

October 12, 2022

President Neeli Bendapudi  
Vice President Damon Sims  
Provost Justin Schwartz  
The Pennsylvania State University Administration  
201 Old Main, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802

Dear President Bendapudi, Vice President Sims, and Provost Schwartz,

I am writing to you from the Southern Poverty Law Center, the premier U.S. nonprofit civil rights organization working to counter hate and extremism, to make you aware of our concerns about Gavin McInnes, who is scheduled to speak on Penn State's campus on October 24, 2022. His appearance is part of an event sponsored by Uncensored America, an organization founded by a former Penn State student. He was the founder of one of the most active and harmful organizations operating in the U.S. hate movement today, the Proud Boys.

Given his profile and history of hateful provocation, we thought it was important to provide background on McInnes and the group he founded, as well as how the hard right movement to which McInnes belongs has used campus speaking events to legitimize and promote their bigoted ideas. You can use this documentation to make a fully informed decision whether to host McInnes and put at risk the security and safety of your campus community.

Established in 1971, the SPLC has been tireless in identifying and rooting out hate and extremist groups to create a fair, inclusive, and unified nation. We are a nonprofit advocacy organization serving as a catalyst for racial justice throughout the South and beyond. The SPLC's Intelligence Project has deep expertise in monitoring the activities of domestic hate groups and other extremists – including the Ku Klux Klan, the neo-Nazi movement, racist skinheads, antigovernment militias, and others. We currently track hundreds of extremist groups operating across the country and publish investigative reports, share key intelligence, and offer expert analysis to the media and public.

One of the most active and harmful organizations operating in the U.S. hate movement today is the Proud Boys. As the lead analyst on the White Supremacy desk at SPLC, I have extensively researched and monitored the Proud Boys since they were founded by Gavin McInnes in 2016. In addition to writing and providing media commentary on the group, I have been asked to provide testimony on the Proud Boys by both the U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol and the U.S. House Committee on Veterans Affairs.<sup>1</sup>

The Proud Boys is an authoritarian, ultranationalist hate group that has a long history of engaging in violence. Their activities focus on dehumanizing and mitigating the perceived threat

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/06/10/splc-statement-jan-6-select-committee-proud-boys;>  
[https://www.splcactionfund.org/sites/default/files/SPLC\\_Action\\_statement\\_Veterans\\_Affairs\\_Committee\\_hearing\\_on\\_Domestic\\_Violent\\_Extremist\\_Groups\\_and\\_the\\_Recruitment\\_of\\_Veterans\\_final.pdf](https://www.splcactionfund.org/sites/default/files/SPLC_Action_statement_Veterans_Affairs_Committee_hearing_on_Domestic_Violent_Extremist_Groups_and_the_Recruitment_of_Veterans_final.pdf)

posed by those they consider their political enemies, who include anti-racist activists, Muslims, feminists, transgender people, and, broadly, the political left. While a handful of Proud Boys have run for elected office, violence and intimidation are the group's primary vehicles for engaging in politics. Indeed, McInnes has unambiguously promoted violence as a political tool since the beginning of the Proud Boys' existence. "Fighting solves everything," he declared the year Trump won the presidency, "we need more violence from the Trump people – Trump supporters: Choke a motherfucker."<sup>2</sup> The group reveres Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet and have attended rallies wearing shirts that read "Make communists afraid of rotary aircraft again" – a reference to Pinochet's death squads.<sup>3</sup> As part of their long-running assault on multiracial democracy and liberal pluralism, Proud Boys were among the primary organizers and participants in the January 6 insurrection. More than 40 members face charges related to the events at the Capitol, one of whom recently pleaded guilty to seditious conspiracy.<sup>4</sup>

McInnes and the Proud Boys claim to believe in what they call "Western chauvinism," or the notion that Western culture is superior to all others. Proud Boys claim they do not define national belonging by race, but adherence to specific cultural ideals. For the Proud Boys, though, Western culture is European, Christian, and governed by strict adherence to "traditional" notions of gender. People who do not belong to these groups or hold these ideals are viewed as existential threats to Western nations and, therefore, deserving of ridicule, intimidation, and even violence. This belief goes hand-in-hand with McInnes and the Proud Boys' promotion of the white nationalist "great replacement" theory, which states that white people are being systematically and deliberately replaced by non-white people – a process they believe will ultimately degrade and destroy Western society.<sup>5</sup>

McInnes has spent his career maligning Black people, Muslims, LGBTQ people, and women – a history the SPLC has clearly documented.<sup>6</sup> In 2014, he contributed to *American Renaissance*, one of the most prominent white nationalist publications of the last 30 years, in a piece arguing that there are innate disparities between races. *American Renaissance* is best known for pushing the racist myth that Black people are more violent and prone to criminality than others – an idea that racists have, over centuries, used to justify countless acts of hate and violence against Black people.<sup>7</sup> It is also one that McInnes, to this day, regularly promotes on his online show, *Get Off My Lawn (GOML)*, specifically in a recurring segment called "Blacks Behaving Badly."<sup>8</sup> In one

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Leith Gollner, *Vanity Fair*, "The Secret History of Gavin McInnes,"

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/06/the-secret-history-of-gavin-mcinnnes>, June 29, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Cassie Miller, *Hatewatch*, "Why are Proud Boys so Violent? Ask Gavin

McInnes," <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/10/18/why-are-proud-boys-so-violent-ask-gavin-mcinnnes>, October 18, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Spencer Hsu, *Washington Post*, "First proud Boy leader pleads guilty to Jan. 6 seditious conspiracy,"

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/10/06/proud-boys-bertino-plea-seditious-conspiracy/>, October 6, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> For a recent example of McInnes promoting the great replacement theory, see his May 18, 2022, appearance on "The Anthony Cumia Show," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPCp3DTej8c>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys>

<sup>7</sup> Cassie Miller, *Hatewatch*, "The Biggest Lie in the White Supremacist Playbook: Unraveling the Truth about 'Black-on-White Crime,'" <https://www.splcenter.org/20180614/biggest-lie-white-supremacist-propaganda-playbook-unraveling-truth-about-%E2%80%98black-white-crime>, June 14, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> *Get Off My Lawn*, "Amateur Hour at the Apollo," June 14, 2022.

episode, he detailed what he called a series of “brutally sadistic black-on-white hate crimes” that the media had chosen to ignore – perpetuating the racist notion that Black people pose an *especial* threat toward white people. The episode was titled “Black Murder Syndrome.”<sup>9</sup> McInnes frames these segments as if he is reluctantly revealing an unpleasant truth, rather than broadcasting a spectacle he has consciously constructed to elicit an emotional, biased response. In these segments and elsewhere, McInnes is participating in a long history of misrepresenting already flawed crime data to imply that Black people, because of their race, are dangerous and even sadistic.<sup>10</sup>

McInnes also has a long history of denigrating transgender people, including a 2014 piece called “Transphobia is Perfectly Natural.”<sup>11</sup> He has encouraged the Proud Boys recent campaign against the LGBTQ community, which has focused on protesting and threatening dozens of LGBTQ events around the country.<sup>12</sup> Both McInnes and Proud Boys members have described trans people as “mentally ill gays” and claims they represent an especial threat to children – a dangerously bigoted belief exhibited by their frequent attempts to paint trans people, and LGBTQ people more broadly, as “groomers.” Proud Boys have, on multiple occasions, shown up to events for children wearing tactical gear and armed with weapons, including firearms.<sup>13</sup> “If there’s drag queen story hour in your community you’ve got to go over there and say something. You can’t let them groom kids,” McInnes said on a September 2022 episode of *Get Off My Lawn*.<sup>14</sup>

Even though McInnes stepped down from his role in the group in 2018, he openly promotes the Proud Boys and remains intimately involved in their internal matters. He has worn Proud Boys regalia on *GOML* and, very recently, attended the Proud Boys annual gathering called Westfest.<sup>15</sup> In late September 2022, he mediated a dispute between quarreling factions of the Proud Boys and ultimately used his show to announce that two members of the group were disavowed. In other words, he remains a central figure within the Proud Boys – a fact that Uncensored America fails to mention in their advertisements of McInnes’s appearance on Penn State’s campus.

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<sup>9</sup> *Get Off My Lawn*, “Black Murder Syndrome,” September 24, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent history of how statistics have been used to embed the notion that Black people are especially prone to criminality, see Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> McInnes, *Thought Catalog*, “Transphobia is Perfectly Natural,” <http://web.archive.org/web/20140819040944/http://thoughtcatalog.com/gavin-mcinnis/2014/08/transphobia-is-perfectly-natural/>, August 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Cassie Miller, *Hatewatch*, “Proud Boys Aid Right-Wing Assault on the LGBTQ Community and Reproductive Justice,” <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/07/13/proud-boys-aid-right-wing-assault-lgbtq-community-and-reproductive-justice>, July 13, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Jade Tagulao, ABC News 4, “Man with gun turned children’s library reading book event into chaos in Nevada library,” <https://abcnews4.com/news/nation-world/man-with-gun-turned-childrens-reading-book-event-to-chaos-in-nevada-library-lgbtq-rights>, June 27, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> *Get Off My Lawn*, “Viva Italia!” September 26, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> See [https://twitter.com/AndyBCampbell/status/1479281742905323525?s=20&t=Y4Q0S6BWIIIdOx\\_w0SdbTPQ](https://twitter.com/AndyBCampbell/status/1479281742905323525?s=20&t=Y4Q0S6BWIIIdOx_w0SdbTPQ); McInnes mentions attending Westfest on multiple episodes of *Get Off My Lawn* and documented his travel on his Telegram channel.

In the past, violence has followed McInnes's public appearances. Indeed, McInnes stepped down from the Proud Boys in 2018 specifically because he believed that doing so would "show jurors they are not dealing with a gang and there is no head of operations" after members of his group attacked counter protesters following a speech McInnes gave at New York City's Metropolitan Republican Club.<sup>16</sup> At that event, McInnes celebrated the 1960 assassination of a Japanese socialist, calling the assassin a "f----- badass" the next day on his podcast.<sup>17</sup>

McInnes's scheduled appearance at Penn State is part of a longer history of extreme far-right figures using college campuses as platforms that lend their ideas credibility. In the months leading up to the deadly 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, for example, the racist "alt-right" movement used college campus speaking events as one of their primary strategies for making their ideas appear credible and worthy of public debate. It also allowed them to create a spectacle: they presented wildly offensive and dangerous ideas specifically to elicit backlash, and then used that response to argue that they were merely starting necessary conversations and breaking "taboos." These events also created dangerous circumstances in and around college campuses. After white nationalist Richard Spencer spoke at the University of Florida in October 2017, for example, three of his followers made Nazi salutes at a group of protesters before one of them shot at the group.<sup>18</sup>

We are concerned that by welcoming McInnes to your university, you are not promoting fruitful scholarly debate or challenging students to think critically about the many challenges currently facing the country. Platforming McInnes at a university serves to launder the image of a hate group founder who continues to promote one of the largest and most destructive hate groups in the country. In the process, hosting this event promotes the dehumanization of gay, transgender, non-binary, Muslim, Black, and immigrant students, in addition to many others who already face discrimination because of their identity.

If you have further questions about this manner, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,



Cassie Miller, PhD

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys>

<sup>17</sup> Cassie Miller, *Hatewatch*, "Why are the Proud Boys so violent? Ask Gavin McInnes," <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/10/18/why-are-proud-boys-so-violent-ask-gavin-mcinnnes>, October 18, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Sylvia Svruga and Lori Rozsa, *Washington Post*, "'Kill them': Three men charged in shooting after Richard Spencer speech," <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/10/20/kill-them-three-men-charged-in-shooting-after-richard-spencer-speech/>, October 20, 2017.