

Online Article

The Changing World Order and Rise of Transcontinental Racial Politics

I recently listened to an insightful 25-minute interview of *The Guardian* journalist, Chris McGreal, on Democracy Now!’s YouTube channel (Democracy Now! 2025), which discussed the apartheid roots of Elon Musk, the world’s richest man, who has carved out for himself a big job in Trump’s government to reorganise the US’s federal bureaucracy. In that interview, I was struck that a group of white South Africans who were raised in the apartheid system had penetrated not only the high-tech industry in the US but also joined forces with Trump’s Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement, inserted themselves into the Trump administration, and were part of Trump’s grand strategy to overturn the liberal order in the US and globally. The insights I gained from the interview led me to read more about the background and activities of the group. I also refreshed my understanding of hard-right or white supremacist groups in the US, Europe and South Africa, to gain insights into what looks like a convergence of interests and the transnationalisation of the group’s activities.

After listening to the interview, I hypothesised that the breakdown of the global liberal order is not only empowering authoritarian regimes across the world and ush-

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ering in old-fashioned big-power politics, as realist scholars in international relations predict; it is also connecting three types of racial politics globally. These are the politics of the anti-immigrant and pro-white MAGA movement in the US; the politics of the nativist or anti-immigrant far-right parties in Europe; and the politics of ‘white victimhood’ in South Africa, which seeks to hold back or overturn progressive social change in South Africa and elsewhere.

Many of these movements reject the label of racism or genetic white superiority and insist that their goal is to defend white culture and interests, which they believe are threatened by demographic changes and public policies that favour non-white people. Some, such as AfriForum in South Africa, even identify as civil rights and minority advocacy groups. However, the growing strength of these groups, especially in the US and Europe, where many are now represented in government, poses a threat to civic values and forms of politics that respect diversity, inclusion and equality. The legitimisation of

these groups by the US – the most powerful state in the world – may undermine popular struggles for social rights and the wellbeing of historically disadvantaged groups. It threatens to reverse the laudable work of the UN in combating racism, xenophobia and related intolerances (Bangura and Stavenhagen 2005; UN Human Rights Council 2001).

This essay interrogates the drivers of this ‘new’ brand of racial politics and the threats it poses to the world order. It starts with an overview of the apartheid roots of four US high-tech billionaires, three of whom are active in right-wing American politics, handsomely financed the Republican party in the 2024 elections, and currently play important roles in the Trump administration. I’ve used the activities of these tech billionaires as my entry point because I was motivated to reflect on the convergence of the racial politics of these movements after listening to McGreal’s interview. I initially wanted to write a short piece on the tech billionaires, because I found their growth in the US tech world and insertion into American far-right politics intriguing. However, as I delved into their backgrounds, I realised that there was a bigger story to tell about the rise of transcontinental racial politics.

The overview I present on the tech billionaires relies on McGreal and several other readings that I consulted after listening to McGreal and reading some of his articles in *The Guardian*. What comes out of the overview is a fusion of the libertarian and anti-equity worldviews of the tech billionaires and the hard-right MAGA movement in the US. The overview provides a context for analysing, in the subsequent section, what I've described as transcontinental racial politics. I divide that section into three parts: Trump's attack on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); Trump's disengagement from European liberalism and embrace of hard-right nativist parties in Europe; and Trump's support for white supremacist groups in South Africa and their false narrative of 'white victimhood'.

The PayPal Mafia

Let me start with an overview of McGreal's insights on Elon Musk's apartheid background. Musk's maternal grandfather, Joshua Haldeman, a Canadian, was a staunch anti-Semite, who sympathised with Hitler and opposed the Allied war against Germany. He moved to South Africa in 1950 – two years after the Afrikaner National Party (NP) came to power and institutionalised the apartheid system. Haldeman was attracted to the National Party's ideology of Christian nationalism, which the NP's leader at the time, John Vorster, proudly associated with Nazism. Before moving to South Africa, Haldeman led a fringe movement in Canada that sought to replace democracy with a fascistic government run by technocrats (McGreal 2025a).

Musk lived a privileged life in South Africa and went to some of the best whites-only schools. His father, Errol Musk, rejected the

principle of 'one person one vote' and advocated a separate parliament for each 'race'. In a letter he wrote to Elon Musk in 2022, cited by Rebecca Davis (2024) in *Daily Maverick*, he asserted: 'With no whites here, the blacks will go back to the trees'. Elon Musk moved to Canada at the age of 18, in 1988, with much racist baggage from his family before apartheid was dismantled in the 1990s. Amazingly, Davis (2024) reports that there is hardly any mention of the word 'apartheid' in Musk's biography, written by Walter Isaacson in 2023, despite the tumultuous anti-apartheid events in South Africa during Musk's formative years.

Musk is not the only white South African who came out of apartheid and made it big in the US tech industry. Three other high-tech geeks – Peter Thiel, David Sacks and Roelof Botha – also have deep apartheid roots. Botha was born in Pretoria and is the grandson of Pik Botha, apartheid South Africa's last foreign minister. Sacks was born in Cape Town; and Thiel was born in Germany but went to school in Johannesburg and Swakopmund – a Namibian town with a distinct German architecture and feel. Namibia (formerly German South West Africa) became a South African colony after Germany's defeat in World War One. Background readings I consulted before holidaying in Namibia last year indicate that souvenirs celebrating Hitler and Nazism were available in gift shops at Swakopmund decades after Hitler was defeated in 1945. That city was a bastion of Nazism and white supremacy in Africa.

In 1998, working with about twenty young high-tech nerds in the US, Musk and Thiel co-founded PayPal, one of the pioneer companies for electronic payments around the world. Sacks and Bo-

tha served as PayPal's chief operating officer and chief financial officer, respectively, before moving to other ventures. Since leaving PayPal, Botha has been a board member of more than a dozen investment firms and heads Sequoia Capital, a venture capital company with combined assets in the US, Europe and Asia valued at USD 118 billion (Hirsch 2023).

This group of highly driven venture capitalists became known as the PayPal Mafia (Fleximize n. d.; Khan 2024). It is believed that they developed strong social bonds at PayPal and continued to support each other even after leaving the company. Most of them are graduates of Stanford University or the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A distinct feature of the South African PayPal quartet is their lack of empathy and strong libertarian views. Musk recently stated that 'the fundamental weakness of Western civilisation is empathy, the empathy exploit', which will push the West to 'civilizational suicide' (Wolf 2025). He and his colleagues are viscerally opposed to government initiatives that seek to redistribute income, wealth and opportunities in favour of the poor or disadvantaged. They believe that their own success in education and business is entirely due to their individual efforts.

Growing up in apartheid South Africa, which saw itself as an outpost of Western civilisation, it's not surprising that these tech billionaires espoused a racist 'Western civilisational' form of politics when they migrated to the US to pursue their university education and careers. They found a home in the US's large network of groups that espouse racist or white supremacist ideas. Thiel and Sacks published a book, *The Diversity Myth: Multiculturalism and Political Intoler-*

ance on Campus (1998), in which they criticised multiculturalism in colleges and universities. They denounced affirmative action and social justice policies, claiming that they hurt rather than helped the disadvantaged, and entrenched segregation. Relying on Max Chafkin's biography of Thiel, Davis noted in her *Daily Maverick* article that, as a founder of *The Stanford Review* at Stanford University, Thiel opposed the university's plan to include black writers in the student literature syllabus. Thiel used as a headline a racist trope, 'Western culture in the balance', to scare white students and elicit their support for his views.

We're all familiar with the infamous Nazi-like 'Heil Hitler' salutes that Musk made when celebrating Trump's second inauguration at a rally in January 2025. Many in Germany and elsewhere, with deep memories of the Holocaust, condemned the salutes; the US's Anti-Defamation League described it as just an awkward gesture (Connolly 2025). Musk's estranged child, Vivian Jenna Wilson, also affirmed that his father's gesture was 'definitely a Nazi salute' and described the Trump administration as 'cartoonishly evil' (Yurman 2025). Musk, however, dismissed his critics as politically motivated. Regardless, it was widely reported that neo-Nazi, white supremacist groups celebrated the salutes on social media (*France 24* 2025). Symbols matter; they project identity and signal intentions.

Three members of the quartet – Musk, Thiel and Sacks – have strong ties to Trump and the Republican Party. Musk is Trump's point man in the newly created Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the aim of which is to dismantle the federal bureaucracy

and reconfigure it after Trump's anti-equity and authoritarian image. He spent USD 277 million on Trump's and the Republican Party's 2024 election campaigns (Ingram and Reilly 2024), and has used his X platform (previously Twitter) to disseminate conspiracy theories (Klee 2024a) and support hard-right views, such as 'the great replacement theory' propounded by the French writer Renaud Camus and embraced by the MAGA movement. Followers of this theory assert that white people are being demographically and culturally replaced by people of colour – a process, they affirm, that should be combated.

Thiel is estimated to have a net asset of more than USD 18 billion (Salvucci 2025) and is ranked 129th in global wealth. He runs several investment or venture capital firms and is the financial godfather of US Vice President J. D. Vance. He bankrolled Vance's election for an Ohio Senate seat in 2022, spending USD 10 million on his campaign, and once employed him (in 2015) at his global investment firm, Mithril Capital (Klaidman 2024).

Sacks is a big donor and fundraiser for Trump, having raised more than USD 12 million for him at one event at his San Francisco home. Trump rewarded him with the job of 'White House AI and Crypto Czar'. Miles Klee (2024b) reported in *Rolling Stone* that, after leaving PayPal, Sacks made a fortune by founding other tech companies, which earned him the title 'angel investor' (someone who invests in good ideas at their formative stages and reaps huge returns when they become successful) for his early investments in companies such as Uber, Facebook and Airbnb.

In discussing the influence of rich, apartheid-era white South Africans in Trump's political circle, one should also mention the conservative radio host, Joel Pollak, who currently works as a senior editor at *Breitbart News* (Fabricius 2025), an American far-right news website, which was founded by the hard-right ideologue Steve Bannon – Trump's chief strategist when he first became president in 2017. Pollak was born in Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city. Another white South African who is strongly linked with Trump is the famous golfer, Gary Player. Player told *Biz News* (2024), a South African online business daily, that South Africa's high level of unemployment was caused by its 'open border' policy and called for policies to regulate immigration. Player's views reflect the strong anti-immigration posture that has fanned xenophobia and violence in South Africa against African immigrants since the end of apartheid. In his words, 'You cannot share a loaf of bread with 50 people'. Pollak was a recipient of the US Medal of Freedom during Trump's first term in office and celebrated Trump's return to the White House in 2024. In the *Biz News* interview, he applauded Trump's tough stand on law and order and asserted that Trump 'is going to stop the Woke agenda and bring back a sense of discipline and pride'.

Transcontinental racial politics

Racism has always been a global phenomenon. It provided the ideology for Europe's conquest of foreign peoples and lands, transforming the world's disparate regions and continents into a Eurocentric system. It is associated with the transatlantic slave trade, the enslavement of Africans in the US

and the extermination of Indigenous people in the Americas and Australia. Racism fuelled the brutal colonisation of Africa and Asia, the German genocide in Namibia, the Holocaust in Europe and the apartheid system that dehumanised black people in South Africa.

In one of his most famous quotes (often cited by Barack Obama), Martin Luther King, the US civil rights leader, asserted that ‘the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice’. Surely, the history of global society does support this optimistic view of the human experience. The transatlantic slave trade ended, slavery was abolished in the US, laws that respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and African Americans were promulgated, genocide was categorised as a crime against humanity, and colonialism and apartheid were defeated. A large body of laws and declarations that made racism a taboo and a crime were passed or adopted across the world and in global institutions.

However, it is also incontestable that ‘the arc of the moral universe’ carries elements of discredited values, bigotry and hate. This suggests that justice is always a contested issue. When the balance of forces changes, hate-filled movements and ideas that had been defeated or contained may receive a new lease on life and threaten an established order or consensus. With the triumph of Trumpism, attacks on liberal values in the US and the crumbling rules-based global order, the world seems to be entering a new phase in racial politics. Institutions and policies that helped to push back or contain racism in the US are being dismantled, and previously marginalised racist groups, ideas and practices are being legitimised in the nerve centre of government.

This development is not a return to the extremist ideology of ‘scientific racism’ or biological white superiority, which drove slavery, colonisation and genocidal politics. The new racial politics is generally couched in non-racial, meritocratic terms. It sees racial DEI as anti-white discrimination. In other words, it turns the historical discourse of racism on its head: the victims of racism are now white people, who are accused of receiving undeserved favours. In the logic of white victimhood, DEI policies deny jobs, services and educational opportunities to qualified white people, encourage inefficiency and retard economic development.

Perhaps US House Representative, Marjorie Taylor Greene, a far-right conspiracy theorist, captured the mindset of members of this movement when she told a Trump rally in 2022 that ‘Joe Biden’s 5 million illegal aliens are on the verge of replacing you, replacing your jobs and replacing your kids in school. And coming from all over the world, they’re also replacing your culture. And that’s not great for America’ (Anderson 2022). Far-right groups project an image of toughness, use inciteful language to stoke fear among voters and cast themselves as the defenders of the ‘people’ against an indifferent elite. Their support for traditional values and gender hierarchies endears them to voters who may not share their racist beliefs (Wolf et al. 2025).

The Trump administration’s embrace of this movement has struck a chord with Europe’s hard-right nationalist parties, reversing a 100-year history of consistent and strong US support for European liberalism. This radical change in US policy is also impacting racial politics in

South Africa, where white groups with strong roots in the apartheid system have solicited support from the US by projecting an identity of white victimhood or anti-white racism and white genocide, hoping that the limited social reforms that the African National Congress (ANC) has implemented since 1994 will be reversed or contained.

Trump’s attack on DEI in the US

Since taking office in January 2025, the Trump government has swiftly enacted a raft of executive orders to roll back many social reforms that had helped to moderate the harmful effects of centuries of white racism and exclusionary politics. Central to these orders is the systematic assault on DEI, which is redefining the terrain of racial politics in the US today. This assault has four major planks. First, it has shut down programmes that seek to promote a more diverse and inclusive federal bureaucracy (White House 2025a). This is likely to affect racial minorities, women, transgender groups and those with disabilities. The reason is clear: even when governments prioritise merit, recruitment in public bureaucracies is often influenced by social ties or networks. Numerous studies have shown that ‘race-blind’ or ‘race-neutral’ policies may make racial minorities with a history of discrimination invisible, if recruiters are under no obligation to look for qualified minority candidates. Leland Saito shows in *The Politics of Exclusion* (2009) that race-blind policies that were expected to generate improvements across races overlooked non-white groups who were not well connected or represented in politics.

Second, the new order prohibits companies with federal contracts from applying DEI policies when recruiting staff. This may make it difficult for racial minorities who lack the right social ties to gain access to the federal contract system. Shockingly, the Trump government is even trying to impose this ban on foreign businesses. It has warned foreign companies, local suppliers to US embassies and US grant recipients worldwide to comply with the ban or risk losing payments (Rosemain and Irish 2025). France's ministry of trade and Spain's labour ministry have kicked against the ban, with the latter describing the DEI ban as a 'flagrant violation' of Spain's anti-discrimination and diversity laws (Reuters 2025). Indeed, the DEI ban drives a knife into the core values of the UN system and its impressive work on diversity, equality and inclusion.

The logic of the DEI ban goes against research that finds a strong correlation between diversity and profitability. McKinsey and Company, a US management consulting firm, conducted four surveys on the relationship between leadership diversity and company performance between 2015 and 2023, with each report showing that diversity was good for profitability. The 2023 report, *Diversity Matters Even More: The Case For Holistic Impact* (McKinsey 2023), which covers more than a thousand companies in twenty-three countries, found that organisations with higher levels of ethnic and racial diversity (or companies in the top quartile of diversity) were 39 per cent more profitable than those with less diversity. It also found that gender-diverse companies had a 39 per cent higher profitability than those with less gender diversity.

Third, Trump has shut down the Department of Education (White House 2025b), which, over the years, has developed programmes that seek to empower racial minorities in the US's highly unequal educational system. This retrogressive policy operates in tandem with the defunding of colleges and universities that teach and conduct research on racial DEI.

And fourth, Trump is trying to whitewash the teaching of US history by underplaying the terrible toll of slavery on African Americans and calling for the restoration of the Confederate statutes – symbols that celebrate slavery and racial oppression. Trump's recent executive order on the Smithsonian Institution (White House 2025c), which hosts the largest complex of museums in the US, to remove 'improper, divisive or anti-American ideology' from its museums and research centres, is seen by many civil rights activists and historians as an attack on academic freedom and African-American history (Barrow 2025). The executive order specifically names the National Museum of African American History in its attack on what it claims is a concerted effort by the Smithsonian Institution to rewrite American history. This flagrant attempt to define historical truth as that which is sanctioned by the state, and to police it, is reminiscent of George Orwell's Big Brother in his fictional totalitarian state in which rulers wield absolute power through a dreadful system of mass surveillance.

It is important to point out that the victims of the full gamut of Trump's policies are not just racial minorities and immigrants. Women, LGBTQ communities, pensioners, the white working class who massively voted for him, uni-

versity professors and researchers, students and academics protesting Israel's genocidal carnage in Gaza, foreign travellers who store anti-Trump views on their phones, diverse groups of people in federal institutions that are being considerably downsized, and those who value free speech are all impacted by Trump's unchecked use of executive power and shakeup of the federal state.

Trumpism and European racial politics

Trump's attacks on DEI are occurring at a time when far-right parties with a dark history of racism are making tremendous gains in European politics. This poses a challenge to the sustainability of the liberal European and global order as well as the protection of racial minority rights in Europe. In defending Europe's fragile democracies just after World War Two, the US worked with mainstream European parties (those that embraced social democracy, liberalism, Christian democracy and mainstream conservative beliefs) to outlaw or contain racist and extreme left parties.

The US played a lead role in denazifying German society and supported the Basic Law and Constitutional Court Act, which prohibits parties that 'seek to undermine or abolish (Germany's) free democratic basic order' (The Federal Constitutional Court n. d.). Under these provisions, Hitler's National Socialist party (estimated to have had 8.5 million members) and the Communist party were banned from politics. The Italian Constitution of 1947 also banned the extreme right and violent National Fascist Party and its successor, the Republican Fascist Party. And US leaders aggressively pressured

mainstream Italian parties to not share power with the Italian Communist party (the largest in Europe at the time) and threatened covert operations against the Italian government if the communists gained control of it (Boghardt 2017).

Europe's postwar economic boom and expansion of welfare provisions helped to consolidate the US-backed fledgling democracies and kept extreme right or racist parties on the fringe. The marginalisation of hard-right parties was also aided by Europe's proportional representation (PR) electoral system. While this system made it easy for fringe parties to gain representation in legislative institutions, it also acted as a check on such parties to gain control of governments. Under the PR system, voters distribute their votes to many parties. This necessitates coalition governments, because it is rare that a single party is able to secure the majority of the votes and monopolise power. The mainstream parties also pursued a policy of 'cordon sanitaire', or firewall, by refusing to form coalition governments with extreme-right or extreme-left parties (Worth 2024).

However, in the last two decades, as Europe has experienced a rapid increase in migration and its economy has largely stagnated, hard-right parties, which mimic the racist parties of yesteryear, have made substantial electoral gains across the continent. The cordon sanitaire has been broken in many countries (Worth 2024). Today, hard-right parties govern or share power in eight countries: Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Finland, Switzerland and, to some extent Sweden, where the far-right party props up the centre-right governing party, which has pledged to sharply reduce immigration. According to *The Economist's* (2025)

data on European parties' votes and seats shares, hard-right parties are now Europe's most popular, even though they mostly have been kept out of power. If, as *The Economist* projects, the hard-right's vote share is able to match its seats share, Europe will become 'less welcoming of racial and sexual minorities'.

J. D. Vance's and Musk's brazen interference in Germany's 2025 elections, in which they supported the hard-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which received an unprecedented one-fifth of the votes, sent shock waves across Europe's liberal political establishment. Musk tweeted that only the AfD could save Europe (*Le Monde* 2025); Vance astonished the world by meeting the leader of the AfD, Alice Weidel, before the elections and chastised German mainstream politicians for excluding the AfD from government (Shuster 2025). And Trump condemned the recent court ruling in France that found Marine Le Pen guilty of corruption and barred her from contesting elections for five years (Symons 2025).

At a stroke, these unprecedented interventions upturned more than eighty years of US policy of keeping hard-right parties in Europe from the centre of power. They signalled that Trump's government is uncomfortable with Europe's liberal parties and prefers to work with the hard right, which shares its authoritarian and anti-DEI worldview. They suggest that Trump is not just disengaging from Europe in order to pivot to Asia, as realists, such as John Measheimer (*The Face of War*, n. d.), have asserted. An additional, and equally (if not more) important reason for Trump's disengagement from Europe is that he doesn't like the liberal worldview of the dominant powers in Europe.

Trumpism and white victimhood in South Africa

Trump's assault on DEI has provided a fillip to the discourse of 'white victimhood' advanced by white South Africans who seek to hold back or block redistributive justice. With the dismantling of apartheid and the loss of white power and influence in politics, there is, perhaps, no other place in the world where the notion of 'white victimhood' is as potent as in South Africa. Nicky Falkof (2023), writing in the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, links this sense of victimhood, which she describes as 'moral panic', to two emotional strands or beliefs that have plagued white South Africans since the end of apartheid: satanism and white genocide.

According to Falkof, belief in satanism or stories of occult rituals, including the black abuse of white children and cannibalism, was prevalent in the dying years of apartheid in the 1980s and 1990s, inducing many white South Africans to migrate to Australia and the US. The black liberation fighter assumed the status of the folk devil, or Satan, in the conspiratorial imagination of white supremacists. Falkof notes that the second myth – 'white genocide' – gained traction in 2023 after a few instances of white farm murders, which led white supremacists to believe that the ruling ANC was encouraging black militants to exterminate whites.

South Africa's white supremacists are totally blind to the enormous privileges and gross levels of inequality they enjoy in that country even after thirty years of ANC rule. While whites account for only 7.3 per cent of the population, they own more than 70 per cent of farmland and vastly dominate the manufacturing, mining and modern

services sectors. We were shocked by South Africa's obscene racial inequalities when we holidayed in the Western Cape Province in November 2024. Leafy white neighbourhoods had big, immaculate houses with dreamland swimming pools and high electric fences. The contrast with the more than 400 high-density townships, especially Khayelitsha, home to two million people, with innumerable tin shacks and poor sanitation, was mind-boggling, depressing and deplorable. We couldn't believe that such dehumanising places still existed and seemed to be expanding, three decades into the ANC's rule.

The ideology of white supremacy is intertwined with the global history of racism. It is what drove Europe's conquest of the world. White supremacy lost its sting with the end of slavery, colonialism and apartheid and became confined to fringes within states. However, scholars believe that it has made a strong rebound in recent decades by assuming a transnational character. Heidi Beirich (2022) has traced the evolution of these movements from a domestic to a transnational phenomenon. She notes that these movements use modern technologies and have crafted a coherent worldview that focuses on fear of displacement by non-whites and the need to counter demographic trends that aid displacement, increasingly through violence.

These transnational movements largely operate in the US, Europe and South Africa. One remarkable development is the increasing interconnection of the politics of white supremacist groups in South Africa and those in the US. Earlier, I described how Musk and his South African PayPal colleagues moved seamlessly into the libertarian and anti-DEI discourses and

movements in the US and became ardent supporters of the Republican Party and Trump. The penetration by South Africa's white supremacist groups of US politics and its feedback effects in South Africa go deeper than the activities of the high-tech quartet.

To give a few examples: Jacob Ware (2020) reports on the Council on Foreign Relations website that a neo-Nazi organisation, the Base, which was formed in 2018 and is active in Maryland, recruited some of its members from South Africa; and a senior official of an Afrikaner far-right group, Suidlanders, participated in the infamous white supremacists' Charlottesville Unite Right rally in August 2017, in which a young woman was killed by a far-right car attack. And Dylann Roof, the murderer of nine African Americans at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, was inspired by the politics of white supremacy in Southern Africa. His Facebook page had a picture of him with a jacket bearing racist, white Rhodesian flags and featured his manifesto, which he titled 'The Last Rhodesian'.

Significantly, Kallie Kriel and Ernst Roets, leaders of AfriForum, the ultra-right Afrikaner organisation, travelled to the US in 2018 and lobbied the Trump administration to resist land redistribution in South Africa (McGreal 2025b). The organisation opened an Afrikaner Foundation in New York in 2024 to co-ordinate its international activities. During their campaign in the US, Kriel and Roets falsely claimed that 'white farmers are being brutally murdered in South Africa for their land'. AfriForum has been a strong advocate for Musk in his standoff with the ANC government, which insists that Musk's

proposed Starlink project in South Africa should include the participation of black people as part of that government's Black Economic Empowerment programme. Musk described the programme as 'openly racist ownership laws'.

The lobbying activities of the South African hard-right groups were massively boosted in February 2025 when Trump issued an executive order (White House 2025d) that condemned South Africa's new land law, which seeks to confiscate some white farmland, and froze aid to the country. The order also condemned South Africa for taking Israel to the International Criminal Court and accusing Israeli leaders of genocide in Gaza. It's clear that hard-right groups in South Africa now have strong allies in Trump's White House and the MAGA movement. Trump has even offered white southern Africans, who he claims are being victimised, refugee status in the US. The goal of the Trump-Musk-AfriForum alliance is to preserve South Africa's highly iniquitous racial system of land ownership, which is a product of massive land grabs by white settlers and the displacement of black people from their lands.

Conclusion

Trump's assault on the global liberal order has empowered far-right movements with a dark history of racism and violence. These movements no longer espouse the racist theory of biological white superiority or 'scientific racism'. They believe instead that the 'white race' is being replaced demographically and culturally by non-white people through lax immigration laws, and that programmes that seek to correct historical racial injustices and foster inclusion and equity discriminate against whites and should be resisted.

One interesting dimension of the transnationalisation of hard-right movements is the role that tech billionaires with apartheid roots have played in their development. These billionaires and their far-right views found a home in America's racially charged environment when they moved to the US to pursue their careers. They financed Trump and the Republican Party and are part of the strategy to upend the global liberal order.

Previously operating within the confines of nation-states, hard-right movements have become transnational in membership, information-sharing, networking and mass activism. The cordon sanitaire that restricted them to the fringes of politics after the Second World War has been broken in many countries; and Trump has relentlessly pursued the grievances of these movements on immigration and DEI.

Speeches by senior government officials and Trump's executive orders clearly demonstrate a realignment of American power away from liberalism and towards hard-right groups in Europe and South Africa. The racial factor, which complicates recent shifts in the geopolitical landscape, is likely to influence the calculations of states as interests are realigned.

Trump and his new friends are unlikely to prevail in this new form of politics, given how far the world has come in combating racism and given the declining authority of the US in the global structure of power. But it's a challenge that the rest of the world will have to recognise and confront. The arc of the moral universe undoubtedly bends towards justice, as King observed, but it needs sustained pressure and vigilance to keep it on the right trajectory.

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