

An Asymmetry of Influence (Pt. 1 of 4)

The 1st of a 4-part series comparing the outreach effectiveness of MAGA & Woke philosophy

This is Part One of a four-part series that looks at the profound disparity between the communication abilities of MAGA Conservatism & Wokeism. Bottom line, the former has proven very effective & the latter is...a joke.

Part One looks at the general model that makes MAGA effective at getting their message out (to their targeted demographic). Part Two will drill down on the specifics.

Part Three & Four will do a similar analysis of Woke political philosophy.

[Db of all my Substack essays \(as of 11/25/ 25\) and other stuff](#)

MAGA is about marketing.

A good starting point in understanding the Trump phenomenon is to look at cigarette advertising in the 1960s and 1970s.

There was a sameness to the product and the advertisers compensated by deliberately appealing to group identity and psychological archetypes. This meant consciously constructing brand loyalty through demographic targeting rather than innovation.

Marlboro and Virginia Slims exemplify this strategy, with campaigns that openly admitted their reliance on cultural symbolism rather than product differentiation.

Cigarettes in the mid-twentieth century were, by design, a commodity. Aside from minor variations—menthol versus regular, filtered versus unfiltered—there was little that manufacturers could do to make one brand stand out in terms of taste or function. Advertising executives of the period understood this limitation and leaned into it.

As one Philip Morris executive candidly admitted:

We are not selling a product so much as a way of life.

This is the starting point in understanding the marketing of Donald Trump.

There is a critical distinction. While cigarettes were largely the same – there is only so much that one can do with a cigarette – MAGA was a radically different political

philosophy...a bizarre mix of conspiracy theory, racism and a theology called [Christian Dominionism](#)...than the other offerings.

Regardless, it was the acceptance of the limited variety of cigarettes that shaped the industry's most iconic campaigns. Unlike cars – which do differ wildly because of design – cig ads sought to bind consumers to a brand by embedding it within the psychology and sociology of identity groups rather than by touting technical superiority.

The Marlboro campaign is perhaps the most famous example.

[Originally marketed in the 1930s as a “ladies’ cigarette”](#) with a red filter tip to hide lipstick stains, Marlboro was rebranded in the 1950s and 1960s to appeal to men.

But the iconic tough cowboy image evolved over time.

Marlboro Man began in 1955, when Phillip Morris relaunched its Marlboro brand of cigarettes. This was done with the help of the [Leo Burnett](#) advertising company of Chicago. At this time, Philip Morris had been producing Marlboro cigarettes for over 30 years. The brand first appeared in 1924 with the eponymous beauty tip.

The goal in 1955 was to create an entirely new image for the product. In the first instance, Burnett developed a series of advertisements showing a range of masculine styles. They included a man in a tuxedo, a chess player, a man in a towel coming out of a shower, a writer who was typing, a cinematographer, a diver, a cowboy, and a sailor. All the ads carried the byline, “A lot of man . . . a lot of cigarette.”

By the early 1960s, [the Marlboro Man](#)—rugged, silent, independent—had become the centerpiece of the campaign.

This figure was not simply a cowboy but a projection of masculine fantasy for white-collar men trapped in bureaucratic office jobs. The Marlboro Man offered an escapist identity: a chance to feel individualistic and macho in a world increasingly defined by conformity.

MAGA similarly was a marketed product. It was targeted at white working class Christians who felt that US society – with the ever growing visibility of LGBTQ and the influx of immigrants who were either non-Christian or mixed the faith with “demonic” analogues (like [Santería](#)) was literally going to hell.

This was the view expressed by ideological spokespeople like Ann Coulter (the conservative columnist). She long argued that Christianity is the greatest religion: foundational to America's values. And [she feared that immigrant variations of Christianity \(such as syncretic practices like Santería\) were diluting what she the “true” form of the faith.](#) Coulter's concern reflected her broader cultural critique: that traditional Christianity was being eroded by hybrid religious expressions. These bastardized forms

were undermining its purity and weakening its role as the moral and civic bedrock of U.S. society.

Returning to the Marlboro Man, psychologists noted that the campaign tapped into Jungian archetypes of the lone hero: sociologists argued that it reflected anxieties about emasculation in postwar consumer culture. The product itself was unchanged; what mattered was the symbolic narrative that smoking Marlboro placed the consumer in “Marlboro Country,” a mythic landscape of freedom and virility.

MAGA appealed to racism.

When Trump descended that golden escalator and announced his first presidential run, he delivered this hateful tirade about brown people:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

The racists felt immense joy when he spoke those words. A candidate of a major party felt as they did.

Yes! He hates the s---s too!

And like the Marlboro man campaign, Trump plugged into the archetype of racism.

Racism is...technically...not a Jungian archetype. Archetypes are universal figures like the Mother or Hero. While racism is historically constructed, Jungian theory helps explain racism through the Shadow. This is where societies project disowned fears onto marginalized groups. Post-Jungian thinkers (like Fanny Brewster) describe racism as a racial complex: a cultural pattern shaped by archetypal energies but tied to history. Thus, racism isn't archetypal itself: it is a manifestation of shadow dynamics within cultural complexes.

When Trump spoke that racist diatribe, he connected to racist voters in a way that was unprecedented in recent history.

Something that might be unpleasant – but must be acknowledged – is that Christianity and racism are not mutually exclusive. If we are serious about understanding the Trump phenomenon, that must be acknowledged.

This is about the difference between good & evil. And this has nothing to do with religion. Nonetheless, a significant number of – *by no means all* – Christians are evil and justify their depravity with their god. I am not hostile to Christianity. As a critical thinker, I can't overlook the fact that the most perverse episodes in human history involved believers and were often justified by their beliefs.

Consider the Jim Crow South: cross burning (as practiced by the Ku Klux Klan) carried a twisted religious symbolism that used Christian iconography to justify racial terror. While it was primarily a tool of intimidation and psychological warfare against Black communities, it was steeped in Christian ritual.

The Klan claimed the burning cross represented the “light of Christ” and divine truth. They saw it as a beacon of purity and a call to defend white Christian civilization: a grotesque inversion of Christian teachings on love and compassion.

Barry Black, a Klan leader, has described cross burning as "a very sacred ritual."

"We don't light [the cross] to desecrate it," he told the Roanoke Times in 1999. "We light it to show that Christ is still alive." The burning symbolizes the "burning away of evil."

To be clear, the religious connotation behind the KKK burning crosses developed over time.

Linda Gordon (Professor of History at New York University and author of *The Second Coming of the Ku Klux Klan*) explained:

The original KKK was not particularly religious. They didn't make a big deal of religion in their activities. They would, almost all of them, claim Christian belief, of course, but this wasn't a religious group in itself.

The first Klan was a secret society. Some historians believe it was inspired by Scottish history.

Some 14th Century Scottish clans would set ablaze crosses on hillsides, as symbols of defiance against military rivals or to rally troops when a battle was imminent. But the first wave of the Ku Klux Klan didn't engage in the practice.

The first wave of the KKK died out when it became clear that ‘Jim Crow’ laws in the US – “state and local statutes that legalised racial segregation” – would cement white supremacy.

A recurrent theme of mine – in past essays – is that MAGA is based in racism and extreme religious fanaticism (Christian Dominionism). I will fully develop that point in the next essay. My theme here is that MAGA has utilized marketing strategies to realize their undeniable success.

Stone Mountain is known for the largest high relief sculpture in the world: it depicts three Confederate figures of the Civil War (President Jefferson Davis and Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson). The entire carved surface measures three-acres. The relief is larger than a football field and Mount Rushmore. The carving of the three men towers 400 feet above the ground and measures 90 by 190 feet. Recessed

42 feet into the mountain, the deepest point of the carving is at Lee's elbow (which is 12 feet to the mountain's surface).

This admittedly impressive work of art was a marketing strategy to further in racism and extreme religious fanaticism (like MAGA).

In 1915, Methodist preacher [William J Simmons](#) and about 15 other men climbed Stone Mountain in Georgia, and put a match to a pine board cross. As the cross went up in flames, they announced the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. Stone Mountain in Georgia is widely known for the massive relief carving depicting Confederate officers on horseback: the [project formally began in 1915](#) (the same year that Simmons and his compatriots engaged in the aforementioned cross burning). [Sculptor Gutzon Borglum](#) was hired by the Stone Mountain Monumental Association. Although physical carving did not begin until 1923 (due to funding delays and World War I), the project's commissioning, design work, and organizational start date clearly trace back to 1915.

([As an aside, Borglum worked both on Stone Mountain & Mount Rushmore.](#))

[Gutzon Borglum had a relationship with the Ku Klux Klan:](#) he aligned himself with the Klan during the Stone Mountain period. [Evidence includes a 1923 letter Borglum wrote to the Klan's Imperial Wizard](#) expressing admiration for the organization's mission and seeking financial support. He also had a close relationship with James Simmons (a Klan leader in South Dakota). I could not readily find evidence that James was related to William: regardless, the two men share the same last name. Evidence of Borglum's active engagement and ideological sympathy is strong.

While William Simmons led the Thanksgiving-night ceremony with 16 men, I could not find info that Borglum was present at the event. The sculptor arrived in Atlanta in August 1915 and was already involved with Stone Mountain organizers.

[The Stone Mountain Monumental Association – which commissioned Borglum – was deeply connected to the KKK.](#) The early leadership, funders, and organizers behind the Stone Mountain carving were directly intertwined with the Ku Klux Klan: including the circle around William J. Simmons, the preacher who revived the Klan in 1915.

The Atlanta History Center's (AHC) condensed history states:

[From the beginning of efforts to create the carving in 1914, early proponents of the carving had strong connections to the Ku Klux Klan and openly supported Klan politics.](#)

This directly implicates the organizational ecosystem that became the Stone Mountain Monumental Association.

[Helen Plane was a leader of the Atlanta chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and openly praised the Klan.](#) She helped to initiate the carving project and

“openly praised the Klan and even proposed Klansmen be incorporated in the carving” (per AHC). Plane was one of the key figures who pushed for the formation of the Stone Mountain Monumental Association.

Further, [Sam Venable \(owner of Stone Mountain\) was a major Klan ally](#). AHC documents that Venable “sanctioned Klan meetings on the mountain and remained highly involved with the group for many years”. He leased the mountain to the Stone Mountain Monumental Association: giving the Klan direct influence over the project.

To recap, The Stone Mountain Monumental Association emerged from a network of:

- (1) United Daughters of the Confederacy leaders who openly supported the Klan.
- (2) A mountain owner who hosted Klan ceremonies.
- (3) A cultural and political environment shaped by Simmons’s revived Klan.
- (4) Funders and organizers who aligned with Klan ideology.
- (5) The carving project and the Klan revival were intertwined from the beginning.

After the rebirth of the KKK, cross burnings were often part of elaborate ceremonies that mimicked religious rites—complete with prayers, hymns, and invocations. This lent a veneer of spiritual legitimacy to acts of terror: embedding racial violence within a pseudo-religious framework.

The second wave of the KKK – begun by Simmons on that Georgian mountainside – restricted membership to white Christians. Members wore white robes to symbolize “purity” and [burned crosses to signify “the light of Christ”](#).

Linda Gordon (Professor of History at New York University and author of [The Second Coming of the Ku Klux Klan](#)) explained:

“The second version of the Klan was really the product of evangelical Christianity. It was very religiously-oriented.”

Stone Mountain marketed the hate of the KKK: MAGA marketed the racism of Donald Trump.

MAGA was marketed like cigarettes: the core demo being poor, white, racists.

The overlap between MAGA identity and Christian affiliation—especially evangelical—is consistently high. Christianity, particularly in its nationalist and evangelical forms, remains a core cultural and ideological pillar of the MAGA movement.

[When asked about the due process rights of undocumented immigrants](#), a majority of voters (57%), including a majority of Democrats (83%) and Independents (59%), believe

that “the federal government should only be allowed to deport undocumented immigrants if it has provided evidence and a hearing” A minority of Republicans (30%) agreed.

An aspect of the marketing that elevated Trump/MAGA was the lionization of Charlie Kirk after his assassination. No honorable person celebrates the violent death of another. Simultaneously, a thoughtful person analyzes events in a critical manner.

After the death, the Trump administration rapidly canonized Charlie Kirk as a patriotic martyr, blending state symbolism with partisan mobilization.

This included public condemnations (which was reasonable). However, it expanded out to threats to label antifa and liberal networks as “terrorist,” and vows to dismantle progressive nonprofits.

And beyond the expected denunciations, the Trump response was irrational, anti-democratic or both.

The narrative focus by Trump to blame “Antifa” for the death is absurd. While it does align with the ongoing marketing that positions MAGA as being endlessly persecuted, it does not align with the facts.

[There is no organized group called “Antifa”.](#)

[In a committee hearing,](#) US Rep. Bennie Thompson pressed senior FBI official Michael Glasheen on Thursday (12/11/25) to substantiate his assertion that Antifa constitutes the nation’s top domestic terror threat. Where is this terrorist organization located? How many members does it have?

[Glasheen became totally flustered and attempted to turn to Trump talking points. He never answered Thompson’s questions.](#)

[Tyler Robinson is currently accused](#) of the Kirk assassination. He is not a supporter of LGBTQ (as Trump supporters speculated prior to his identification and arrest) but is aligned – at least virtually – with Nick Fuentes (the outspoken antisemite). Robinson appears to have an informal connection with him on social media.

[Fuentes and his Groypers have long viewed Kirk as a “Zionist sellout”](#) and a gatekeeper for donor-class conservatism.

Their feud dates back to the 2019 “[Groypers Wars](#),” when Fuentes’ supporters disrupted TPUSA events: they accused Kirk of being too moderate on immigration, LGBTQ rights, and foreign policy. Now, with Trump elevating Kirk to martyr status—complete with stadium memorials, executive orders, and a data foundation—Fuentes sees the administration as **rewarding the very figure he spent years trying to discredit.**

The attempt to link the murder of Kirk to Antifa is BS.

Despite frequent political references to [“Antifa” \(as if it were a formal organization\), there is no recognized group by that name with membership rolls, leadership structures, or centralized operations.](#) “Antifa” is shorthand for anti-fascist activism—a decentralized, loosely affiliated movement rooted in opposition to authoritarianism and far-right extremism. Participants often organize independently or through local networks, and their tactics, goals, and affiliations vary widely.

Antifa is not a domestic terrorist organization as it lacks the structural characteristics of a traditional group. The term is used rhetorically to conflate disparate protest actions and create the perception of a singular threat.

It is not a unified entity.

It’s more Trump/MAGA marketing BS. There is no discreet organization that was behind the killing of Kirk. Apparently, he was killed by a MAGA sympathizer.

He had ample opportunity to come out in opposition to anti-humane and anti-democratic policies of Trump. He did not...no, the opposite.

Charlie Kirk consistently supported aggressive immigration enforcement: including ICE operations, the Alligator Alcatraz detention center, and the idea of sending people from the U.S. to El Salvador’s CECOT mega-prison (all without due process). He did not publicly criticize these policies or raise concerns about our country’s shift to authoritarianism.

Kirk defended ICE agents amid rising public criticism and violence against them: framing attacks as reactions to policies that [“the American people have actually voted for”](#).

Kirk is the founder of Turning Point USA (TPUSA).

Both he and his group have expressed support for ICE.

I could find no evidence of him criticizing ICE for detaining people without due process. The same is true with TPUSA. Kirk’s organization has focused on issues like promoting conservative values, free markets, and limited government (not explicitly endorsing rounding people up without the accepted legal restraint).

[However, students at Dominican University expressed concerns about TPUSA’s stance on ICE \(after the group started the process of opening a chapter\).](#) The critics cited potential harm to undocumented students and the organization’s support for ICE (which they felt contradicted the university’s values). TPUSA did not take the opportunity to clarify that it supports the rule of law.

He supported **mass deportations** and a **net-zero immigration plan**: implicit backing for ICE's role in enforcing these policies. And there's simply no record of him criticizing ICE for rounding up individuals without due process. Instead, he often portrayed ICE agents as "[heroes under siege](#)" and condemned rhetoric comparing them to Nazis.

Since he was addressing the fact that critics were calling ICE agents "Nazis", he was aware of their arguments. He did not take the opportunity to clarify his position.

Kirk was a hateful man & did not deserve a memorial ceremony that was attended by the president.

The Kirk memorial was history repeating itself.

The Nazis transformed the death of [Horst Wessel](#) (a young SA officer killed in 1930) into one of their most powerful propaganda myths. After Wessel was shot by members of the Communist Party, [Joseph Goebbels](#) immediately reframed the incident as a political martyrdom narrative. In the propagandistic retelling, Wessel not as a street-level activist but as a heroic victim of "Bolshevik terror."

Goebbels amplified [Wessel's funeral into a major public spectacle. The internment was attended by Nazi leadership](#): the event was staged to symbolize the struggle between National Socialism and its enemies. Nazi newspapers and rallies repeatedly invoked Wessel's story to stoke fear, anger, and loyalty: the rhetoric made his death into a rallying cry for the movement. The propaganda machine emphasized his youth, sacrifice, and supposed racial & ideological purity. The Nazis crafted a mythic figure whose death demanded political vengeance.

While a political assassination is always deeply disturbing, Charlie Kirk was a total creep. And – I assume – that Horst Wessel was as well.

In an episode of [The Charlie Kirk Show](#), he reacted to Taylor Swift's engagement to NFL star Travis Kelce by urging her [to "submit to your husband" and "reject feminism"](#). Kirk framed the engagement as a potential turning point for Swift: asserting that marriage and motherhood could "de-radicalize" her and steer her away from liberal politics. He speculated that Swift's prior progressive stances were due to her unmarried status and claimed that embracing traditional gender roles would make her a better role model for young women.

And there are more provocative examples of Kirk's creepiness. But the guy had a program – and could have used it to say anything – he used it to get into the business of a woman that he did not know and boss her around. While political assassination is repellent, this was a s--- guy. Beyond the disturbing nature of his death, I was not bothered by it.

Through ritual, music, spectacle, and myth-making, the Nazis turned Wessel's death into a foundational symbol of their movement. Trump/MAGA did the same with Kirk.

The whole thing was marketing for Trump's hateful agenda.

It is reasonable to state that the only people mourning Kirk's death are members of the MAGA movement.

But...MAGA has consistently been a minority of the total U.S. population: even at its peak influence. While it has dominated Republican identity in recent years, it has never represented a majority of Americans overall.

[A May 2025 YouGov/Economist poll found](#) that 50% of Republicans identify with the MAGA movement. The Vanderbilt Unity Poll echoed this. But Republicans comprise only about 28% of the U.S. adult population. That means roughly 14% of Americans identify as MAGA.

It was always a minority.

[NBC News polling showed](#) that **23% of all registered voters** identified as MAGA in **2023**, rising to **27% in 2024**, and reaching **36% by March 2025**. Even at this high point, MAGA remained a minority of the electorate.

Currently...an approximate 14% of the US population belongs to this political movement.

This means the Trump has been using the power of the Federal Government [to market evil](#) to a minority of the population.

This crass marketing is not limited to the executive branch of the federal government.

According to [Newservice Florida](#), the Senate Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee voted 5-2 along party lines in favor of the bill ([SB 194](#)). If passed, this bill would designate October 14, which is Kirk's birthday, as "Charlie Kirk Day of Remembrance."

While commercial marketing – like the marketing of cigarettes in the 1960's/1970's – is done with dispassion, the marketing of the far-right agenda is perverted by fanaticism.

The far-right agenda is collapsing popular support for the GOP.

Former Miami-Dade County Commissioner [Eileen Higgins](#) won Miami's mayoral runoff election Tuesday, marking the first time in nearly 30 years that the city has [elected a Democrat as mayor](#).

And...it was a blowout.

Higgins secured 59% of the vote versus former Miami City Manager [Emilio Gonzalez](#)'s nearly 41%, according to [unofficial results](#) from the Miami-Dade County Supervisor of Elections. The win marks an end to a [competitive race](#) that began with a crowded 13-person field.

While Marlboro appealed to machismo to sell cigarettes, Virginia Slims tapped into the burgeoning feminist movement. MAGA also played to ineffable concepts like traditional gender roles: it also played to a specific theological movement: Christian Dominionism.

Launched in 1968, the Philip Morris product was designed specifically for women: introducing a slimmer, more elegant cigarette, that was meant to look fashionable in a woman's hand.

The famous slogan "[You've Come a Long Way, Baby](#)" was directly tied to the second wave of feminism: positioning smoking as a marker of empowerment and independence.

Yet, as scholars of gender history have pointed out, the campaign simultaneously reinforced traditional stereotypes of femininity by emphasizing slimness, fashion, and attractiveness. Advertisers consciously exploited the cultural moment: they knew they could not innovate much with the cigarette itself.

So...they innovated with meaning.

The trim design was a minor product tweak: the real differentiation lay in the narrative that smoking Virginia Slims was a declaration of modern womanhood. Marketing executives openly admitted that they were "selling emancipation in a pack," This was a striking acknowledgment of the psychological manipulation at play. And – as will be discussed in the next essay – MAGA was sold with the same crass manipulation: playing on the target demo's fears, hate, arrogance and extreme religious beliefs.

The cigarette advertising in the 1960's/1970's exemplified the shift from product-based marketing to lifestyle branding: [the perception of lifestyle was consciously shaped by mass media](#).

And we will explore – in the next essay - how social media (and the internet) was used to sell MAGA. The difference was emphasis. MAGA was sold by appealing to a pre-existing lifestyle of the target demo: older, less educated whites that held extreme religious views.

Like the MAGA-branding, those cigarette campaigns exploited identity formation. While the cig adverts focused on young adults seeking symbols of maturity or rebellion, MAGA focused on a demo whose identity was set and who felt that they were being cut out of the participation in the larger society. MAGA-branding gave these people a way in.

The advertisers for Phillip Morris (and others) segmented markets along gender and racial lines. Marlboro dominated white men: menthol brands like Kool appealed to African American consumers.

Marketing theorists described this as [“demographic loyalty,” a conscious effort to tie a brand to a social group so tightly that switching brands would feel like betraying one’s identity.](#) The cigarette became less a consumable item than a badge of belonging.

MAGA-branding did not play to multiple demos: it played to one: older, less educated whites that held extreme religious views. And turning one’s back on MAGA/Trump was positioned as group betrayal. It was not only betraying one’s group: it was betraying Jesus.

Marlboro’s rugged masculinity and Virginia Slims’ fashionable feminism were deliberate constructions: designed to exploit insecurities and aspirations. MAGA was sold in a similar fashion.

Part Two will expand on this. It will look at how the marketers of MAGA could not control the messaging because of the nature of social media-based outreach and the intense – frankly dimwitted – emotions of the target demo. It will explore how the marketers were not advertising agencies but hostile foreign powers (primarily Russia).

Namaste and Shalom,

John Eisenhauer

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