

Benjamin R.
Teitelbaum



War

The Return of
Traditionalism and
the Rise of the
Populist Right

for

'Insightful
and immersive'
Sunday Times

Eternity

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WAR FOR ETERNITY

'Argues that Steve Bannon's rise, alongside counterparts in countries such as Brazil and Russia, can be traced to Traditionalism, an obscure school of thought that loathes everything to do with modernity . . .

If you are interested in exploring the intellectual traditions that underpin today's populist revolt, this is a useful place to start'

Matthew Goodwin, *Sunday Times*

'Alarming, with a terrible, pertinent relevance . . . a book to make us tremble . . . we can only hope that our democracies are strong enough to withstand' Julia Langdon, *The Tablet*

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'The author has penned a fast-paced account that reads like a Dan Brown novel. Rich in cinematic description, it cuts from ornate hotel lobbies to Caucasian battlefields, from Steve Bannon's couch to a Hare Krishna ashram in Mumbai . . . gripping, and convincingly makes the case that eastern-themed ideas have influenced thinkers on the right' Eric Kaufmann, *Financial Times*

'It is difficult for the casual observer to keep track of all the strange and esoteric voices in contemporary post-liberal politics, of the fine lines between integralists and occultists, white supremacist neo-pagans and religious members of the alt-Right. But Benjamin Teitelbaum's *War for Eternity*, a study of one particular strain of far-right thought, the 19th-century occult school of traditionalism, is a necessary primer . . . briskly written analysis-cum-reportage'

Tara Isabella Burton, *Washington Examiner*

'Excellent . . . *War for Eternity* works as a kind of anthropological study, but also as a beautiful piece of investigative journalism . . .

Benjamin Teitelbaum builds his argument from many hours of in-depth interviews and, where inattentive observers routinely impute randomness, he manages to point out a conscious pattern of rationality in the rise of far-right movements in disparate countries like Russia, the USA and Brazil' Gabriel Trigueiro, *O Globo*

'Teitelbaum's quest to find the Traditionalist roots of these men is dogged . . . a curious tale of hidden ideas operating in the undergrowth of the far-right populist revolt' Martin Ivens, *The Times*

'A breathless account . . . a provocative book' *Kirkus Reviews*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Benjamin Teitelbaum is a professor at the University of Colorado Boulder. His first book, *Lions of the North*, was widely reviewed and critically acclaimed. He has published opinion pieces in *Foreign Policy*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and the *Atlantic*, as well as multiple op-eds in the *New York Times*, all of them dealing with far-right politics and activism.

BENJAMIN R.
TEITELBAUM

War for Eternity

*The Return of Traditionalism and
the Rise of the Populist Right*



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KEY PLACES IN *WAR FOR ETERNITY*

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A man encountered a tiger in the forest. Unable to flee or subdue the animal by force, he chose a third option, and leapt on the tiger's back. The man knew that if he was careful and patient he could ride the tiger until it was old and weak. Then he could clutch its neck and begin to squeeze.

—*East Asian parable*

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I AM BY TRADE AN ETHNOGRAPHER, NOT A JOURNALIST. I am trained in a method of academic research where scholars observe, interact with, and sometimes live among the people they study for extended periods of time, a central goal being one of empathy: to understand and interpret the ways they see the world. Ethnography has often involved the study of the poor and disenfranchised by the powerful. There are ideological and practical reasons for this. Scholars have tended to see political virtue in empathizing with and giving voice to the marginalized, and the same people are often more accessible to—alternately, less able to resist—study. Ethnography isn't the best tool for producing impassioned criticism of its subjects. Its use in the study of powerful elites is rare.

This book is not a proper ethnography, but rests instead in the blurred space between that method and investigative journalism. It is based primarily on firsthand accounts and interviews, most conducted between June 2018 and September 2019, including over twenty hours of on-the-record interviews with Stephen K. Bannon. My writing also draws from informal time I spent with

and around the book's main characters or in the ideological and social worlds they inhabit. As a scholar, my instinct is to relate the stories and events I encountered to academic discussions. However, because of the timeliness and broad relevance of the book's content, I have limited academic commentary and placed most in endnotes.

Virtually all of the exchanges and statements I write about were recorded as part of on-the-record interviews. In cases where a recording device was not present, I have contacted participants afterward to confirm transcriptions made from my memory of a verbal exchange. My ability to perform these and similar tasks varied, because I had differing levels of access to those I studied. With Steve Bannon, John Morgan, and Jason Jorjani, I was able to have not only extended visits and observations but also rich dialogues about my analyses and lingering questions. My relationship with them has been much closer to that I am accustomed to as a scholar. With others, notably Aleksandr Dugin and Olavo de Carvalho, interactions were more limited and formalized, consisting to a large degree of interview time and little else.

This becomes challenging when tracing interactions between those I engaged with closely and those I did not, as well as re-creating conversations and actions I did not witness. Key instances of this are the prologue and chapters 2, 4, 8, 10, and 12. I advise readers that reported spoken and inner dialogues in these chapters come from interviews I conducted later—months later in the case of chapter 12, years later in the others. I have made an editorial decision to recontextualize those statements based on my understanding of past events, and in the case of chapter 12, based on an informal review of the text by one of the participants (Bannon) but not the other (Dugin). At best, I will have captured the dialogue and events that once took place; at worst, I will have decontextualized thoughts and expressions. Readers can trust, nonetheless, that extended quotations and

substantive inner dialogues are statements that were made to me by the figures in question in on-the-record interviews or verified afterward. Note that though Steve Bannon and I reviewed informally sections from the prologue and chapters 2 and 12, he has not formally reviewed these quoted materials nor any others, and this despite intentions to do so on his part and considerable effort from me (circa fifty text messages or emails to him and his handlers sent from October through November 2019, plus one meeting in D.C. and one trip to New York City with a canceled meeting). Note also that I have lightly edited the grammar of verbal statements by non-English speakers. Note also that I have changed the names of certain secondary individuals.

PROLOGUE

HIS CAR ROLLS SLOWLY ATOP THE COBBLESTONES OF Via del Babuino, toward the Piazza del Popolo—the People’s Square—where crowds swirl round a two-thousand-year-old Egyptian obelisk before the gazes of stone lions, demons, and dogs. It’s a warm Rome morning in November 2018, and Russian philosopher and political activist Aleksandr Dugin is headed to one of the city’s most exclusive addresses for a meeting he has sworn never to speak of.

He steps out onto the street just shy of the piazza and walks in among the white arches of the opulent Hotel de Russie. Glancing through the lobby and its rear windows, he sees the terraced gardens framing the courtyard and the outdoor Stravinskij Bar behind it, lush even in fall with palm trees, poplars, sculpted vines, and shrubs. Dugin doesn’t linger. He passes through the lobby and turns up the stairs, where he is greeted by a handler who walks him onward, down a hall, through another set of doors, and into a suite and the outstretched arms of Stephen K. Bannon.

They exchange smiles and pleasantries while Bannon looks

Dugin over, studying the Russian's marble-blue eyes and his signature long grizzled beard—an emblem of another place and another time. “Incredible,” Bannon says. “Can you imagine what Washington would think?”

Good question. Dugin was banned from traveling to the United States and Canada in 2015 after allegedly calling for a genocide in Ukraine. His international reputation, justified or not, as the mad mastermind of Vladimir Putin's geopolitical agenda makes him particularly poisonous for someone like Bannon. Back in the States, Donald Trump's successful presidential campaign has been under criminal investigation for over a year and a half amid allegations it coordinated and colluded with the Russian government during the 2016 election. Bannon managed that campaign, and although those who worked under and around him are falling to the investigation as it churns on—three high-profile figures have pled guilty in the past weeks alone—he himself remained untouched. Now he is standing face-to-face with Russia's most notorious ideologue, an inspiration not only to Putin's geopolitics but to the Russian leader's radicalism as well.

They are in one of the hotel's private rooms and will remain there all day, hidden from the white-clad clerks, concierges, and bellhops below; from the bustle of the piazza outside; from the metastasizing hunt for Russian influence in the U.S. government that rages across the Atlantic. Risks abound, but this couldn't wait any longer. Both men want to influence each other, and for Bannon, this entails bringing Dugin to his side, and Russia to America's. How? By leveraging a bond between him and his guest that few know about, and even fewer would understand.



ABOUT EIGHT HOURS LATER, they emerge from the room, shaking hands and promising to meet again.

“You are a very different kind of person, Mr. Bannon.”

“You, too, brother.”

Reverent, irreverent till the end. Bannon’s handlers start to brief him on his dinner plans. Dugin turns back down the stairs, moving through the hotel lobby and out into the dark Rome night, where his car is waiting. For all the time they have spent together, there is still much left unsaid. In truth, Dugin regards Bannon as more than simply “different,” more in fact than a mere person. This American emerged from a wasteland, a society forged in modernism with no connection to its soil, no connection to history, and no sacred roots. To be American is to be without Tradition, which has made Bannon’s rise all the more spectacular. For there, among the ruins of modernity and materialism—in the midnight kingdom, at the midnight hour—a sudden blast of light. The Russian sees Bannon’s rise to power as the beginning of a successful revolt against the modern world, one foretold by ancient mystics and detailed in the writings of underground twentieth-century spiritualists. Bannon isn’t a person; he’s an eschatological sign.

They may disagree about geopolitics, and their careers may have had ups and downs. It doesn’t matter. They are differentiated men, men of the spirit, men against time—part of the same transcendental unity. *We are Traditionalists*, Dugin thinks to himself, *and it is our time*.

PILLARS OF TRADITION

I TURNED ON MY RECORDER. “SO MY FIRST—MY MAIN question is, are you a Traditionalist?”

Steve Bannon pondered this question as he sat down at the table across from me, framed by windows opening onto the skyline of Manhattan’s Upper East Side. It was June 2018 and we were in one of the most exclusive hotels in the neighborhood. I had given Bannon’s code name to the reception desk. Soon uniformed staff whisked me up to his luxurious penthouse apartment, in the middle of which he presided, swarmed by assistants meeting his every request. *He looks better in person*, I thought, fresh out of the shower with his hair slicked back and face shaved. Tossed onto the couch behind him, however, was his signature green and brown barn jacket—ratty, worn, unbecoming on any body, and particularly on Bannon’s when he was at his most rumpled and ruddy. The jacket had itself become an object of caricature and ridicule in pop culture, an emblem of the ugliness many saw in the man himself and his ideas; ugliness that had been the preoccupation of exasperated and outraged liberals throughout Europe and North America who were struggling to

make sense of his many contradictions and the possibility that he still wielded influence in their societies and beyond.

He took a sip of his black coffee. “It depends what you mean. And this is off the record today. Later, we can see.”

Click.

Only a few seconds had passed since I had turned my recorder on, then off, but what Steve said during the interval was richly revealing. My question caused him to hesitate and retreat; I doubt he would have done this had I asked about the sensational labels he is so often described with these days, like *white supremacist*, *white nationalist*, or *neo-Nazi*. His caution indicated that he knew exactly what I meant by Traditionalism, that he took the question seriously, and that he knew certain answers could be damning. It meant that the effort on my part—a year of emails and text messages, false alarm trips to the airport, and a flight to New York City across two time zones on little more than a hunch—had been worth it.

By Traditionalism—with a capital T—we were referring to an underground philosophical and spiritual school with an eclectic if minuscule following throughout the past hundred years. When combined with anti-immigrant nationalism, however, it was often a sign of a rare and profound ideological radicalism, and that is why I follow it. I am a junior professor and scholar from Colorado specializing in the contemporary far right. For nearly a decade I have devoted myself to studying its personalities, life stories, ideologies, and cultural expressions, preferably through in-person observations and direct interactions. It’s complicated work—technically, intellectually, ethically—and it has resulted in a steady stream of speculations and suspicions among my friends and those who know me personally as to how I could persist with, even enjoy, what I do. Indeed, my interest in the subject has various roots, including fear and alarm but also the thrill of discovery and the lessons brought by the unearthing

of deeper complexities in places I expected only to find brutal dullness. The timeliness of the subject became an unexpected incentive as well. To study the contemporary radical right is to study the most transformative political movement of the early twenty-first century. It is to witness history.

For years I regarded Traditionalism as the curious prerogative of the most marginalized members of an already marginalized cause—the hallmark of a handful of intellectuals in the radical right disinclined toward skinhead street gangs or populist party politics. Few people knew much about it, not even some expert scholars and journalists, because it just didn't seem consequential. I would introduce it in my classrooms to show students that the people I studied could be not just scary but weird, too. Amid startling political gains for nationalist, anti-immigrant forces in the twenty-first century, Traditionalists on the right appeared to be carrying on with a fantasy role-playing game—like *Dungeons & Dragons* for racists, as a student once put it. It was the sort of thing that “serious,” practical-minded activists on the radical right fled from as they charged toward burgeoning political opportunities and the chance to brand themselves as viable leaders.

That's why I was shocked when media reports surfaced around the 2016 U.S. presidential election that Steve Bannon, then chief strategist to President Trump and the purported mastermind of Trump's campaign, had been recorded name-dropping Traditionalism's key figures. That an individual with such remarkable power and influence even knew about them was almost more than I could believe. How had he come in contact with Traditionalism? What did it say about him, his visions for the United States and the world? And who else was he speaking to about it?

I asked myself whether it was crazy to think he might speak to *me* about it, too. I'm not a political scientist or a journalist—my main department at the university was ethnomusicology, and that

was more likely to confuse than impress. But I had rare insight into the fusion of Traditionalism and right-wing politics, as well as a network of insider contacts years in the making to help me study it. It was enough to prompt me to try, though not enough to make me feel as though I belonged as I sat there in front of him; a man who, for a period of time at least, had been one of the most powerful people on the planet, and whom I had managed to freeze with a single query.

But let me back up first and explain what both Steve and I knew when we met.



IT MAY SOUND simple and familiar: Traditionalism. It is anything but.

In casual conversation, we use the word *traditionalist* to describe a person who prefers doing things the old-fashioned way, who believes that life used to be better and is critical of new trends. The kind of Traditionalism I'm talking about may incidentally overlap with that, but it is far more complicated and bizarre. To introduce ourselves to the way Traditionalists think, we'll do best to start by looking at what they reject, for that is far easier to understand than what they champion. They claim to oppose modernity, another concept that sounds deceptively familiar. While we tend to think of *modern* as meaning something that is new or updated, they speak about modernity the way a historian or a social scientist would, as both a method for organizing social life and a period of time when that method came to predominate Europe and the Europeanized world, which is to say generally the 1800s and forward. Modernization, to paint in broad strokes, involves the retreat of public religion in favor of reason. Corresponding to this, it entails a weakening of the symbolic in favor of the literal, and a declining interest in things

that aren't easily mathematicized and quantified—spirit, emotions, the supernatural—in favor of those that are, namely material things. Modernization also involves the organization of greater and greater masses of people for the sake of more powerful political mobilization (nations and colonialism) or industrial production and consumption of goods. This leads to attempts to standardize social life so that mass populations may more easily be created. Finally, modernization centers on the belief that through human innovation we can gain a better world than the one we have. A faith in progress, in other words, which in the realm of Western politics has tended to show itself in calls for greater freedom and equality.

Traditionalists aspire to be everything modernity is not—to commune with what they believe are timeless, transcendent truths and lifestyles rather than to pursue “progress.” Some Traditionalists work their values into a system of thought far beyond the pale of what counts as modern left or right politics: some even say that it is beyond fascism. Consequently, to the extent that it has infused the thinking of right-wing anti-immigrant, populist, and nationalist actors, it has done so awkwardly. It is anti-capitalist, for instance, and can be anti-Christian. It condemns the nation-state as a modernist construct and celebrates aspects of Islam and the Eastern world more generally. Sound right-wing?

Indeed, the patriarch of Traditionalism was a Muslim convert from France named René Guénon. Tall and thin, with the daintiest of mustaches, he died in 1951 in Cairo, having traded his Western suits for white robes and a turban and having changed his name to Abd al-Wahid Yahya. He embraced Islam while also recognizing it as only one of multiple valid paths toward a greater end. Guénon and his followers believed there once was a religion—the Tradition, the core, or the perennial Tradition—that has been lost, its values and concepts surviving today only in

fragments across different faith practices. Like the occurrence of a similar physical trait in separate species, commonalities among different belief systems testify to a common ancestor—namely, the original core religion. And for many Traditionalists, inter-religious agreement is most apparent among the so-called Indo-European religions, notably Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the pre-Christian pagan religions of Europe.

Some believed that Catholicism also covertly preserved pre-Christian Indo-European truths. Guénon disagreed, although he thought that Sufi Islam had performed such a task. He aspired to live as a Muslim, regarding investment in a single living Tradition a virtue. But though he avoided religious syncretism in his own daily practice, his writings and those of his followers sought to fuse the wisdom of the various faiths and thereby illuminate the pillars of the Tradition.

So what is *it*—the Tradition? What are the beliefs and values it channels, and how should they be implemented? You'll seldom hear anyone offer details; Traditionalists often speak in broad generalizations. Nonetheless, their thinking tends to be framed by a peculiar understanding of time and society. Let's start with time. Even if we think of our own lives as having a beginning, a middle, and an end, Traditionalists follow Hinduism in believing that human history has always cycled through four distinct ages: from a gold age to silver to bronze and then to dark before moving back to gold and starting the cycle over again. *Gold*, of course, refers to virtue, and *dark* to depravity, meaning that Traditionalists offer a view of history that is both fatalistic and pessimistic. As time passes, the human condition and the universe at large worsen until a cataclysmic moment when utmost darkness explodes into utmost gold and decay begins anew. It is this cyclicity, and with it the belief that the only way for society to improve is to plunge forward into degeneration, that separates Traditionalism from casual conservatism and skepticism to-

ward change. Further, cyclicity ascribes an unusual importance to history, for here, our past is nothing to overcome or escape; it is as well our future.

Thus far I haven't mentioned what Traditionalists consider to be good and bad, what it is that makes the golden age golden and the dark age dark. To understand that, we need to shift our focus from time to people. Traditionalists—especially those in the radical right—think that each age belongs to a different type of people, a different caste. And these castes are ordered in a hierarchy descending from a priest caste to warriors to merchants and finally to slaves. Traditionalists call the upper two castes spiritual and the lower two materialistic. Priests and warriors live their lives striving toward higher, immaterial ideals—in the case of priests, pure spirituality; in the case of warriors, earthly notions of honor. Merchants, on the other hand, value goods or money—physical stuff, the more the better—and slaves take that a step further by trafficking in the most immediate and basic material they can find: bodies and bodily gratification.

Traditionalism's social hierarchy thus opposes the abstract and the concrete, the spirit and the body, quality and quantity. It also maps onto the ages of the time cycle, showing us in the process what it is that Traditionalists consider to be righteous and how it decays. The golden age is the priestly era, the silver belongs to warriors, the bronze to merchants, and the dark age to slaves. And in each age, the caste that predominates dictates its vision of culture and politics to the rest of society. For instance, during the golden age, the government would be a theocracy and religious authority and devotional art would be prized above all else, while subsequent eras would witness the rise of a military state, plutocracy and the rule of the wealthy, and finally a dark age in which a reign of quantity gives political power to the masses in the form of either democracy or communism. How long is each four-age cycle? Hinduism typically says it takes mil-

lions and millions of years to complete. Traditionalists often see it playing out on a shorter time span, though all tend to agree as to which age we live in today: the dark age—the Kali Yuga, in Sanskrit. They condemn the present, accordingly, trusting that time will make their societies great again.

Those are the basics, the points upon which most Traditionalists on the right agree. But to grasp this is only to scratch the surface of their thought.

A complicated successor to René Guénon, Italian baron Julius Evola, would add considerably to Traditionalist thought and carry the school into right-wing politics. Born in Rome in 1889, Evola was less inclined to see Westerners turn East in search of spiritual transcendence. Traditionalism for him would become a tool for championing what he saw as the native European. In addition to a hierarchy with spirituality on top and materialism at the bottom, Evola proposed that race also ordered human beings, with whiter, Aryan people constituting a historical ideal atop those with darker skin—Semites, Africans, and other non-Aryans. Other hierarchies he honored included those placing masculinity above femininity, geographical northernness over the global south, even one ordering people's body postures and gazes, with those looking upward and worshiping the sun being more virtuous than those oriented toward the ground.

And like Guénon, Evola also thought that the hierarchy itself was a variable in this scheme. As he wrote regarding Traditional societies of the golden age, “the underlying principle [. . .] in such societies [. . .] is that there does not exist one, simple universal way of living one's life, but several distinct spiritual ways.” As the time cycle advances, differentiation and diversity recede as the caste that reigned in one age disintegrates during the next. With time, priests and warriors simply disappear, or become costumed versions of the dominant caste—people dressing and acting like priests and warriors but with the values and attitude of

merchants and slaves. Time, in other words, levels humanity into a mass community based on its lowest common denominator, and hierarchy and human differentiation can return only after the turning of the dark age. Thus we can name an additional hierarchy, one with differentiated social order at the top and mass homogenization at the bottom.

Ponder the potential synergies and interactions between these hierarchies and you will have begun to grasp Traditionalism as most on the radical right relate to it. In the version I've presented here, spirituality, antiquity, Aryan or white race, masculinity, the northern hemisphere, sun worship, and social hierarchy are all intertwined. Having an authentic relationship to any one of these items entails embracing them all. This informed part of Evola's understanding of history: he believed that Aryans were descended from a patriarchal society of ethereal, ghostly beings who lived in the Arctic and whose virtue declined as they migrated south and became incarnate. Alternately, he and others saw in modernity the rise of a dark age where democracy and communism proceeded from widespread contempt for the past and a corresponding faith in progress; where politics focused on economics, where the global population was darkening due to northward migration from the global south, and where feminism and secularism forged a culture that celebrates sexual hedonism and chaotic disregard for boundaries of all kinds.

Thus what Traditionalism offers is an account of history and society that treats a wide range of modern ideals and movements as interrelated and equally contemptible. One cannot celebrate capitalism while opposing a similarly mass-ified and materialistic communism, or endorse a Christian worldview that treats the past as a sin and the future as salvation, claims all are equal before God, and advocates a separation of church and state while also condemning a modern feminism that channels similar ideals. The Traditionalist is obliged to resist it all to the extent he

(most are men) can. That's why its political incarnation seems so radical, and also why it is so hard to imagine Traditionalism ever operating *within* the institutions of contemporary democratic politics.



BANNON AND I had been speaking for nearly an hour and a half when the door to his apartment opened and his next guest, early bitcoin investor Jeffrey Wernick, entered the room. I took my leave, rode the elevator down to the hotel lobby, passed the dapper bar to the right, and wended my way out to the street.

How surreal it all was. Bannon was well-read and quick-thinking. Brilliant, even. And yet our conversation also left me curious and unnerved. An obscure and exceptionally radical way of thinking had somehow moved from shrouded religious sects and ultraconservative intellectual circles into the White House and beyond. Bannon wasn't just aware of Traditionalism, as some media had reported; it shaped his fundamental understanding of the world and of himself.

I didn't yet have time to ponder it all, because immediately after leaving Bannon's hotel, I had another meeting to attend to. In haste I walked to Fifth Avenue and turned left, heading down the eastern edge of Central Park before turning right on 59th Street and entering the Plaza Hotel and the glimmering Palm Court restaurant in its center. Margarita in hand, a slight young man named Jason Reza Jorjani was waiting for me at the bar, a smile on his face. Jason wasn't new to me. He was the type of person I was more accustomed to studying: the former editor of the leading English-language publisher of far-right intellectualism and Traditionalism, *Arktos*, and a former associate of notorious white nationalist activists like Daniel Friberg in Sweden and Richard B. Spencer in the United States.

An hour or so later, as I was leaving the bar, he handed me a copy of his book *Prometheus and Atlas*. “If you get a chance, would you give this to Steve?” he asked. I hesitated, replying that I couldn’t count on getting another interview. Jason understood, but insisted nonetheless. We shook hands and I walked out to see Central Park aglow in a warm sunset. I glanced at the cover of the book in my hand, which depicted the two Greek mythological namesakes, and remembered that Prometheus and Atlas were each immortalized as statues in Rockefeller Center just blocks south of me. I flipped to the back cover and read that the book aims, among other things, “to deconstruct the nihilistic materialism and rootless rationalism of the modern West.” It sounded Traditionalist. *My mind is too full for more of this right now*, I thought to myself as I put the book in my bag and charted my path across the street and into the park, hopefully to find a secluded space to process and take some notes. I don’t know why, but I decided to look at the book one more time. I opened it, skipped to the title page, where I found a handwritten message.

Dear Steve,

Sorry for the trouble. The NYT and Newsweek took my words way out of context. But I hardly need to explain to you how fake news works. Thank you for all your efforts to Make America Great Again! Best wishes, Jason

P.S. In case you’d ever like to have the meeting that Jellyfish planned to set up, call me . . .

That’s odd. Why would Jason give Steve this book? Why would the two meet? And who was Jellyfish? I looked around. Jason was gone. And something was up.

In that moment, I found myself on the inside—observing an

attempt to open a private line of communication based on Steve Bannon's eccentric philosophical interests. What I didn't know then was that other exchanges of this kind were already taking place, and they would soon involve some of the most influential ideologues on earth. With time, I would work my way inside those communications, too, and explaining what I learned in the process is the purpose of this book.

What follows is a story about hidden ideas and partnerships operating in the global far-right populist revolt. It is a story about an extraordinary way of looking at people and history that moved suddenly, secretly, and almost simultaneously from the margins of society into positions of power throughout the world, wielded by actors seeking to create a political order unlike anything we've seen before. It is about the birth of multiple geopolitical campaigns, as well as a stranger-than-fiction scramble in the underground right-wing intelligentsia to exploit the situation.

During the year and a half that followed my first meeting with Steve Bannon, I would learn how Traditionalism propelled his ongoing efforts to elevate Donald J. Trump, to align the United States and Russia, as well as his campaigns to bolster nationalist parties worldwide while targeting the European Union and the Communist Party of China. Traditionalism was likewise inspiring Brazil's populist leaders to distance their country from China and embrace the United States and, paradoxically, Russia's disinclination to pursue new partnerships with the West. And when exploring the social worlds where Traditionalist ideas grow, I encountered white Aryan nationalists who make pilgrimages to Hare Krishna ashrams in India; frequenters of metaphysical bookstores who claim that multiculturalism can be stopped with mysticism; Caucasian warlords; exiled Chinese kingpins; and lobbyists laundering money for Mexican drug cartels in order to fund anti-immigration projects. Combining to make an outland-