

What is Patriot Prayer? Who are the Proud Boys?

Patriot Prayer is a far-right political organization: in this case an association of newly active Christian bigots, low-key white nationalists, professional agitators, and opportunistic brawlers based in the area of Portland, Oregon, founded in late 2016 to defend the honor of the ascendant Trump presidency from the massive waves of social upheaval accompanying his election. Repeatedly since then, Patriot Prayer and their affiliates have rallied in support of an array of vacuous and American-sounding principles like “freedom,” “love,” and “truth,” while making common cause with an array of open white supremacists as well some non-white US ultra-nationalists and fascists along the way.

They have brutally attacked vulnerable individuals and populations, and have clashed with anti-fascists of various stripes—always under the auspices of supporting the billionaire president, closing the national borders, and championing figments of the democratic imagination like “free speech.”

Their leader Joey Gibson attempts to navigate a vague middle ground of reaction that maneuvers temporarily away from anything extreme enough to prevent his goal of forging a broad-based far-right populist movement. Gibson has aspirations toward seizing State power, having announced his run for U.S. Senate from Washington early in 2018. Two years after its formation, it is becoming clear that not only is Patriot Prayer not going away, but it is using its apparently protean political commitments to give impetus to what is becoming potentially the most significant up-welling of fascistic street mobilization in years.

Patriot Prayer uses dog-whistle politics—thinly-veiled or coded language meant to motivate the base of true believers who understand its references—to mobilize white rage against minorities. They have organized or have been present at a great many of the rallies and demonstrations of the past couple years associated with the term “Alt-Right” (itself an obscurantist euphemism which refers to the adherents of a

collection of ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi ideologies), including the high-profile battles of Berkeley which transpired throughout 2017.

In April of that year, an anti-Muslim bigot and frequenter of these events named Jeremy Christian murdered Ricky John Best and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche and seriously wounded Micah David-Cole Fletcher on a Portland MAX train after they had attempted to deescalate Christian’s harassment of 2 young Muslim girls. Similarly, August 2017’s “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, VA saw an anti-racist activist named Heather Heyer murdered (and several more seriously injured) when a fascist drove a car into the assembled counter-demonstrators. In the wake of these and other attacks, Gibson has weakly attempted to distance himself from outright racists and fascists (Patriot Prayer loves parading its token couple of non-white members), and denied that his movement is part of the Alt-Right.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Gibson’s obligatory gestures of disavowal of these murders – motivated in large part by his own light-vs-dark rhetoric and budding militancy – ring hollow. Before and after each new attack, nothing changes with this group. Several supporters of Patriot Prayer can be seen and heard to gloat over these and similar outrages, and go on making brazen threats or actually attacking their opponents in the streets.

The Proud Boys are an aspiring street gang who basically serve as the shock troops of Patriot Prayer, with whom their membership overlaps. According to founder Gavin McInnes (also co-founder of Vice Media), the Proud Boys are a “pro-Western fraternal organization” of men who “refuse to apologize for creating the modern world.” That is, they refuse to condemn patriarchy, genocide, colonization, and slavery. These apologists for the world of prisons, parking lots, and date-rape drugs have chapters across the United States and Canada, with several members in the Pacific Northwest. Their members explicitly gain status and advance through the orga-

nization by physically attacking anti-fascists and minorities at rallies and other events (such as the recent sexist and anti-choice attacks organized by PP/PB on people seeking clinic services in Olympia, capitol of Washington state) and by refraining from masturbation, an attempt to supercharge with virile energy their attempts to “meet women.” The Proud Boys have recently been alleged to have taken part in a vicious and calculated gang-rape in Portland.

The Proud Boys’ barely-hidden propensities for virulent racism, extreme patriarchal violence, and close association with blatant neo-Nazis are all underscored by the existence of their paramilitary wing, “The Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights,” (FOAK), for whom the white nationalist Augustus Sol Invictus once served as second-in-command. Furthermore, Jason Kessler, the white nationalist who organized the first “Unite the Right” rally in 2017 at which Heather Heyer was murdered, is a former Proud Boy. He was expelled after Heather’s murder in order for Proud Boys to save face. James Allsup, a white nationalist who attended Unite the Right in Charlottesville, also rallied with Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer in Seattle.

Most recently, on August 4th, Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys held a rally in Portland, OR and hid for several hours behind a massive formation of riot police. They waited it out until the latter dispelled the massive anti-fascist counter-demonstration with extreme force to then prowl the streets and attack random people of color and bystanders. In the clash with the cops, one anti-fascist sustained a severe wound when Portland PD intentionally blasted them in the back of the head with a concussion grenade at close-range. Likely, only the helmet worn by the demonstrator saved their life.

Patriot Prayer and Proud Boys may attempt to distance themselves from overt white nationalists and the Alt-Right, but the writing is on the wall. So far, it remains to be seen if the deaths and the injuries of the victims of these groups and their close allies have been in vain...