

## ARTICLE

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## “Democracy Must Be Made Safe for the World”

### *Ralph Adams Cram and the Tradition of American Monarchism*

CHRISTIAN RUTH

University of Florida

**Abstract:** *Ralph Adams Cram was an architect famed for his role in the Gothic Revival movement in the United States. He was also a monarchist. This article examines Cram’s intellectual history and the Romantic-era influences behind his antidemocratic beliefs and ties them to the neoreactionary politics of the “Dark Enlightenment” on the contemporary far right in the United States and abroad.*

**Keywords:** Ralph Adams Cram, monarchism, neoreaction, Curtis Yarvin, Dark Enlightenment, political thought, far right

Ralph Adams Cram is best known as a luminary figure in American architecture. Born the son of a Unitarian minister in 1863 in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, Cram experienced a marked religious experience during a stay in Rome in his early twenties and converted to Anglo-Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> His architectural talents, informed by a deep belief in the primacy of the aesthetics of the medieval era, led him to become the United States’ torchbearer for the Gothic Revival movement, and for Romantic-era architecture. Between 1890 and his death in 1942, Cram built dozens of libraries, cathedrals, university buildings, and government offices. This prolific streak put him on the cover of *Time* magazine and made him a rival of Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>2</sup>

Cram’s deeply held belief in the beauty of the medieval world was only matched by his fervor for feudal politics. “‘The world must be made safe for democracy’ is a noble phrase,” he wrote in 1917, amid the chaos of World War I, “but it is meaningless

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1 Ralph Adams Cram, undated letter in “Childhood Reminiscences” folder, Ralph Adams Cram Papers, Boston Public Library (hereafter RACP), FA 2015.01, Box 6.

2 See *Time’s* cover for December 13, 1926.

without its corollary, ‘democracy must be made safe for the world.’”<sup>3</sup> Cram was an ardent monarchist. He did not necessarily espouse a belief in a pure return to the ancien régime, but he argued for most of his life that modern democracy was a debasement of what he called the “High Democracy” of the Middle Ages, the height of the feudal era.<sup>4</sup> America, he believed, would be best served by jettisoning democracy for the rule of a philosopher king, or a coterie of educated aristocratic rulers.

Cram was not alone then, nor is he alone today. He was a member of a variety of medievalist and Romanticist circles in the late 1800s and early 1900s, ranging from “the Visionists” to the American chapter of the Jacobite Order of the White Rose, which he cofounded.<sup>5</sup> Filled with an eclectic mix of writers, poets, and artists, these groups lauded the beauty of medieval splendor and in some cases the feudal social hierarchy. They were joined in their critiques of modernity and American politics by a wide range of overlapping sociopolitical groups, including the “new humanists,” the distributists, and the Southern Agrarians, all of which Cram increasingly affiliated with later in life. Today, Cram and many of his contemporaries, as well as the Counter-Enlightenment philosophers of the 1700s, 1800s, and early 1900s who influenced them toward monarchical views, are invoked by the growing ranks of reactionary conservatives on the far right. Instead of revered architects like Cram, though, the new reactionary spectrum encompasses serious scholars such as Patrick Deneen, online figures such as Curtis Yarvin (“Mencius Moldbug”), and the dubiously named but popular “Bronze Age Pervert.”<sup>6</sup> Like Cram, these illiberal reactionaries invoke the same tradition of antidemocratic ideas and lean on the same thinkers and concepts.

As democracies confront the rising illiberal wave of the current era, which to many observers seems to have little historic origin beyond the mid-twentieth century, it is critical to understand the long, winding tradition of illiberal thought. This article

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3 Ralph Adams Cram, *The Nemesis of Mediocrity* (Marshall Jones, 1919), 22.

4 Ralph Adams Cram, *The End of Democracy* (Marshall Jones, 1932), 23.

5 See the “Order of the White Rose, 1898–1900” folder, RACP, FA 2015.01, Box 6.

6 On this intellectual lineage, see Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (Yale University Press, 2009). Recent examples of this tradition include Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (Yale University Press, 2018); Patrick Deneen, *Regime Change: Toward a Postliberal Future* (Sentinel, 2023); Guillaume Faye, *Archeofuturism: European Visions of the Post-Catastrophic Age* (Arktos, 2010); and Nick Land, *The Dark Enlightenment* (Imperium Press, 2022). Among many works of scholarship on this illiberal resurgence, see George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (Columbia University Press, 2017); Matthew N. Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists: The U.S. Far Right’s Challenge to State and Empire* (PM Press, 2018); Roberta A. Adams, *Trumpism, Carl Schmitt, and the Threat of Anti-Liberalism in the United States: The Political Thought of Donald Trump and Trumpism* (Lexington Books, 2024); David Austin Walsh, *Taking America Back: The Conservative Movement and the Far Right* (Yale University Press, 2024); Brian Wolfel, *Thomas Carlyle and the Political Universe: From American Transcendentalism to an Elusive Post-Liberalism* (Lexington Books, 2024); and Domenico Losurdo, *Democracy or Bonapartism: Two Centuries of War on Democracy* (Verso, 2024).

reexamines Cram, who has received limited scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup> It links him to a broader constellation of antidemocratic conservatives, neo-medievalists, and Romantic-era thinkers as a case study in medieval-inspired reactionary alternatives to democracy. It draws connections to the present day by looking at how some modern reactionary movements, particularly the neoreactionary “Dark Enlightenment,” ground themselves in the philosophies, aesthetics, and emotions of the Counter-Enlightenment, the Romantic era, and the reactionary movements of the early twentieth century.

### Errant Knights

Cram’s yearning for monarchy was inextricably linked to his attraction to the medieval period. Like many others in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Cram was bombarded by the rapid changes in the political and social climate of the United States. He saw mass politics, the excesses of Gilded Age consumerism and industrial capitalism, and the reform tendencies of the Progressive Era wiping away the traditional art and culture that linked the United States to Europe. Modernity loomed, and Cram joined the ranks of Romanticists and Pre-Raphaelite artists who yearned for a purer, emotionally and spiritually fulfilling past. Many of these, particularly in the Victorian era, were ardent critics of democracy, and drew on real and imagined histories of the medieval past to inform their opinions on art, politics, and life. English architect and polymath John Ruskin, who helped ignite the Gothic Revival, argued that places like fifteenth-century Venice epitomized the height of European civilization, a late medieval utopia that embodied the ephemeral “Gothic” that the revival sought to recreate. “Gothic,” Ruskin said, “was formed in the baron’s castle, and the burgher’s street. It was formed by the thoughts, and hands, and powers of labouring citizens and warrior kings.” Such history

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7 Most of the scholarship on Cram has focused on biographical sketches of his bohemian life, his architectural significance, and his impact on Boston rather than his political and philosophical ideas. See Louella Elizabeth Edwards Hirsch, *Ralph Adams Cram: The Gothic Quest in America* (University of Minnesota Press, 1975); Robert Muccigrosso, *American Gothic: The Mind and Art of Ralph Adams Cram* (University Press of America, 1980); Sarah Drummond Lanford, “A Gothic Epitome: Ralph Adams Cram as Princeton’s Architect,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 43, no. 3 (Spring, 1982): 184–220; Douglass Shand-Tucci, *Boston Bohemia, 1881–1900, Ralph Adams Cram: Life and Architecture* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Douglass Shand-Tucci, *Ralph Adams Cram: An Architect’s Four Quests: Medieval, Modernist, American, Ecumenical* (University of Michigan Press, 1995); and Michael D. Clark, *The Discovery of American Tradition: 1865–1942* (Louisiana State University Press, 2005), chapter 3. Greater attention has recently been paid to Cram’s philosophy and politics. See Michael J. Connolly, *Jacobitism in Britain and the United States, 1880–1910* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023), chapters 5–7, for longer discussions of Jacobitism and Cram. See also the recent work of Alex McPhee-Browne reexamining interwar reactionary politics in the United States, including figures like Cram: “Defying the Demos: Antidemocratic Thought in the United States, 1930–1950,” *Journal of American Studies* (2024): 1–26; and “The Menace of Globalism: Merwin K. Hart and Nationalist Conservatism, 1930–1960,” *Journal of Right-Wing Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): 2–30.

was wrought in an inescapable aesthetic that gave life to that social and political order. It was not enough to simply ape the architecture of the medieval period, though thinkers like Ruskin also advocated for a return to its patterns and behaviors. In a time of rapid change, leaning on the solidity of the medieval past, whether it be the aesthetic of flying buttresses or the tradition of feudal social hierarchy, provided sociopolitical continuity and security. Democracy, industrialization, and commercialization threatened the fabric of society and politics that Ruskin and Cram believed to be essential.<sup>8</sup>

In part, Cram's life was a study in contradictory influences. His family had deep New Hampshire roots, having immigrated to a colonial steading in the mid-1630s after receiving a commission from Charles I and II of the House of Stuart. Raised within a family and community of centuries-long affiliation to Puritanism, Cram converted suddenly to Anglo-Catholicism after he moved to Boston to study architecture. His conversion reflected not only his profound piety but also his fierce loyalty to his Anglo-American roots—while sympathetic, he never converted to Roman Catholicism. Biographers of Cram have noted the influence of his grandfather Ira Blake, who remained an ardent Federalist until his death, on the young architect. Cram himself wrote fondly of “the Squire,” as Blake was nicknamed, and grounded himself in the aristocratic politics of his grandfather while his distaste for modern democracy matured during the heyday of American democratic expansion in the late 1800s and early 1900s.<sup>9</sup>

Cram cultivated connections to a variety of medievalist and Romanticist circles in the 1890s once he moved to Boston. In the early 1890s, Cram and several others in the “Visionists” social circle in Boston began publishing a short-lived art and commentary journal, *The Knight Errant*. The Visionists were an eclectic group of artists, philosophers, and writers led by noted Boston photographer Frederick Holland Day.<sup>10</sup> Cram worked with Day to organize medievalist plays and art shows inspired by the work of those in the group, including, in 1916, an extravagant set piece, the “Masque of Power,” for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where Cram had been a professor of architecture. Cram bedecked hundreds of students in period attire and recreated a massive sea galley, like those from the doge of Venice, in faux-medieval splendor. He dressed himself as Merlin (figure 1).<sup>11</sup>

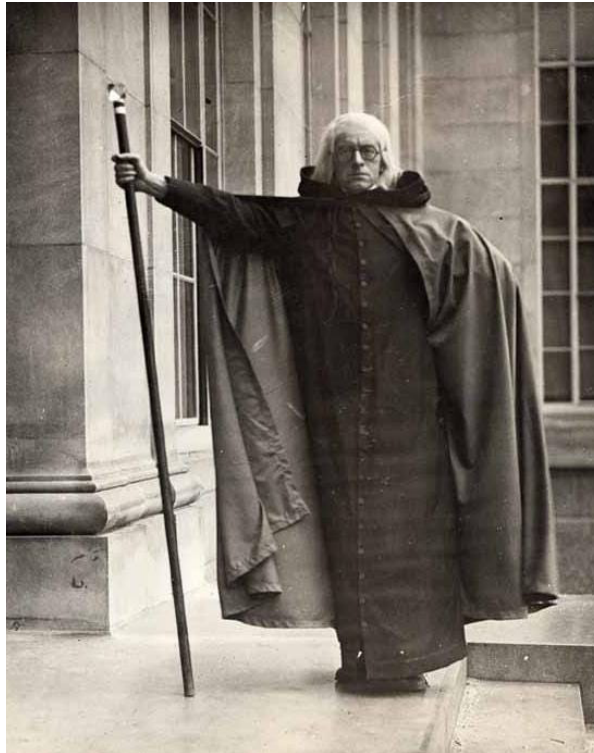
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8 John Ruskin, “Lecture II: Traffic,” in *The Crown of Wild Olive* (John Wiley and Son, 1866), 77; see also Benjamin Evans Lippincott, *Victorian Critics of Democracy: Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Stephen, Maine, Lecky* (Oxford University Press, 1938).

9 Ralph Adams Cram, “The Last of the Squires,” *Atlantic Monthly* 145 (January 1930). On Cram's family, see Shand-Tucci's *Ralph Adams Cram and Boston Bohemia*.

10 Ralph Adams Cram, *Miscellany 1891–1899*, Box 10, Frederick Holland Day Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. For more on Day and the Visionists, see Patricia J. Fanning, *Through an Uncommon Lens: The Life and Photography of F. Holland Day* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2008).

11 “Boston Tech's Telephone Stunt,” CD17-1, Technology Pageant Committee Records, Technology Pageant Committee costumes and properties, 1916–1916, Collection on the Celebration of the Move of



**Figure 1.** Ralph Adams Cram dressed as Merlin in 1916.<sup>12</sup>

It was in groups like the Visionists that Cram first explained publicly his disdain for modern life. The world, he claimed in 1892, was “reaping the whirlwind” of the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Reformation. To Cram, the reactionaries of the nineteenth century—whether they be the Oxford Movement that led to the rise of Anglo-Catholicism, the Pre-Raphaelites trying to capture the essence of color and beauty in defiance of mechanistic art styles, or the growing conservative movement in England—were all linked. He and his friends in the United States were joined to the same “great reaction” to modernity and the legacies of the Enlightenment. “With us, the rise of the tide still continues,” he told readers of *The Knight Errant*.<sup>13</sup> In the medieval period, at least within the imaginary that Cram and his cohort conjured, a true democracy

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the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from Boston to Cambridge, MIT Libraries, Department of Distinctive Collections.

12 Photo from Joshua Kastorf, “The Visionists: Boston’s Turn-of-the-Century Bohemians,” *Medium*, November 5, 2016, <https://mitsap.medium.com/the-visionists-mit-architecture-and-bostons-turn-of-the-century-bohemians-2e6415ec8c80>.

13 Ralph Adams Cram, “Concerning the Restoration of Idealism, and the Raising to Honour Once More of the Imagination,” *The Knight Errant* 1, no. 1 (April 1892): 11–12, RACP, FA2015.01, Box 6.

could be found. That democracy was a limited one, based in the feudal hierarchy of elite rule that allowed everyone, whether they be laborer, merchant, or warrior, to know their established place in society and cooperate, communally, in an interlocked fashion Cram called “democratic.”<sup>14</sup>

Among Counter-Enlightenment thinkers, Cram was especially enamored with Thomas Carlyle, Edmund Burke, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, Ruskin.<sup>15</sup> Carlyle, the controversial conservative Scottish philosopher and historian, who has become a darling among today’s far-right thinkers like Curtis Yarvin, decried the social and political upheaval of the 1800s as a “mad state of matters,” plagued by a lack of heroic individual leaders and “a universal big black Democracy” that loomed over the West.<sup>16</sup> Ruskin, something of a personal hero to Cram, and an ardent disciple of Carlyle, argued for a totalitarian government to organize and protect the masses through the just rule of law.<sup>17</sup> The rule of philosopher-kings, inspired by Plato, features prominently as a connective current between these reactionary figures as the best alternative to the chaos of democracy.

Disdain for the mass politics driving emergent global democratic movements in these years was pervasive. French Romantic poet Charles Baudelaire argued that “there are but three beings worthy of respect: the priest, the warrior and the poet. To know, to kill and to create. The rest of mankind may be taxed and drudged, they are born for the stable . . . to practice what they call *professions*.”<sup>18</sup> English mathematician Sir James Jeans, whom Cram cited as a philosopher worth reading, put it succinctly by saying democracy’s achievement is that “it gave credible time to the underdog.” It was likely, Jeans hoped, that democracy was “like teething,” a stage to pass through before achieving higher orders of being.<sup>19</sup>

As these influences shaped Cram, he helped give them new shape via his prominence as an architect. His leadership of the Gothic Revival in the United States was fueled by his determination to resurrect the ephemeral spirit of medievalism that he yoked to both his artistic and political beliefs. He wrote a collection of ghost stories, *Black Spirits and White*, and a dull Arthurian play called *Excalibur*, after he helped launch *The Knight Errant* off

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14 Cram, *End of Democracy*, 65–70.

15 Ralph Adams Cram, *My Life in Architecture* (Little, Brown, 1936), 9.

16 Thomas Carlyle, “No. 1. The Present Time,” in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (Chapman and Hall, 1850), 1–40, quotes at 7, 8. On Yarvin’s love of Carlyle, see Mencius Moldbug [pseud.], “Why Carlyle Matters,” chapter 2 of *Moldbug on Carlyle*, originally published July 16, 2009, on his *Unqualified Reservations* blog, <https://www.unqualified-reservations.org/2009/07/why-carlyle-matters/>.

17 Jon Roper, *Democracy and Its Critics* (Routledge, 1989); Frederick York Powell, *John Ruskin and Thoughts on Democracy* (Saint George Press, 2005).

18 Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, trans. Christopher Isherwood (Hyperion Press, 1930), 69, original italics.

19 James Jeans quoted in *Living Philosophies: A Series of Intimate Credos* (Simon and Schuster, 1931), 112–13.

the ground.<sup>20</sup> His writing became prolific as he advanced his architectural career, turning in the years before World War I to the pressing sociopolitical matters of the day. It was then that Cram's organizing efforts increasingly married his medievalism to his criticism of modern politics.

Along with his lifelong friend, the poet Louise Imogen Guiney, Cram founded the American chapter of the Jacobite Order of the White Rose (OWR).<sup>21</sup> The original Order of the White Rose was created in 1886 by Bertram Ashburnham to continue the centuries-old Jacobite tradition in the United Kingdom. Neo-Jacobites like Ashburnham maintained the divine right of kings and the legitimacy of the deposed House of Stuart. While they did not have the ability to instigate mass upheaval like the Jacobites of old, the OWR still possessed political and, perhaps more powerfully, cultural influence that gained them headlines in the UK.<sup>22</sup> Across the Atlantic, Neo-Jacobites like Cram and his associates in groups like the Visionists were eager to work with the UK-based OWR and to pledge their support to what they saw as the true, divinely appointed crown. Cram took over leadership of the American branch of the OWR in 1899, leading the organization and writing for its flagship pamphlet, *The Royal Standard*.<sup>23</sup>

The American OWR, like its progenitor in the UK, espoused a modern aristocratic benevolence that echoed other conservative voices of the day, but with a dose of Hamiltonian verve that was entirely due to Cram and his longstanding love of the Federalist leader. It was time, Cram wrote for the OWR, that the United States turn toward the system of government created by "the greatest man this continent has ever known—Alexander Hamilton."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Cram never denied the unique circumstances that he and his fellow American monarchists faced: They were citizens of a country that had rebelled against the very monarchy they so revered. "The Revolution of 1775, whether or not we hold it to be unavoidable, is yet an accomplished fact," Cram allowed. And while the United States was fundamentally "false in theory and unchristian in principle," there was no way to deny it existed.<sup>25</sup> Cram reluctantly admitted the dismal likelihood of a hereditary monarchy suddenly arising in the United States, which lacked a royal heritage to start from. It seemed inevitable to him that some amalgamation of aristocracy and centralized

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20 Ralph Adams Cram, *Black Spirits and White: A Book of Ghost Stories* (Stone and Kimball, 1895); and Ralph Adams Cram, *Excalibur: An Arthurian Drama* (R.G. Badger, 1909). See also Ralph Adams Cram, "Red Poppies," undated, in "Red Poppies, or 'The Spirit of Prophecy'" folder, RACP, FA 2015.01, Box 7.

21 "Order of the White Rose, 1898–1900" folder, RACP, FA 2015.01, Box 6.

22 Connolly, *Jacobitism*, 108–112.

23 *Ibid.*, 110.

24 "Proclamation by Ralph von Cram, the Prior, and Alfred John Rodwaye, the Registrar for the Order of the White Rose," *Americana* 5 (1910): 522. Note the addition of the aristocratic "von" to Cram's name.

25 *Ibid.*, 524.

government in the Hamiltonian mode would replace the false “democratic sovereignty and equal political rights” that Cram and his cohort disdained.<sup>26</sup>

To Cram’s frustration, the American branch never took off, and the original OWR fell into a moribund state during World War I, largely due to the fact that the Stuart heir to the throne, Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, led troops against British forces, casting a pall over the movement.<sup>27</sup> As Jacobitism fell into greater disrepute during the war, the American OWR dissolved and Cram transitioned to a more general advocacy for monarchism and aristocratic governance.

The war had a profound and despairing effect on Cram, who lobbied for greater American assistance and early intervention to help Britain and France.<sup>28</sup> Civilization, he argued, had lost the spark of greatness that he located in the medieval era. The intersection between Cram’s fierce Anglo-Catholicism and his medievalism was never more evident than in these years, when he would write about the modern democratic world being beset by a “sterile Puritanism on the one hand” and “a futile hedonism on the other.” For Cram, the horrors of modern war, and the uncertain peace that ended it, cast shadows on his own time. Occupied by imperfect humans, the Middle Ages were far from perfect. Yet Cram remained convinced “the evils” of the medieval period had “been equaled or exceeded during the last ten years,” while “its virtues have . . . scarcely found their rivals within the same decade or, for that matter, the century that went before.”<sup>29</sup>

Chivalry, spirituality, and just government by knowledgeable rulers seemed to Cram to be a vast improvement over the unlettered masses that had seized the reins of power through democratic upheaval over the prior three centuries.<sup>30</sup> Cram’s medieval-romantic idyll was echoed by others. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Benjamin Disraeli, both men Cram admired, had similarly leaned on medieval imaginaries and medieval constructs to frame their politics in the 1800s, adapting medieval values to fit modern times.<sup>31</sup> Ruskin argued for a return not only to some form of medieval politics but also to its aesthetics.<sup>32</sup> Later in life, in the interwar years of the 1930s, Cram, who enjoyed recommending books

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26 Ibid., 526.

27 Connolly, *Jacobitism*, 124.

28 Ralph Adams Cram, *Toward the Great Peace* (Marshall Jones, 1922).

29 Ralph Adams Cram, “The Answer of the Middle Ages,” in *What Is Civilization?* (Duffield, 1926), 59–76, quote at 73. For a larger discussion on this issue, see Muccigrosso, *American Gothic*, chapter 7.

30 Ralph Adams Cram, “The Revolt of the Masses,” *Atlantic*, December 1932; see also Ralph Adams Cram, “The Mass-Man Takes Over,” *American Mercury*, October 1938, 165–75.

31 See Elizabeth Fay, *Romantic Medievalism: History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Shannon L. Rogers, “‘The Past is a Dream’: The Neo-Feudalism of Disraeli,” *Victorian Review* 28, no. 2 (2002): 65–95; and Carl E. Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 70–80.

32 John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (George Allen, 1880), 113.

by philosophers and writers, also lauded the works of critics and historians with a disdain for modernity, such as William Aylott Orton, Nikolai Berdyaev, José Ortega y Gasset, and Salvador de Madariaga.

Like Cram, Berdyaev lamented the loss of art and spirituality that seemed endemic in modern society and argued for a “call to a new Middle Ages” that would enliven Christianity and alleviate the spiritual malaise sweeping across the Western world. Berdyaev, writing from an Orthodox Christian viewpoint, appealed to a frustration, similar to Cram’s, at the hollowed-out spiritual and artistic spaces he found himself in.<sup>33</sup> After reading Ortega’s essays on the “mass-man,” a collective idea of common people as barbaric and dully led by majority opinion, Cram adopted the term in his own writing, constantly reifying his low view of the worth of the average citizen.<sup>34</sup>

Cram’s beliefs, and the ideas of the philosophers and commentators he drew on, represented a combination of prelapsarian aristocratic yearning and, occasionally, a pseudoscientific racism. Such ideas were geared toward addressing the excesses of the industrial present. The priest, the warrior, and the poet were Romantic ideals, but the modern era seemed to belong to the politician, the industrial magnate, and the salesman.

In *Walled Towns* (1919), Cram reflected on feudal villages as an Edenic image of communal living, and contrasted these with the dirty, smog-ridden, industrial towns that beset the modern world. There must, Cram claimed, be a way out of “this coil of uttermost confusion,” which saw races mingling and families benighted by the dangers and rigor of industrial labor inside contemporary urban America.<sup>35</sup> “Walled Towns,” Cram argued, were meant to evoke the purity of feudal communities, organized around families and protected—in theory—by a benevolent government; such communities were to be refounded, as one reviewer of Cram’s work noted, “in deliberate opposition to nineteenth century democracy.”<sup>36</sup> But Cram’s rural agrarianism and communitarian streak were rooted, too, in the common racial and antisemitic prejudices of his time. To Cram, democracy’s “Mordred,” a reference to the Arthurian villain, was “anarchy and Bolshevism,” and their origins lay in “the Semitic influence which has and always will be the foe of nationality.”<sup>37</sup>

It was time, Cram argued, for a new aristocracy based on his conception of “race values,” which were grounded in then-popular conceptions of evolutionary racial science

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33 Nikolai Berdyaev, *The End of our Time* (Sheed and Ward, 1933), 80.

34 José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (W. W. Norton, 1932).

35 Ralph Adams Cram, *Walled Towns* (Marshall Jones, 1919), 13.

36 *Ibid.*, 96.

37 Ralph Adams Cram, “Peace in Peril! Ralph Adams Cram Warns Us All,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 24, 1918.

and “civilizational” differences between human groups.<sup>38</sup> This was a line of thought that ran through Cram’s conception of socioeconomic classes and human biology. His engagement with Darwinian evolution was influenced by a mixture of his Catholic faith, his medievalism, and his conception of differences between humans that arose from his understanding of history. The interacting of different races, whether socially or sexually, was, for Cram, likewise a product of a mismanaged world that saw “the just line of demarcation” drawn between “Neolithic Man and the anthropoid ape,” and not, as it should be, between the “glorified and triumphant human being and the Neolithic mass which was, is now and ever shall be.”<sup>39</sup> “Mass-man,” Cram repeatedly asserted, was barely human and had to be ruled by those of elevated status. Cram devoted an entire book, *The Nemesis of Mediocrity* (1919), to explaining his early thoughts on the need to have heroic, well-rounded leaders corral and guide the modern masses.<sup>40</sup>

When disputes over the scope and power of the executive branch erupted during the New Deal, Cram, who had become a strong supporter of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, lauded the president’s attempts to expand executive power to meet the crises of the Great Depression. While the country debated, and by the late 1930s began to curtail, FDR’s political might, Cram remained enthused by the president’s seemingly unilateral actions. When FDR’s plan to expand the Supreme Court was met with public and political backlash, Cram griped that the American people had suddenly, and unfortunately, become “constitution conscious.”<sup>41</sup> It would be leaders like Roosevelt, Cram thought, with the Carlylean “heroic will” required to take “the bull by the horns,” who would fix the problems America faced.<sup>42</sup> It should come as no shock that Cram’s political beliefs earned him some notoriety outside the august architectural circles where he usually resided. He became something of a Luddite in spirit, if not in fact, arguing for the abolition of the internal combustion engine, and he debated which had inflicted greater calamity on the world, gunpowder or the printing press.<sup>43</sup> Pining for a monarch and rejecting both the essence and the messy reality of American democracy made him something of an occasional laughingstock among his own friends and fellow artists.<sup>44</sup>

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38 Ralph Adams Cram, “Race,” later titled “Race Values,” in “Race Values: Proposition Toward a New Aristocracy Based Upon Race Values” folder, RACP, FA 2015.01, Box 7.

39 Ralph Adams Cram, “Why We Do Not Behave Like Human Beings,” in “Why We Do Not Behave Like Human Beings” folder, RACP, FA 2015.01, Box 9. A version of “Why We Do Not Behave Like Human Beings” also appeared in *The American Mercury*, September 1932, 41–48.

40 Ralph Adams Cram, *The Nemesis of Mediocrity* (Marshall Jones, 1919).

41 Cram, *End of Democracy*, 126. See also Ralph Adams Cram, “The Return to Feudalism,” *American Review*, January 1937, 336–52.

42 Cram, *End of Democracy*, 163.

43 Cram, *My Life in Architecture*, 65.

44 Louise Imogen Guiney to Rev. W. H. van Allen, May 8, 1899, and Louise Imogen Guiney to Her-

In some circles, however, Cram received praise. He was part of a growing, varied transatlantic conservative cohort that resisted the early twentieth century's disruptive modernity. His "race values" closely mirrored the eugenics movement, and his dismay at mass industry, urban life, and the extension of the franchise were echoed by many. "New humanists," distributists, neoscholastics, Southern Agrarians, and others joined Cram's medievalists in calling for radical transformations of society to address the growing inequality and sociopolitical chaos of the 1900s, especially the global aftershocks of World War I and the Great Depression. "New humanists," led by literary critics and scholars like Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, shared Cram's dismay at the erosion of classical and traditional culture.<sup>45</sup> Catholic distributists, a label Cram would likely accept, were inspired by the social teachings of the Church and the then-recent exhortations of Pope Leo XIII to address the poverty and social unrest caused by the Industrial Revolution.<sup>46</sup> The Southern Agrarians, a varied group of writers and poets centered around Tennessee in the 1920s and 1930s, lamented the erosion of Southern culture, agrarian identity, and traditional faith.<sup>47</sup>

These movements interacted with and informed one another, and they shared, to an extent, a similar reactionary philosophical foundation. They drew, as Cram did, on the Counter-Enlightenment and the feudalistic anti-industrialist traditions of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Joseph de Maistre to inform their calls for a return to what English supporter of Southern Agrarianism Arthur J. Penty called a "definite political status" ensured by royal largesse, craft guilds, and the Church.<sup>48</sup> Like Cram, they worried about the tangible and intangible effects of modernity, and fretted, as Agrarian Donald Davidson claimed, that the arts had no place in industrial life other than what could be purchased. Like Cram, Davidson dismissed modern artistic styles as informed by greed and the whimsy of a decadent public, "which the Middle Ages called a Devil's Bargain," rather than the soulful pursuit of art.<sup>49</sup> What united these movements, and Cram's, was that all shared the sense of "alienation" described by literary scholar Solomon Fishman. They all suffered, as

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bert E. Clarke, June 23, 1899, in Grace Guiney, ed., *Letters of Louise Imogen Guiney* (Harper and Brothers, 1926), 132, 215.

45 Irving Babbitt, "Humanism: An Essay at Definition," in *Humanism and America: Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilisation*, ed. Norman Foerster (Farrar and Rinehart, 1930).

46 See Alexander William Salter, *The Political Economy of Distributism: Property, Liberty, and the Common Good* (Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

47 The foundational collection of the Southern Agrarians was *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Harper & Brothers, 1930), which featured essays by the "main" Agrarians and announced their ideas. See Alexander Karanikas, *Tillers of a Myth: Southern Agrarians as Social and Literary Critics* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1966); Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

48 Arthur J. Penty, *The Restoration of the Guild System* (Swan Sonnenschein, 1906), 47.

49 Donald Davidson, "A Mirror for Artists," in *I'll Take My Stand*.

their various causes and passions suffered, from the “centrifugal impulse” of modernity, which saw industry and culture fly out and reflect “the detachment of the particle from the mass.”<sup>50</sup>

The disasters of war and economic depression had produced an era of reactionary mass politics, ranging from Louisiana’s populist governor, Huey “the Kingfish” Long, to the demagogic “radio priest” Charles Coughlin; and while Cram disdained the Kingfish, he had a begrudging respect for Long’s recognition of the dangers of unchecked modern industry and the threats to what he perceived as American social cohesion. “Hero worship,” Cram thought, “was one of the fine qualities in man. . . . [I]t is just as implicit in the masses as it is in the elite.” And so it was unsurprising to Cram that figures like Long or Coughlin had ascended to prominence. That Carlylean tendency toward heroic action, which Cram so admired, had to be shepherded carefully, he believed, by his envisioned aristocratic elite.<sup>51</sup>

The new century’s disasters were the “final disenchantment” with modern capitalism and democratic government for Cram and others in his orbit. Some of Cram’s associates, like fascist sympathizer Seward Collins, pursued the idea of creating an American monarchy more vigorously than the architect even considered. Collins was a wealthy socialite and business owner who had turned away from his earlier Progressive views in the late 1920s.<sup>52</sup> In the midst of the Depression and growing geopolitical change, Collins had started to flirt with fascism as a solution to the world’s ills.<sup>53</sup> He started *The American Review* as an outlet for his views, drawing together a spectrum of thinkers who shared his critiques, including Ortega y Gasset, Berdyaev, “new humanist” Irving Babbitt, French distributist Hilaire Belloc, and Southern Agrarians like Herbert Agar.<sup>54</sup>

Shortly after its creation, Cram joined *The American Review* as a contributor. He had long ventured into public writing and had been involved in the creation of several Catholic publications, including the still-running *Commonweal*. In *The American Review*, Cram’s monarchical views meshed with Collins’s, but Cram was never as *directly* tied to American fascism. Collins shared Cram’s admiration for Roosevelt’s powerful expansion of executive authority, though the former became increasingly disillusioned with what he

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50 Solomon Fishman, *The Disinherited of Art: Writer and Background* (University of California Press, 1953), 140.

51 Cram, *End of Democracy*, 84–88.

52 Albert E. Stone Jr., “Seward Collins and the American Review: Experiment in Pro-Fascism, 1933–37,” *American Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1960): 3–19, esp. 3–5; Donald Davidson, *Southern Writers in the Modern World* (University of Georgia Press, 1958), 61.

53 For a discussion of Collins’s philosophical changes, see Gregory L. Schneider, *The Conservative Century: From Reaction to Revolution* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 268–73; and Edward Shapiro, “American Conservative Intellectuals, the 1930’s, and the Crisis of Ideology,” *Modern Age* 23, no. 4 (1979): 370.

54 Seward Collins, “Editorial Notes,” *American Review*, April 1933, 122–27.

saw as Roosevelt's inability to take unilateral control over the country like the European fascists he had come to admire.<sup>55</sup> Cram lent legitimacy to Collins's monarchical musings, and other conservative figures within Cram's orbit buttressed Collins's journal with the weight of their names. More broadly, there was a running thread in *The American Review* of conservative Catholic rebukes to the modern liberal world, which Cram joined. Catholic commentators like Ross J. S. Hoffman wrote in the *Review* of the "disenchantment with democracy" that had swept the world in the interwar years and argued it was a consequence of people yearning for the natural mode of governance: a strong, stable, single leader.<sup>56</sup>

In places like *The American Review* one can see how Cram's medievalism was not merely a quixotic anachronistic yearning but part of a larger reactionary backlash. Cram's economic philosophy was rooted in an aristocratic distributism, echoing philosophers he had befriended, including Belloc and especially G. K. Chesterton—who also wrote for *The American Review*. Collins, Chesterton, and Cram all pushed for a return to a medieval-style guild system, which they believed would address the socioeconomic disruption they saw stemming from unchecked capitalism and modern industry.<sup>57</sup> It was vital, Cram argued, to return to such systems because, in his mind, they guaranteed housing, protection, and economic purpose to those whom modern industrial revolutions had rendered into impoverished masses.

As Cram phrased it, the progression of philosophy, industry, and politics since the Enlightenment had turned humans into nothing but a "mechanical organism." The medieval era's feudal system, at least as he conceived it, was the "best economic foundation for society," not only in the past but for the tumultuous present and the uncertain future. The "Forgotten Class" of the majority of Americans, Cram claimed, like Hoffman, yearned for and needed the guidance of strong leaders in the feudal mold, which possessed what he considered a personalizing, humanistic touch.<sup>58</sup> The ascendancy of strong authoritarian leaders in the interwar years, and the corresponding rejection of fair, representative democracy, was a boon. It presaged, Cram and others in the *Review* believed, a return to a better natural order. "I am convinced," Cram argued in a piece that praised Berdyaev's work, "that it is a return to the realities of an old mediaevalism and the building-up of a new—and a better—feudalism." But the likelihood of that was questionable, even to

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55 See Stone, "Seward Collins"; and Michael J. Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him: Seward Collins and the Chimera of an American Fascism* (Peter Lang, 2006).

56 Ross J. S. Hoffman, "Liberty and Authority: A Political Essay," *American Review*, October 1934, 562–90. See also Hoffman's sympathy toward fascism in his "The Totalitarian Regimes: An Essay in Essential Distinctions," *American Review*, September 1937, 321–38.

57 Cyril Clemens, *Chesterton: As Seen by His Contemporaries* (International Mark Twain Society, 1939), 35–38.

58 Ralph Adams Cram, "The Forgotten Class" and "The Forgotten Class: Part II," *American Review*, undated, 179–90.

Cram, and his pessimism about humanity and its ability to regain what he thought it had lost remained through the end of his life.<sup>59</sup>

### Medieval Modernists

“I am not a Medievalist because I love old things,” Cram claimed; rather, it was because he thought taking the Middle Ages as a model offered a better way to reform the modern era. “Ralph Adams Cram, the Modern Medievalist? . . . maybe, and maybe, Medieval Modernist!” he joked.<sup>60</sup> Cram’s architectural legacy is still admired and influential today across the United States. But his “medieval modernist” political beliefs have seen the strongest resurgence in recent years. Moving forward from Cram, we can chart the haphazard line of American monarchist thought into the present day, where Cram still serves as an inspiration to some. Cram provides an interesting lens for comparing these new circles of right-wing elitist thought to the old Progressive Era and interwar movements Cram affiliated with because the same global *pressures* that led Cram toward his medieval modernism echo today. Cram’s rejection of the primacy of free-market capitalism and industry, his worry over sociocultural cohesion, and his concern that American life had become divorced from the moral “good” resonate with many of the major worries that animate the modern illiberal New Right.<sup>61</sup> As in Cram’s time, monarchism remains a niche movement, and the monarchism of the present does not always map onto Cram’s ideal. Exploring how today’s currents overlap with, but also diverge from, Cram’s “medieval modernist” alignment reveals how modern monarchism and conservative thinking have drawn inspiration from Cram’s milieu but remade their ideas in new forms.

American monarchists, Cram included, have always faced an uphill battle. In the decades since Cram’s death in 1942, other “royalist” adherents, such as T. S. Eliot, have struggled to balance their “medieval modernist” respect for tradition and (often) their Christian faith with the modern industrialized world.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, due to the bloody fight for civil rights and the broader Cold War binary, which saw a growing postcolonial and democratic “free world” pitted against the totalitarian Soviet Union, American monarchists had a thin tightrope to walk in the second half of the twentieth century.

Some organizations, like the Constantian Society, struggled to keep the idea alive as a grassroots movement. Founded by Randall J. Dicks in 1970, the society advocated for

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59 Ralph Adams Cram, “The Return to Feudalism,” *American Review*, January 1937, 336–52.

60 Ralph Adams Cram, interview, quoted in Ervel Fern Orchard, Ralph Adams Cram, *Medieval Modernist* (Boston University Library, 1937), 148.

61 Ralph Adams Cram, “The Philosophical Necessity,” undated, in “The Philosophical Necessity, originally Sacramental Philosophy” folder, RACP, FA2015.01, Box 8.

62 Indeed, Eliot had a tangled relationship with the “royalist” label throughout his life. See Jason Harding, ed., *T. S. Eliot in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 270.

the creation of an American throne. Dicks was a quiet student at Georgetown University from a Republican family who loved classics. He admired then-prominent monarchs like Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, who Dicks claimed had “transformed his country from the ‘Tibet of Africa’ to the ‘Switzerland of Africa.’” He was adamant that while American monarchism was unlikely it was still worth trying to achieve.<sup>63</sup> The society never had a broad reach or significant impact, but it doggedly maintained publication of its pamphlet, *The Constantian*, and interviewed monarchs from over a dozen countries.<sup>64</sup> It was the goal of the society to “give unity” to monarchists in the United States and promote knowledge about the benefits of monarchism over other forms of government. Dicks’s politics echoed Cram’s only in part. While he asserted monarchy as the best and most natural form of government, Dicks, a product of mid-twentieth-century suburbia, did not have Cram’s attachment to medievalism or the depth of learning that grounded Cram’s ideas in the history and philosophy of aristocratic benevolence.<sup>65</sup>

After the end of the Cold War in 1991, Dicks’s output declined, and the society became defunct with his death in 1999. In its wake, the only active monarchist groups in the United States were joined to larger organizations such as the International Monarchist League, which has acted as an umbrella organization for a wide variety of monarchist groups around the world. American monarchism in the twenty-first century has become both more and less tethered to its earlier roots. Some classical American monarchists who espouse a view similar to Cram’s have become enmeshed with the Royal Stuart Society, which was founded in 1926 as a successor to the OWR and remains the largest and most vocal Jacobite organization in the world.<sup>66</sup> Charles Coulombe, a conservative American Catholic commentator and member of the Royal Stuart Society’s leadership, represents a vocal wing of modern monarchism in this vein. Coulombe’s writings, including several books on modern monarchism and its supposed viability today, draw on many of the same complaints that Cram levied.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Coulombe calls Cram the “foremost” American monarchist and often invokes Cram’s thoughts on government and the critical import of Catholicism.<sup>68</sup> He also *evokes* Cram, but with a far higher degree of optimism about the possibility of a fundamental change in American governance than Cram ever had.

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63 “Student Critic of Nixon; Randall James Dicks,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1969, 22, <https://www.nytimes.com/1969/10/14/archives/student-critic-of-nixon-randall-james-dicks.html>.

64 *The Constantian* 9, nos. 2-3, December 1980, New York Public Library (hereafter NYPL). Most of the extant copies of *The Constantian* are located at the NYPL.

65 *The Constantian* 8, no. 1, April 1979, NYPL; *The Constantian* 25, no. 2, August 1998, NYPL.

66 For the Royal Stuart Society’s website and publications, see: <https://www.royalstuartociety.com/> (accessed December 15, 2025).

67 Charles A. Coulombe, *Star-Spangled Crown* (Tumblar House, 2016).

68 Charles A. Coulombe, “Triumph and the Quandary of American Conservatism,” *Catholicism.org*, August 1, 2023, <https://catholicism.org/triumph-and-the-quandary-of-american-conservatism.html>; and Charles A. Coulombe, “Blueprint for a Catholic Future? Ralph Adams Cram and the An-

Times have changed, Coulombe asserts, since Cram's era. Liberal pluralism and democracy have waned over the first two decades of the new millennium.<sup>69</sup> It is no longer just “intellectual LARPing” to be a monarchist in America, Coulombe claims, referring to those who enjoy live-action roleplaying at Renaissance fairs.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Coulombe is hardly alone. A great deal of ink has been spilt over the last decade discussing the ever-increasing crisis of global liberalism. Writing in his recently published *The Compleat Monarchist*, Coulombe highlights the growing ranks of avowed “postliberals” or “illiberals,” whose adherents include American bloggers like Curtis Yarvin, scholars like Patrick Deneen, and statesmen like Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, who are all sympathetic to or outright supportive of the kind of antidemocratic, Counter-Enlightenment-inspired thinking Coulombe champions.<sup>71</sup> As Coulombe argues, monarchism is a small but growing slice of political expression, and the growth of illiberal and postliberal movements has created a fertile environment for monarchism to flourish.

The rise to prominence of Curtis Yarvin—a monarchist and Cram admirer who was profiled in *The New Yorker* in June 2025—is a case in point.<sup>72</sup> “Let those of us born with golden brains, therefore—the tiny top sliver that Ralph Adams Cram called human, as opposed to anthropoid—inherit the earth,” Curtis Yarvin wrote in 2009 on his blog *Unqualified Reservations*.<sup>73</sup> Yarvin has also followed Cram in discussing racism in a positive light. “As Ralph Adams Cram suggested, if a boolean line must for political reasons be drawn, it is not a line around humanity—but a line within it,” Yarvin wrote in 2025, alluding not to Cram's architectural prowess but his invocation of biological “race values” that supposedly determine human accomplishment.<sup>74</sup>

Yarvin, who is credited as a driving force behind the rise of the neoreactionary (NRx) movement in the late 2000s and early 2010s, is a chimerical figure. Until the last few years, before he catapulted into more mainstream discussions due to his influence on prominent political figures like Vice President J. D. Vance, and on Silicon Valley billionaire Peter

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glo-Papalists,” *New Oxford Review*, September 2014, <https://www.newoxfordreview.org/documents/blueprint-for-a-catholic-future/>.

69 Charles A. Coulombe, “Confessions of an American Monarchist,” *European Conservative*, June 23, 2024, <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/essay/confessions-of-an-american-monarchist/>.

70 Charles Coulombe, “Are American Monarchists Dreamers?,” *Crisis Magazine*, December 30, 2019, <https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/are-american-monarchists-dreamers>.

71 Charles A. Coulombe, *The Compleat Monarchist* (Os Justi Press, 2025).

72 Eva Kofman, “Curtis Yarvin's Plot Against America,” *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2025, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/06/09/curtis-yarvin-profile>

73 Mencius Moldbug [pseud.], “The Dire Problem and the Digital Option,” *Unqualified Reservations*, November 13, 2009, <https://www.unqualified-reservations.org/2009/11/dire-problem-and-virtual-option/>.

74 Curtis Yarvin (@curtis\_yarvin), “Ultimately the boolean distinction between man and animal is a theological error,” X, May 15, 2025, [https://x.com/curtis\\_yarvin/status/1923059685743116389](https://x.com/curtis_yarvin/status/1923059685743116389).

Thiel, Yarvin haunted the online realm of right-wing discourse as a strange specter that advocated for an American monarch and the abolishment of democracy.

Yarvin's ideas have shaped the tenor and direction of far-right ideologies, particularly through his concept of the "Cathedral," which he and philosopher Nick Land, often described as the father of accelerationism, developed.<sup>75</sup> Yarvin's Cathedral names an amalgamation of concepts, institutions, and beliefs that have allegedly captured global society. This is particularly true of Western societies, and the components of the Cathedral have ever tightened their grip on culture, politics, and the global economy. The bureaucratic "deep state"—a concept in vogue since Donald Trump's ascendancy as the haphazard standard-bearer of the new conservatism of the post-2010s—is part of the Cathedral. Universities and the broader academy, steeped as they are in decades, if not centuries, of Enlightenment thinking, socialism, Marxism, and postmodern theory, are a key part of the Cathedral's ability to indoctrinate new generations. Hollywood, the media, and so on are all, in some cases intentionally, in some cases coincidentally, working together with these larger institutions to obliterate dissident thought and dominate the world. In Yarvin's words, the Cathedral acts as a "reification of the legitimate sources of information," operating as a multilayered lens through which ideas are approved or disapproved for public consumption. The Cathedral shapes what Yarvin, drawing on Cram, considers to be the "mass-man" that makes up the democratic majority, someone who is ill-informed and lacking in true insight beyond the commercialized modern world they see around them.<sup>76</sup>

Yarvin's concept quickly took root and has spread since the early 2010s into the highest echelons of political and social discourse. It is not difficult to find journalistic discussions of direct financial, political, or personal connections between Yarvin's circle of far-right philosophizers and the new Trump administration, with Vice President Vance especially tied to the more intellectual wing of the "New Right."<sup>77</sup> It is also not difficult to see how

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75 See Land, *Dark Enlightenment*; and Robin Mackay and Armen Avanesian, eds., *The Accelerationist Reader* (Urbanomic, 2014).

76 Curtis Yarvin, "The Cathedral or the Bizarre," *Tablet Magazine*, March 30, 2022; Claire Donnelly and Meghna Chakrabarti, "JD Vance and the Rise of the New Right," *WBUR*, August 1, 2024, <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2024/08/01/vance-trump-new-right-republican-election>.

77 Dennis Saffran, "Populism and Power," *Quillette*, September 23, 2024, <https://quillette.com/2024/09/23/populism-and-power-jd-vance-donald-trump-patrick-deneen-postliberalism-conspiracies/>; Gaby Del Valle, "JD Vance Thinks Monarchists Have Some Good Ideas," *The Verge*, October 16, 2024, <https://www.theverge.com/2024/10/16/24266512/jd-vance-curtis-yarvin-influence-rage-project-2025>; Kiera Butler, "To Understand JD Vance, You Need to Meet the 'TheoBros,'" *Mother Jones*, November/December 2024, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2024/09/theobros-jd-vance-christian-nationalism/>; Greg Rosalsky, "The Economic Mind of JD Vance," *NPR*, July 23, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/sections/planet-money/2024/07/23/g-s1-12513/economic-mind-jd-vance>. For an attempt to define this new "New Right"—a term often used by movements of conservative renewal—see Laura K. Field, *Furious Minds: The Making of the MAGA New Right* (Princeton University Press, 2025). Field is clear on Vance's prominence within the MAGA New Right's intellectual camps.

the actions of the new administration reflect a war against the largest and most powerful facets of Yarvin's globalist elite Cathedral.

Beyond the chaotic events spiraling across newsfeeds daily, there lie deeper ideological connections that draw the New Right, or, as Nick Land dubbed it, the Dark Enlightenment, into the past.<sup>78</sup> Yarvin alone did not weave the movement from whole cloth, and he is joined by a growing wave of philosophers, academics, and online thinkers that draw, much as Ralph Adams Cram did, on the past to inspire their ideas of how to radically transform the present.

Take, for example, Charles Haywood. Haywood, once a businessman and now a figure in online right-wing circles prominent for his book reviews and commentary, described Cram "as a proto-Yarvin" due to the architect's insistent demands to abolish American democracy and his eugenicist views on race and human biology.<sup>79</sup> Haywood, who veers away from Yarvin's Machiavellian view of power politics in favor of a more explicitly religious though still authoritarian future, caused waves within the New Right by refusing to disavow white supremacists within the movement. Rod Dreher, a former commenter at *The American Conservative*, and Haywood have argued publicly over the latter's assertion that there could be "no enemies to the Right" as long as one is against leftist thought.<sup>80</sup> Disagreement is as much a hallmark of the New Right and the broader Dark Enlightenment as agreement, and casting these only loosely aligned figures as a monolith is certainly a mistake. Still, many within these ideological circles identify, as Cram did, some kind of aristo-populism or monarchy as the cure for what they see as the disorganized chaos of liberal democracy led by "mass-man."

Cram's critiques resonate today within broader New Right circles. For example, the excesses and gross inequalities of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era dismayed Cram. This was not because he believed every person was worthy of an equal economic footing—quite the opposite, in fact—but because he rejected what he saw as a slovenly and poorly run "kakistocracy" in the United States.<sup>81</sup> The drive toward endless production and consumption of goods, brought on by industrial technology and unchecked free markets, had warped the "New Aristocrats" and resulted in what Cram considered a debasement

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78 Land, *Dark Enlightenment*; Elizabeth Sandifer, *Neoreaction a Basilisk: Essays on and Around the Alt-Right* (Eruditorium Press, 2017).

79 Charles Haywood, "On the 'Dark Enlightenment,' and of Curtis Yarvin / Mencius Moldbug," *The Worthy House*, June 27, 2018, <https://theworthyhouse.com/2018/06/27/analysis-dark-enlightenment-curtis-yarvin-mencius-moldbug/>.

80 Daniel Miller and Charles Haywood, "No Enemies to the Right? DC Miller vs Charles Haywood," *IM-1776*, accessed November 7, 2025, <https://im1776.com/2022/12/13/no-enemies-to-the-right/>; Rod Dreher, "No Enemies to the Right," *American Conservative*, November 29, 2022, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/no-enemies-to-the-right/>.

81 Ralph Adams Cram, "The Limitations of Demos," undated, in "The Limitations of Demos" folder, RACP, FA2015.01, Box 8. A kakistocracy is government by those least suited to rule (from the Greek *kakistos*, "the worst").

of the true purpose of the upper echelons of society: rightly guiding the country and ensuring the protection of the poor masses. The “orgy of optimism” over the seemingly endless progress of the modern technological age was a lie, Cram asserted.<sup>82</sup>

While free-market capitalism has been the watchword for conservatives over the last century, especially within the United States, such neoliberal ideals have increasingly eroded. Many now reject mainstream free-market neoliberalism, which had come to define both conservative and, arguably, many left-leaning political parties across the globe by the early 2010s. Defending the Trump administration’s chaotic rollout of protectionist tariffs, Vice President J. D. Vance caused an uproar among free-market advocates earlier this year when he said “reducing barriers to free markets shouldn’t be the ultimate aim of our politics. Instead, we should use them, and other tools, to improve the well-being of our people.”<sup>83</sup> Such a formulation of the role of markets and human well-being is a reversal of the neoliberal paradigm, which sees the unshackling and protection of markets as *the* ultimate aim to ensure the well-being of people. Long gone are the days when Ronald Reagan’s calls for a globalized, interconnected world of permeable economic barriers and liberalized trade were the dominant voice of conservatism.

Anti-neoliberalism and strains of aristo-populism have become a key facet of the global New Right. Prominent Catholic academic Patrick Deneen, one of the most visible and respectable of the New Right’s ranks because of his academic credentials, maintains a concerted attack on liberalism, both for its sociopolitical and its socioeconomic implications. In Deneen’s view, liberalism has eroded social cohesion, traditional culture, and economic welfare in favor of glorifying free markets.<sup>84</sup> Such views are shared abroad. Viktor Orbán’s rise to power in Hungary, for example, was fueled by a message of economic independence and a strong rejection of neoliberal economics.<sup>85</sup> But while postliberals and

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82 Ralph Adams Cram, *Convictions and Controversies* (Marshall Jones, 1935), 190.

83 J. D. Vance, “JD Vance Responds to Matthew Hennessey on Markets and Politics,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 28, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/jd-vance-the-market-isnt-the-purpose-of-u-s-politics-economics-92a8b3e7>. Vance was responding to an article by Matthew Hennessey, which criticized Vance’s understanding of the market and the government’s role in it. See Matthew Hennessey, “JD Vance Is Wrong: The Market Isn’t a ‘Tool,’” *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/jd-vance-is-wrong-the-market-isnt-a-tool-economics-politics-bea824c4>.

84 Reinhold Martin, “The Ends of Liberalism,” *Places*, August 2024, <https://placesjournal.org/article/the-ends-of-liberalism-patrick-deneen-new-right/>; Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*; Deneen, *Regime Change*. For a critique of Deneen’s failure to differentiate neoliberalism from liberalism, see Samuel Moyn, “Neoliberalism, Not Liberalism, Has Failed,” *Commonweal*, December 3, 2018, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/neoliberalism-not-liberalism-has-failed>.

85 Gábor Scheiring, *The Retreat of Liberal Democracy: Authoritarian Capitalism and the Accumulative State in Hungary* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). On Fidesz’s pro-family agenda, see Orsolya Bajnay, “Financial Incentives Meet Moral Imperatives in Viktor Orbán’s ‘Social Contract’ with Hungarian Women,” Heinrich-Böll Foundation, December 12, 2022, <https://cz.boell.org/en/2022/12/09/Orban-Viktors-social-contract-women>.

illiberal parties like Orbán's Fidesz might agree, as Deneen has written and as Cram long argued, that "liberalism has failed," they do not agree on the solutions to that problem.

Conversely, a more technocratic wing of the New Right, epitomized by entrepreneurs and corporate leaders like Peter Thiel, Elon Musk, and Sam Altman, has leaned into what some have called "hyper-neoliberalism," embracing the idea of an aristocratic elite, which so enamored Cram, but via capitalist control. The advancement of the early stages of generative artificial intelligence has led to a surge in technocratic power, coalescing around individual corporations and their leadership—whether in Silicon Valley or elsewhere. Thiel, who has openly and repeatedly discussed his ties to Yarvin, has worked with other venture capital titans, like Marc Andreessen, to invest in the creation of "Freedom Cities," a policy then-candidate Donald Trump endorsed in 2023.<sup>86</sup> While it echoes Cram's idyllic "Walled Towns," the concept of "Freedom Cities" departs from Cram's feudal guild utopia and instead evokes a techno-utopian dreamscape of unfettered innovation, away from government oversight and the legalities or messiness of actual American democratic life.

Some, like Balaji Srinivasan, take this even further. Srinivasan, who wrote *The Network State: How to Start a New Country* (2022), has simply called for wealthy technocrats to carve out sovereign states of their own from the existing geography and body politic of America.<sup>87</sup> Peter Thiel's investment in the Seasteading Institute, which funded privately owned floating proto-cities in neutral bodies of water, is an example of this thinking.<sup>88</sup> The rise of corporate power has fueled debate over the growing disparity between the global rich and poor, leading to discussions, perhaps ironically, of a "neofeudalism" that would have struck Cram as far removed from the medieval imaginary he invoked when he called for a return to the feudal order. It seems questionable that Cram would have approved of the emerging technofeudal *elite*.<sup>89</sup>

Such reactions have proliferated around the world.<sup>90</sup> In France, Action Française, a monarchist organization founded in the nineteenth century, has energized disaffected

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86 Max D. Woodworth, "Freedom Cities: Trump and an American Global New City," *Urban Geography* 45, no. 1 (2024): 45–52.

87 Balaji Srinivasan, *The Network State: How to Start a New Country* (pub. by author, 2022), <https://thenetworkstate.com>. For a recent discussion on network state concepts, see Mark Lutter and Jeffrey Mason, "Build the Presidio Freedom City," *Palladium*, January 17, 2025, <https://www.palladiummag.com/2025/01/17/build-the-presidio-freedom-city/>.

88 "Cities on the Ocean," *Economist*, December 3, 2011, <https://www.economist.com/technology-quarterly/2011/12/03/cities-on-the-ocean>.

89 See Yannis Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism* (Penguin, 2024); Jodi Dean, *Capitalism's Grave: Neofeudalism and the New Class Struggle* (Verso, 2025); and Joel Kotkin, *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism: A Warning to the Global Middle Class* (Encounter Books, 2020).

90 See, for example, András Bíró-Nagy, "Illiberal Democracy in Hungary: The Social Background and Practical Steps of Building an Illiberal State," Barcelona Center for International Affairs, January 2017,

young conservative voters to march in the streets for the return of a king and the ancien régime to fight against globalization.<sup>91</sup> These impulses have occasionally turned violent. In Germany, dozens of extremist members of the German nationalist Reichsbürger group were arrested in December 2022 for participating in a plot to overthrow German democracy and create a quasi-monarchical government.<sup>92</sup>

In January 2025, hundreds of French royalists from Action Française protested through Parisian streets shouting “anarchy today, monarchy tomorrow” as they honored the death of “king-martyr” Louis XVI at the onset of the French Revolution.<sup>93</sup> Action Française is quite aware of the unique contemporary connections shared between postliberal movements in Europe and abroad. As Action Française members write in their newsletter, the emergence of technocrats like Musk as a new aristocracy provides a strange, but for some welcome, bridge between public and private entities. Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Musk, and others represent, they argue, a “new dynasty” of American politics oriented around technocratic postliberalism, the standard-bearer of which they say is Trump.<sup>94</sup>

The impulse to revert to a semifeudal system goes beyond the “techbro” stereotype, however. In rural eastern Germany, in areas hit hardest by globalization and retreating industrial life, some communities have tried to split off from the German government and make their own sovereign communities. It is not surprising that it is in the former East Germany, for example, where deindustrialization and the scars of communism linger, that the Reichsbürger movement and other reactionary groups that wish to leave the international order are strongest. Neofascist monarchist groups, most prominently Freie

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<https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/illiberal-democracy-hungary-social-background-and-practical-steps-building-illiberal>; Andras L. Pap, *Democratic Decline in Hungary: Law and Society in an Illiberal Democracy* (Taylor and Francis, 2017); István H. Szilágyi, László Kelemen, and Sam Gilchrist Hall, *Changing Legal and Civic Culture in an Illiberal Democracy: A Social Psychological Survey of the Hungarian Legal System* (Taylor and Francis, 2021).

91 Edward G. DeClair, *Politics on the Fringe: The People, Policies, and Organization of the French National Front* (Duke University Press, 1999). See also Ismael Saz, Julián Sanz, Toni Morant, Zira Box, eds., *Reactionary Nationalists, Fascists and Dictatorships in the Twentieth Century Against Democracy* (Springer, 2019), 70–75.

92 Ido Vock, “Reichsbürger: German Far-Right Extremists Charged with Planning Violent Coup,” *BBC News*, December 12, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67691489>.

93 See Dalek\_Caament (u/Dalek\_Caament), “This evening in Paris hundreds of royalists paid homage to the martyr King Louis XVI,” Reddit, r/monarchism, January 18, 2025, [https://www.reddit.com/r/monarchism/comments/1i4lhca/this\\_evening\\_in\\_paris\\_hundreds\\_of\\_royalists\\_paid/](https://www.reddit.com/r/monarchism/comments/1i4lhca/this_evening_in_paris_hundreds_of_royalists_paid/); Western Exile (@westernexile), “A Royalist march in the heart of Paris is the most thunderous cry of ‘We’re so back’ to sound in Europe in a hundred years,” X, January 20, 2025, <https://x.com/westernexile/status/1881295826984870311?mx=2>.

94 Gwendal Keraliès, “Le trumpisme: Un post-libéralisme utile à la France?,” Action Française, January 9, 2025, <https://www.actionfrancaise.net/2025/01/09/le-trumpisme-un-post-liberalisme-utile-a-la-france/>; Gwendal Keraliès, “Les géants de la Tech: Une nouvelle dynastie dans le pouvoir américain,” Action Française, January 15, 2025, <https://www.actionfrancaise.net/2025/01/15/les-geants-de-la-tech-une-nouvelle-dynastie-dans-le-pouvoir-americain/>.

Sachsen (Free Saxons), arose there during the COVID-19 pandemic as a response to what they viewed as heavy-handed government policies toward public health, but they are rooted in the economic malaise of Germans who feel abandoned by globalization and deindustrialization. Such discontent is exacerbated by the social unrest caused by the massive influx of refugees from places like Syria in the 2010s.<sup>95</sup>

Scattered across regions like Saxony and Thuringia in the former East Germany are enclave villages where thousands of people aligned to the “Königreich Deutschland” (Kingdom of Germany) and other separatist movements reject the current government and carry their own currency and IDs.<sup>96</sup> Like the Reichsbürger, which they are aligned with, these small towns are not, on their own, major threats to Germany’s democratic government. Yet, they seem to be a bellwether: As they grow, and their messages spread, the fact that they are seeing success and support is indicative of the growing grassroots disdain within the West for established liberal-democratic norms and systems.

Cram, who would have likely despised the AI-fueled corporate craze for further hollowing artistic expression, is clearly not a perfect forerunner of every member of the New Right, or the Dark Enlightenment. No such person exists. Yet, many of them draw on Cram’s ideas, those of his contemporaries, or the ideas of people that influenced him. Julius Evola, the Italian fascist turned mystic who hated modernity, is invoked frequently, as are Seward Collins, Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger, and Oswald Spengler, casting a distinctly fascist shadow over the intellectual foundations of people like Yarvin, or conservative writer Michael Anton, who served as the second Trump administration’s director of policy planning.<sup>97</sup>

On the more market-oriented end of the spectrum, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, the German anarcho-capitalist, Ludwig von Mises, and other libertarian thinkers like Murray Rothbard and Robert Nozick, who have all cast doubt on democratic government, tend to appeal to the technocratic, ultra-libertarian streak running through the Silicon Valley crowd calling for network states.<sup>98</sup> As some scholars have dubbed it, these would-be

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95 Manès Weisskircher, “The Strength of Far-right AfD in Eastern Germany: The East-West Divide and the Multiple Causes behind ‘Populism,’” *Political Quarterly* 91, no. 3, (2020): 614–22; Anna-Sophie Heinze and Timon Scheuer, “Growing Up Far Right? Youth Support for the AfD in Eastern Germany,” *German Politics* (November 2025): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2025.2587919>; and Tim Brinkof, “The Former East Germany Is Fertile Ground for the Far Right,” *New Lines Magazine*, November 14, 2024, <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/the-former-east-germany-is-fertile-ground-for-the-far-right/>.

96 Jenny Hill, “The Self-Proclaimed Kingdom That Doesn’t Recognise Germany,” *BBC News*, December 9, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63916812>.

97 See, among many instances, Lomez, “Curtis Yarvin (aka Mencius Moldbug): An Interview,” *IM-1776*, accessed November 7, 2025, <https://im1776.com/2021/09/03/curtis-yarvin-interview/>. On Anton’s views on Schmitt, see Michael Anton, “Reductio ad Hitlerum,” *American Mind*, June 28, 2022, <https://americanmind.org/salvo/reductio-ad-hitlerlum/>. More broadly, see Adams, *Threat of Anti-Liberalism*.

98 See Max Chafkin, *The Contrarian: Peter Thiel and Silicon Valley’s Pursuit of Power* (Penguin, 2021); Raymond Craib, *Adventure Capitalism: A History of Libertarian Exit, from the Era of Decolonization to the Digital Age* (PM Press, 2022); and Peter Thiel, “The Straussian Moment,” in *Studies in Violence, Mimesis*,

corporate kings espouse a kind of “reactionary futurism,” where technology leads to the transcendence of established political and social orders.<sup>99</sup> Carlyle’s writings emphasize the necessity of a heroic leader to shape the course of a nation’s destiny, meshing with and heavily informing the corporate wing of the New Right, which seeks to raise up such strong leaders from the bitter forge of corporate wheeling and dealing. A “Red Caesar” might be required, some within the New Right argue, to unilaterally right the country’s course. Just as with the original Caesar, the republic is a necessary casualty in such projected scenarios, and the line between a theoretical Caesar and a king seems nonexistent.<sup>100</sup>

In less severe realms, Cram’s legacy, and the legacies of his intellectual milieu, continue. In digital arenas, anonymous users debate the merits and aesthetics of monarchies. On Reddit, for example, communities have formed that discuss the continued relevancy of monarchy, and their personal yearning for a return to monarchical government. The largest community, *r/monarchism*, is a subreddit—a single community—where users post jokes, memes, and paintings of their favorite monarchs. They debate the existing royal lines of various countries, the likelihood of monarchies returning, and the ways that might happen, violently or otherwise.<sup>101</sup> As the subreddit’s own description says, it is a place “for the proliferation, reestablishment, and defence of monarchy.” Users can add decorative badges and colorful titles to their profiles, including the heraldry of their favored royal lineages, or add tag lines that describe their niche brand of monarchical affiliation, ranging from “French Eco-Reactionary Feudal Absolutist” to “Federal Monarchist-U.S.” Users debate the wide spectrum of reactionary thought related to monarchism, including the influence of people like Yarvin, whose idea of a corporate-style CEO-monarch often causes disagreement among traditional monarchists.<sup>102</sup> One user was still trying to keep Dicks’s Constantian Society website functioning nearly twenty years after his death.<sup>103</sup>

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*and Culture: Politics and Apocalypse*, ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly (Michigan State University Press, 2007), 189–218.

99 Ali Rıza Taşkale, “The Affective Politics of Reactionary Futurism in Silicon Valley,” *Critical Studies on Security* (March, 2025): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2025.2474781>; Sergio C. Fanjul, “NRx: The (Underground) Movement That Wants to Destroy Democracy,” *El País*, November 29, 2024.

100 Casey Wheatland, “Founding Fathers and Red Caesar,” *American Mind*, October 20, 2023, <https://americanmind.org/salvo/founding-fathers-and-red-caesar/>; Michael Lind, “Caesarism Won’t Save Us,” *Compact Magazine*, February 9, 2023, <https://www.compactmag.com/article/caesarism-won-t-save-us/>. For what seems like the originator of the “Red Caesar” discussion over the last half decade, see Michael Anton, *The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2020).

101 See the *r/monarchism* main page: <https://www.reddit.com/r/monarchism> (accessed November 7, 2025).

102 See, for example, ToTooTwoTutu2II (u/ToTooTwoTutu2II), “Thoughts on Curtis Yarvin aka Mencius Moldbug,” Reddit, January 21, 2024, [https://www.reddit.com/r/monarchism/comments/1b96iwq/thoughts\\_on\\_curtis\\_yarvin\\_aka\\_mencius\\_moldbug/](https://www.reddit.com/r/monarchism/comments/1b96iwq/thoughts_on_curtis_yarvin_aka_mencius_moldbug/).

103 TheSensibleCentrist (u/TheSensibleCentrist), “Constantian website is up,” Reddit, December 6, 2020, [https://www.reddit.com/r/monarchism/comments/k821wn/constantian\\_website\\_is\\_up/](https://www.reddit.com/r/monarchism/comments/k821wn/constantian_website_is_up/).

For some in these niche realms, it is also a chance to advertise: The Danubian Restoration Movement (DRM), organized by students in the United States, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, and Austria, seeks to resurrect the Austro-Hungarian empire by placing Habsburg descendants on a new throne. Marking the hypermodern realities of these new movements, the DRM does not tend to meet in person or put out pamphlets. They organize on Discord, a gaming and messaging app, on Reddit, and advertise on YouTube via “The Monarchist Channel.”<sup>104</sup> Modern technology might be a cause of woe and social disintegration, but it has also become a tool to raise awareness and promote right-wing causes. The Substacks of prominent figures like Yarvin, whose blog hovers around sixty thousand subscribers and a far larger number of viewers, have a significantly wider reach than Cram could have ever imagined for *The Knight Errant* or *The Royal Standard*.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

Bringing these themes together, we can paint a picture of the major ideas animating these often disparate movements on the contemporary far right. They mirror, though not always perfectly, the same kinds of animus that drove Cram: a fierce traditionalism that rejects modernity; an aristo-populism that embraces elite control over democracy; and critiques of liberalism grounded in both the harsh reality of a rapidly transforming modern world and a romanticization of the past. Our current global tumult echoes many of the same worries and problems that led Cram and those in his intellectual circles toward monarchical conclusions. Modernity’s edge, which Cram saw cutting away all that was good and virtuous in traditional life, has only been sharpened in the last century. Emergent artificial intelligence, technocapitalism and the Internet, and the financialization of the economy have heightened the socioeconomic dangers that Cram warned about. The solutions raised by modern monarchists draw on the long tradition that Cram immersed himself in; like Cram, today’s monarchists imagine them as solutions to the woes of a rapidly atomizing, uncertain world. Understanding these impulses is critical toward deciphering what these varied right-wing movements want and what they plan to do to achieve it.

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104 See “Students Want to Restore Austro-Hungarian Empire,” posted May 28, 2024, by The Monarchist Channel (TMC), YouTube, 8:14, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2G8bFGv-Pa0&ab\\_channel=TMC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2G8bFGv-Pa0&ab_channel=TMC).

105 See Yarvin’s “Gray Mirror” Substack at <https://graymirror.substack.com> (accessed December 15, 2025).