’ a site of predatory violence, social regression, a lawless place bereft of its humanity. Just as, in Wall’s words, the thin blue line “... splits humanity into two warring species, with police as the

arbiters for deciding who is human or not, whose lives matter and whose lives don't" (Wall 2020:323), This argument draws a line right through Kenosha and places Rittenhouse in the center, one of a few concerned citizens acting as a quasi-police force, protecting and defending those who cannot defend themselves.

The TBL is most clearly displayed in the defense version of the interaction Rittenhouse and reporter Richie McGinnis had with a group of unnamed protestors prior to the shooting.

Again, from Richards,

... here comes three individuals, and the individual in the yellow pants accuses Kyle Rittenhouse of pointing a laser sight from the gun at him. Kyle shrugs it off, does not want a confrontation with these individuals, does not point his firearm at them and he leaves. Why does he leave? Because he does not want trouble ... yellow pants one is carrying a noose. I don't know what that's for. The other individual, the testimony will be from Kyle Rittenhouse and Richie McGinnis had rocks in his hands and then the blue shirted individual was carrying a 9mm firearm. Richie McGinnis will tell you about the marauding nature of these individuals. He was so intimidated by them after Kyle walked away, that he had to give up two White Claws to them to settle them down and some cigarettes so that he would be able to leave them. (ABC 7 Chicago 2021)

Clearly, the strategy for the defense continues from Rittenhouse's position as a dutiful young man acting in good faith, to his eventual encounter with an encroaching mob. Like a good cop, Rittenhouse deescalates and bargains with members of the gang that has upended the city. He doesn't want trouble, he's just there to help, he is actively avoiding any confrontation that could lead to violence. Again, in keeping with the friend/enemy dichotomy inherent to TBL discourse, the defense labels protestors as dangerous marauders, representative of a more generalizable threat to civil peace and social order. The marauders are portrayed as violent by nature and challenge the authority which Rittenhouse held in that situation, bestowed upon him by the police implicitly. Keeping with the various themes, Rittenhouse seeks to avoid the confrontation. In leaving the marauders to deescalate the situation, the individual he was

protecting, Richie McGinnis is harassed and held hostage by the threatening, noose-wielding marauders and only released after bribing them with alcohol and cigarettes. At the behest of locals, Rittenhouse began making his way across town, as Richards states:

Dominic Black informs him the evidence will show that they're breaking windows and starting fires down at Car Source Three. He asked an individual for a fire extinguisher and asked the individual to go down to Car Source Three with him. The individual gives him the fire extinguisher but does not go with him, and Kyle heads down to Car Source Three. He doesn't know that Mr. Rosenbaum is down there, he's been asked to go down there by Nick Smith. (ABC 7 Chicago 2021)

Effectively describing an emergent state of lawlessness, the defense conjures a clear image of the mad city, with burning buildings and chaos on the other side of town. Rittenhouse, seeking support from others, does not find it. A good kid left to his own devices, Rittenhouse becomes adjunct to police, law and order from below. Police, which as Nikhil Pal Singh (Singh 2014:1092) argues "can be understood as those preventive mechanisms and institutions for ensuring private property *within* public order, including access to the means of violence, their legal narration, and their use." As his legal team argues, Rittenhouse did just this, implicitly deputized by police and called to action by a concerned citizen, like good police, he stepped into a lawless void to secure private property, ensuring a confrontation with a dangerous predator.

At this point the defense implies that Rosenbaum was simply a predator waiting for the proper victim to come along to strike. Seeing as they have already established that Rittenhouse was not seeking confrontation, time and again, all that happens, happens *to* Rittenhouse. He sought support from others who did not go with him, so he ventured out into the night on his own, a lone vigilante aiming to restore order and security. Rosenbaum was presented as a clear symbol of the threat posed if order was not restored and became enraged at any and all who attempted to undo the destruction that he was supposedly responsible for. Richards notes that,

“Rosenbaum ... let out one of the scariest screams ever heard” (ABC 7 Chicago 2021), painting him as something other than human as well. The discussion of him and the group previously referred to as ‘marauders’ resembles, “...the most naturalized and fundamental story of all police stories” (Wall 2020:329), in which civility is all but gone and individuals are regressed into an animalistic state. Thus, Rittenhouse, ventured into a den of beasts amidst the chaos of the night only to find those very beasts waiting in the shadows to victimize and potentially kill him.

In sum, the defense crafted Rittenhouse as de facto police, acting on behalf of both police and community, with tacit approval from each. They focus primarily on his role as a good kid combatting those who threatened the fragile state of civil life that necessitate police, and because of the nature of the protest, “Black Lives Matter” protestors, enraged about police violence, the line is drawn in a starkly racialized fashion. As they present it, this is not a multi-racial coalition, this is black versus white.

The defense effectively portrayed Rittenhouse as a necessary agent of a propertied class, a justified vigilante in the face of a declining civility. An embodiment of the thin blue line, Rittenhouse is a ‘good kid’ (or good cop), who reacted to unwarranted violence and like so many actual police, did what he had to in order to survive, defended himself. Here we find a microcosm of U.S. social life. Kyle Rittenhouse did not simply cross state lines to kill two people, he is an agent of order, de facto counterinsurgency *within* the country. When protests are no longer defined as peaceful, demonstrators are out past curfew, and businesses are damaged, a vigilante force may be justified as a means to pacify any unrest.

Tucker Carlson: Good Kid Defending Himself in the Mad City

Much like Rittenhouse’s formal criminal legal defense, Fox News television personality Tucker Carlson characterized the protests in Kenosha as representative of a broader civil decline

while also pointing to Rittenhouse as a ‘good kid.’ He makes a number of statements that on surface level come across as disconnected, with them primarily conforming to his well-known disdain for the political left. In an interesting approach though, he positions Kenosha and Rittenhouse as part of a broader struggle between presumably ‘good’ Americans and leftist agitators, conforming closely to the “us versus them” logic present in the thin blue line. Carlson frames the demonstrators as the very animalistic nature that police fight off to invent and fabricate humanity under a specific, liberal understanding of order and security.

Carlson rails against the political leadership in Kenosha as well, and the city’s democrat mayor, John Antaramian proved a useful punching bag to distance police from responsibility in determining what led to mass unrest. On his show September 23rd, 2020 Carlson states, “Hamstrung by local politicians, police did little to stop the destruction. A small number of citizens decided to fill the vacuum. One of them was a 17-year-old from suburban Chicago called Kyle Rittenhouse” (Fox News 2020b). Further, he justified the presence of white vigilantes in Kenosha on the night of the shooting by implying the police were politically powerless in this situation. Regardless though, where the defense portrayed Kenosha as purely under siege, Carlson examined Kenosha as a city under siege in which its own elected, liberal leaders, threw its community to the wolves to placate a vaguely liberal insurgency brought on by a cause which Carlson only barely acknowledges, if at all.

In his first bit of coverage on Kenosha, Carlson invited Rittenhouse’s former attorney, John Pierce onto *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. In this segment, Pierce and Carlson paint a picture of a mad city in the midst of being destroyed and Rittenhouse himself as a ‘good kid’ who was attacked unprovoked by violent rioters. With footage of Kenosha and images of Rittenhouse in the background the pair sketch their own version of events:

This is 100% self-defense Tucker, Kyle. He's a good kid. He's a lifeguard. Kenosha was burning down. Actually, when he got done with work that day, he went to the high school with some friends to try to remove some graffiti. After that, they got a call from a local businessperson who owns three businesses in downtown Kenosha. Two of those three businesses had been burned to the ground. And this business owner simply wanted to desperately protect what was left of his life's work. So, he asked for help. Kyle and his friends decided that nobody was doing anything to protect that community. And they decided that they would answer that call and help to protect that business. Kyle actually took a first aid kit downtown, because he was concerned that there will be wounded protesters downtown. And in fact, he took a firearm because Kenosha had become a warzone that any sensible person would take that and him and his friends have stayed on the premises and protected that property. And then he some events started to unfold whereby he was trying to treat medically wounded protesters and ultimately, he got trapped out on the street out in the open because the riot police had moved the line far enough down that they were between himself and that premises. (Fox News 2020a)

In this statement we find clear threads of the formal legal defense that would emerge a year later. Rittenhouse is framed as a 'good kid,' his community ties, and his work as a lifeguard are underlined. Where Pierce differs from the courtroom defense is the how he refers to Kenosha explicitly. Given the venue, he's more able to describe Kenosha as a 'warzone,' a clearer example of a mad city, besieged by violent rioters and looters, making this good kid its noble defender.

We should not take the use of 'warzone' lightly, not only does it discursively justify Rittenhouse or *any sensible person* arming themselves in the city that night, but it invokes the imagery of a very palpable ongoing war for civilization. Geo Maher (2021:23) uses "pig majority" to describe the majority portion of the U.S. population which support the police and their power, and who at times take it upon themselves to act as self-deputized vigilantes who police others on their behalf. This pig majority reveals itself through the combination of white victimhood, racism, and "the perilous quantity that is white fear." Rittenhouse symbolizes this white fear, a good white kid who armed himself and shot when threatened.

The 'good kid' framing allows Carlson to embolden the line between those protesting and those standing in opposition. Their discussion continues,

There was a shot that was fired as Kyle was retreating actually, from a mob that had become enraged that he was trying to put out fires that the arsonists had set because he was trying to protect property. The mob became enraged, they began screaming that Kyle needed to be killed and they were going to kill him. They started relentlessly hunting him as prey as he ran down the street attempting to retreat as he ran out of room to retreat. (Fox News 2020a)

No longer are humans involved, in the place of the demonstrators is an enraged animalistic mob actively hunting and seeking to kill Rittenhouse for trying to prevent the fragile American city from regressing into a violent and feral state of nature. In contrast to the previous instance, Rittenhouse is not police and instead a victim. Already in retreat, he was no longer imposing some form of social order, he was acting in defense of himself also. Logically then, any action Rittenhouse took from this position, might be justified if presented as clearly self-defense.

Framed as good kid, valiant defender, and victim simultaneously, Rittenhouse engendered sympathies from anxious white Americans who also fear the encroaching chaos the mob represents. Regardless of the racial and ethnic makeup of the demonstrators, Geo Maher's understanding of white fear is useful here. Police and white power are inseparable (Maher 2021:23), so a threat to the police is a threat to the white power which serves as this nation's very foundation. Rittenhouse, encompasses all of this, representing the fragility of civilization which police are meant to fabricate.

Three weeks later Carlson continues, in a video in which he again, portrays Rittenhouse as a 'good kid' who did what any of us would do, take up arms and protect his community, alongside a 'small number' of citizens who took up the mantle of police:

Hamstrung by local politicians, police did little to stop the destruction. A small number of citizens decided to fill the vacuum. One of them was a 17-year-old from suburban Chicago called Kyle Rittenhouse. On Tuesday, August 25, Rittenhouse finished his shift as a lifeguard in Kenosha video shows he spent part of that day cleaning graffiti from the walls of a local high school. Rittenhouse then went downtown with a rifle to try to protect a car dealership that had been attacked by mobs the night before. (Fox News 2020b)

Carlson argues, the white vigilantes of Kenosha are small in number, and merely trying to protect their community from the violence unjustly thrust upon the town, forming that imperiled line that is inherently *thin*. In order to justify a security apparatus as far reaching as the police, there must always be a threat of regression into animalistic violence. The same is true here, those self-deputized few who aimed to protect Kenosha, Rittenhouse among them, supplement the ever-thinning thin blue line. Carlson's narrative, which blames the bloat and tangle of progressive bureaucracy for a police force low on morale, low on manpower, only justifies vigilante violence. Police hamstrung by liberals, unable to protect the town from violent rioters, Rittenhouse, and his kind *had to* step up and face the enemy. He continues,

That was the day then night came, Kyle Rittenhouse found himself in downtown Kenosha in the middle of a riot. He wound up face to face with a convicted child molester called Joseph Rosenbaum, [who] was there protesting on behalf of BLM. (Fox News 2020b)

Again, familiar imagery, a predatory Rosenbaum lay in wait for a moment to strike. Despite his lack of knowledge of Rosenbaum's criminal history, Carlson implies that Rittenhouse was at least in part aware and that he did the world a favor by ending his life as well. Setting the stage for their confrontation, Carlson presents a chaotic and highly volatile environment in which no good outcome can be expected. In this sequence of events, Rittenhouse sought only to help the politically limited police and found himself amidst a riot, face-to-face with a predator. In many of the incidents presented throughout Carlson's coverage of Kenosha, Rittenhouse is both protector and prey, embodying the thin blue line itself while his predator,

Rosenbaum, effectively used as a stand-in for BLM, symbolizes the chaos and violence Carlson and his ilk claim the movement represents.

Like the Rittenhouse legal team, Carlson presents him as de facto police and a good kid all at the same time. He emphasizes the fact that Rittenhouse was called to action by community members and Pierce's discussion brings forward the argument that Kenosha was no longer a peaceful middle-class city, but most pure and simple, a warzone, a mad city. Carlson presents an argument that is useful for attempting to understand white vigilante violence more broadly as it highlights a segment of American society which sees this violence as legitimate, if not necessary to pacify unrest in the face of protest. Additionally, while the defense largely leaves police out of their argument, Carlson portrays them as constrained by politics that are simply out of their control, and that Kenosha would not have felt the brunt of this violence if police were unhindered by bureaucracy. To put it simply, Carlson seizes the opportunity to rouse his conservative audience by portraying Rittenhouse both as defender and victim, to present an argument against liberal reforms and controls being placed on police and white vigilantes alike, calling upon the ever-present specter of government repression, only held at bay by an armed population ready to rise up at a moment's notice.

Steven Crowder: Good Kid Retaking the Mad City

Unsurprisingly, Steven Crowder focuses primarily on the notion that Rittenhouse was a good kid interested in helping his community. First touching on the same points, he begins with a simple self-defense argument that portrays Rittenhouse as a child unjustifiably put in danger for merely wanting to do his part. However, in later coverage of the Rittenhouse trial, he begins to explore the notion of the militia and what it means within the broader American social landscape. Crowder is interesting because he represents a clear break between the 'online right' and its

‘mainstream’ counterpart, with him often pursuing a more adversarial and provocative tone in response to the protestors, demonstrations, and BLM itself. Furthermore, by nature of his show, formatted as a talk show/podcast, his statements are ‘off the cuff’ and unrehearsed when compared to the likes of Carlson and Richards, and come across as more significant and authentic to his true thoughts on a given situation (Dean 2005:60). In a recorded livestream, November 2nd, 2021, Crowder gives his input on the opening arguments of the trial, emphasizing what was *done to* Rittenhouse over what he did to others, conforming to common liberal understandings of self-defense:

Well, look, let's go through let's go through the counterclaim that they're making. That the attacks from Kyle Rittenhouse, were unprovoked. No, that's absolutely not true. You just saw it on the videotape. These attacks were absolutely self-defense. That the people Rittenhouse shot were completely innocent. Well, not only we're talking about long criminal records of strangling women raping children, and we're talking about them committing crimes that very night felonies on camera. (StevenCrowder 2021a)

Not only does Crowder maintain the same argument that Rittenhouse was acting in self-defense, but also notes that his actions justifiably removed violent people from society who were deserving of death. What Paul J. Hirschfield and Daniella Simon (2010:162) call the “expurgation of the victim” is useful to consider here, in particular, a specific type of expurgation in which prior criminal history is used as a justification in ‘cop vigilante’ narratives. In this instance, Rittenhouse had no knowledge of Anthony Huber or Joseph Rosenbaum’s criminal histories, but Crowder jumps at the opportunity to use them as justification for their deaths. Throughout coverage of the trial, he refers to Rosenbaum as ‘child rapist’ repeatedly, and effectively uses this strategy to imply the danger that Rittenhouse was in that night. He engages in the same defaming to a lesser degree with Huber and Grosskreutz alike, calling up the former’s history with domestic violence and the fact that the latter was carrying a firearm illegally that night in Kenosha.

However, Hirschfield and Simon note that expurgation does not only end at defaming the victim, but also, “Expurgation can also be achieved merely by associating victims with deviant social contexts...” (2010:169). This is seen with some frequency among all three sources, but most often in Crowder’s coverage of the trial. He uses the presence of looting and property damage, the fact that the city had gone mad not only as justification for Rittenhouse’s presence, but to attribute guilt to all demonstrators that night. The deaths that took place and the injuries that Rittenhouse caused, can be attributed to the damage and unrest of the previous night; a cause that goes back no further than the start of the demonstrations in Kenosha and stops prior to the shooting. Those who were shot, deserved it, and all non-cop, non-vigilantes present, are guilty of violence by association with the protests alone.

Much like other claims about the violent mob and marauding forces, Crowder quickly dives in, painting a picture of a mad city in which Kenosha’s streets are flooded with marauding criminals who had no place in civil society at all. Not only does Crowder argue that these individuals were responsible for the destruction and destabilization of Kenosha, but they themselves represented the encroaching chaos present throughout thin blue line rhetoric. The white vigilantes of Kenosha are necessary where the police fail, but they are also in and of themselves police, which Crowder demonstrates in an episode discussing the closing arguments of the Rittenhouse trial, recorded on November 15th, 2021:

They had let- they had let people take over. So, tell me what you're supposed to do. You live in a town where it burned the night before. It's burning again tonight. And the police have all gone home and you have no one to protect yourself. (Steven Crowder 2021b)

As is now a patented trope, Crowder asks his audience to imagine Kenosha as a mad city, a lawless place, a place of chaos and destruction. Where Carlson argued that police were hamstrung by local politicians, necessitating citizens to ‘fill the void,’ and the defense largely

focused on the same, Crowder makes the argument that Kenosha has been all but abandoned by its police. He implies that the residents of Kenosha were the helpless recipients of the violence of the mob with no protectors present and the only guarantee being death. It is from this point of portraying Kenosha as a lawless warzone that he argues his most explicit and provocative point throughout his trial coverage, and that is the role of the militia in American society. His argument follows as such, with two quotes closely tied to one another from the same episode published November 15th, 2021, he states,

It's very clear. All of you are the militia. And the militia isn't just to fight off the world's greatest superpower who let their number one draft pick get away, sorry, but it's also to fight internal threats like I don't know, gas bombs and murder in the streets of your town. And they want you to be afraid. They want you to think we are so far -of What are you suggesting that I am not suggesting that anybody go out and hunt anybody? I'm not suggesting that anyone go out and pull a Charles Bronson Deathwish. What I am suggesting, however, is enshrined into our Constitution. When people are burning down your neighborhoods and throwing gas bombs, Molotov cocktails, bricks, if they are pulling you out from your cars, if they're smashing your car while you are in it, which we've seen countless times. They are forfeiting their right to live and if these people are organizing and burning down city blocks like we saw in Kenosha. (Steven Crowder 2021b)

Shortly after a discussion of the previous quote with his cohosts, Crowder continues,

You are never, not the militia. Yeah, just to be clear, at every moment of every day, you are the militia. Some people might create factions and militia where they're organized, are they coordinate together? You are the militia, every minute of every day. That's what the Second Amendment says. Yeah. That's how we fought the world's greatest superpower one century to become the only world superpower of the next century never been done before. Since you are the militia, you are always the militia. This is not a call to violence. It's a call to responsibility. So, you understand the importance and why it is grafted into our basic human rights in the United States Constitution, not granted by government, simply recognized by God and a document to say government, you cannot infringe upon these, there's there's a huge, huge difference. None of these rights are granted by government you watching right now listening, you are never anything but the militia, every second of every day, every single American, let's be really clear about that. And take that responsibility seriously. So, we don't burn down more innocent businesses. (Steven Crowder 2021b)

First and foremost, Crowder begins with the belabored point that Kenosha was a mad city, a warzone, lawless and filled with destruction. Running almost parallel to notions of a war for civilization that run throughout thin blue line rhetoric (Wall 2020; Linnemann and Medley 2018), he emphasizes the destruction while noting the need for some kind of force to fabricate social order, a collection of ‘police vigilantes’ as Maher (2021) might refer to them. These self-deputized vigilantes are not granted authority and legitimacy by the government as Crowder sees it, but by God himself. In his view, where the government fails to protect property, capital, and racial order, the white vigilante must step in and serve as the militia. Those serving in the militia are not only justified by the constitution, but a higher power, ordained by God to hold the thin blue line and keep those interested in destroying civilization on the other side of it.

Immediately following this line of thought, Crowder returns to the expurgation of the victim, noting that anyone engaging in destructive activity (looting, damaging property, etc.) is actively *forfeiting their right to live*. Like he discussed with reference to Rittenhouse’s victims, any engagement with or presence alongside criminal activity negates one’s right to life. Like before, no longer are these human lives we are talking about, to Crowder they are a violent and animalistic mob, seeking only to destroy and inflict violence. He uses this as further justification for his view on the militia more generally, dividing society much like the thin blue line does, but in the place of a ‘chosen few’ as TBL rhetoric might imply (Wall 2020) Crowder places all ‘good’ American citizens on the line itself and all ‘bad’ constantly on the assault.

The second quote is where he digs in and establishes what exactly he means by militia. Crowder begins by noting that, as Americans, we are *never not the militia*. This stands out as he is not implying that the militia is legitimate in some instances and illegitimate in others, no, Crowder sees the militia as playing a central role in fabricating social order in the United States,

and he is not necessarily wrong. Like Geo Maher (2021:44), discussing a Ta-Nehisi Coates quote, “To challenge the police is to challenge the American people” as accurate if inadequate, Crowder exemplifies it well. Police are not merely a discrete institution, but a system of whiteness, imperialism, and capitalism that shape and control the world we live in (Maher 2021:44). The militia, as Crowder presents it, fits this notion. Kyle Rittenhouse crossed state lines to take up arms as a vigilante to defend property and fabricate social order, leading to the deaths of two men who Crowder sees as deserving of death anyway. As such, Rittenhouse did not do anything illegal, but was merely engaging in an act which is the responsibility of all good (white) Americans.

Crowder notes, “This is not a call to violence, it’s a call to responsibility” as if to perfectly encapsulate the arguments put forth by the defense, Carlson, and himself alike. To him and his ilk, a de facto counterinsurgent force is not only necessary, but central to maintaining American social order. That job befalls all Americans, and as if to portray himself as seeking some form of justice he notes the innocence of the businesses that were damaged in the Kenosha riots and places the mantle of responsibility upon the everyday American middle and working class to step in and stand firm against those who seek to upend the social order. As Maher argues, “Policing and whiteness – white *power* – are inseparable” (2021:23). Crowder’s call to responsibility can be understood to target a specific segment of the American population, a largely white segment, whose anxieties and concerns about the future have effectively been offloaded from the structures that alienate us, and onto largely nonwhite, subversive, and dissident Americans who make their dissatisfaction with the status quo known.

What Crowder highlights then, is a fascination with warfare and violence as central themes in online right-wing rhetoric. In his statements on the trial, he repeatedly draws upon the

criminal histories of victims, the hopelessness of the mad city in the absence of white vigilantes in Kenosha, and the argument that the militia is central to the fabrication of social order.

Crowder clearly argues that Rittenhouse was a white vigilante and justified as such. For him, the police are not a discrete institution as some may argue, but rather policing is the responsibility of all American citizens. Crowder largely says out loud what Carlson and the Rittenhouse defense imply: Kyle Rittenhouse was justified in violently defending property and acting as de facto police, because it is the responsibility of all Americans to do so.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The findings uncover several common tropes in the defense, valoration, and validation of white vigilante violence through the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse, with the ‘good kid’ narrative being the most commonly drawn upon among the three sources. Mark D. Richards, Tucker Carlson, and Steven Crowder all emphasized the notion that Rittenhouse was fundamentally a good kid caught up in a situation created by other bad actors around him. This narrative did much of the leg work in providing a way for the jury and public alike to see their own anxieties and fears through Rittenhouse and his various altercations that night in Kenosha. Put simply, portraying him as a child endears him to the public and jurors alike. His defenders paint a vivid picture of a burning city, overrun with violence, and place Rittenhouse in the dead center of it, fearful of a predator, lurking in the dark, actively hunting him in the form of Rosenbaum. This narrative also supports thin blue line rhetoric, displaying a vulnerable city and people, personified in Rittenhouse, with him also acting as a lone hero.

There is common ground in the ways the three sources portray white vigilantes more generally as well. While much of the defense rests heavily on Rittenhouse as a childlike presence, Richards and Carlson justify the actions of white vigilantes through their portrayal of Kenosha the ‘mad city’ and the various actors within. From the haunting of marauding figures in the night put forward by the defense to the criminal history of Rittenhouse’s victims, his legal team and Carlson present an image of Kenosha as a lost, mad, city. Crowder engages in a much more explicit expurgation of Rittenhouse’s victims than the defense or Carlson though. He routinely refers to Rosenbaum and Huber’s criminal histories when discussing their deaths, particularly with the former, often calling up his history alongside comments about Rittenhouse being a child. These three come together to effectively convey an image of Rittenhouse as the

hunted in the face of a violent mob led by Rosenbaum. This narrative serves the dual purpose of justifying his decision to kill both Rosenbaum and Huber while also propping up the necessity for more of these vigilantes to keep cities safe, not unlike the ways in which cops use their own failures as proof their indispensability (Maher 2021:31).

What proved to be the most interesting and unexpected discovery of this brief research project came from Crowder himself. Specifically, his discussion of the role that the militia plays in American life. In a time where the topics of white nationalism and militias alike play such a dominant role in American political discourse, Crowder's comments proved important to analyze. Regardless of the other Rittenhouse narratives presented by the defense and Carlson, Crowder sees his role in fabricating order in Kenosha as completely legitimate. Claiming that he was engaging in a God-given right, Crowder presents the militia as a central piece of American life. It is not that Rittenhouse was justified in that singular instance, but it is that, in the face of civil unrest, all Americans are responsible for arming themselves and violently fabricating order. Crowder presents a view of American social life in which any transgressions should be handled by what he generally refers to as 'the militia' and *any and all Americans* are to take part in serving as the militia. As he sees it, militias were central to this nation's very foundation, and should play a role in maintaining social order going forward. This perspective warrants further exploration but highlights an important break between the online right and its mainstream, corporate counterpart.

What is just as important as what was said though, is what *was not* said in the defense of Rittenhouse. In the exploration of the content for this project, a common thread of silence among the three defenders arose, and that is an entirely ahistorical view of the protests themselves. The defense, Carlson, and Crowder all treat the Kenosha riots for the most part as an anomaly.

Carlson briefly mentions the shooting of Jacob Blake (the event which centralized the protests in Kenosha), but in the process, defames him, referring to a “long criminal record” and a violent past (Fox News 2020a), though he refrains from mentioning George Floyd or the many other police shootings which led to the mass unrest. Crowder also crafts a narrative around the assumption that nothing led to the unrest in Kenosha, and any brief mention it does get follows the same defamatory approach of Carlson. This is emblematic of a broader ahistorical understanding of police, protest, and white vigilantism in the United States. Like railing against vague boogeymen like critical race theory, any reckoning with race and U.S. history receives an expected pushback from the American right, as is the case here, divorcing the 2020 BLM protests from their catalyst.

This carefully curated approach to the narrative brought with it a depoliticizing element, which served to undermine the broader political struggle at hand, in particular as presented by Crowder and Carlson. As Jodi Dean (2005) discusses, communicative technologies, (referred to as communicative capitalism), are depoliticizing in nature. As such, the fragmentation of the online space and the illusion of meaningful participation in political discourse contributes to the ‘us versus them’ mentality present throughout their rhetoric. In the instance of both Crowder and Carlson, they actively engage with the broader discourse of the Rittenhouse trial, though each of them de-emphasizing politics in their meaningful capacity and actively frame the incident around the already depoliticized notions of security and self-defense. This effort assists them in divorcing the Kenosha shooting and unrest from the broader BLM movement, prioritizing vigilante violence as ahistorical and discrete in a world where they are anything but.

Largely, the reactions and defense put forth by the American right can be expected and understood as presented. While Crowder’s defense of the militia proved fruitful to explore, and

the combined themes of the ‘good kid’ and ‘mad city’ were useful in highlighting some new ground being tread in this discourse, their arguments often trended where one assumes they might. However, in collecting data for this project, I serendipitously came upon some interesting claims from those who might be assumed to be standing in opposition to Rittenhouse.

Specifically, the prosecution in his case gave credence to the claim that Rittenhouse was protecting property. As they note, “... I want to be clear, there’s nothing wrong with that.

Protecting that property is entirely lawful” (ABC 7 News 2021). This was important as it came directly from the prosecution and implies an agreement surrounding the role Americans play in violently protecting property. Throughout their opening arguments, the prosecution emphasized that when defending property, what Rittenhouse did was acceptable and lawful, it was only when they determine he was no longer protecting property that it became illegal behavior.

Additionally, centrist, and liberal media outlets like the Atlantic, Slate, and others lent legitimacy to the ‘good kid’ narrative in that there was some common ground between liberal and conservative commentators that Rittenhouse was not wrong for protecting property, and that he was just a kid. Though generally, they diverge once the shootings are pulled into discussion. This discovery highlights an interesting perspective among American liberals in that the protection of property is acceptable, even when violence is involved, it’s when one is seen to no longer be actively engaged in property protection, do problems arise.

This highlights several potential areas for future research. Particularly, the defense of property sets the stage for an engaging comparison between liberal and conservative media outlets and commentators. Furthermore, a greater exploration of the ahistoricism present on the American right with regards to civil rights and vigilante violence may be warranted. Most of these claims are not shocking in the least, especially with ongoing attacks on public education,

but understanding the ways in which right-wing media personalities construct narrative surrounding these shooting events may prove to be a useful tool as the American political landscape becomes increasingly volatile. Finally, consideration of the strictly ‘liberal’ perspective should be brought forth in incidents like that in Kenosha. While this research project proved fruitful in exploring the themes of ‘the militia,’ ‘the good kid,’ and ‘the mad city’ the role that American liberal media outlets and personalities play in this discourse is just as important if not more important. If there is common ground between liberal and conservative commentators on the protection of property, understanding the legitimization of white vigilantes coming from American liberals is an important consideration to make.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

I began this project with a personal interest in American hate groups and their response to the George Floyd protests in 2020. After exploring some of the literature and protests while seeing the common trend of what can often be described as ‘white nationalist militias’ present at the majority of these protests, frequently standing alongside if not in outright defense of the police, I began to pivot my project with the help of my advisor. This was done a few months after the Kenosha incident, and with his trial coming up (at the time) we determined that the discourse surrounding Kyle Rittenhouse and his trial may prove a useful case study. From this point I continued my literature review, basing it largely in the history of white vigilante violence, police, and their rhetoric. What I found was of course, the well-known but often overlooked role that white vigilantes have played in shaping U.S. social life.

This project brings to the table the claim that these white vigilantes are not a new phenomenon in the United States and only seeks to explore how their defenders validate their actions. As the literature displays, they have frequently been legitimated via their defense of property or a sense of order as presented by the timeframe in question. It is also important to frame these individuals (particularly Rittenhouse) as white vigilantes. In his case, he sought to go forth and violently uphold the law despite him not having the legitimacy granted to the likes of police. In this incident, Kyle Rittenhouse was a white vigilante in that he aimed to maintain social order and ‘fight crime’ when it seemed the police were unable to do so. His defenders even utilized some of this language, with Carlson implying the police were hamstrung and Crowder labeling them as inadequate. Regardless though, it is useful to consider white vigilantes through the lens of police. Like Geo Maher makes clear and the old saying goes, the cops and Klan go hand in hand.

Though this project is a limited exploration of the defense, validation, and valoration of white vigilante violence, using Rittenhouse as a case study, it does warrant further exploration of this topic. As the literature shows us, this is nothing new, and white vigilante violence is not going anywhere anytime soon. Future research should take a larger swath of contemporary political discourse surrounding multiple cases of white vigilante violence. Additionally, the consideration of the liberal media sphere is an important aspect of this research as well. We can somewhat expect where conservative and right-wing commentators will take a narrative surrounding these actions, but the subtle ways in which liberal organizations and their commentators' legitimate white vigilantes are just as important, perhaps even more so.

Thus, this project, in its limited capacity, proposes a proof of concept of sorts, for exploring and understanding white vigilante violence and its defenders. Further research should consider alternative political views on the matter and elements such as the visual should not be excluded either. In collecting and analyzing the data for this project, this much became clear to me: the strategies for defending white vigilante violence have not changed that drastically throughout history. Most often it rests on whether or not an action was privileged under a given law, and if so, one can safely assume the outcome from the start. Kyle Rittenhouse is but one in a long line of white vigilantes, self-deputized as they are and tacitly approved by police, they are but a longstanding feature of the American order-fabrication system. All things considered, this project was fruitful in exploring the defense of white vigilante violence, but primarily brings to light areas in which further exploration is warranted.

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