

PROFILE

The Nationalist Party of America: Right-Wing Activism and Billy Roper's White Revolution

DIANNE DENTICE

Department of Social and Cultural Analysis, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX, USA

ABSTRACT *This profile examines the emerging Nationalist Party of America and its leader, Billy Joe Roper. Founder and chairman of White Revolution, a neo-Nazi group and Internet social networking site, Roper was a write-in candidate in the November 2010 Arkansas gubernatorial race. Drawing parallels with David Duke's political campaigns in Louisiana, this profile paints a picture of a rising star in a reactionary movement fueled by racism and his attempt to enter mainstream politics. I introduce portions of his party platform and conclude by discussing some consequences of right-wing political activism for the USA.*

KEY WORDS: White supremacy, nationalism, right-wing activism, skinheads, neo-Nazi movements

According to Mark Potok in the *Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report* (spring 2010, pp. 1–3), almost 1000 hate groups currently operate in the USA. The intensely heated public debate about the economy, immigration, a perceived Hispanization of the USA, and the election of the nation's first African-American president provides impetus for ongoing extremist activity in the form of radical right-wing groups, assorted militia groups, and Internet-based social networking forums for self-identified white nationalists. The contemporary political landscape is littered with candidates aligning with the conservative Tea Party movement, launched in March 2009 during President Obama's efforts to deal with the foreclosure crisis, and there is a growing undercurrent of government mistrust among segments of the population fueled by myth and innuendo surrounding Obama's citizenship and political orientation.

Billy Roper, an Arkansas native, white racial activist, and white nationalist political candidate is building a coalition of supporters who feel that mainstream politicians neither address their concerns nor represent their interests. They are particularly worried about the nation's economy, followed by concerns about immigrant groups who they believe put undue strain on America's social institutions. Roper capitalizes on the fact that he is a fiscal conservative and he claims that if elected to public office, he will never support government policies that benefit minority groups over white citizens (personal communication, 4 June 2010). A self-described 'biological racist', he is quiet, mild mannered, articulate, and well educated. Roper is organizing fragmented groups associated

Correspondence Address: Dianne Dentice, Department of Social and Cultural Analysis, Stephen F. Austin State University, 1936 North Street, Nacogdoches, TX, 75962-3047, USA. Email: denticede@sfasu.edu

1474-2837 Print/1474-2829 Online/11/010107-6 © 2011 Taylor & Francis

DOI: 10.1080/14742837.2011.545230

with the white supremacist movement into a political party called the Nationalist Party of America.

Roper's mentor was William Pierce, a former physics professor who authored several incendiary books, including *The Turner Diaries* and *Hunter* (the first of which was found in Timothy McVeigh's possession after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995). Pierce founded National Alliance, an extremist group prominent in the USA from the 1970s through the 1990s, and hired Roper as a membership coordinator in 1999. Following Pierce's death in July 2002, Roper attempted to gain control of the organization, losing to another young high-ranking member of the organization. Rather than being relegated to a foot soldier for the new leadership, Roper moved back to his home state of Arkansas to form his own neo-Nazi organization anchored with a website of the same name, White Revolution. In May 2010, according to whiterevolution.com, over 1100 people from 16 different states were enrolled as members. The site also has members from other countries, according to Roper (personal communication, 4 June 2010).

Many of the young people Roper attracts to his party either are or were skinheads at one time. Skinhead groups are often associated with neo-Nazi and Fascist political ideology; the factions are sometimes linked. Skinheads who reach adulthood graduate to neo-Nazi groups such as White Revolution and Volksfront. According to Roper, people who join his group must be white, loyal to their race, and able to stay out of trouble with the law (personal communication, 4 June 2010). A former high school history teacher, Roper prides himself on his ability to communicate to whites of all ages, not just young people, who feel betrayed by multiculturalism and affirmative action. Internet technology provides a mechanism for leaders such as Roper to network, promote upcoming events, recruit new members, and gain political support for his emerging political party. He ran as a write-in candidate for Arkansas governor in the November 2010 election, and has plans to run for president as the Nationalist Party of America candidate in 2012.

The Quest for Political Representation

What are the connections between white nationalism and mainstream politics? Since the political successes of former Klansman and neo-Nazi David Duke, who gained national media attention when he won a runoff election for an open Louisiana state legislative seat in 1989 and made the runoff in the Louisiana gubernatorial election 2 years later, the white supremacist movement has been waiting for a new leader to emerge and gain a foothold in electoral politics ('A Racist on the Rise', *Newsweek*, 10 May 2004). As Ronald King (see *Dave Duke and The Politics of Race*, 1992, p. 243) has argued, Duke broadened his appeal during each stage of his political career by connecting with mainstream whites who were threatened by government policies such as affirmative action. Following Duke's lead, Roper believes that the Tea Party hybrid of libertarianism–conservatism is creating an opening for his ideas to enter mainstream political discussions (personal communication, 20 November 2009). Roper's political rhetoric is very similar to American racial ideology espoused by media commentators such as Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, and Shaun Hannity. By focusing on concerns about the disintegration of American society which Roper attributes to massive, uncontrolled immigration and out of touch politicians, he promotes his candidacy as an alternative to politics as usual.

Not all people who are interested in Roper's candidacy identify as white nationalists. The campaign trail not only leads him to White power meetings hosted by neo-Nazi youth

groups, but also to Tea Party gatherings in the state of Arkansas. Following a Tea Party event in May 2010, he received the following email from a woman who identifies as a conservative Arkansas Republican:

Dear Billy – instead of trying to destroy the two party system and putting the Dems back in office, why don't you pay your money and run on one or the other tickets with your great ideas? I suggest that Republican ideas are good and they have a better platform than the Democrats and the people that run on either ticket is going to have to abide by the platform of the party, no matter what ideologies that they bring to the table, now if they are smart enough to get other folks in Washington to change the way they think than their chances of a better government will work, regardless of the party. Again its a POWER EGO they run on. Republicans are the party of WANNA BE RICH. The Democrats are the party of the WANNA STAY POOR. NOW where is your PARTY?

Roper's response follows:

To tell you the truth, with up to twenty million illegal immigrants in our country right now and more coming in everyday... with a President who is an illegal immigrant himself who is surrendering traditional national sovereignty to foreign nations and international treaties and the United Nations, such as with the small arms treaty and global environmental laws... with trillions of dollars of American debt being held by the Chinese and others... with current demographic projections indicating that within our children's lifetimes, the people who built America will be a minority... my party is the party that wants to stay American. You are absolutely right that if a person runs on a major party ticket, they have to abide by that party's platform and compromise their beliefs in order to make the party bosses in Washington happy. I can't and won't do that and that's a major reason why I will not run under a major party ticket. George Washington couldn't remain a British army officer. Robert E. Lee couldn't accept the generalship of the Federal army... and I cannot run as a Republican.

Journalistic and watchdog reports suggest that the current mood of the country is exemplified by dissatisfaction with the federal government. Coupled with fears about a protracted recession and the ongoing war in the Middle East, scattered non-mainstream political groups such as the Nationalist Party of America mobilize and rally supporters. Discontent has also resulted in the Tea Party phenomenon. While not exactly a third party, the Tea Party appears to be having some political successes beginning with the election of Scott Brown to Ted Kennedy's Senate seat in Massachusetts. Roper suggests that even though his Nationalist party has an openly racist agenda, many of the Tea Partyers he has met have a racialist streak that lay dormant until the election of Barack Obama (personal communication, 4 June 2010). He hopes to gain support from people in the Tea Party movement who claim not to be racists but who secretly support most, if not all, of Roper's positions on current political issues, including race. Again, he sees a window of opportunity similar to what occurred with David Duke in Louisiana.

The importance of the Internet and assorted social networking techniques in American politics cannot be overstated. Sometimes the ability to use technological innovations can

even result in election to the presidency of the USA. For white supremacists, contemporary extremist online sites enable them to wage verbal attacks on immigrant groups and stereotype them as threats to national identity and national security. When an influential person such as Samuel P. Huntington espouses the same ideas under a cloak of Ivy League respectability (see *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, 2004, p. 109), extremist ideas begin to seep into mainstream discourse. Roper believes that he can influence a segment of the American population beyond his white nationalist community that is searching for autonomy in a fractured, multicultural society (personal communication, 20 February 2010). He also understands the importance of building coalitions with people outside the white supremacist movement who may have some common ideological similarities.

A Man with a Plan: Roper's Party Platform

Roper presented an introduction to his party platform to a crowd of more than 100 people at a coalition of white nationalist organizations in October 2009. A portion of the platform will be presented here. The first item on the Nationalist party agenda is to abolish the Internal Revenue Service and to create a national sales tax of 23% to fund the federal government. Roper also supports imposition of a 30% tariff on products imported into the USA. Exemptions include products of comparable kind and quality that are not produced in the USA.

The Nationalist Party of America takes a hard line on immigration. The key to putting an end to illegal immigration is very strict border security with 24 hour patrols by armed US military forces (personal communication, 9 October 2009). The immigration section of the party platform supports limiting natural born citizenship to children of legal US citizens. The platform also calls for a deportation program beginning with 'aliens' convicted of felonies and every gang member who is not a citizen of the USA. This, of course, extends to all 'illegal aliens' as well.

A green racist, Roper does not support deep water drilling and his party platform suggests that federal incentives must include the phasing out of fossil fuels and the phasing in of clean, renewable energy sources. Part of Roper's plan includes close examination of Brazil's ethanol program which he thinks is a viable solution (at least in the short term) to America's growing energy crisis. He also proposes an escalating tax on fossil fuels to fund research and development of alternative fuel sources. Roper and his party envision the creation of pedestrian and bicycle friendly sustainable white communities throughout the country.

White Revolution: The Only Solution

According to Roper, patriotic Americans with traditional values have few choices when it comes time to vote. He believes that the solution is mobilization of a viable third party such as the Nationalist Party of America. In some of his speeches he mentions Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams, patriots who refused to work within the existing political system of their time. He is quick to point out that their ideas helped to bring about the American Revolution and resultant American independence. His favorite president is George Washington, followed closely by Ronald Reagan. Another historical hero is

Thomas Jefferson who posed questions about justice and political systems that Roper still considers to be very relevant and timely (personal communication, 26 April 2010).

Heavily influenced by mythic Western heroes epitomized in the John Wayne movies of his youth, Roper still idealizes America's pioneer spirit (personal communication, 26 April 2010). Adhering to ethnocentric cultural beliefs, Roper strongly believes that Anglo-Saxons were the creators of civilization as we know it and other racial and ethnic groups have not made significant contributions to human development throughout history. He is steadfastly against 'log cabin Republicans' and neo-Conservatives who have sold out to their liberal constituents, whom he identifies as puppets of the terrorist state of Israel (personal communication, 9 November 2009). As for Democrats, they became even more problematic when President Obama was nominated and then elected.

Roper states that his write-in campaign for governor of Arkansas got some of his ideas out to a broader constituency. He came in fourth in a field of six candidates. He knows that much of the rhetoric contained in his website is offensive and only a select audience is exposed to his writings and his blogs. His campaign promoted him as the only candidate for governor who stands up for the middle classes against the 'powerful far left elite' and their lower class minority power base. Echoing traditional populist rhetoric, he is against excessive state spending and taxation and for implementation of an Arizona-style law to curtail illegal immigration. Roper did not expect to be an elected governor, and does not delude himself into thinking he will even make much impact in the general presidential election in 2012. However, he does think that anyone who bothers to listen will realize that elected officials who represent the two-party system continually fail to represent the interests of the people (personal communication, 20 November 2009).

Some Final Thoughts

According to a recent NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, 61% of Americans believe that the country is in decline. Arizona has passed a controversial immigration bill which makes the failure to carry immigration documents a crime, and gives police broad power to detain anyone suspected of being in the country illegally; according to critics, the bill is an open invitation for harassment and discrimination against Hispanics, regardless of citizenship status. Together with a sluggish economy, and a monumental environmental and economic disaster along the Gulf coast, there is an increasing sense of malaise in American society. When Fox News commentator Glenn Beck calls President Obama a Fascist, a Nazi, and a Marxist on the air, a hostile social milieu becomes a breeding ground for extremist groups and their leaders who ultimately capitalize on the problems that plague the US government and its leaders.

Roper states that politicians with differing viewpoints have been excluded from political debates, thus increasing discontent among people who feel they have no voice. He feels that the only issue the media cares about is his views on race: 'They do not bother to find out where I stand on other issues such as immigration, abortion, and the tax and spend culture of the liberal Democratic Congress' (personal communication, 20 November 2009). He hopes that as his ideas continue to get publicized in mainstream media outlets, he will gain legitimacy with voters who are fed up with politics as usual. The Tea Party, along with various secessionist and militia movements, is tearing away the façade of power associated with the federal government which will serve to strengthen alternative political ideologies such as Roper's (personal communication, 4 June 2010).

First and foremost, Roper is not an apologist for his racist views. He comes by them honestly as the son and grandson of former Klansmen. Growing up in rural Arkansas, he was taught that whites were superior to all other races. Still believing this to be true, he touts the negative effects of multiculturalism whenever given the opportunity. He firmly believes that the existing political system is dedicated to the destruction of white culture. The only solution, according to Roper, is to replace the broken system with what Thomas Jefferson and the other signers of the Declaration of Independence really wanted it to be; a nation based on Anglo-Protestant traditions (personal communication, 20 November 2009).

According to *Newsweek* (19 April 2010, p. 45), this political era is more intense than usual for Americans. Threats to members of Congress have tripled since 2009 and FBI operatives worry about domestic terrorism and a resurgence of militia activity. An enigmatic personality, Roper is creating an image of himself as a politician who, although racist, is honest, fiscally conservative, and smart. He has a contingent of people around him who are helping him formulate his political platform and develop his personal style. Although Roper consistently states that he did not anticipate winning either the Arkansas gubernatorial race nor does he anticipate winning the American presidential election in 2012, he does plan to participate in the broader political debate. Unlike David Duke, who went to prison for tax evasion and mail fraud, Roper is very cognizant of obeying the law. He views himself as a representative for law abiding working people (personal communication, 15 June 2010). By employing populist rhetoric and decrying elitist politicians and their constituents, he is a voice for a segment of the population who hate President Obama, his political agenda, and the federal government in general. Roper is more than happy to pick up the gauntlet of racial politics first thrown down by David Duke.

Dianne Dentice is Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, USA. She teaches courses in Race and Ethnic Relations, Social Problems, Social Psychology, and Gender. Her research interests include extremist social movements, white racial activism, white identity formation, and the transgender experience in American society. Her research on Billy Roper was funded by grants from the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at Stephen F. Austin State University.

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