

Federation for American Immigration Reform

In 1979, a Michigan eye doctor named John Tanton established the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). A former member of the Sierra Club's National Long-range Planning Committee, Tanton's conservation motives led him to rationalize his nativist stance, faulting immigrants for environmental degradation in the United States. Frustrated after years of fruitlessly urging environmentalists towards his cause, Tanton established FAIR to fill a role no other organization would, one that focuses solely on the issue of immigration.

FAIR has come to sit at the apex of an elaborate network that Tanton created—a network that essentially comprises the contemporary anti-immigrant movement. It has become a household name in the immigration debate and, in conjunction with the rest of the network, has shifted public discourse to increasingly tolerate anti-immigrant sentiment. But make no mistake—just because their arguments fill popular news outlets and political debates, this fact does not change what they espouse: nativism.

Tanton and FAIR have long collaborated with white nationalists and the far-right in disseminating their message. Tanton himself has cited a perceived “Latin onslaught” on the demographic makeup of the United States—inarguably more concerned with race than his frequently cited ‘conservationism.’

Moreover, in its early years, FAIR solicited and received about \$1.2 million in contributions from the notorious Pioneer Fund, a foundation committed to the pseudo-science of eugenics. Eugenic research aims to prove the existence of fixed genetic differences between races, an undertaking that has been appropriated for a number of contentious causes—namely, for proving the genetic superiority of white, European-descended peoples. This practice has been mired in controversy since its inception, and especially since the Nazis used it to rationalize the Holocaust and other war crimes.

But this has not deterred Tanton, who has actually written a paper on the topic. In “The Case for Passive Eugenics,” he does not explicitly distance himself from the Nazi program, instead arguing that “Hitler’s reign in Nazi Germany did little to advance the discussion of eugenics among sensitive persons.”

FAIR’s legacy of bigotry continues to this day. In April of 2011, the [New York Times](#) Sunday edition published a front

page exposé on John Tanton, revealing his extremist views. In the weeks following the article’s publishing, Tanton quietly disappeared from FAIR’s board only to reappear months later on the organization’s advisory board. But with or without Tanton, FAIR will continue to influence the discourse of the immigration debate in an increasingly nativist direction.

- In a 1993 article in [The Progressive](#), in response to public concern and confusion about FAIR’s solicitation of grants from the Pioneer Fund, FAIR president Dan Stein stated, “I don’t give a sh*t what they do with their money, my job is to get every dime of Pioneer’s money.”
- Rick Oltman, a former field representative for FAIR, spoke at the 1997 Council of Conservative Citizens’ (CofCC) national conference. Descended from the White Citizens Councils of the 1960s, the CofCC is a white nationalist organization that has referred to African Americans as “a retrograde species of humanity.” A picture of Oltman at the conference was published in the [Citizens Informer](#), the CofCC’s newsletter, identifying Oltman as a FAIR employee.
- In April 2010, Dan Stein told Rachel Maddow that “We certainly never had nothing to do with [self-described ethnic separatist] Virginia Abernethy. I don’t know where you got the idea that we worked closely with her. We never have.” However, Abernethy, a director of the white nationalist political party American Third Position, was published in a FAIR book titled, “Immigration 2000: The Century of the New American Sweatshop.”
- Several FAIR board members have written for the anti-immigrant blog VDARE.com, founded by white nationalist Peter Brimelow. VDARE commonly propagates anti-Semitic and Islamophobic opinions. One such author, Donald A. Collins, was a longtime FAIR board member who now sits on its advisory board. He has also written for and is on the advisory committee of [The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies](#), published by anti-Semite Roger Pearson.
- In a 1995 correspondence on racial eugenics with Harry Weyher, the former president of the white supremacist Pioneer Fund, Tanton questions the sexuality of Asian men by claiming that “male Orientals are less well equipped than those of some other groups.”