

Center for Immigration Studies

Amid a growing national debate on immigration, the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) has become one of the most cited organizations in the media. Under the banner of its “low-immigration, pro-immigrant” mantra, CIS positions itself as a non-partisan research institute that proposes pragmatic solutions to the perceived problem of “mass immigration.” But while disavowing any ideological import to its views, this organization is actually an integral component of the largest, most controversial anti-immigrant alliance in the country: the John Tanton Network, known for harboring right-wing extremists and disseminating hateful rhetoric.

Founded in 1985 by white nationalist John Tanton, CIS maintains a notable relationship with the network he started and its flagship organization, the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). Tanton and FAIR have waged an extensive campaign to eliminate immigration into the United States, collaborating with ethnic separatists and the far-right to carry out this aim. Within this nativist coalition, CIS fulfills a specific role.

By the time of CIS’s founding, FAIR had already been well-established, and the Tanton Network had already begun growing around FAIR. But with this came the potential problem of seeming too biased. According to Tanton, FAIR personnel “concluded that a ‘Think Tank’ on the scale of Worldwatch Institute is needed,” and that “[f]or credibility, this will need to be independent of FAIR, though the Center for Immigration Studies, as we’re calling it, is starting off as a project of FAIR.”

After FAIR donated several board members and donors to CIS, the time came to establish the young organization’s mainstream credibility. Shortly after its founding, Tanton gave shape to his hopes: “We need to get CIS fully funded and entrenched as a major Washington think-tank, one that can venture into issues FAIR is not ready to raise.”

In this sense, CIS is a double-pronged asset for the Tanton Network: it legitimizes otherwise extreme arguments with an academic veneer, while it simultaneously becomes the cutting edge of the anti-immigrant movement by “ventur[ing] into issues” as-yet untouched. CIS now regularly hosts panel discussions, publishes voluminous reports, and places opinion pieces in mainstream newspapers across the country—all of it serving to remove the sting from the white nationalism inherent to its project.

So make no mistake; CIS is very much a part of Tanton’s Network, and its personnel continue to prove this fact.

- CIS’s current executive director, Mark Krikorian, was previously employed by FAIR before joining CIS in 1995. Krikorian has run the gamut of sneering chauvinisms, and has made a career out of his callous remarks through his blog at the [National Review Online](#). Of his more odious observations, his reaction to the 7.0 magnitude earthquake in Haiti in 2010 is particularly telling: “My guess is that Haiti’s so screwed up because it wasn’t colonized long enough....[A]fter experiencing the worst of tropical colonial slavery, the Haitians didn’t stick around long enough to benefit from it. (Haiti became independent in 1804). And by benefit I mean develop a local culture significantly shaped by the more-advanced civilization of the colonizers.”
- The rest of CIS’s staff is also particularly abrasive in their statements—even for the Tanton Network. In a 2008 report for CIS, David Seminara, a CIS fellow, referred to immigrants who marry US citizens as “Third-World gold-diggers.” That same year, the organization’s director of policy studies, Jessica Vaughan, wrote a blog arguing that the temporary protection status for refugees had contributed to “the burgeoning street gang problem in the United States.”
- Despite its “non-partisan” gloss, CIS often collaborates with the far-right, especially when those elements are present within the Tanton Network. Krikorian and other CIS staffers have participated in the annual Writers Workshop for the Social Contract Press, a white nationalist publishing house established by Tanton. They have also contributed to Tanton’s white nationalist journal, [The Social Contract](#).
- CIS regularly circulates articles from the anti-immigrant blog VDARE.com, a site founded by white nationalist Peter Brimelow, which regularly features the writings of anti-Semites, homophobes, and flagrant racists. CIS fellow John Miano has also contributed to VDARE.com. Brimelow, for his part, has been published in CIS reports.

- CIS has seen its own writings published in even more extreme forums. In 2009, an article written by Steven Camarota, director of research at CIS, appeared in two issues of the anti-Semitic newspaper American Free Press. That same year, a CIS report was reprinted in the Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies, a quarterly publication run by anti-Semite, Roger Pearson.
- In recent years, CIS has demonstrated a particular intolerance for Muslims. In a 2011 blog for the National Review Online, Mark Krikorian went on record as saying, “I’m afraid that in the Islamic world democracy faces the problem of a vicious people, one where the desire for freedom is indeed written in every human heart, but the freedom to do evil.” Additionally, CIS fellow James R. Edwards has proposed “broader grounds for exclusion” when considering visa applicants, and suggested that “In-depth examination of visa applicants’ beliefs and attitudes toward Western democracy and liberty could be part of the screening process”—a suggestion addressing the assumption that Muslims are incapable of grasping democracy.