

Who's behind Project 2025?

At least 5 writers have history of racist remarks

Will Carless

USA TODAY

Former President Donald Trump has spent weeks distancing himself from Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation's 900-plus-page manifesto that seeks to create a blueprint for his next presidency. The effort "dismantles the unaccountable Deep State, taking power away from Leftist elites and giving it back to the American people and duly-elected President," as per its website.

Commentators and academics have been raising alarms. Project 2025, they say, is a deeply racist endeavor that is aimed at dismantling many protections and programs for Americans of color.

"Really, it's kind of a white supremacist manifesto," said Michael Harriot, a historian who wrote an article in July titled, "I read the entire Project 2025. Here are the top 10 ways it would harm Black America."

And a closer look at the named contributors to Project 2025 adds to the concern: A USA TODAY analysis found at least five of them have a history of racist writing or statements, or white supremacist activity.

They include Richard Hanania, who

See PROJECT 2025, Page 11A

Project 2025

Continued from Page 10A

for years wrote racist essays for white supremacist publications under a pseudonym until he was unmasked by a Huffington Post investigation last year.

Failed Virginia GOP Senate candidate Corey Stewart, another named contributor, has long associated with white supremacists and calls himself a protector of America's Confederate history tasked with "taking back our heritage."

One Project 2025 contributor wrote in his Ph.D. dissertation that immigrants have lower IQs than white native citizens, leading to "underclass behavior." Another dropped out of contention for a prestigious role at the Federal Reserve amid controversy over a racist joke about the Obamas.

The presence of contributors to Project 2025 who have published racist or offensive tropes comes as no surprise to academics and commentators who have warned about the endeavor for months.

The plan calls for the abolition of diversity, equity and inclusion programs in the federal government. It would severely limit the mailing of abortion pills and disband the Department of Education. It would replace the Department of Homeland Security with a more powerful agency to choke immigration. It would curtail or disband programs that experts say greatly benefit communities of color, including food stamps and Head Start.

"Project 2025 is a plan about how to regulate and control people of color," said Arjun Sethi, a civil rights lawyer and adjunct professor at Georgetown Law. "It seeks to regulate what they do with their bodies, how they advocate for their rights and how they build family and community – all while disregarding the historical injustices and contemporary persecution they have experienced."

It's not clear how much influence the contributors USA TODAY identified had on Project 2025. They are listed among scores of contributors to the document, and none would agree to an interview.

But even among the broader collection of think tanks, nonprofits and pundits on the author list, others have past controversies on the issue of race. Seven of the organizations on Project 2025's advisory board have been designated as extremist or hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center, according to a May report from Accountable.us, a non-partisan organization that tracks interest groups.

This proliferation of organizations and individuals with racist modus operandi is by design, not accident, Harriot said: "One of the things that you see when you read Project 2025 is not just

the racist dog whistles, but some ideas that were exactly lifted from some of the most extreme white supremacists ever."

After multiple requests from USA TODAY, the Heritage Foundation declined to address questions about the Project 2025 contributors and their past statements. On Tuesday, a day after USA TODAY first published this story online, Paul Dans, the director of Project 2025, stepped down from his position.

Contributor wrote for white supremacist websites

Hanania is a right-wing author and pundit who has built a reputation as an "anti-woke crusader" and become a favorite of prominent conservatives – including Ohio Sen. JD Vance, Trump's pick for vice president.

But earlier, Hanania pushed a far more extreme version of his views. In the early 2010s, writing as "Richard Hoste," Hanania "expressed support for eugenics and the forced sterilization of 'low IQ' people, who he argued were most often Black," the Huffington Post reported last August. "He opposed 'miscegenation' and 'race-mixing.' And once, while arguing that Black people cannot govern themselves, he cited the neo-Nazi author of 'The Turner Diaries,' the infamous novel that celebrates a future race war."

Hanania acknowledged writing the posts and has only partly renounced his past. Two days after the Huffington Post exposé, in a post on his website titled "Why I Used to Suck, and (Hopefully) No Longer Do," Hanania wrote, "When I was writing anonymously, there was no connection between the flesh and blood human being who would smile at a cashier or honk at someone in traffic, and the internet 'personality' who could just grow more rabid over time."

Vance's connection to Hanania was documented in a 2021 interview with conservative talk show host David Rubin – two years before Hanania began denouncing his racist past – when Vance described Hanania as a "friend" and a "really interesting thinker."

Vance and Hanania have also liked and commented each other's posts several times on social media platform X.

Richard Spencer, a white supremacist credited with creating the "alt-right" moniker, published several of Hanania's articles on the website Alternative-Right.com, including one in which Hanania wrote, "If the races are equal, why do whites always end up near the top and blacks at the bottom, everywhere and always?"

In a July interview, Spencer told USA TODAY that while Hanania may have moderated some of his views, "I think it's very clear that Richard is a race realist and eugenicist."

Hanania did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

A Confederate cheerleader and promoting the 'Great Replacement'

In a 2017 speech at the "Old South Ball" in Danville, Virginia, Stewart, an attorney who would become the 2018 Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate, told the crowd he was proud to stand next to a Confederate flag.

"That flag is not about racism, folks, it's not about hatred, it's not about slavery, it is about our heritage," Stewart said.

According to a 2018 New York Times profile of Stewart, white supremacists volunteered on his Senate campaign. "Several of his aides and advisers have used racist or anti-Muslim language, or maintained links to outspoken racists like Jason Kessler" – who helped organize the white-supremacist Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia – the Times reported.

Stewart did not respond to an email seeking comment. Kessler did not respond to a phone call. At least three contributors to Project 2025 have supported the racist "Great Replacement" theory, which contends that powerful Democrats and leftists are conspiring to change the demographics of the U.S. by ignoring or even encouraging illegal immigration.

Michael Anton, a former senior national security official in the Trump administration, wrote in a pseudonymous 2016 essay that "the ceaseless importation of Third World foreigners with no tradition of, taste for, or experience in liberty means that the electorate grows more left, more Democratic, less Republican, less republican, and less traditionally American with every cycle. As does, of course, the U.S. population."

Anton has also written several essays, including one for USA TODAY, arguing to end birthright citizenship. His arguments have been widely criticized as factually incorrect and misleading. In an opinion piece for the Washington Post, Tufts University politics professor Daniel Drezner called them "very racist."

Anton did not respond to a request for comment.

Another contributor is Stephen Moore, who in 2019 withdrew his name for consideration for the Federal Reserve Board amid scrutiny over misogynistic and racist jokes and commentary. Moore made a joke about Trump removing the Obamas from public housing when he took office and was widely mocked when he tried to clear up the joke in a TV interview. He also had a history of writing articles viewed as disparaging toward women. Moore did not respond to a request for comment. The 2009 dissertation of Project 2025 contributor Jason Richwine was titled "IQ and Immigration Policy." The thesis includes statements such as: "No one knows whether Hispanics will ever

reach IQ parity with whites, but the prediction that new Hispanic immigrants will have low-IQ children and grandchildren is difficult to argue against."

Richwine resigned from his position at the Heritage Foundation in 2013 amid controversy over his research. The paper, and Richwine's defense of it, were widely decried as racist, bigoted and scientifically incorrect. It didn't help Richwine that his thesis was uncovered in the midst of controversy over an immigration study he co-wrote for Heritage that was roundly criticized by liberals and conservatives alike.

"Had he not in his dissertation argued that Hispanic immigration ought to be limited on grounds of inferior Hispanic intelligence, he would have endured the firestorm over the risible Heritage immigration study," read an analysis in The Economist.

Richwine did not respond to a request for comment. "The fact that they consulted individuals with such abhorrent views to develop this plan is further evidence of just how un-American these proposals are," Tony Carrk, executive director of Accountable.us, told USA TODAY. "The idea that the next conservative administration might replace 50,000 government experts with extremists like this should concern every American."

Trump's connections to Project 2025

Trump has been distancing himself from Project 2025. "I disagree with some of the things they're saying, and some of the things they're saying are absolutely ridiculous and abysmal," he wrote on Truth Social July 5.

At a July campaign rally in Michigan, Trump told the crowd that Project 2025 is "seriously extreme."

"Some on the severe right came up with this Project '25," Trump said. "I don't even know, some of them I know who they are, but they're very, very conservative. They're sort of the opposite of the radical left." But reports show at least 31 of the 38 official authors and editors of Project 2025 have a connection to Trump. Vance has his own connections to Project 2025. He wrote the foreword for a book being released later this year by Kevin Roberts, one of the manifesto's key architects, as well as a glowing review of the book published on Amazon praising Roberts' "genuinely new future for conservatism." The review has since been removed. Trump has pointed to his own policy manifesto, "Agenda 47" – the next U.S. president will be the 47th – as evidence that he doesn't plan to use Project 2025 if he wins. Agenda 47 focuses on the same broad issues as Project 2025: education, immigration and crime. It also includes policy on the LGBTQ+ community and welfare programs.