



**Main Street Project Civic Engagement Call 4/28/08**  
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**“HATE BASED ORGANIZING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES”**  
**Eric Ward speaker, Center for New Community**

I want to thank Main Street Project for their incredible work through the Midwest and all the way through the West. It's exciting to get to know you all and folks on the ground.

I would like to spend 25 minutes addressing 3 topics this morning the first is the nature of organized bigotry and hate activity in the Midwest, mountain states and Pacific Northwest. How extreme organizations and extreme politics have mainstreamed themselves into the American body politics. Third how to look at suggestions how those of us who are engaged in rural organizing what specific tools can we begin to use to ensure our communities are not ripped apart or not divided by groups who seek to divide our communities based around race, religion, gender, immigration, other issues

I want to start out by saying it is important to realize that hate organizations whether they run the gamut from neo Nazi skinheads to the more main street supremacist groups anti immigrant organizations they don't bring racism, Anti-Semitism or xenophobia to our communities they simply use the bigotry that already exists to divide our communities.

In the long term the best defense we have in and against these type of organizations is by engaging and confronting directly some of the fears and stereotypes we hold in our communities and ensuring that both our public leaders and everyday community members are challenged to be better community members by confronting head on the bigotry and discrimination that exists within our communities.

With that said I want to set a framework of white nationalism and extremism, I'd like to start talking about it with an addiction I have with CNN, I love, love, love CNN, I have to regulate my cable time at home because I constantly have CNN on, watching it since it first came on air back in the 80s. 10 years ago they started CNN 2 – I'm switching back and forth between commercials so I can get real continuous news. When it first started they had the thing about the minute, the weather minute sports minute, they would go around and sell the 30 minute news cycle and they used to have this thing called the fashion minute (every Friday) Rio De Janeiro, London, Tokyo, NY they would

MSP Civic Engagement conference call  
4/28/08

show off the latest fashions. I had this love hate relationship with the fashion minute because I would love to sit and watch it, watch the extreme fashions come down the runways and go “God I hate that, no one is ever going to wear that.” And I was right, most fashion with the big heels; gold embroidered, big 20-inch hats are never worn. You may see them at the Grammy’s or the White House dinner but after that they go into the closet and you never see them again. As I was watching the fashion minutes though I begin to see something interesting that those fashions that seemed so extreme so way out there no one was ever going to wear them begin to show up in clothing stores, whether it was the Bon Marché, or May companies, TJ Max or Ross the fashions that were coming down the runways, were influencing the kind of clothing people would wear. It wasn’t extreme but the influence was definitely there.

I like to point out to my friends back in the 1980's 70's fashions began to come back down the runway with bell bottoms, big heel shoes, elephant collars, paisley, halter-tops and I remember at that time calling my roommates, and saying CNN fashion has gone too far. 70's once is enough for everyone--it's never going to happen again. I was wrong, you know as well as I do by the 90's, 70's fashion was back in style. Not only were they back in clothing but they were influencing the shows people were watching--we should not forget the number one rated show was “That 70's show.” Even Wal-Mart who has been destroying rural communities couldn't help but jump into the picture, creating a whole campaign with the 1970's happy face running around slashing prices and destroying communities at the same time. The 70's were back in style why do I tell this story I tell this story I tell this story to remind folks that in the same way the fashion industry seeks to influence what happens in the cultural mainstream so too does the white supremacist movement seek to influence the political and political main street movement, and like the fashion industry they have been just as successful.

Let me give you an example. There was an individual by the name of David Duke. You may or may not have heard of him-- a long time leader in the white supremacist movement, he sold “Mein Kampf” out of his campaign office, “Mein Kampf” is Adolph Hitler’s autobiography, it translates into English as “my struggle”-- he was the head of the imperial wizards, a knight of Klu Klux Klan, started a number of Neo Nazi orgs in the U.S. David Duke has run as a Democratic, and a Republican. David Duke has run as an independent, David Duke has run for political office so many times that I don't really want to get into the details about all those different runs. When David Duke started running for public office people were outraged. They couldn't believe that a white supremacist would have the gall to run for public office. It was so extreme, so “out there.” People did what they do when they are confronted with bigotry, they held marches, they organized in communities, they elected people, they registered people to vote, they wrote op-eds, they campaigned heartily against David Duke. David Duke lost! But, Duke turned around ran for office again. People were outraged, he lost again, he ran again and again was defeated. By the time David Duke ran for office again (the 4th time) people were done with him, he was so extreme, so way out there it was clear that he was never going to win for public office. People felt there were other important

issues that they needed to pay attention to, issues of poverty, losing jobs, schools decaying-- all the important issues that our communities face everyday and people thought we need to stop paying so much attention to David Duke and put our energy into the real issues.

It appeared to be the right thing. David Duke continued to run and lose. Finally, in the 1980's he won a seat in the Louisiana House. That didn't stop David Duke. In the early 90's., he begin to run for Governor-- he lost, but he won the majority of the white vote. This meant that if the people of color could not vote in that state--this white supremacist that was so extreme, so "way out there" that no one would take him seriously-- would have taken the Governorship of Louisiana. People begin to freak out. They wanted to know how could this happen? How could this occur? They did what most of us do in social non profits when we freak out-- people did a lot of polling and focus groups. I think we could have told them what happened over a couple of 6 dollar meals at McDonalds and a few conversations. What was clear was that David Duke had bombarded the public for so long with his ideas that they no longer seemed so extreme. They no longer seemed so" out there." They had become part of the main stream public discourse in our country.

It's interesting, David Duke wrote an autobiography a decade ago called "My Awakening"-- if it sounds similar to Hitler's "Mein Kampf"--don't worry, David Duke assures us that it is "purely coincidental." However, if you read this book, David Duke talks about his political platform which hasn't really changed since he first started running for office in the 70's. And, he talks about what his important pieces were. Let's look at what this "extreme white supremacist" was campaigning for-- that we all thought was so "way out there" that we thought it would never happen. The first thing he wanted to dismantle and end was affirmative action in the US. I like to remind my friends that it was David Duke not the Republican party and Ronald Reagan who coined the term, "reverse discrimination" and "reverse racism." The second thing he wanted to do is pass a "national English only law" in this country. I like to point out to friends today that 16 states have passed "some" form of English only legislation in our country. The third thing--David Duke will tell us today that he has been extremely successful at mainstreaming his methods-- David Duke wanted to stop non white immigration into the US. We can look at draconian anti immigration laws being passed at the local, state and federal levels and draw our own conclusions about the success of that.

David Duke would tell us today that he has been extremely successful at mainstreaming his methods. I like to point out that David Duke did not do this by himself because I do not like David Duke (I'm not giving him much credit) he had a lot of help. He had a lot of help from the majority of people because David Duke, representing the white supremacist movement, figured out some very key tools to move this debate. The first thing he realized is Americans don't like overt bigotry. It offends us. It is the reason we respond to the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming, a gay man who was beaten to death with outrage. It is the reason we respond to the Klu Klux Klan marching down

the street-- it offends the very notion of who we are. However, David Duke and his ilk realize, if you take that bigotry and coat it—it is, as my niece says, “we will drink it up like grape Kool-Aid.”

If you take an example of how it works. Close your eyes-- I’m going to give you a word-- listen to the word, what it looks like, what it sounds like (immigration). And when your ready open your eyes. Here is one of the biggest secrets white supremacists learned that we haven’t accepted. When the majority of the Americans hear the word “immigration” they do not envision Canadians coming down from the North. What they are imagining in their heads is brown skinned people coming up from the South. What the white supremacist movement figured out, is that they could have a debate on race without ever mentioning the word race or racism. All they needed to say simply was the word “immigration.” Our imagination does the rest.

What else they learned while everybody else was talking about Y2K-- I don't know if you remember Y2K but back in the winter of '99, our phone was ringing off the hook. Reporters calling, and asking, “what would hate groups be doing January 1, 2000 when Y2K occurred? What were social justice people going to be doing? Computers going down, no electricity and every social justice activist get a well-deserved vacation. My response was White supremacists would not be doing anything January 1, 2000. Probably doing what I would be doing--staying home and popping popcorn and watching Lawrence Welk. The reason why is that the white supremacists were not talking about Y2K-- they were talking about 2050. Why 2050? Now it is no mystery to us-- the reason why?, the US census bureau said that 2050 would be when there would be no clear racial majority. How the white supremacists framed it was that white's would be in the minority, which is not an accurate portrayal. The white supremacist group was not the only group to get involved with it. Time magazine in the late '80's early '90's did it twice with two front covers on the “browning of America.” You see, this rhetoric percolating now with the anti immigrant movement theory of reconquista-- reconquest of America by Latinos. You see this in the dehumanization of immigrants-- the idea of a takeover of America.

Why were the white supremacists excited about this 2050 and being in the minority? They were excited because everywhere they were looking around the world Religious and racial nationalism was on the rise from the national front in France from the Quebec separatist movement in Canada, to Fiji, to the breakup of the former Yugoslavia to the Middle East, to Germany where there weren't dozens of Neo Nazis skin heads gathering-- but thousands taking to the streets. Everywhere they saw that Religious and racial nationalism was on the rise. If it happened in Europe, why can't it happen in the US? We would point and say we have seen a significant shift in extremist organizations-- that most of the organizations and individuals begin to move to anti immigration. Groups like the Council of Conservative Citizens based out of St Louis, MO--which is the direct descendant of the White Citizen Council--working on segregation in the '50's and '60's began taking immigration on as key issue. Other

organizations have already begun to lay groundwork around the country. And, I want to talk about that now and the impact it has on the Midwest. If we don't know--immigration through the work of the white supremacist groups will remain for decades the most volatile human rights issue in the US. We should remember that the issue of immigration is not about really immigration and refugees for the anti immigrant movement. I would argue with you today if there was not one immigrant or refugee in the US today, we would still have an anti immigrant movement.

This movement is not looking to solve any issues around immigration or migration what it is looking to do is force the debate on "who is American and what does it look like."

For it--immigration is an issue of Civil Rights, or national identity. So what we know is that the nations new immigrant workforce is comprised of people of color from poor nations, impacted by globalization. These are people who have made great sacrifices for family, employment and new opportunity. The response to this landscape has been that the white nationalist movement across the USA has formed anti immigrant organizations. The last 12 years anti immigrant organizations have grown from about 20-- currently we are tracking over 450. Within the nexus of these anti immigration organizations, the Federation for American Immigration reform is the lynchpin of contemporary anti immigrant activities.

FAIR's affect can be felt from Minnesota to Long Island, to Nebraska to Chicago, to Phoenix to Montana and to other local communities across the country. The Federation for American Immigration Reform has managed to fuel existing anti immigration sentiment to set the terms of the current immigration debate. For more than two decades FAIR through strategic media advocacy, lobbying, effective use of the internet and extensive grassroots network has distracted the nation from the real work of immigration policy reform by elevating xenophobia to a new legitimate policy position. By standing against any reform not grounded in exclusionary politics FAIR has exasperated the immigration problems facing this nation. What we know that neither democracy nor human dignity is served when FAIR and its allies seek immigration policies that deny basic human rights and fail to realize realities of migration flows in an era of globalization

How successful has FAIR been? Congressional passage of the Real ID act of 2005 was the first victory for anti immigration organizations. Emboldened by the passage of the real ID act and by their defeat of conference immigration reform. Recently 90 members of congress several months ago joined together to support legislation in 2008 to deny citizenship to children born in US of undocumented parents. How significant is that? What is significant this is an intentional misreading of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to the US constitution which is the foundation of definition of citizenship to this country-- which is one to the struggle of African Americans and others who fought to end slavery through the civil war? Only an intentional xenophobic misreading of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment would permit such a stature to be considered legal.

FAIR track record and success should be a growing source of concern for all advocates of human dignity particular those of us in the Midwest. Since the defeat of the conference immigration reform in the fall of '07 FAIR has been actively positioning its local and state leaders to advance draconian anti immigration legislation at the local and federal levels. Beyond the beltway anti immigration policies are sweeping through city councils and state legislators at an alarming pace. The number of state laws enacted in '07 was tripled since 2006 an idea of that 2006, 84 laws enacted in 2007, 240 laws enacted. Immigration currently today as we talk is being debated in all 50 states according to the national conference and state legislators. Some 1,562 bills were introduced in all 50 states. Laws enacted in 46 states in 2007 compared to 32 states in 2006.

Where does FAIR come into play? Well the lead staff for FAIR when asked about recent anti immigration legislation in Oklahoma told the local newspaper that FAIR helped pen the Oklahoma bill as nearly every state wide enforcement proposal in the nation. FAIR has provided financial support, training materials, and direction, drafted anti immigration and offered supporting testimony and political pressure to get these bills passed. Across the country immigrant and refugees have also come under attack. The current fears such as security concerns in the post 911 world, economic strains on state and local government and unsteady job markets have been used successfully by anti immigration organizations to galvanize support for FAIR's agenda. Moreover, FAIR has helped spark the creation of more than 350 state and local groups in more than 40 states.

The rise of the minutemen as we have talked about before is another dramatic example of the anti immigrant landscape. What began as small bands of ageing pseudo vigilantes on the Arizona, New Mexico borders, minutemen are organizing well into the interior, Tennessee, Washington, Illinois and at least a dozen other states. Has its own political action committee, which gives tens of thousands of dollars around to candidates around the country around election season. To draw it back to the extremist white supremacist movement I would like to point out the minuteman was not the first group to patrol border to seek media attention. In the '70's early '80's, David Duke and Tom Metzger (runs organization white Aryan resistance)--you might be familiar with him in late '80s he was held liable in civic trail of a murder death of an Ethiopian student in Portland Oregon who was attacked by racist skinheads. These two joined forces and started the first border patrol organization on the border when they were both members of clan to garner media attention. What is happening now with hate activity what we are seeing is a movement that has been effective in mainstreaming its message, mainstreaming its activity to the American body politic.

In responding to this I want to talk about some tools that I think are very effective. The first is that though we have to deal with day-to-day public policy fights that are occurring in our communities and at the state and regional levels we must continue to advance and be proactive. It is incumbent on us to respond to the anti immigrant movements

and extremist organizations as well. What I would suggest in this first tool rather than looking at our organizing and our activities as us against them us against those we are trying to hold accountable we kind of look at this at a three sided fight there is another social movement on the scene that is also trying to influence public policy and state law and that social movement is the anti immigrant movement or the white nationalist movement depending on how you try to define it. And that movement must be responded to it must be responded to by isolating it and we isolate it by being clear that it is a bigoted movement and show the public the bigoted statements, and associations that these individuals have. That allowing the public to make a moral choice to allow public officials to draw a clear moral barrier against hate by not associating with organizations with extremist politics that include ties to white supremacists.

Inoculate the general public and what I mean by inoculating that we have to compete for the constituency that the anti immigrant movement is trying to recruit into it's base. WE do that by building large based coalitions in our communities to give real answers compared to the made up answers that anti immigrant organizations are using. Which are instead of scapegoating immigrants for lack of jobs or lack of resources, challenge communities to build real consensus to do not fall into laziness of bigotry but to roll up our sleeves and make a real commitment to not divide neighbor against neighbor. Build a real movement on the ground hold our public officials responsible for associating with anti immigration movements. I think for instance when you think of FAIR I think of their satellite organizations, the list of front groups: The Coalition for the Future American Worker, the Center for Immigration Studies, The United Secure American Coalition, 911 Families for Secure America, The Immigration Reform Law Institute, State Legislators for Legal Immigration, Fair Congressional Task Force, Coalition for Secure Drivers License, US Immigration Reform PAC, their Hispanic front—"You Don't Speak For Me Coalition", their African American front called "Choose Black America", the US House Immigration Reform Caucus which is led by former FAIR lobbyist Rep Brian Bilbricht--for those of you who don't know the US House Immigration Reform Caucus makes up nearly a fourth of the quarter of house of rep currently. The last two, Mayors and County Executives for immigration reform and the last US Incorporated. These are nearly a dozen of FAIR front groups that operate at the state and local level often providing testimony and resources.

Part of our work is educating and unveiling for other folks who these organizations are and who these individuals are as well. For more information Go to [www.newcommunity.org](http://www.newcommunity.org), [www.buildingdemocracy.org](http://www.buildingdemocracy.org). And finally what I want to say is that what will turn back the clock of anti immigrant moving, is our ability to close ranks and send a strong message at the local level that we will not let our any member of communities be isolated, targeted, regardless of their race or their religion or their ethnic status or their immigration status in this country. What we understand this is about something much larger than the issue of immigration. What we are dealing on right now we are asking public leaders and all Americans of good will all neighbors in our community to reject bigotry directed against ethnic groups against their families their

neighbors whether they are immigrant or not that this is not an immigrant or anti immigrant issue. It is a choice to standing up for an America that values respect for human dignity or one that tolerates bigotry and intolerance to reign supreme.