The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) is a group with one mission: to severely limit immigration into the United States. Although FAIR maintains a veneer of legitimacy that has allowed its principals to testify in Congress and lobby the federal government, this veneer hides much ugliness.

**EXTREMIST GROUP INFO:**

**Date Founded:** 1979

**Location:** Washington, D.C.

**Ideology:** Anti-Immigrant

**SPLC Designated Hate Group**

**ASSOCIATED EXTREMIST PROFILES**

**John Tanton**

Petoskey, Mich.

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**Dan Stein**

Washington, DC

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**Garrett Hardin**

FAIR leaders have ties to white supremacist groups and eugenicists and have made many racist statements. Its advertisements have been rejected because of racist content. FAIR's founder, John Tanton, has expressed his wish that America remain a majority-white population: a goal to be achieved, presumably, by limiting the number of...
nonwhites who enter the country. One of the group’s main goals is upending the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which ended a decades-long, racist quota system that limited immigration mostly to northern Europeans. FAIR President Dan Stein has called the Act a “mistake.”

In Its Own Words

“As Whites see their power and control over their lives declining, will they simply go quietly into the night? Or will there be an explosion?”
— FAIR founder and board member John Tanton, Oct. 10, 1986

“I’ve come to the point of view that for European-American society and culture to persist requires a European-American majority, and a clear one at that.”
— John Tanton, letter to eugenicist and ecology professor Garrett Hardin (now deceased), Dec. 10, 1993

“I blame ninety-eight percent of responsibility for this country’s immigration crisis on Ted Kennedy and his political allies, who decided some time back in 1958, earlier perhaps, that immigration was a great way to retaliate against Anglo-Saxon dominance and hubris, and the immigration laws from the 1920s were just this symbol of that, and it’s a form of revengism, or revenge, that these forces continue to push the immigration policy that they know full well are [sic] creating chaos and will continue to create chaos down the line.”

“Do we leave it to individuals to decide that they are the intelligent ones who should have more kids? And more troublesome, what about the less intelligent, who logically should have less? Who is going to break the bad news [to less intelligent individuals], and how will it be implemented?”
— John Tanton, letter to eugenicist Robert K. Graham (now deceased), Sept. 18, 1996

“Immigrants don’t come all church-loving, freedom-loving, God-fearing ... Many of them hate America, hate everything that the United States stands for. Talk to some of these Central Americans.”
— FAIR President Dan Stein, interviewed by Tucker Carlson, Oct. 2, 1997

Background

John Tanton founded the Federation for American Immigration Reform on Jan. 2, 1979, in Washington D.C. Roger Conner, an environmental lawyer, was appointed executive director, while Tanton served as the chairman of the board of directors. Before establishing FAIR, Tanton had experience working with groups concerned about how population growth affected the environment. Tanton served in several Sierra Club leadership posts, and he had been the president of Zero Population Growth, a group founded by biologist and longtime FAIR adviser Paul Ehrlich, from 1975 to 1977.

The founding of FAIR was a major change for Tanton. But he was driven to shift his efforts to the battle against immigration by his increasing concern that it was the primary cause of population growth. As a result, FAIR focuses exclusively on immigration issues. Its goal, according to its website, is to set immigration quotas “at the lowest feasible levels” and to prevent all illegal immigration. The group attempts to appear moderate, even though its record is extreme, particularly on racial issues. This strategy has paid off: In August 2009, FAIR President Dan Stein boasted that FAIR leaders had testified before Congress about 100 times.

In its early years, FAIR was known for frequent op-ed pieces and controversial advertisements. In December 1980, it ran an ad in the Rocky Mountain News with the headline: “Our Grandparents Came To America To Escape Poverty And Despair. Will Our Children Want To Leave For The Same Reasons?” The implication was that unless immigration policies were reformed, immigrants would swarm the United States, undermine job prospects for Americans and put an end to American prosperity.
In 1988, Dan Stein replaced Roger Conner as executive director. Stein had been an employee of FAIR since 1982; before that, he was the executive director of the Immigration Reform Law Institute (IRLI), which was incorporated under FAIR's tax exemption and still serves as FAIR's legal arm. Conner became FAIR's president; this meant that Stein took over the responsibilities of running FAIR while Conner focused on fundraising.

On Oct. 9, 1988, the Arizona Republic published excerpts from embarrassing memos that had been sent by Tanton and Conner to members of FAIR's leadership. The documents were known as the WITAN memos; they came from an October 1986 conference in which Tanton met with a number of anti-immigration activists for a strategy session. The memos revealed Tanton's innermost, and controversial, thoughts. Tanton warned of a “Latin onslaught,” complained of Latinos' allegedly low “educability.” He asked, “Will Latin American migrants bring with them the tradition of the mordida (bribe), the lack of involvement in public affairs, etc.?” He also wondered: “Can homo contraceptivus [meaning whites] compete with homo progenitiva [meaning Latinos] if borders aren’t controlled? Or is advice to limit ones [sic] family simply advice to move over and let someone else with greater reproductive powers occupy the space?”

In the memos, Tanton, sounding much like the Klan of the 1920s, expressed concerns over the role of the Catholic Church in the United States, a favorite topic of his. He worried that the Church would capitalize on the Catholic faith of Latino immigrants to exert more political influence in the U.S. Specifically, he thought the church would try to subvert the division between church and state and limit abortion and birth control.

Linda Chavez, then the executive director of another group founded by John Tanton and of which he was then president, U.S. English, resigned because of the memos, calling them “repugnant and not excusable” and “anti-Catholic and anti-Hispanic.” Several members of U.S. English’s board, including Walter Cronkite and Arnold Schwarzenegger, also quit the group, and Tanton resigned. But there was no fallout for Tanton with his colleagues at FAIR; there, Tanton was supported and a committee created to craft his defense for the incendiary comments in the WITAN memos.

The memos were far from the sum of Tanton’s extremism. As reports by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) would document, Tanton has a lengthy record of friendly correspondence with Holocaust deniers, a former Klan lawyer and leading white nationalist thinkers, including Jared Taylor (who wrote in 2005, “When blacks are left entirely to their own devices, Western civilization — any kind of civilization — disappears”). On another occasion, Tanton wrote a major FAIR funder to suggest she read the work of radical anti-Semitic professor Kevin MacDonald — to “give you a new understanding of the Jewish outlook on life” — and suggested that the entire FAIR board discuss the man’s theories about the Jews. In a letter to FAIR board member Donald Collins, Tanton enthused over the work of John Trevor Sr. — a key architect of the bluntly racist Immigration Act of 1924 and a man who distributed pro-Nazi propaganda and warned shrilly of “diabolical Jewish control” of America — and said it should serve FAIR as “a guidepost to what we must follow again this time.” Tanton has also made several racist comments, telling a reporter in 1997 that unless U.S. borders are sealed, America will be overrun by people "defecating and creating garbage and looking for jobs."

The WITAN memos reveal Tanton’s keen awareness of the importance of seeming respectable. In one memo, he wrote: “the issues we’re touching on here must be broached by liberals. The conservatives simply cannot do it without tainting the whole subject.” But the publication of the memos did not halt FAIR’s growth. In 1990, FAIR claimed 50,000 members.

Tanton’s preoccupation with immigration appears to be based, at least in part, on race. In a March 3, 1993 memo to FAIR board member Otis Graham, he demonstrated his desire to limit the number of nonwhites living in the U.S. The memo concerned a new group Tanton wanted to start, which he would have named the League for European American Defense, Education, and Research, or LEADERs [sic]. According to another Tanton memo, he had hatched the idea with help from three prominent white nationalists: the Council of Conservative Citizens’ Sam Francis, American Renaissance’s Jared Taylor and Wayne Lutton, who edits Tanton’s hate journal The Social Contract. Tanton wrote in his LEADERs memo: “Projections by the U.S. Census Bureau show that midway into the next century, the current European-American majority will become a minority ... This is unacceptable; we decline
to bequeath to our children minority status in their own land.” Here, Tanton made it quite clear that the skin color of immigrants factored into his desire to limit immigration.

Despite Tanton’s unsavory track record, longtime FAIR President Dan Stein has shrunk from any criticism of FAIR’s founder; on the contrary, in 2009 he told the Washington Post that Tanton was a “Renaissance man.”

Maybe Stein has vigorously defended Tanton because he has expressed similarly extreme positions. In 1991, Stein sent a report to FAIR’s board of directors under the subject line: “The Defenders of American culture Rise to the Call to Arms.” In the memo, which is archived at George Washington University's Gelman Library, Stein celebrated a new “disdain” in the media and among intellectuals for “the political agenda of those who openly attack the contributions of Western Civilization.” He was particularly happy that “multicultural and Politically Correct” school curricula had come under criticism.

Stein’s report expressed the hope that mounting criticism of multiculturalism would eventually lead to attacks on the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which ended years of racist immigration policy (under a national origins quota system heavily skewed against non-whites and even darker-skinned Europeans) and initiated a wave of non-white immigration to the U.S. For Stein, the 1965 Act was “a key mistake in national policy” and a “source of error.”

In 1994, Tanton interviewed Stein for FAIR’s oral history project, which is composed of transcribed audio interviews with about a dozen FAIR principals. In that interview, Stein again expressed his disgust for the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. He told Tanton that those who supported the 1965 reform wanted to “retaliate against Anglo-Saxon dominance” and that this “revengism” against whites had created a policy that is causing “chaos and will continue to create chaos.”

Between 1985 and 1994, FAIR received around $1.2 million in grants from the Pioneer Fund. The Pioneer Fund is an eugenicist organization that was started in 1937 by men close to the Nazi regime who wanted to pursue “race betterment” by promoting the genetic lines of American whites. Now led by race scientist J. Philippe Rushton, the fund continues to back studies intended to reveal the inferiority of minorities to whites.

FAIR stopped receiving Pioneer Fund grants in 1994 due to bad publicity it received when the grants were made public. At the time, FAIR was backing California’s punishing anti-immigrant Proposition 187, which would have denied education and health care to the children of undocumented immigrants in that state if it had not died as the result of court challenges. Stein and Tanton had led FAIR’s efforts to win funding from Pioneer, and Stein said in 1993, before Pioneer’s extremism was made public, that his “job [was] to get every dime of Pioneer’s money.”

After the bad publicity, FAIR denied that the Pioneer Fund money had any influence on its work or in any way influenced its programs. To manage the fallout, on March 16, 1994, Stein wrote a letter to Harry Weyher, then the president of the Pioneer Fund. Stein attached a draft of a document that he wanted Weyher to endorse and send out, titled “Why the Pioneer Fund Supports the Immigration Reform Movement.” Stein wrote the piece as though Weyher had written it himself. One part read, “We are pleased and proud that through financial support, we’ve made FAIR’s important work possible.” Though FAIR stopped receiving grants from the fund, which require public disclosure, it continued to receive private financial support from Pioneer’s leaders for several years. In early 1997, Tanton organized a gathering at the New York Racquet and Tennis Club, where three members of FAIR’s board — Henry Buhl, Sharon Barnes and Alan Weeden — met with Harry Weyher. In the late 1990s, Tanton also vacationed with Pioneer Fund board member John Trevor Jr., who also provided private financial support to FAIR.

FAIR also has produced controversial media programming. In 1996, FAIR started a television program called “Borderline.” The show lasted for about a year and featured a number of prominent white nationalists, including Sam Francis and Jared Taylor. “Borderline” often advanced ideas popular in white nationalist circles; particularly popular was the idea that immigrants are destroying American culture or displacing Western civilization with degenerate, Third World ways.
Lawrence Auster, a white nationalist who spoke in 1996 to a conference put on by *American Renaissance* and whose website "A View from the Right" is listed as a hate site by the SPLC, appeared on the show on April 1, 1996, making the argument that if the U.S. loses its white majority, it will be destroyed. The topic that day, according to host Dan Stein, was to "take a politically incorrect look at American culture and Western Civilization." Stein added, "America, love it or lose it." Auster argued that because of an "invasion," "America is in the process of dissolving as a nation." Supposedly drawing on history, Auster warned that as demographic change occurs and "the majority is threatened in its position," the result could be "civil war." Auster's particular concern that day was the loss of "the historic European Anglo American culture." Stein certainly seemed to agree with his guest's worries. "How can we preserve America if it becomes 50% Latin American?" he asked. Stein also said that Anglos were leaving Los Angeles because it had become "a foreign country to them."

Another prominent white nationalist who appeared on "Borderline" was naturalized English immigrant Peter Brimelow, who in 1999 would go on to found the anti-immigrant hate site VDARE.com. Brimelow authored *Alien Nation*, a book that argues America should remain white-dominated. In a discussion about *Alien Nation* on Aug. 5, 1996, Stein asked Brimelow whether "America's social and economic elites seem to be writing off the whole idea of the nation-state." He added: "If they shift their loyalty from the nation-state, what are they loyal to?" Brimelow argued that these same elites are creating the "greatest transformation of any independent state in history" by bringing in "new minority groups that did not exist before." Brimelow considered these elites to be "treasonous," people who "hate our traditional culture and they see immigration as a weapon to help destroy it." "Are they really patriots?" Brimelow asked.

Stein asked Brimelow to talk more about his statement "race is destiny in American politics." Brimelow did, saying, "you really alter the texture of the country by bringing in different ethnic groups." Endorsing the invasion theory, Brimelow told one caller, "you have areas of South Texas and so on that have essentially gone back to Mexico." Stein later asked Brimelow whether this all meant "the end of the United States?" Brimelow's answer: "Sure."

In 1998, various nativists and nativist groups attempted to get the Sierra Club to take an anti-immigration stance. The effort culminated in a 1998 vote in which Sierra Club members determined whether the group would support immigration restrictions. FAIR was one of the groups that helped to put the measure on the Sierra Club ballot, and Dan Stein teamed up with then-CNN Crossfire host Pat Buchanan to advocate for it. Members ultimately chose to retain the Sierra Club's neutral stance on immigration policy in a 60%-40% vote. The Sierra Club was an important target for FAIR because it was considered a liberal group, and Tanton, who held leadership positions there in the 1970s and still had many allies, expressed in his WITAN memos that he thought that the Sierra Club would be less vulnerable to charges of racism when advocating against immigration.

In April 1999, FAIR attacked U.S. Senator Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.) for supporting more visas for foreigners with technology skills. It ran a newspaper ad that placed a picture of Abraham, an Arab-American, alongside a picture of Osama bin Laden. It asked, "Why Is a U.S. Senator Trying to Make It Easier for Osama bin Laden to Export Terrorism to the U.S.?" FAIR's ads were widely condemned and caused former Senator Alan K. Simpson (R-Wyo.) to resign from FAIR's advisory board. FAIR has also run other extremely controversial political advertisements, including one in 2000 in Iowa that was rejected by a TV station as "borderline racist."

Several FAIR officials have links to white supremacist hate groups. Rick Oltman, who for much of the 1990s was FAIR's western regional coordinator, spoke as part of a 1997 immigration panel sponsored by the Council of Conservative Citizens, a racist group that has described black people as a "retrograde species of humanity." Council publications at the time listed Oltman as a member. Jim Staudenraus, FAIR's eastern regional coordinator, participated in an anti-immigration conference in 2002 with white nationalist Jared Taylor. In 2007, a senior FAIR official met with leaders of Vlaams Belang, a Belgian political party that officials in that country outlawed in a previous incarnation (Vlaams Blok) as a "criminal organization" because of its racist, anti-immigrant views.
In late 2006, FAIR hired Joseph Turner as its western field representative after Oltman departed. Turner was the founder of the Southern California group Save Our State, a now-defunct anti-immigrant hate group that was known for attracting neo-Nazis to its rallies. Turner was on record before joining FAIR as saying that being a white separatist did not imply a person was racist. Turner once accused Mexican immigrants of turning California into a “third world cesspool.” He left FAIR in December 2007 shortly after the SPLC, in tandem with publishing an extensive report on the group’s racism that included Turner’s inflammatory comments, designated FAIR as a hate group. FAIR representatives did not comment as to the reason for Turner’s departure.

FAIR board members harbor extreme views and connections as well. Garrett Hardin, a now-deceased biologist, was a very close friend of Tanton’s and an active board member of FAIR from the mid-1980s until around 1996. Like Tanton, he often expressed eugenicist views. Hardin was a longtime supporter of population control: In 1968, he wrote “The Tragedy of the Commons,” in which he argued that “[the] freedom to breed is intolerable.” In a 1992 interview with Omni magazine, he argued against sending food to starving Ethiopians, noting that doing so would only “encourage population growth.” In that interview, he lauded China for its “one-child policy” but lamented that the policy was not thorough enough. Former Colorado Gov. Richard Lamm, a longtime member of FAIR’s board of advisors, once said that “new cultures” in America were “diluting what we are and who we are.”

Longtime FAIR board member Donald A. Collins writes frequently for the VDARE.com, an anti-immigrant hate site named after Virginia Dare, said to have been the first English child born in the New World. (VDARE is dedicated to bashing immigrants and has published the work of many white nationalists and anti-Semites.) Collins has been published in The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies, a journal run by eugenicist Roger Pearson. Collins’ articles have focused on attacking the Catholic Church for its liberal stance on immigration. One accused Los Angeles Archbishop Roger Mahony of selling out his country “in exchange for more temporal power and glory.” Another claimed bishops were “infiltrating and manipulating the American political process” to dismantle the separation of church and state — the classic calumny directed at American Catholics for decades by the Klan and others. Another person linked to VDARE is Joe Guzzardi, a member of FAIR’s board of advisors who worked as an editor of the site.

On Oct. 2, 2007, Julie Kirchner became FAIR’s third executive director. Dan Stein had taken the position of FAIR president by that time. Stein retained his status as leader and public face of FAIR, while Kirchner managed the day-to-day operations.

In the late 2000s, FAIR become much more active in pushing anti-immigrant laws at the state and local level. Attorney Kris Kobach, who works for FAIR’s legal arm, the Immigration Reform Law Institute, helped to write Arizona Senate Bill 1070. The bill, signed by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer on April 23, 2010, forces police officers to detain individuals who they suspect to be illegal immigrants and makes it a misdemeanor under state law for non-citizen immigrants to fail to carry their immigration papers. The law is currently caught up in the federal courts. Kobach earlier helped to pass anti-immigrant ordinances in Farmers Branch, Texas; Hazleton, Pa.; and other cities. These laws seek to punish those who aid and abet “illegal aliens.” The laws have proven a massive financial burden to the towns that pass them and, in many cases, have sparked racial strife and economic disorder. The Hazleton ordinance, which was struck down by a federal appeals court in September, had left that community of about 20,000 on the hook for nearly $3 million in legal fees as of January 2011. The city is appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Another FAIR initiative to end birthright citizenship provisions of the 14th Amendment, a longtime goal of the group, was launched in January 2011. IRLI, FAIR’s legal arm, working in partnership with State Legislators for Legal Immigration (SLLI), announced a plant to halt what they call “the misapplication of the 14th Amendment.” The 14th Amendment ensures that children born in the U.S. are U.S. citizens. Birthright citizenship is how most Americans become citizens.

SLLI is a coalition of about 70 legislators in 38 states dedicated to eliminating “economic attractions” for immigrants and their “unlawful invasion” of the U.S. The group is often described as the legislative arm of FAIR, which is apt given the group says on its website that it has a “working partnership” with FAIR. SLLI’s legislators
are the main instigators behind favored FAIR initiatives, including attempts at the state level to deny immigrants various rights through laws modeled on Arizona’s S.B. 1070.

SLLI has grown dormant in recent years, and the Supreme Court in 2012 struck down most of SB 1070’s provisions as unconstitutional.

The 2012 election saw a renewed push for immigration reform at the federal level, with a bipartisan bill passing the Senate before collapsing in the House. In an effort to stop reform legislation, anti-immigrant front groups first created with the help of FAIR in the mid-2000s were revived and rebranded. Groups like Choose Black America and You Don’t Think for Me were replaced by the African American Leadership Council (AALC), a name replaced quickly by the Black American Leadership Alliance (BALA), and Alliance for Immigration Justice (AIJ). These groups, which ostensibly opposed reform because it would damage job prospects for minorities and hurt taxpayers, were made up of African Americans and Latinos. Many of them – such as Leah Durant, a former staffer at IRLI (FAIR’s legal arm), and Frank Morris, a longtime FAIR board member – had close ties to nativist organizations. BALA did manage to organize a rally in Washington – the “DC March for Jobs” – that brought together a few thousand activists, including some nativist extremists like D.A. King of Georgia.

Following the failure of reform legislation, FAIR found a new focus. As the number of children fleeing violence in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua spiked in the summer of 2014, FAIR and its allies began to target organizations aiding these unaccompanied minors. FAIR published a map on its website with the title, “Is the Border Crisis Coming to a Town Near You?” It named locales where minors were being resettled and the organizations helping in that effort. Protests organized by anti-immigrant activists took place in a number of locations, most infamously in Murrieta, California, where activists blocked a bus full of women and children on their way to an immigration-processing center. In Michigan, anti-Muslim activist Tamyra Murray, a state adviser for FAIR, organized a protest against the relocation of minors in Vassar.

Even without a major immigration reform bill to challenge, FAIR’s public statements in recent years show that the organization remains true to the white nationalist principles on which it was founded. In late December 2015, Dan Stein told supporters in a video message that without a moratorium on immigration, “we’re going to lose everything about what it means to be an American.”

Recent News

Francis Cissna, head of USCIS, to address anti-immigrant hate group Center for Immigration Studies today