

United States: White House strategist Steve Bannon loves France (meaning French far right)

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White House strategist has borrowed heavily from Le Pen and other touchstones of the French far right.

White House senior adviser Steve Bannon's political credo is "America First" — but it has a distinctly French flavor.

Bannon admires the anti-immigrant policies and economic nationalism of National Front leader Marine Le Pen and his far-right Francophilia goes even deeper. Donald Trump's chief strategist [\[1\]](#) has said he is also a fan of a violently anti-Jewish propagandist and Nazi collaborator as well as other cultural touchstones for the French far right — offering clues to where the Trump administration may take America.

Trump's inauguration in January was widely seen as emboldening Europe's far right movements. His "America First" vision, outlined in a speech written with close help from Bannon, seemed to give a lead to nationalist movements across the Continent.

But the flow of inspiration may actually be in the other direction.

For political scientist Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund, French presidential contender Le Pen can plausibly lay claim to the roots of Bannon-Trumpism: "The politics put in place by Donald Trump and his collaborator Steve Bannon are profoundly inspired by the extreme right in Europe, but most notably by the program of Marine Le Pen."

"We ask all the time 'is Trump-Bannonism going to impact us in Europe and has Trump helped Marine Le Pen?' But the often unexplored issue is that Trump has been influenced by the programs of the extreme right in Europe and he is inspired by them," said de Hoop Scheffer, the head of the German Marshall Fund's Paris office.

Last June, Bannon declared that France was "the place to be" with "its young entrepreneurs, women of the family Le Pen," and described Marine Le Pen's niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who is also a senior National Front figure, as "the new rising star." [\[2\]](#)

It is also striking how often Bannon's rhetoric mirrors that of Marine Le Pen and others associated with the French far right. Take Charles Maurras, a Catholic intellectual and father of extreme right French nationalism who laid the propaganda groundwork for French Nazi collaboration during World War II — an event he welcomed as a "divine surprise."

Maurras then supported the Vichy administration which helped round up and deport 80,000 Jews and sent them to their deaths in concentration camps. He died in prison after the war.

The long-shunned author is enjoying a renaissance among the French extreme right. In May, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen spoke at the annual meeting of Action Française, a far right movement that dates back to the late 19th century which at one point had Maurras as its chief ideologue. She spoke approvingly of Maurras' distinction between what he called "*le pays légal*" (the 'fake' legal country) versus "*le pays réel*," the authentic country of the people.

It is an idea that has apparently filtered through to Bannon. "We are at the end of the Enlightenment. Have you read Charles Maurras?" Bannon recently asked a French official in Washington, according to a report in *Le Figaro* [3].

"I didn't come to do insignificant things," Bannon reportedly said about his war against the Washington "establishment."

"Those people hate us, but we have the people. It is the legal country against the real country. And I am with the real country."

In another report [4], *France-Amérique* magazine said Bannon's interlocutor had been a French diplomat. It said he had revealed in the conversation that "Maurras was his guru....[and] According to Bannon, Trump represents the flesh-and-blood, natural, real country, pitted against the abstract, far-off, legal country."

'France Alone'

With Maurras at the helm, Action Française through its media organ and popular violence championed a "France Alone" policy of "nationalisme intégral," or total nationalism, against what it regarded as a conspiracy of Jews, Protestants, Masons and foreigners. The radical group was banned by the Vatican in the 1920s, and Maurras encouraged political assassinations of resistance members and Jews.

Another controversial writer on Bannon's Francophone reading list is Jean Raspail, author of the apocalyptic 1973 novel "*The Camp of the Saints*." [5]

But Bannon's aggressive marketing for Raspail only came after Marine Le Pen had tweeted to her followers in September 2015 that France was under a "migratory submersion. I invite the French to read or reread *Camp of the Saints*." [6]

Le Pen said she had first read the novel aged 18 [7] and as early as 2013 she was prominently displaying her original edition copy from her office bookshelf in TV interviews. It paints a picture of a Europe that is invaded by hordes of "stinking" dark-skinned migrants and "rat people" flowing in a "river of sperm."

French magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* condemned the book as "unambiguously and intimately fascist, as much for its vocabulary as its imaginary elements: less a political system than a production of the 'other' as a nightmarish reality, calling for its annihilation."

But Bannon, like Le Pen, sees it as a prophetic work [8] being proven correct because radical Muslim refugees were starting an "invasion" of Europe via Germany. Starting in October 2015 [9], he began extolling the book, often on the right-wing Breitbart news network he controlled.

"It's been almost a Camp of the Saints-type invasion into Central and then Western and Northern Europe," he said in October 2015, referring to migrants escaping the Syrian war. In January 2016 he said, "It's really an invasion. I call it the Camp of the Saints."

Raspail told POLITICO that Bannon had not reached out to him, and said the book had been read by presidents Ronald Reagan and François Mitterrand without any criticism. He said the novel was not racist and denied it was a “how-to manual” for far right policies.

Bannon also appears to have followed some of Le Pen’s more violent anti-Muslim rhetoric: declaring at a conference in the Vatican in 2014 that Judeo-Christian civilization was in a “war against Islamic fascism.” [10]

Back in 2010, Le Pen was comparing French Muslims praying in the streets to a Nazi “occupation.” And in 2012 she said France was faced with the advance of a “green fascism” (green being the color of Islam) and vowed to “bring radical Islam to its knees.”

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Also, in a forerunner of Trump’s controversial travel ban, she has long championed changing the French constitution to give preference to French citizens over all other residents, and outlawing dual nationality except with other European countries. The measure would disproportionately affect France’s millions of Muslims, many of whom have passports from their family’s countries of origin, and the French Jewish population that holds Israeli citizenship.

Le Pen has also said that she would expel all foreigners who had traveled to Afghanistan and “all other countries where terrorism training takes place,” and put under house arrest any French citizens who had done the same.

On economics too, Bannon and Trump have much in common with the French far right. In Le Pen’s 2012 run for the presidency, her program clearly spelled out the precursor of Bannon’s “economic nationalism” (she called it “economic patriotism”), including heavy border taxes on imports, the expulsion of all illegal immigrants, and the slashing of legal immigration as well as a government push to “buy French.”

For her part, Le Pen appears to have noticed the fandom from across the Atlantic. But she is also keen to point out that she got there first, rejecting the idea that her party is following Trump’s lead.

“I don’t take Trump as a model, it is him applying what I have been putting forward for years now and that our political opponents have always considered inept,” she told La Voix du Nord earlier this year [11].

One thing she would like to copy from Bannon and Trump, though, is their electoral success. In just a few weeks, on the night of the second round of the French presidential election on May 7, she will know whether she has succeeded.

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P.S.

* “Steve Bannon loves France”. 3/22/17, 4:10 AM CET Updated 3/22/17, 9:20 PM CET:
<http://www.politico.eu/article/steve-bannons-french-marine-le-pen-front-national-donald-trump-far-right-populism-inspiration/>

* Emma-Kate Symons is a freelance journalist.

Footnotes

- [1] <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/trump-steve-bannon-destroy-eu-european-union-214889>
- [2] <http://radio-londres.fr/2016/07/breitbart-debarque-a-paris-presidentielle-france/>
- [3] <http://lirelactu.fr/source/le-figaro/f0742138-b1c1-4627-9fac-4f032fcf9c87>
- [4] <https://france-amerique.com/fr/the-french-source-of-trumpism/>
- [5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Camp_of_the_Saints
- [6] https://twitter.com/MLP_officiel/status/638959623215706112?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw
- [7] http://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/09/16/le-livre-de-chevet-de-marine-le-pen-decrit-une-apocalypse-migratoire_1383026
- [8] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/steve-bannon-camp-of-the-saints-immigration_us_58b75206e4b0284854b3dc03
- [9] <https://soundcloud.com/siriusxm-news-issues/the-american-people-are-angry>
- [10] https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/this-is-how-steve-bannon-sees-the-entire-world?utm_term=.hp6wyG6jp1#.kawQe23yAv
- [11] <http://www.lavoixdunord.fr/109702/article/2017-01-26/marine-le-pen-l-hypothese-de-ma-victoire-est-tout-fait-credible>