



Graphika

Facebook's VDARE Takedown

Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior
Boosted VDARE and Unz Review

05.2020

Takedowns

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Introduction

On April 30, Facebook took down a network of pages, groups, and accounts, based in the United States, that used coordinated inauthentic behavior to amplify websites and promote books that advanced racial stereotypes, attacked people of color, and promulgated narratives of white victimhood at the hands of Black Americans.

The network primarily steered users toward two websites that the Southern Poverty Law Center has [described](#) respectively as a “white nationalist hub” and having “published work by antisemitic writers and other assorted extremists.” It appears to have been partially driven and managed by a range of fake accounts, some of which made only the flimsiest attempt to claim a persona.

As it [announced](#) the takedown on May 5, Facebook said, “The people behind this network used fake accounts to create fictitious personas, post in Groups, manage Pages, drive traffic to off-platform sites, and evade enforcement. (...) Although the people behind this operation attempted to conceal their coordination, our investigation linked this network to VDARE, a website known for posting anti-immigration content, and to individuals associated with a similar website The Unz Review.”

Before the takedown, Facebook shared the names of the assets with Graphika for an independent assessment.

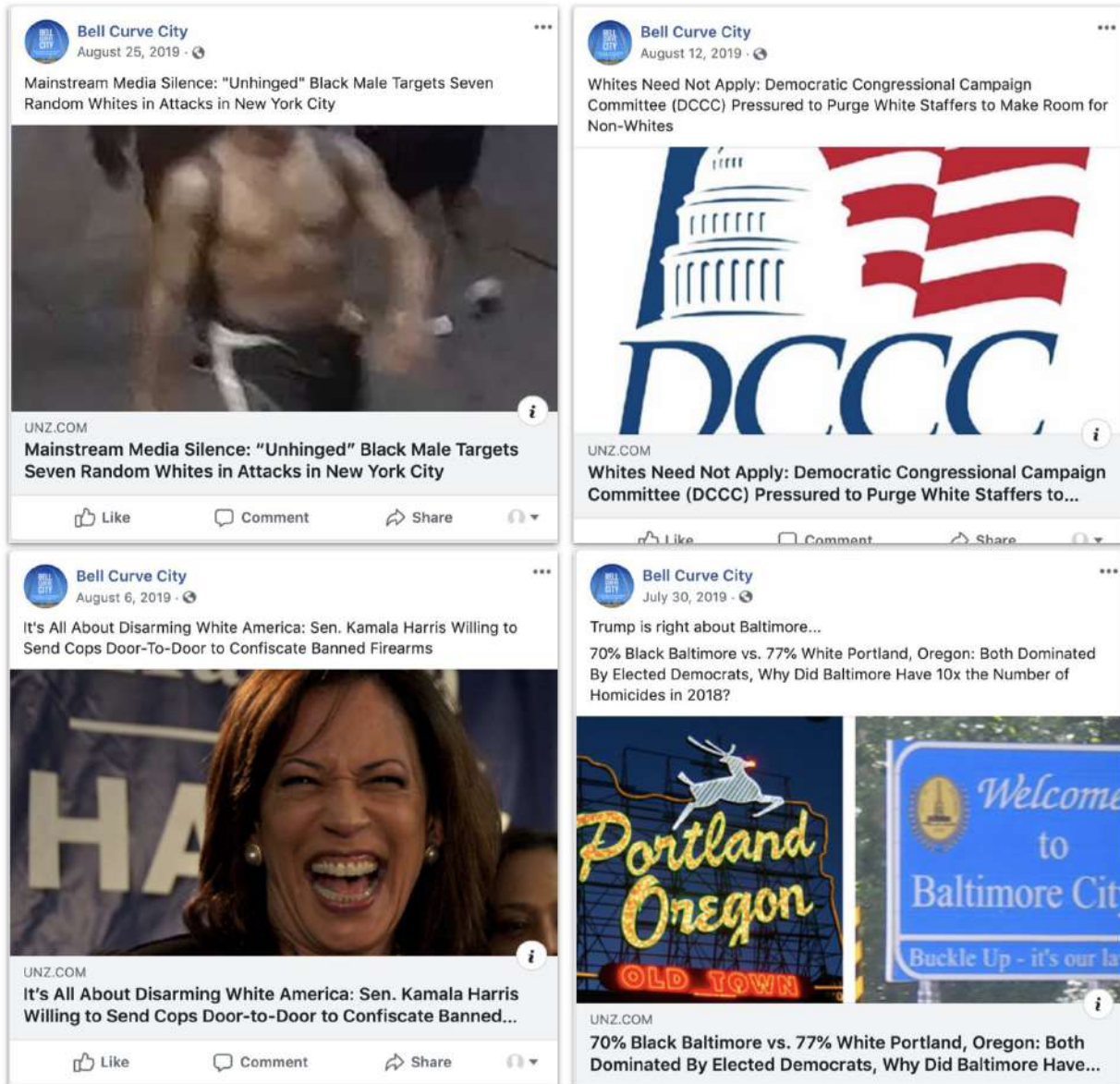
Background

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, VDARE, established by the Center for American Unity in 1999, is an outlet for “[intellectually inclined](#)” voices within the anti-immigrant movement to promote their views. In the past, the website has published articles written by authors from across the far right, including known white nationalists, race scientists, and [anti-Semites](#). Within the last decade, a number of prominent far-right figures have been given platforms on VDARE, including [Richard Spencer](#), [Jared Taylor](#), and [Kevin McDonald](#). The website also featured pieces from conservative figures with more mainstream appeal, such as Michelle Malkin.

The Unz Review is an “online journal of opinion” founded and run by [Ron Unz](#), a businessman and former publisher of The American Conservative, whom the Anti-Defamation League has accused of promoting [anti-Semitic conspiracy theories](#). According to the ADL and conservative magazine The Spectator, Unz has a history of writing pieces on controversial subjects on topics like immigration, race, and Holocaust, a tradition his eponymous website continues to uphold. Like VDARE, the Unz Review serves as a platform for far-right viewpoints; however, the website also provides space for pieces from across the ideological spectrum. The Unz Review hosts the formerly independent blog Stuff Black People Don’t Like (SBPDL); according to the watchdog group [Right Wing Watch](#), the blog, penned by “Paul Kersey” - whose books the network also promoted in a coordinated fashion - publishes inflammatory content promoting a return to segregation in the United States.

Amplifying Websites

Throughout the takedown set, the pages almost exclusively shared content from just three websites: vdare[.]com, unz[.]com, and stuffblackpeopledontlike[.]blogspot[.]com (which now resolves to unz[.]com). Most of the pages made no explicit mention of any affiliation to either website, but the sharing was so consistent and so predominantly from just these three sites that it resembled an attempt at systematic amplification.



Sequential posts by Bell Curve City, all sharing articles from unz[.]com.

Western News Today
April 24 at 4:32 PM · 🌐

The Great Replacement In New York City: From 98% White In 1910 To 32% White In 2020: NOW WITH INTERACTIVE CHARTS

VDARE.COM

The Great Replacement In New York City: From 98% White In 1910 To 32% White In 2020: NOW WITH INTERACTIVE...

👍👏 6 4 Comments 4 Shares

Like Comment Share

Most Relevant ▾

Write a comment... Press Enter to post.

Western News Today
April 24 at 9:26 AM · 🌐

Lead Black NIH Coronavirus Researcher Suggests Pandemic Could be "Genocide" of Blacks and White Doctors Will Let Blacks Die (Despite Elderly Whites Being Disproportionately Impacted)

BLACK UNZ.COM

Lead Black NIH Coronavirus Researcher Suggests Pandemic Could be "Genocide" of Blacks and White Doctors Will Let...

👍👏 37 22 Comments 17 Shares

Like Comment Share

Most Relevant ▾

Write a comment...

Western News Today
April 24 at 8:44 PM · 🌐

"Peter Brimelow has actually been calling for a moratorium since 1992, although his National Review cover story didn't use the word moratorium, & has continued to do so up until Trump came out publicly in agreement with him & us."
#ImmigrationMoratorium

VDARE.COM

Peter Brimelow's Call In ALIEN NATION For An Immigration Moratorium—25 Years Ago! | Blog Posts

👍 2 3 Shares

Like Comment Share

Most Relevant ▾

Write a comment...

Western News Today
April 22 at 6:00 PM · 🌐

"There's one way to stop it, and Trump could do it tomorrow. Sign an executive order ending the anchor baby scam. Not say he's going to sign it, as he does whenever he wants to gin up the base. Actually sign it." - @AnnCoulter
#ImmigrationMoratorium

VDARE.COM

Ann Coulter: Media Lies About China And Trump—Who Needs To STOP Chinese Job Theft, Birth Tourism | Articles

👍👏 21 2 Shares

Like Comment Share

Most Relevant ▾

Write a comment...

Sequential posts by Western News Today of vdare[.]com and unz[.]com.

The War on the Blue
April 16 at 7:15 PM · 🌐

Treason... "ICE SVU has succumbed to a deliberate political campaign to release illegal aliens from custody. In a mass jailbreak, ICE SVU released 700 illegal aliens, many infected with the Chinese Virus." #Coronavirus #chinavirus



VDARE.COM
ICE SVU Releases 700 Illegals, Some Of Whom May Be Infected With Coronavirus | Blog Posts

👍👎 38 3 Comments 12 Shares

The War on the Blue
April 16 at 9:24 AM · 🌐

Black Professor of Trauma at U of Chicago Blames Whites for High Rates of Gun Violence and Disproportionate Rates of Coronavirus Deaths in Black Community



UNZ.COM
Black Professor of Trauma at U of Chicago Blames Whites for High Rates of Gun Violence AND Disproportionate Rates of...

👍👎👎 46 20 Comments 7 Shares

Like Comment Share

The War on the Blue
April 15 at 9:56 PM · 🌐

LA & Chicago are following the lead of California & providing direct cash aid to illegal aliens. That is a violation of Title 8 United States Code Section 1324, Bringing In or Harboring Certain Aliens, which prohibits such succor to illegal aliens.



VDARE.COM
Arrest Eric Garcetti And Lori Lightfoot For Harboring Illegals | Blog Posts

👍👎 129 12 Comments 52 Shares

Like Comment Share

The War on the Blue
April 15 at 10:14 AM · 🌐

Anarcho-Tyranny: Black Tampa Prisoner Released Amid #Coronavirus Fears Arrested on Murder Charge... One Day After Being Set Free He had 35 prior arrests...

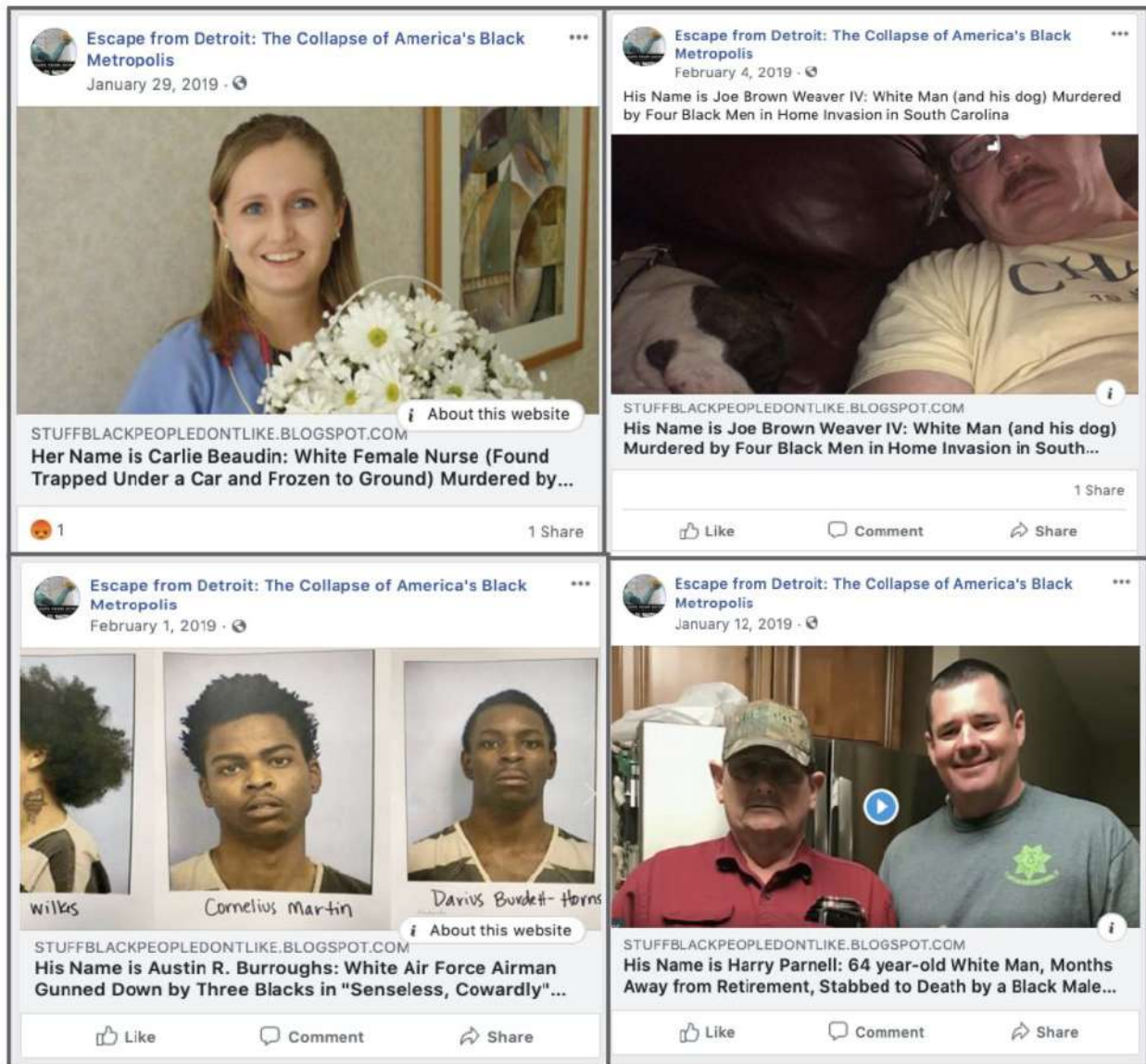


UNZ.COM
Anarcho-Tyranny: Black Tampa Prisoner Released Amid Coronavirus Fears Arrested on Murder Charge... One Day...

👍👎👎 31 1 Comment 9 Shares

Like Comment Share

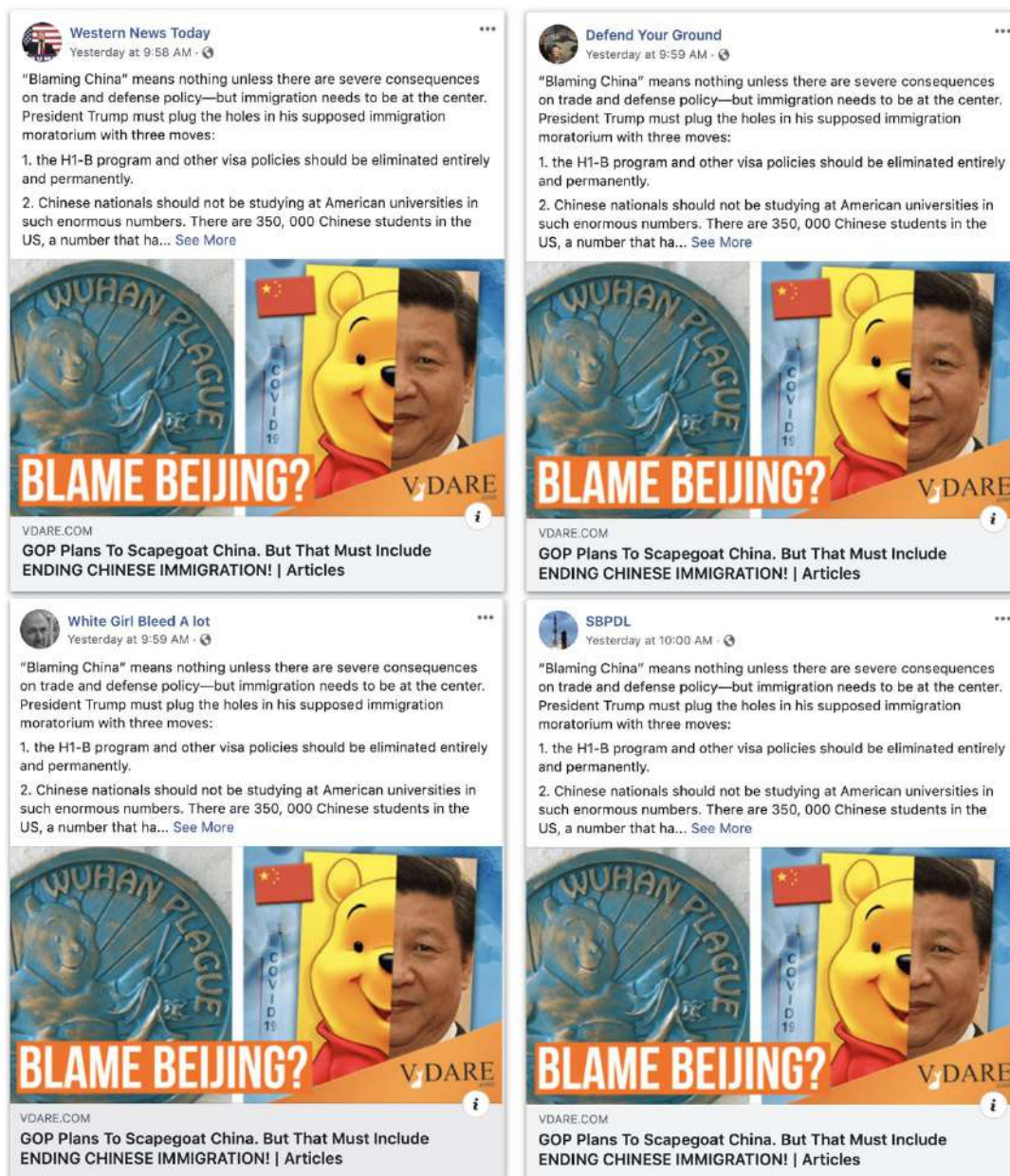
Sequential posts by The War on the Blue of vdare[.]com and unz[.]com.



Near sequential posts by *Escape from Detroit: The Collapse of America's Black Metropolis* of *stuffblackpeopledontlike[.]blogspot[.]com*

Coordinated Posting

This network operated in a coordinated fashion; Graphika identified numerous examples of the same content being repeatedly shared across pages in the same order and, in many cases, within a timeframe of 1-5 minutes. When articles, stories, and other content were shared by assets in the network they were frequently accompanied by identical, or nearly identical, language.



Shares of the same article on vdare.com by Western News Today, Defend Your Ground, White Girl Bleed A Lot, and SBPDL between 09:58 and 10:00 on April 27, 2020.

The War on the Blue
April 12 at 9:43 AM · 🌐

How Deep Does the Anti-White Rabbit Hole Go? Twitter Post Calling Picture of White Mom with Her Four White Children "Really Dark" Goes Viral, Getting 44,000 Likes



UNZ.COM

How Deep Does the Anti-White Rabbit Hole Go? Twitter Post Calling Picture of White Mom with Her Four White Children...

👍👎🗨️ 11 3 Comments 2 Shares

Defending Liberty
April 12 at 9:43 AM · 🌐

How Deep Does the Anti-White Rabbit Hole Go? Twitter Post Calling Picture of White Mom with Her Four White Children "Really Dark" Goes Viral, Getting 44,000 Likes



UNZ.COM

How Deep Does the Anti-White Rabbit Hole Go? Twitter Post Calling Picture of White Mom with Her Four White Children...

👍 2 1 Comment 1 Share

Stop Islamization of USA
April 12 at 9:45 AM · 🌐

How Deep Does the Anti-White Rabbit Hole Go? Twitter Post Calling Picture of White Mom with Her Four White Children "Really Dark" Goes Viral, Getting 44,000 Likes




UNZ.COM

How Deep Does the Anti-White Rabbit Hole Go? Twitter Post Calling Picture of White Mom with Her Four White Children...

👍👎🗨️ 12 1 Comment 2 Shares

Escape from Detroit: The Collapse of America's Black Metropolis
April 12 at 10:03 AM · 🌐

How Deep Does the Anti-White Rabbit Hole Go? Twitter Post Calling Picture of White Mom with Her Four White Children "Really Dark" Goes Viral, Getting 44,000 Likes

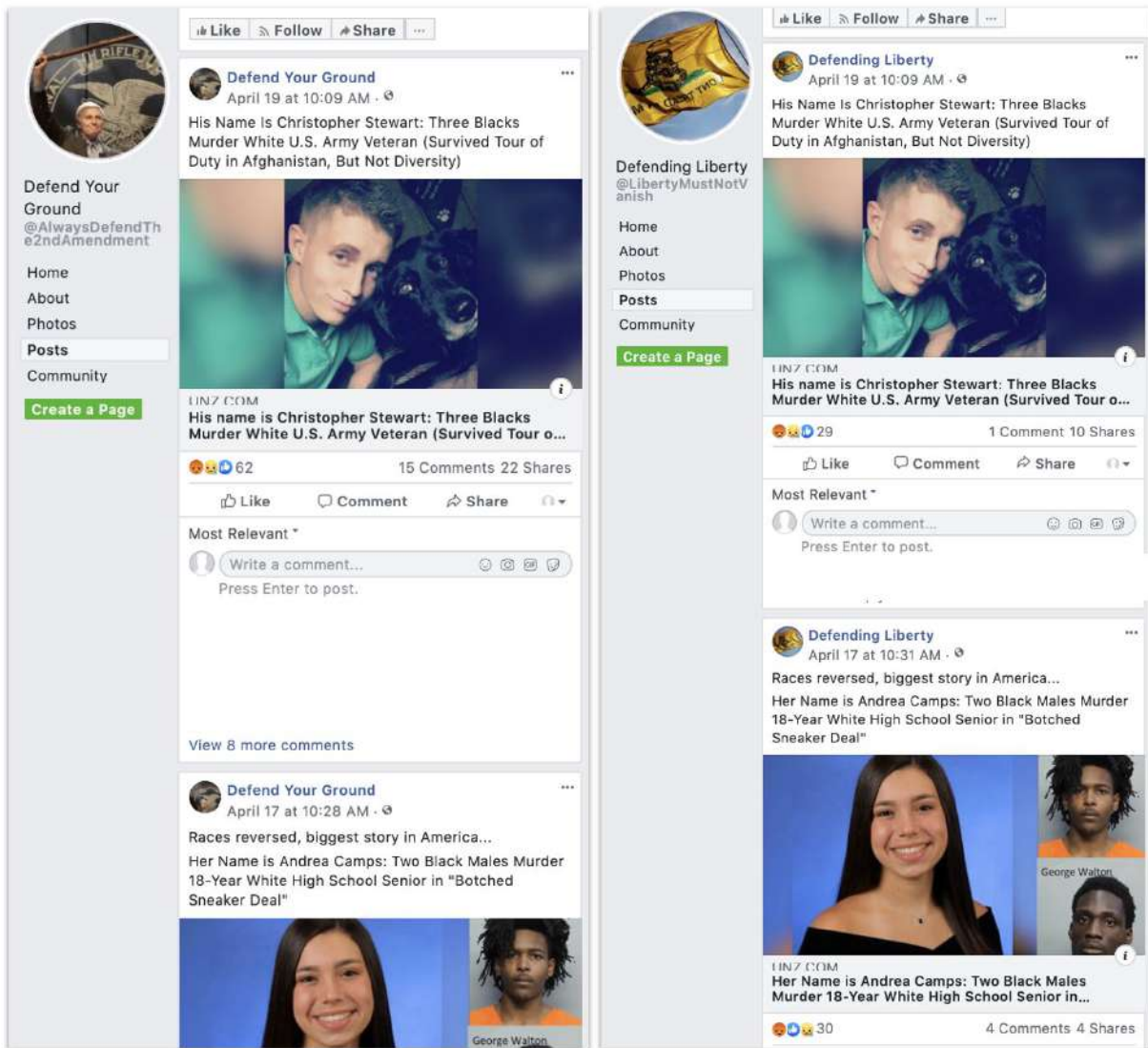


UNZ.COM

How Deep Does the Anti-White Rabbit Hole Go? Twitter Post Calling Picture of White Mom with Her Four White Children...

👍 Like 🗨️ Comment ➦ Share

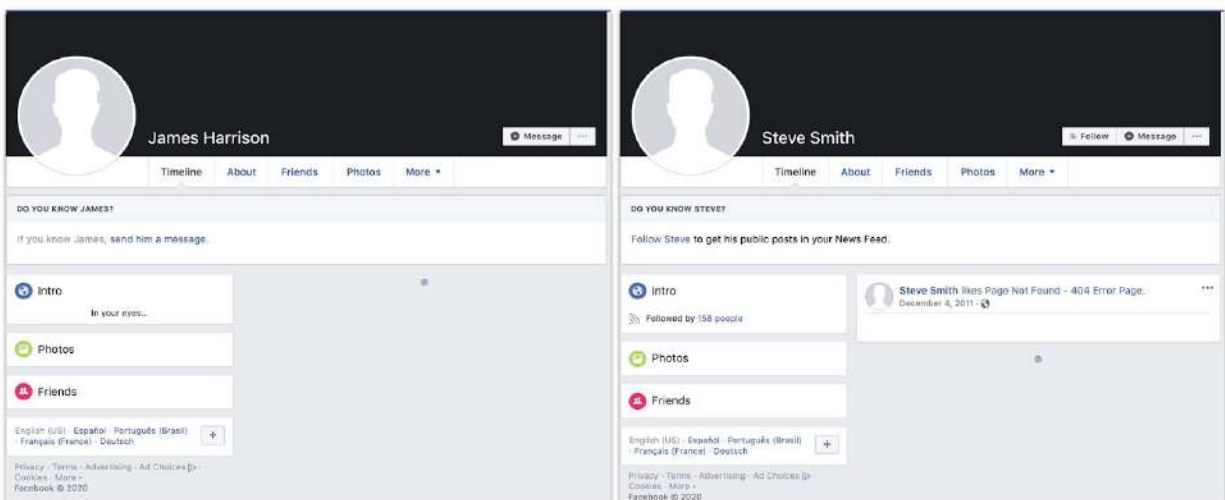
The same article from unz[.]com shared by The War on the Blue, Defending Liberty, Stop Islamization of USA, and Escape from Detroit: The Collapse of America's Black Metropolis between 09:43 and 10:03 on April 12, 2020.



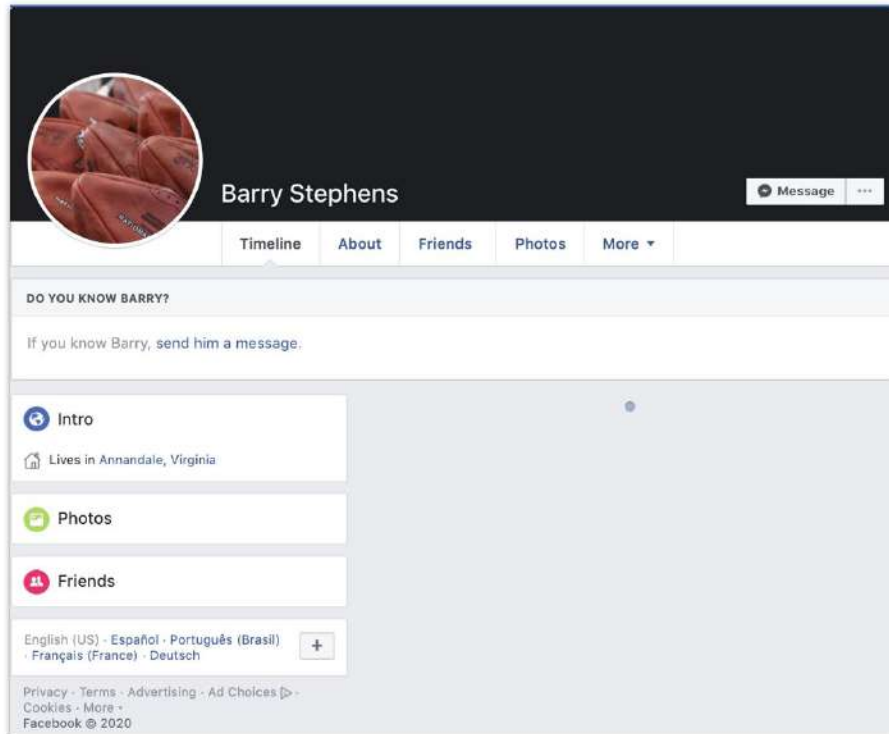
The same posts in the same order and almost the same minute from Defend Your Ground (left) and Defending Liberty (right). Both shares were of unz[.]com. We have obscured comments from users who were apparently unrelated to the network.

Account Behavior

Coordinated posting is not itself a violation of Facebook's terms of service: the critical term is coordinated inauthentic behavior. A number of the accounts that Facebook identified as belonging to this network resembled inauthentic accounts that have been observed in other, larger scale influence operations, in that they showed no information or posting history, although one of them had a following of 158 users nonetheless. There may be a range of reasons for this activity, but in other known information operations it has been a characteristic of inauthentic accounts, set up with a minimum of corroborating detail and used to manage groups elsewhere online.



The profiles of James Harrison and Steve Smith, faceless and postless, but with 158 followers, in the case of "Steve."

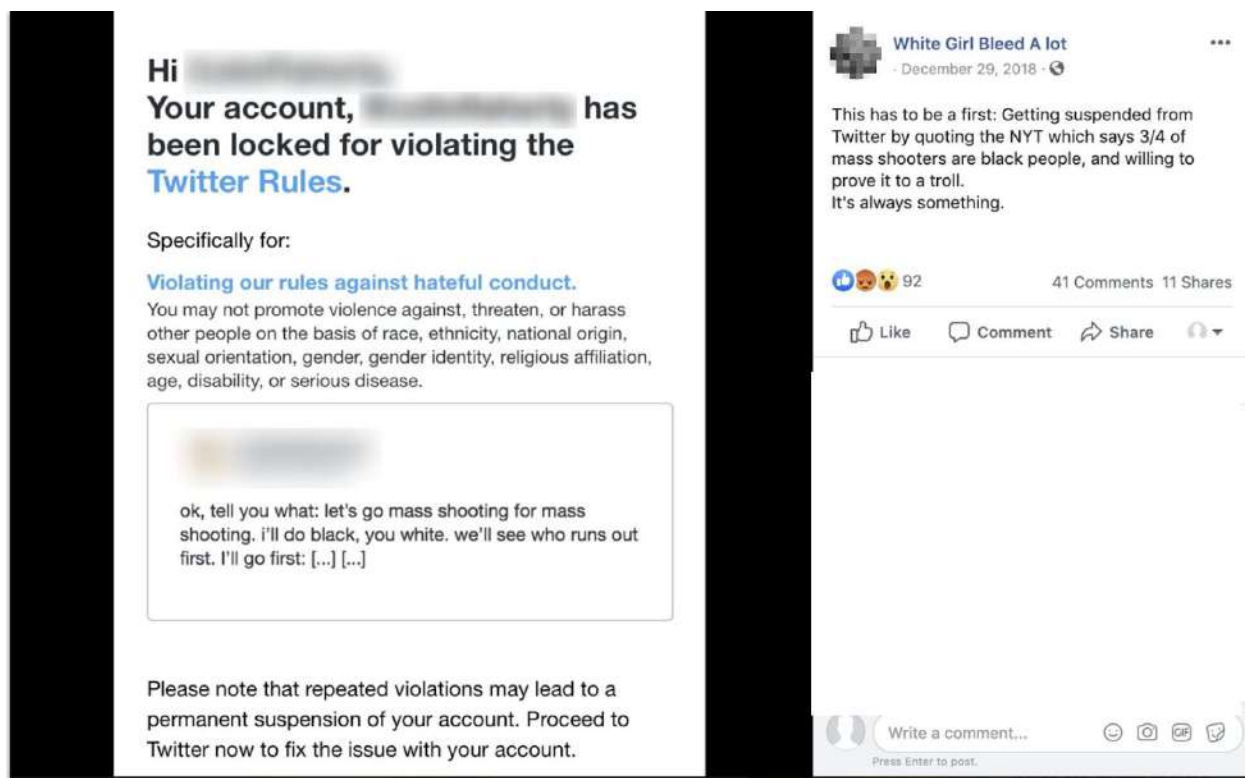


The profile of Barry Stephens, "whose face was a football. Note the lack of any posts, friends, comments, or personal information other than a claimed location in Virginia.

The network was taken down for coordinated inauthentic behavior, but individual users appear to have been found in violation of other terms of services both on Facebook and on Twitter at different times, as the following screenshots highlight.



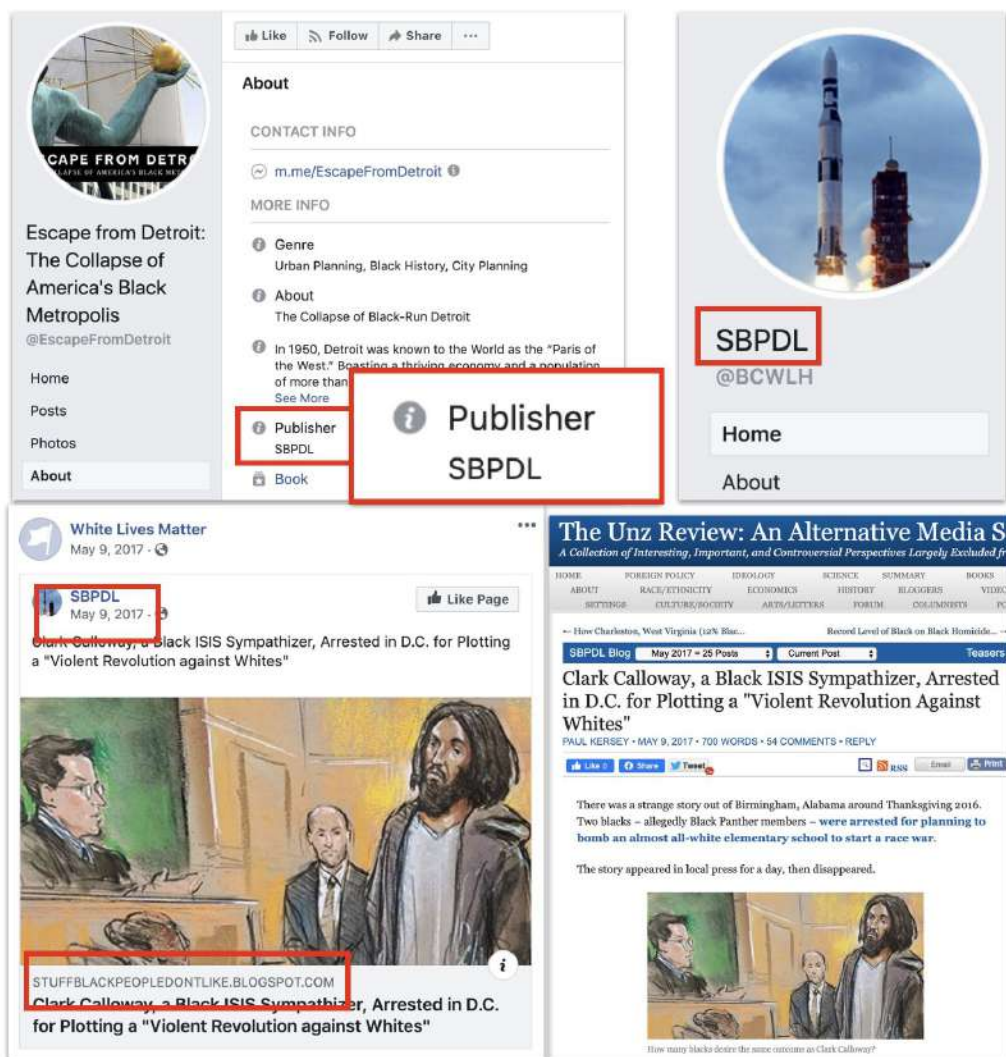
Post by White Girl Bleed a Lot, celebrating release from "Facebook jail ... for who knows how long," suggesting that this was not the first time the account had been temporarily suspended..



Post by White Girl Bleed a Lot, indicating that the associated Twitter account had been locked for violating Twitter's rules.

Network Effect

Further evidence ties the website unz[.]com to the network of Facebook pages. One of the pages promoted a book that blamed people of color for social and economic problems in Detroit; it listed the book's publisher as SBPDL. That was the name of another page in the set. One early post from that account pointed to the blogspot account called "stuff black people don't like," or SBPDL. When clicked, the blogspot links resolved to unz[.]com.

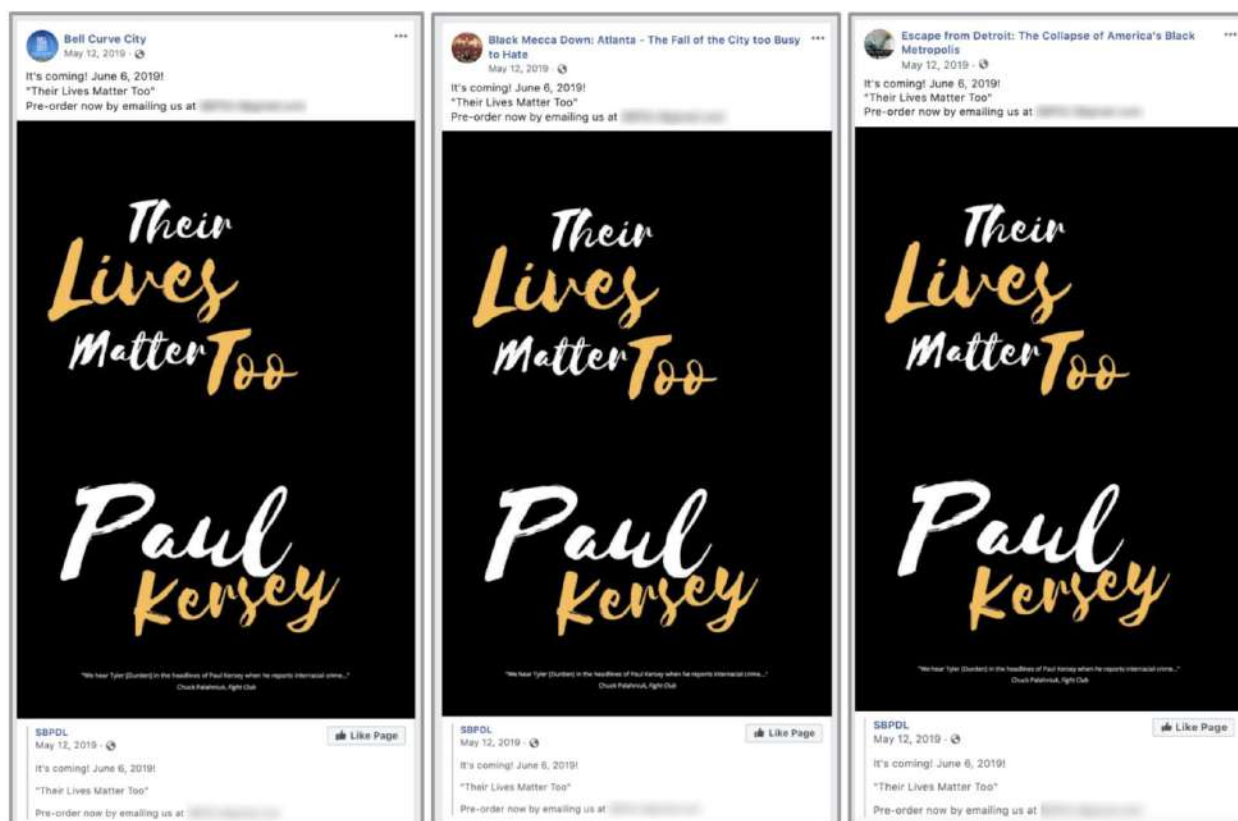


Top left, the Escape from Detroit page, showing its publisher as SBPDL. Top right, the Facebook page for SBPDL, also part of the takedown set. Bottom left, the White Lives Matter page, sharing an SBPDL post in 2017 that linked to StuffBlackPeopleDontLike.blogspot[.]com. Bottom right, the site to which that link now resolves: the Unz Review, unz[.]com. Many of these articles were penned by the same author.

Many of the pages propagating content from UNZ and Stuffblackpeopledontlike also engaged in coordinated promotion of books written by authors published on both VDARE and UNZ: many of these were cross promotions, often shared from the SBPDL Facebook page, and almost always linking back to Amazon. In some cases, the pages shared posts containing identical language that promoted the books within a minute or two of each other.



Chorus of promotion: three of the accounts in the network boosting books that blamed people of color.



The network frequently promoted Amazon.com links to books written by the same author; sometimes on the same day. Many of the pages were named after the titles of books written by said author.

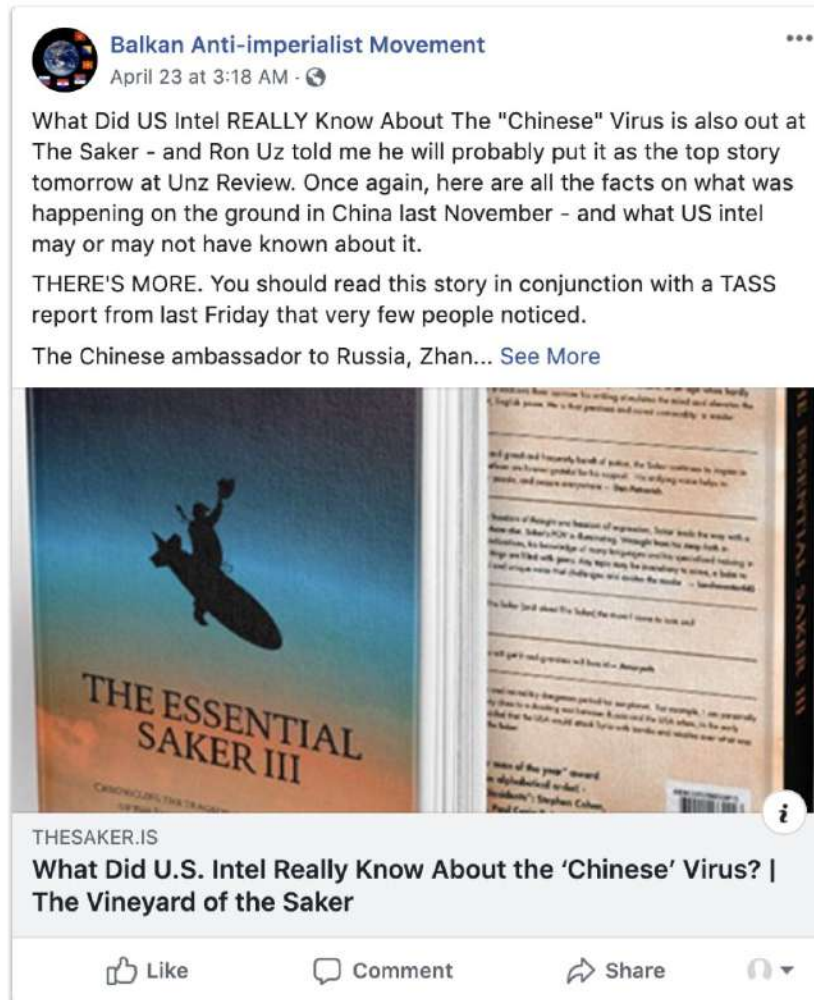
Presence of Associated Twitter Assets in Graphika Maps

A small number of Twitter accounts are associated with the organizations at the center of this takedown. These include the titular accounts of the websites in question, @vdare (44,376 followers as of May 1, 2020) and @UnzReview (5,667 followers as of the same date). The following figures vary by nearly an order of magnitude, but both Twitter accounts have a degree of influence within online communities that Graphika has previously mapped.

Studying where accounts are mentioned in Graphika's maps can illustrate what kind of users most often engage with them and what other topics those users engage with. They do not necessarily indicate a direct organizational relationship between the accounts that are mentioned and the accounts that mention them.

For example, @UnzReview was followed or mentioned by accounts that feature in 19 Graphika network maps. Five of these were maps of accounts that have been attributed to state-sponsored information operations. A further six of these maps were used to investigate suspected state-sponsored campaigns or assets that regularly advance the Kremlin's policies and viewpoints. This indicates that at least part of the Unz Review's Twitter audience likely has significant overlap with those users who produce and engage with state-backed influence operations.

One anecdotal indicator of that overlapping interest was a post that featured in another of the Facebook takedowns announced on May 5: the takedown of a large number of assets tied to Iran's state broadcaster, IRIB. In one of these posts, a Facebook page attributed to a covert IRIB network amplified an article on the pro-Kremlin blog The Vineyard of the Saker, which said that the Unz Review would be featuring the claim that the United States knew about the Covid-19 outbreak before the Chinese government had detected it. This indicates a shared interest in a certain narrative that passed between different and distinct groups; it should not be taken as indicating any organizational connection between them.



Post by Balkan Anti-Imperialist Movement, a Facebook page taken down as part of a network attributed to IRIB, promoting a post by the Saker, which emphasized that the Unz Review would be carrying its story.

Although VDARE's Twitter following was lower, the account was followed or mentioned by accounts in far more Graphika network maps, 206 in total. The majority of these maps center around events that particularly concern the US political right wing, for example the gun lobby rally in Richmond, VA on January 20, or on grassroots extremist and hate-based communities that operate within the US.

For example, one of the network maps that featured a particularly high rate of accounts that followed @vdare mapped out communities involved in the deadly Unite the Right rally in 2017. This indicates that VDARE's content is influential within right-wing extremist communities in the US that have demonstrated the potential to mobilize offline in the past. The followers broke down into a range of subgroups with different main preoccupations - for example white identity politics or Confederate identity - but they were broadly united by a dedication to white supremacist ideals and resistance to migrants and people of color.

The background of the image is a dark, starry sky. In the lower right quadrant, there is a large, dense, and vibrant orange-red light trail that curves upwards and to the right. This trail is composed of many fine, overlapping lines, giving it a sense of motion and energy. The overall composition is abstract and modern.

Graphika

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