

*****Please do not cite. Use Published Version: [10.5840/radphilrev2020412110](https://doi.org/10.5840/radphilrev2020412110)*****

Propaganda and the Nihilism of the Alt-Right

Abstract: The alt-right is an online subculture marked by its devotion to the execution of a racist, misogynistic, and xenophobic politics through trolling, pranking, meme-making, and mass murder. It is this devotion to far-right politics through the discordant conjunction of humor and suicidal violence this article seeks to explain by situating the movement for the first time within its constitutive online relationships. This article adds to the existing literature by viewing the online relationships of the alt-right through the genealogy of propaganda. Through situating the alt-right alongside the genealogy of propaganda, the article offers new insights into the social isolation, increasingly extreme social and political positions, nihilism, and violence that have emerged within the alt-right. The article concludes by applying the lessons of the alt-right for online organizing across the political spectrum and argues that a class-based politics of the left is an important part of countering the rise of the alt-right.

Keywords: Propaganda, Alt-right, Alt-light, Meme, Incel, Mass Shooting, Nihilism, 4chan, Blackpill, Redpill, Trolling

Cory Wimberly
Associate Professor of Philosophy
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
cory.wimberly@utrgv.edu

Propaganda and the Nihilism of the Alt-Right

The alt-right has two seemingly contradictory faces. One face of the alt-right, highlighted by Milo Yiannopoulos and repeated in major media outlets, is an in-jokey bunch of trolls, best seen through their production of “memes” (a meme in this context is typically a picture overlaid with a short bit of text, designed to be humorous and spread rapidly around the internet).¹ Another face of the alt-right can be seen in the constant stream of racist and misogynist mass shooters it produces: for example, in Isla Vista (2014), Charleston (2015), and El Paso (2019).² The public is left to piece together these two apparently contradictory faces of this racist and misogynistic political community: humor and hate, cartoons and blood, in-jokey outcasts and nihilistic mass murderers.³ How should we understand the divergent and apparently contradictory sensibilities of this racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, and heterosexist movement?

Studies of the alt-right have come from a range of approaches in academia. Most academic work to date on the alt-right has looked to the celebrity figures of the alt-right for answers; figures like Richard Spencer, Brad Griffin, and Mike Cernovich are often taken as representative of the movement as a whole. Books like Beiner’s *Dangerous Minds*, Main’s *The Rise of the Alt-right*, and Marantz’s *Antisocial* all focus on the celebrity caste as representatives of the larger movement.⁴ Another way the alt-right has been approached, for instance by Robert Altemayer, is through a psychological exploration of the types of people that participate in the alt-right, like “right-wing authoritarian followers” (RWAs) and leaders with a “social dominance orientation” (SDOs).⁵

Niewert in *Alt-America* combines both the focus on celebrity figures and psychology to explain the movement. In short, he argues that the humor of the alt-right is a marketing ploy skillfully harnessed by the elites in the face of internal factionalism to help the movement

¹ Bokhari and Yiannopolous, “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the Alt-Right.” For the most infamous example of the mass media repeating Yiannopoulos’ view of the alt-right, in which its misogyny and racism are downplayed in favor of its satire and humor, see Bump, “Hillary Clinton plans to tie Donald Trump to the “alt-right” and the worst of the Web.”

² Hankes and Amend, “The Alt-Right Is Killing People.”

³ Wimberly, “Trump, Propaganda, and the Politics of *Ressentiment*,” 179.

⁴ Beiner, *Dangerous Minds*; Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*; Marantz, *Antisocial*.

⁵ Altemayer, *The Authoritarians*.

“cohere” and “make the players forget their differences.”⁶ He finds that the SDO leaders use humor to bind RWA followers to them, and, once under their control, the leaders exhort their followers to violence. Borrowing from Altemeyer’s psychology, Niewert describes the combination of SDOs and RWAs in the alt-right as a “lethal union” that spawns a “cyclonic death spiral.”⁷ The “lethal union” is the consequence of the alt-right RWA followers’ predilection to abdicate moral and political control to SDO leaders who are hungry for just such control and willing to use it for mass violence.

Other critics focus on external social pressures to explain the constitution of the alt-right instead of internal psychological factors or a celebrity caste. Angela Nagel explains the conduct of the alt-right as a counterreaction to the left, especially young online feminists. Nagle sees the alt-right as using the tactics of the left against the left; most importantly, the transformation of cultural norms through transgression, including transgressive humor and violence: “it is hard to think of a better term than Gramscian to describe what they have strategically achieved, as a movement almost entirely based on influencing culture and shifting the Overton window through media and culture, not just formal politics.”⁸ In her view, the alt-right is a mutually co-constitutive movement linked to online feminism, which it borrows from and reacts against; it borrows transgression as a political strategy but directs it against the norms of the left. Her argument describing the influence of the left on the alt-right carries weight, even if it is disturbing how her work at times troublingly resembles Trump’s response to the Neo-Nazi march on Charlottesville: there were bad actors on both sides.

This essay does not seek to confirm or deny Niewert, Altemeyer, or Nagle’s arguments about the impact of the celebrity alt-right, psychological factors, or leftist influences in producing the alt-right. Instead, this essay seeks to give another explanation that is compatible with their theses even if it in no way presupposes or relies on them. An additional source of explanation seems necessary because these arguments do not sufficiently explain what is unique about the alt-right: there have been celebrity figures of racism and misogyny in the United States for hundreds of years, the psychological types identified by the psychologists existed well before the alt-right, and the key ideas from Gramsci’s prison notebooks have been in circulation at least

⁶ Niewert, *Alt-America*, 255.

⁷ Altemeyer, *The Authoritarians*, quoted in Niewert, *Alt-America*, 230-231.

⁸ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 41.

since their first publication in 1948-1951. Even given prior work, one can still ask why the alt-right came to be in this way at this particular time? This essay seeks to close this gap in the research by looking to the impact of the constitutive online relationships of the alt-right to help explain how the movement came to take the shape it did, as both an in-joke troll mob and a series of earnest suicidal mass shooters. While this paper will be focused on the alt-right, it also contains important lessons for political organizing online regardless of ideology because it identifies structural features of online politics that would be relevant to any politics that shares those structures.

The alt-right is an almost exclusively online movement. This essay contends that the online relationships that constitute the alt-right help explain both the prodigious meme culture and the mass violence it produces. More specifically, the alt-right has an extremely competitive online culture in which individuals strive to gain attention for their ideas against a flood of other users looking to do the same. This competition to be seen and heard online has transformed the relationships of the alt-right into propagandistic relations: the priority for participants in alt-right websites has been to produce images, symbols, and short phrases that will garner clicks amidst a sea of other competing users. The consequence of this propagandistic competition is that the online relationships of the alt-right fuel an inflationary extremism to garner clicks from a jaded audience with continually bleaker racist, sexist, and economic pictures of the world. While these increasingly bleak diagnoses are often humorous and ironic, they also promote a suicidal and violent nihilism as individuals in the alt-right are increasingly convinced that the world is flawed beyond their ability to save it. This situation is exacerbated by the way that the propagandistic online culture of the alt-right offers little room for individuals to develop substantive analyses and solutions to their inflationary inventory of problems. The thesis this essay explores is succinctly and brutally echoed in a note left behind by a young man who went on to shoot his girlfriend's parents and then himself: "I use ironic memes as a way to cover up the fact how badly I want to blow my brains out [sic]."⁹ This essay argues that whatever other influences add to the alt-right, the online relations that constitute the community of the alt-right both drive the development of meme culture and the nihilism and violence that are both so strongly identified with the alt-right.

⁹ Jouvenal, "Her son, facing murder charges, is being called an "alt-right killer."

Defining the Alt-right

Outside of difficulties in explaining the eventuation of the alt-right, another problem with looking at well-known alt-right commentators and podcasters as representatives is that the movement is not well-organized and is not organized in a top-down fashion, as Hawley relates: “The Alt-right can scarcely be called an organized movement. It has no formal institutions or a leadership caste issuing orders to loyal followers. There is no Alt-right equivalent of *The Communist Manifesto*.”¹⁰ When someone learning about the movement wants to know what the alt-right believes, there is no simple catechism, no clear spokesperson, and no manifesto. The movement is decentralized in a way that permits a range of views, even as they hover around racism, misogyny, and economic alienation. Andrew Anglin, webmaster of *The Daily Stormer*, described the Alt-right thus: “The Alt-right is an online mob of disenfranchised and mostly anonymous, mostly young White men...*The mob is the movement*.”¹¹ To learn what the mob believes, there is no recourse other than to listen to the mob itself; a job not many academics are keen for with their training in the analysis of essays and manuscripts. If one follows the dialog of the alt-right in the threads on popular websites, one can see that there is significant variation in beliefs that cluster around certain positions on race, sex, and class.¹²

For instance, on matters of race, opinions range from the Neo-Nazi dream for a racially pure white ethnostate to Gavin McInnes’ xenophobia, which he describes as a kind of “western chauvinism” that is not based on the biology of human beings but on the cultural and technological supremacy of Europe.¹³ McInnes claims that he accepts people of any race as long as they accept that “the west is the best.”¹⁴ At the other end of the alt-right spectrum from McInnes is Andrew Anglin and his *Daily Stormer*, a Neo-Nazi anti-Semitic website. In my experience of the alt-right discourse, more of the rhetoric falls closer to the *Daily Stormer* than

¹⁰ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, 11.

¹¹ Andrew Anglin, quoted in Niewert, *Alt-America*, 257

¹² Nagel gives an account of the range of beliefs in the alt-right owing to its leaderless nature in her chapter “The leaderless digital counter-revolution,” *Kill All Normies*, 10-27.

¹³ Gavin McInnes had declared himself a western chauvinist on Twitter but his account was suspended on August 10, 2018 and his posts made unavailable. Documentation of the quote can be found widely in the media, including this article: Wilson, “Who are the Proud Boys, “western chauvinists” involved in political violence?”

¹⁴ McInnes, “THE PROUD BOYS ARE NOT RACIST.”

that of McInnes. What underpins the rhetoric from cultural chauvinism to the call for programmatic racial and ethnic genocide is a nationalism whose sense of “we the people” is not based in citizenship or birthplace but in cultural and racial homogeneity as Jared Taylor of *American Renaissance* relates: “I would put it right at the center of any kind of understanding of the political order of a healthy nation is the recognition that racial homogeneity is essential to cultural survival and to national integrity.”¹⁵

The view of women is something that gets particularly distorted if one takes the celebrity voices of the alt-right to be representative of the movement as a whole. Thomas Main’s *The Rise of the Alt-right* lists four ideological points as central to defining the alt-right: the rejection of liberal democracy, white racialism, anti-Americanism, and vitriolic rhetoric. Nowhere in the list is sex mentioned though it is a pervasive and defining point of the movement outside of its celebrity “representatives.” This is a problematic oversight: many commentators and even members of the news media who cover the alt-right note that its most proximate genesis lies in Gamergate, which was an explosion of sexist rage. Gamergate was a tremendously baroque, convoluted, and massive online kerfuffle. What is relevant for this discussion is that it revolved around gender roles and sexism in video games. The genesis of the alt-right out of Gamergate speaks to the deep roots that sexism has in the movement. The *New York Times* recently ran the article “Gamergate is Everything,” which discussed how tactics, community, and politics that grew out of Gamergate have now become ubiquitous online, especially within the alt-right.

The alt-right is broadly misogynistic; common terms for women include “roasties” (because modern women’s genitalia are said to look like shredded roast beef due to extreme promiscuity) and “fembots”/“femoids”/“foids” because all women are considered to be robots. For the alt-right, women are robots both in the sense that they mindlessly repeat feminist talking points and that they are determined by their biological programming; the result is that women’s words and actions are not the product of the autonomous exercise of reason and can be dismissed as products of larger social and biological systems. Elliot Rodger, the Isla Vista shooter who murdered seven people out of his belief that he deserved sex and affection from women that he was not getting, styled himself the “supreme gentleman” in his manifesto.¹⁶ “Saint” Elliot Rodger (the Alt-right describes him thus) thought that women could not see what he had to offer

¹⁵ Jared Taylor, quoted in Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 169.

¹⁶ Rodger, *My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger*.

due to their biological programming, and so the “supreme gentleman” protested the “injustice” of his celibacy with a murder/suicide spree.¹⁷

Beliefs about the ideal relationship between “man” and his allegedly inferior counterpart vary from those like Rodger’s, which state that enslavement or death is the correct treatment for women, to those that hope for a return of a radical patriarchy in which women will be properly subjugated and the traditional social order will be restored. Others in the alt-right have yet another view which argues that men should not have relationships with women at all and that they should form a separatist movement and isolate themselves; this movement styles itself as MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way). Again, this is another inversion of leftist politics that mirrors the strategies of Black, feminist, and lesbian separatism. While many readers may be tempted to think it is humorous that men as a whole need to be separated and protected from the abuse and mistreatment of women, the MGTOW group is not attempting to be funny. Predictably however, this group of male separatists is also the group that most posts about women and complains most bitterly about their lack of female companionship; they can be seen chatting the nights away at Incels.co and 4chan’s /r9k/ forum.

In terms of class and economics, the alt-right’s positions are grouped around the idea that white men are unfairly denied socially respectable and decently paying jobs. The economic analysis proffered to this conundrum range from conspiracy theories (many of which load the blame on Jews), to scattershot libertarian ideas, and the emasculation of white men. The solutions are equally diverse and include the removal of all non-white immigrants, the colonization and subordination of foreign nations, and the institution of free-market libertarianism sidled with various schemes for institutionalizing a racist and misogynistic economic Darwinism. In essence, classism is seen as a problem but viewed through an extremely racist and sexist lens such that the victims are white men and the perpetrators are women, people of color, and foreigners.

The Character of Alt-Right Discourse

Whether describing their beliefs on race, sex, or class, they are typically delivered in short, often incomplete sentences, accompanied by pictures in online 24-hour streams, and not in

¹⁷ “Elliot Rodger: How misogynist killer became an “incel hero.”

extended blog pieces or news magazine articles. Just as important as it is to note the variance between the beliefs of those individuals in the alt-right, it is important to notice the difference in the depth and quality of the beliefs stated between the celebrity class and the mob online. While the focus of much academic work is on the extended essay-like commentaries produced by a rarefied few, most participants express their beliefs through pictures and short phrases in online discussions and social media platforms.

As briefly mentioned earlier, the large volume of traffic in the alt-right takes place in online fora in which users post content amidst hundreds or even thousands of others doing the same. There is more content on all the various platforms of the alt-right than anyone could possibly view. Users have to pick content to view from an overwhelming abundance of it, choosing what to view often from just a small picture and a short phrase. While the way content is submitted and displayed works slightly differently on platforms like Voat, Discord, 4chan, and The Daily Stormer, they all have in common that clicks matter to visibility, especially the quantity and timing of clicks. For instance, 4chan is the simplest of the bunch and is reverse-chronologically organized, meaning whichever thread has been commented on most recently is at the top of the board followed by those less recently commented on in ranked order. On Voat, which is much like Reddit, users vote up or down on threads posted by other users, which then effects the visibility of the thread to future users. When thousands of threads accumulate over time and many are submitted each day, these sorting algorithms impact which ideas are seen and which have a low impact or disappear almost entirely. Content that has any hope of being seen needs to entice viewership through images and text that immediately grab attention and drive clicks amidst a sea of others looking to do the same.

Recognizing the constant competition for visibility, relevancy, and even existence goes a long way towards explaining the raft of effective memes that issue forth from the alt-right: to participate effectively in the community requires that one practice the skills of the propagandist to effectively be heard. The spilling forth of humorous images overlaid with short bits of text from the alt-right can be explained by the fact that participation in the alt-right involves a significant amount of practice and competition producing pictures and bits of text that grab attention: the energy, intelligence, creativity, and time spent developing the skills to be heard within the alt-right carries over outside of it and attracts broader online attention as well.

To an important extent, to participate in the alt-right is not just to produce beliefs that conform to broadly racist and sexist norms but to become a propagandist of those beliefs. To be heard one needs to be skilled; an individual needs to propagate their message above and against the other individuals also clamoring to propagate their own. The quality and quantity of the memes emerging from the alt-right might not be explained merely by cataloging the political ideology of the alt-right or studying its psychological types, but if one examines the online relations constitutive of the movement, it is not challenging to see why the alt-right has such great fecundity in their production of propaganda.

The connection of the alt-right's online relationships to its meme-making and even its attention-grabbing pranks are not difficult to see.¹⁸ However, how do these same online relationships drive the movement towards mass violence? There is a connection between the constitutive online relationships of the alt-right and the constant stream of violence pouring forth from it. The argument, to be clear, is not that those online relationships are the sole cause of violence but that they contribute to the problem and are an important part of understanding it. To see the connection between the propagandistic online relationships of the alt-right and its nihilism and violence will require a deeper exploration of propaganda and its effects on relationships.

A Tailored History of Propaganda

A basic understanding of propagandistic discourse and the kinds of relationships that can be established through it is necessary to understand how the online discourse of the alt-right shapes its relationships and impacts its participants. We will see that the propagandistic nature of the discourse of the alt-right is at least partially responsible for its nihilism and violence.

The term “propaganda” has become popularized and loaded with ancillary and obfuscatory meanings, so it is important to clarify what exactly is meant by propaganda. Historically, the field now known as public relations was previously referred to as propaganda or

¹⁸ One of the more successful pranks of the alt-right was to claim that the “OK” hand gesture—formed by circling the index and thumb while holding the other three fingers straight—was in fact meant to convey support for “white power.” Now mass media stories regularly occur trying to discern whether or not the “OK” hand-sign given by an individual was conveying support of “white power” or was meant as “OK.” For more, see “Racist Hand Signs: Okay Hand Gesture,” and Niewert, “Is that an OK sign? A white power symbol? Or just a right-wing troll?”

publicity in the early twentieth century.¹⁹ Propaganda had negative connotations even before World War I and with the Germans making good use of it in their *Kriegspropaganda* (war propaganda) the term became even more sullied. There was a hunt for a new name for propaganda after World War I, and the field eventually began to coalesce on the name “public relations” in the 1920s.²⁰ While today people commonly mean different things when they use the terms “propaganda” and “public relations,” materially and historically they name the same profession as revealed by the propagandist Edward Bernays, “When I came back to the United States [from World War I], I decided that if you could use propaganda for war, you could certainly use it for peace. And ‘propaganda’ got to be a bad word because of the Germans using it, so what I did was to try and find some other words so we found the words ‘public relations.’”²¹

Propaganda (“public relations” as it was renamed) then and now is far more than a wartime activity perpetrated through lies and deception; propagandists developed a social, political, and psychological analysis of human relations that they used to govern public opinion, mainly on behalf of large corporations.²² The most relevant aspect of propaganda to the constitution of the alt-right is that it is designed to guide the conduct of people who are assumed to be subrational and of low intelligence. Propagandists theorized that the public was of very limited intelligence, so they developed propaganda to impact the unconsciously and affectively driven publics. Perhaps the most important modern propagandist, Ivy L. Lee wrote, “In the first place, crowds do not reason. It is impossible to induce a crowd to proceed toward any proposition on logical premises.”²³ Consequently, propaganda did not carry premises, argumentation, or much in the way of rational substance; instead, propaganda was developed to appeal to the unconscious drivers of human behavior in order to shape public conduct outside of the priority of reason.

The assumption of the irrational, primitive, and unintelligent public came from the popular crowd psychologists of the early 20th century—e.g. Gustave Le Bon, William

¹⁹ Wimberly, *How Propaganda Became Public Relations*, 1-2.

²⁰ The definitive turn towards the usage of the term “public relations” in place of propaganda or publicity was the publication of Bernays’ *Crystallizing Public Relations*.

²¹ Bernays, *Century of the Self*.

²² Wimberly, *How Propaganda Became Public Relations*, 131-148.

²³ Lee, *Human Nature and the Railroads*, 14.

McDougall, Sigmund Freud, and Wilfred Trotter. Propagandists borrowed the basic means of shaping public opinion from these crowd psychologists, especially Gustave Le Bon, and involved three elements: affirmation, repetition, and contagion.²⁴

Affirmations are typically simple images, symbols, and/or phrases that grab the public's attention and motivate them to adopt new conduct. As Lee wrote, "crowds do not reason," and so the propagandists sought images, symbols, and phrases that would work at a non-rational or even unconscious level to attract and direct the public towards the conduct its client desired. For example, at the behest of Lucky Strike, Bernays famously drove women to smoke by tying the cigarette to the suffrage movement. Bernays used the images, symbols, and phrases of the suffragettes to position Lucky Strike as symbol of female empowerment and sexual desire; the revolutionary imagery of the suffragettes drew attention and Bernays coopted the drive for equality, power, and sexual satisfaction by redirecting it towards smoking.²⁵

Since the public is not rational in the eyes of propagandists but irrational and unconsciously motivated, they believe that behavior is only durably transformed through habituation (rather than through principled argumentation). The new conduct inspired by the propaganda is often ephemeral, and to remedy this and create durable new dispositions, propagandists use repetition. Like one trains a dog, propagandists train the public by repeating their affirmations until the conduct it inspires becomes habit. The use of repetition is easily seen in the mass media today as the advertisements, branding, slogans, images, and key phrases of propagandists endlessly repeat: commercials cycle endlessly, branding appears everywhere, and the same brand-identifying colors and shapes are on every surface for rent.

Finally, if influential publics and/or enough influential individuals come to adopt a new line of conduct, then the new conduct becomes "contagious" (today we might say "goes viral"), and the public spreads the desired conduct as a norm.²⁶ The highest aim of propaganda is to create new norms for public opinion and conduct, which the public enforces itself and at little further cost to the client; if this contagion occurs, it introduces a point of inflection in the culture that moves the public body towards the new conduct on a stable and long-term basis.

²⁴ Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 66-68.

²⁵ Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, a History*, 210.

²⁶ Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 30.

The key aspect that I want to draw out for the examination of the alt-right is the quality of the relations of power and knowledge in propaganda. Propaganda was created specifically not to depend on reasoning, facts, or evidence, since those things would only confuse the supposedly dim-witted public. The pictures, symbols, and short phrases—"affirmations"—of propaganda were created to operate unconsciously and to affectively grab attention and steer conduct. For this essay's argument, it does not matter if the alt-right was directly influenced by the ubiquitous presence of corporate propaganda or if it proceeded on a parallel path of evolution to a like set of knowledge relations, as long as the similarity between the two can be recognized.

The Propagandistic Online Relations of the Alt-Right

The websites in the alt-right inculcate relations that mirror propaganda in that they encourage a similar kind of governmental discourse that aims to conduct its publics through unconscious and affective tactics. The content users craft on alt-right websites are like those of the propagandists in that they aim to grab attention at a subrational level, to spur an individual to click on their content in the blink of an eye. Scrolling through the hundreds and thousands of bits of mob generated content, all that a user sees of a particular thread before clicking on it is usually just a small picture and a phrase. The content that fills the websites of the alt-right—from Voat to Discord to 4Chan to Gab—uses images, symbols, and phrases to gain the clicks they want. Like propaganda, the mob discourse of the alt-right lies mostly outside of the priority of reason and in a space of affective and subliminal appeal for attention.

Among the hundreds or even thousands of memes produced in the alt-right each day, a few have gained wide attention. To take but one example, the "*deus vult*" meme has played a role in reinvigorating interest in Christianity in the movement.²⁷ *Deus vult* translates to "God wills it," and it was a common cry used in the first Crusade during the 11th century. The alt-right has resurrected the phrase along with a drawing of a period helmet as a symbol of the history and continuing need for violent confrontation with Islam, military support for Christianity, and the need for a crusade to champion "European values." The *Deus vult* meme is not a rational appeal—there is no history provided or argument made—it draws on its young white male audience's vague knowledge of the crusades but even more on their feelings of entitlement to a

²⁷ andcallmeshirley, "Deus Vult."

future they believe has been stolen from them. In other words, the meme works not through reason and evidence but by subrational appeal to affect, desire, and/or the unconscious stirred by symbolism. In the end, whether the discourse of the alt-right resembles corporate propaganda because of direct influence, two different groups arriving independently at a similar discursive point, or some mix of the two, the effects are the same in terms of being geared towards sub-rational and immediate appeals to their audiences for attention. This is doubly true of websites like 4chan where nearly all posts are anonymous; no prestige is banked or accorded to a poster that would result in a message being viewed due the quality of past content—every post has to win the battle again against the hordes of other posts. Whether on iFunny or on a corporate campaign, and whether the aim is to move the public to embrace a white ethnostate or some new consumer product, enslave women or increase shoe sales, the strategy is to grab the attention of the viewer and motivate the desired conduct using some economical combination of symbols, images, and short phrases capable of producing an immediate and unreasoned reaction.

The alt-right could have constituted itself as an intellectual project, a set of linked autobiographical records, an artistic movement, or in any number of different ways. What it did was constitute itself through relationships that did not have a sensibility geared towards reason, argumentation, evidence, and the sustained development of thought. I know that participants in the alt-right consider their one-line exchanges and flame wars to be models of truth, reasoned debate, and courage in thought—they often refer to their work as “red pilling” (truth revealing)—but, in the end, what carries the day in the alt-right is not what is most reasoned or true but what garners most clicks. And, since individuals only have an image and a short phrase from which to judge whether to click, it is hard to see how reason is playing the determining factor or even any substantial factor at all. They are instead playing by the rules of propaganda in a highly competitive and supersaturated online community.

As the reader might suspect, there are serious negative consequences for constituting a political movement through relations of knowledge that function on the level of the extremely brief appeals to unconscious, irrational, and affective sensibilities. The alt-right’s social and political ambitions show the kind of comically basic and distorted grip on social reality that one would expect when constructing a knowledge about a nuanced and complicated topic through propaganda. Consistency is not important and neither is plausibility as long as the message is outrageous enough or attractive enough to draw in users with a click; the “Pizzagate” conspiracy

is a good example. The Pizzagate conspiracy trafficked on alt-right websites inspired a man in Washington to shoot up a pizzeria named Comet Ping Pong with an AR-15 because he believed that Hillary Clinton was running a child sex-trafficking ring out of the back of the restaurant. Was it reason that drove Pizzagate's popularity or the visceral appeal of images and phrases associating Clinton with pedophilia and the sex trade?

Another example: the alt-right's frequently stated goal of constructing an American ethnostate, in which all citizens would be "White," never comes close to consistency or plausibility. The dream of an American white ethnostate does not even need external critique to reveal its fantastic nature; the European wing of the alt-right has already offered its own brutal critique. The European participants in the alt-right, especially evident at 4chan, launched dozens of variations on the "le 56% face" meme meant to advertise to the American advocates of a white ethnostate that America is "only 56% white."²⁸ The Europeans began referring to the Americans as mixed-race "Amerimutts" and laughing at their outraged responses by calling the aggrieved Americans "mutthurt." Several popular European-generated memes depict American alt-right members applying to join their future white ethnostate and being denied entry into it for their racial impurity.²⁹ The reason the symbols, images, and phrases surrounding an American ethnostate or any other alt-right point have achieved prominence is not because they can withstand more than a moment's reflection but because they get clicks in less than a moment. The primary loyalty in the alt-right is not to reason, evidence, or even plausibility, but to drawing a pre-reflective reaction from its audience; to exist at all in the online world of the alt-right requires drawing more clicks than others. These propagandistic relationships have resulted in highly impoverished knowledges about the world and their place within it as those values have taken a backseat to the production of clickbait.

It is also likely that the need to compete for clicks has resulted in the increasing radicalization of the thought of the alt-right. Roland Marchand and William Leach have both documented how professional propaganda has had to result to ever smaller amounts of text, greater appeal to image, and increasingly shocking and arresting images to compete for the public's interest, as what was once striking becomes commonplace and ineffective.³⁰ In essence,

²⁸ Don, "Amerimutt / Le 56% Face."

²⁹ arnoldbusk, "Amerimutt / Le 56% Face – Ethnostate Applications."

³⁰ Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 197; Leach, *Land of Desire*, 44-45 & 340-341.

when what was striking becomes the norm, then to be striking requires moving farther along to stand out from the pack. A similar process seems to be at work in the alt-right. The structural need imposed on users by the websites to be seen and heard has a regulatory function on the relationships constitutive of the alt-right privileging extremism; whatever else the relationships of the alt-right might be, they need to constantly be working to stand out and generate public interest. While cleverness works to garner attention and so too does real skill in graphic design, the most basic strategy to gain influence—and one that is within everyone’s reach—is reproducing existing the themes in a more extreme way; this is also how mainstream propaganda has worked—while there are better and worse designed public relations, marketing, and advertising campaigns, the general trend of the industry is towards more extreme methods. More racist, more misogynistic, more xenophobic, and more violent—the dials need to keep twisting past 10 and, like the amplifiers of Spinal Tap, go beyond to find new purchase in a jaded audience. It has to be remembered that less than ten years ago, 4chan was a hotspot for the leftist group Anonymous to organize. After law enforcement cracked down on the leadership of Anonymous in 2010-2012, the group began slowly moving to the right, escalating to its present position in less than a decade.³¹ From “Lolcats” in 2007, to #Gamergate in 2013, to Elliott Rodgers shooting women at random in Isla Vista in 2014, and to the mass shooting at Wal-Mart in El Paso in 2019, the radicalization has been tempestuous and driven.

Dissimilarities Between the Alt-Right and Corporate Propaganda

The similarities between the alt-right’s online discourse and propaganda help explain the movement’s extremism, its jaded irreverence, its facile ideas, and its massive output of memes. Its dissimilarity with propaganda can also help explain the movement’s despair, nihilism, and violence.

Perhaps the most important dissimilarity between the online discourse of the alt-right and propaganda is that professional propaganda operates at two distinct levels while the alt-right lacks that operational division. In the corporation, members of the executive team produce a set of goals, benchmarks, and a rationale that governs their production of propaganda. This executive discourse takes into consideration the corporation’s goals, the current state of the

³¹ Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, 13-14.

public, and how public opinion needs to change to achieve corporate goals. With these ends in mind, propagandists design a campaign to achieve them. In the corporation, propaganda is a tool used to achieve the goals formulated in a considered process; there is a distinct executive level that guides and shapes the propaganda from above. Propaganda may be made to appeal to the unconscious and irrational aspects of public opinion, but its employment is thoroughly planned and guided by a raft of corporate analyses—accounting, operations, marketing, engineering, sales, legal, etc.—to help plot their future aims and strategize about how the public conduct will need to be changed to achieve their goals. John Price Jones, one the most influential propagandists of the twentieth century, wrote of the need for planning and rational calculation in propaganda: “The parable of the house built on the sands may be applied to public relations. No public relations program can withstand the waves of public opinion, unless it is built on a firm foundation of understanding by those sponsoring the program.”³²

In contrast to corporate propaganda, the alt-right almost entirely lacks the executive governmental discourse guiding their use of propaganda. The alt-right largely operates at one level because its analysis of the current situation, its setting of goals, and its strategy to achieve those goals are communicated almost entirely through propaganda. For the vast plurality of individuals in the alt-right there is no separate strategic level from the propagandistic level that is employed to carry out those strategic goals; there is no level of reasoning and discussion about what they should aim to achieve and then a separate manipulative layer at which they carry out those aims; there is only propaganda, through which they also have to formulate their ideals, aims, and produce the rationalization of their movement. The alt-right does not just produce propaganda as instrument to carry out goals formulated at another level; its goals and rationalization are formulated through propagandistic back and forth: the alt-right is constituted by propaganda all the way down, with few spaces outside of propaganda for the kinds of measured executive deliberation or evidenced research that one can find in corporations or private professional propaganda apparatuses. This is a key point: the alt-right communicates with itself and comes to its analysis of society, its aims, and its methods through relations of propaganda largely internal to itself. If the corporation worked the same way that the alt-right worked, there would be no board meetings where executives met to discuss reports and linger

³² Jones and Church, *At the Bar of Public Opinion*, 147.

over numbers and analyses; instead, each member of the corporation would communicate to the other members only by producing propaganda pieces to sway the others' opinions. The online world of the alt-right is propagandistic back and forth with very few other spaces for discourses of a different type.

One might challenge this and ask if the role of the elite in the alt-right, such as the role played by commentators like Richard Spencer or Brad Griffin, does not fill the same role of the executives in corporations? Do not those elites produce the aims, the methods, and the rationalizations like the executives in a corporate propaganda campaign, replicating the two-level structure of professional propaganda? While the situation might seem analogous at first and in this broad view, the situation is significantly different in the alt-right than in the corporation, even accounting for the role of the alt-right celebrity commentariat. In the corporation, the propagandists are employees of the corporation and are bound through relationships of hierarchical authority to carry out the will of the executives. The propagandists are strictly beholden to governmental discourse produced in the corporation and they will be asked to report on their gains vis-à-vis these goals. This is not true for the relationship of the alt-right "mob" to the long-form commentators: the mob is a consumer of commentary rather than employed by the commentators to carry out their ideas. The relationship between the alt-right mob and the commentary on Occidental Dissent, VDARE, or American Renaissance is not employer/employee but producer/consumer: to understand the relationship between the celebrity commentary and the everyday mob traffic at sites like 4chan and Voat, we need to understand the relationship within the frame of consumption.

What frames the consumption of commentary in the alt-right is the same economy of propaganda discussed in the previous section. The context of the alt-right masses in consuming the long-form writing, podcasts, or blogs of the well-known alt-right figures is their daily need for new images, symbols, and phrases to garner interest. Resultantly, the news magazines, opinion pieces, and podcasts are more mined than obeyed, more browsed than listened to, and more sampled than absorbed systematically. The difference can be seen clearly in how the mass of individuals on the alt-right use the goals and strategies of the news magazines and blogs. The denizens of the alt-right social media sites and chat rooms are harvesting whatever material they can get from these pieces in order to make a splash and win clicks for their content. Long-form pieces are mined for catchy phrases, stirring symbols, and striking phrases; they are not taken

whole as arguments but piecemeal and endlessly reconfigured like affective building blocks. The decontented fragments of commentary are reassembled into juxtapositions of images and phrases in the hunt for the magical combination that draws clicks. Where the economy of relations is about drawing immediate and unreflective clicks, citations of systematic arguments do not drive the economy but powerful images, symbols, and phrases do. The alt-right's intelligentsia (such as it is) is limited to providing something like a palate for the movement to sample: it cannot control how the images, phrases, and symbols it provides are used because the systematic links it creates between them are largely discarded; for the most part, what their longer pieces do is to provide fragments ripe for assemblage towards ever more extreme articulations.

Propaganda is a discourse deliberately incapable of any kind of complex thought, purposely created to grab attention and interest at a pre-reflexive level. Relationships of propaganda are extremely poorly suited to the formulation of complex analysis, goal setting, and organizing. Main, in *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, notes the poverty of the alt-right discourse and even teases that it has something to do with the movement's online relationships but without much development: "Further, the quality of Alt-Right thought is abysmal. The movement's thinkers show little familiarity with the relevant facts, no effort at research, no ability to entertain criticism, and a willingness to distort or suppress inconvenient evidence...The shake-up in the production system of public ideas that occurred in the early twenty-first century gave the extremists who had been exiled from mainstream conservatism a chance to show what they had to say."³³ A political movement like the alt-right that works almost entirely through online relations of propaganda is going to find it nearly impossible to come up with an accurate appraisal of the situation, form reasonable goals, and plot a pragmatic course towards their attainment. Pictures, symbols, and short phrases aimed at an unconscious and immediate response are not well-suited for tasks requiring sustained focus, complex thought, and ordered articulation. The deeper the alt-right moves into relations dominated by the priority of propaganda, the less able the discourse becomes to carry an ameliorative strategy that accurately articulates their needs; instead of amelioration, the propagandistic discourse of the alt-right reaps what it was designed to: clicks.

³³ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 164.

The consequence of the propagandistic relations of the alt-right are the formation of two antagonistic processes: the need for clicks pushes the discourse towards more dystopic visions of the present, while simultaneously making action to address that vision more difficult. In processes stemming in part from the propagandistic relations of the alt-right, their ability to act is decreasing in inverse relationship to the increase in their perception of the world as hopeless. The same propagandistic relationships that make analysis and planning problematic also inflate the sense of social and political ills such an analysis should address. In the alt-right, propaganda opens a widening gap that pushes apart the possibilities for concrete action and the perceived need for it: as the possibilities for action grow more occluded in its stunted online relationships, the perceived need for them grows greater as more and more extreme depictions of the world are drawn up in the aim to inspire clicks. For instance, the alt-right now believes themselves (the “white race”) headed for a miscegenation-driven biological extinction and “White” or “European culture” has been destroyed by “Cultural Marxism” and “Blacks.” It is commonly remarked that masculinity has been all but resigned to a mythical past, while in the present feminists, testosterone-destroying fast-food, and porn destroy what is left of “real men.” Many in the alt-right believe that they are an oppressed economic class—not just because people of color and women are favored for them in jobs—but also because Zionist Jews run the economy, U.S. foreign policy, and the military. In essence, members of the alt-right believe themselves to be on the verge of biological and cultural extinction and the future to be in the hands of racial enemies and gender incompetents who will not only destroy them but will destroy the Earth. The most popularly cited solutions are the creation of a White ethnostate, “black” military-style guns, swastikas, and constant calls for armed uprisings. None of these things move beyond the level of vague fantasy: it is remarkable that there is no popular development of these ideas into anything that would resemble a plan, a rationalization, or detailed examination of their implications.

Nihilism as the Consequence of Propaganda

The widening gap between the ever more dystopian images, symbols, and phrases of the alt-right and the increasing inability of its constitutive online relationships to sustain an ameliorative discourse that can bridge that gap helps to explain the nihilism of the alt-right. Nihilism, in this context, refers to the attitude that the future collapse of civilization is impossible to avert; an attitude has evolved in the movement that no matter what one may do or believe, the

end is rapidly approaching and inevitable. This nihilism has its own name in the universe of the alt-right: “blackpill.”³⁴ Blackpill is an oblique reference to the film *The Matrix* where swallowing the red pill leads to enlightenment and the blue pill to pleasant self-deception; the “blackpill” is not in the film but refers to the idea that no matter what one chooses the outcome is always the same: social, political, and economic collapse that will only worsen individuals’ isolation, economic dependence, and self-loathing. The term first originated in the “manosphere”—a related branch of this online movement focused on misogyny—but has since spread through the larger alt-right as a whole. Blackpill nihilism has become such a common element of the broader alt-right that it has now mostly been assimilated into the red pill; meaning that part of coming to be enlightened is to realize that the situation is, at base, mostly hopeless. The nihilism of the alt-right draws from the sense that all future paths lead to the same end because any actions to ameliorate it will come to nothing. Terms like TFL (true forced loneliness), the LDAR lifestyle (lay down and rot), MGTOW (men going their own way), and NEET (not in education, employment, or training) are common self-descriptors and topics for discussion in the alt-right. While the movement often styles itself a “Beta Uprising,” that uprising is rarely portrayed as amounting to or leading to anything beyond chaos.³⁵ “Beta” here refers to the assumed social position of members of the alt-right: social losers in comparison with the Alphas who have good jobs, their own homes, rich social lives, and—often most importantly—“have” women. While the alt-right is often called a “Beta Uprising,” it should not be assumed that its participants believe it will lead to emancipation. Even a brief image or text search of “Beta Uprising” for related memes reveals the consequence of the uprising to be depicted as self and socially destructive; far from emancipatory and ameliorative, the Beta Uprising is often apocalyptic and self-destructive. This nihilism blossoms precisely in the space between the inflationary spiral of dystopic far-right propaganda and the total inability to grapple with that discourse in an ameliorative way.

³⁴ The best resource for examining ideas about the blackpill was <https://www.reddit.com/r/theblackpill> but the forum was banned by Reddit. There is currently no equivalent center for focused discussion of blackpill today and it has many different connotations. While the blackpill takes on many manifestations—in reference to sex, politics, economics, etc.—nihilism is at the heart of all them.

³⁵ Triple Zed, “Beta Uprising Now.”

This nihilism explains a lot of what might otherwise seem nonsensical and unproductive about the alt-right. All of the time and energy devoted by participants in the alt-right to activities that do not directly address their problems, like meme-making, trolling, and online joking, would seem to be a waste of time if judged by the standard of traditional political organizing; but if we can understand those activities to be done less out of hope for (an impossible) social transformation than to pass the time in good humor before the quickly arriving future scrubs them from existence, the alt-right's activities and ethos make more sense. An important function of the alt-right is to act as an opiate for the (at least partially) self-inflicted disease of radical dystopianism; while lowered economic possibilities, the decline of rural America, and other sociological factors contribute to the dystopian attitudes of the white men of the alt-right, much of the blackpill they swallow is of their own making. As I quoted in the opening, this statement from the young man who shot his girlfriend's parents and then himself is perhaps more representative of the sensibility of the movement than Richard Spencer and other commentators, when he writes, "I use ironic memes as a way to cover up the fact how badly I want to blow my brains out [sic]."³⁶ The alt-right mostly reacts to the hyper-negative and poisonously hopeless world that they have help build with their propagandistic back and forth the way one would expect nihilists to do: with self-resignation and distractions to pass the time until the inevitable end.

Humor is not the only way the participants of the alt-right soothe their nihilism; violence is another way that movement deals with its nihilistic outlook. The violence works on a sliding scale all the way from mild trolling and flaming, to doxxing and stalking, to mass murder and suicide. Participants in the alt-right have responded and are continuing to respond to their deepening nihilism with suicidal mass violence aimed at those they believe are most to blame for their hopelessness: women, people of color, immigrants, and the traitorous white men who sympathize with them. In 2014, Elliott Rodgers committed the first alt-right mass murder resulting in seven dead. Patrick Crusius, the El-Paso shooter who killed twenty-two and injured twenty-four, thought that the United States was headed for immanent disaster and only the most radical and self-sacrificing (suicidal) actions had any hope of changing it: "My whole life I have been preparing for a future that currently doesn't exist. The job of my dreams will likely be

³⁶ Jouvenal, "Her son, facing murder charges, is being called an "alt-right killer."

automated. Hispanics will take control of the local and state government of my beloved Texas, changing policy to better suit their needs. They will turn Texas into an instrument of a political coup which will hasten the destruction of our country. The environment is getting worse by the year.”³⁷ As a baseline, before the alt-right there were 12 killings by white extremist organizations in the United States, Australia, and Europe in 2012, and there were 16 killed in 2013. But as the alt-right movement spread online, the killings rose to 135 in 2015, 65 in 2016, and 88 in 2017.³⁸ Though statistics are not yet available for 2018 and 2019, two alt-right shootings in 2019—Christchurch and El Paso—alone killed 73 and injured an additional 73.

The self-constitution and self-entrapment of the alt-right within online relations of propaganda have placed these white men on an elevator of ascending hopelessness, rage, entitlement, and self-loathing that many do not know how to escape. The community turns on a competition for likes that works by accelerating the images, symbols, and phrases of wounded nihilism and white male pride until the participants are deformed and isolated from outside relationships that might otherwise help. The alt-right has produced nihilism alongside its memes as the discourse of the alt-right has become more extreme in its racism, sexism, and xenophobia. This ascending ladder of dystopian nihilism has directed activity away from other forms of organization, analysis, and action that could address their feelings and instead the racist, sexist, and xenophobic knowledges and subjectivities that movement produces result in them being shunned by those members of society necessary for the integration and rewards they want. Gathering psychological evidence points to the result of an individual’s plunge into the alt-right being their further isolation from others outside of that movement and the resources they need to cope with their nihilism.³⁹ Overt racism, misogyny, fascism, and xenophobia are not common prescriptions for broad social acceptance and advancement.

The alt-right’s discourses are so hateful and their conduct so harmful to others that it is hard to imagine an ethical imperative that would demand that others help them—especially for the vast majority of the human race they denigrate as sub-human. Although it is not possible to point to an ethical imperative to help the individual members of the alt-right, neither is it practical to simply let the movement expand or even just fester and worsen. While we can set

³⁷ Crusius, *An Inconvenient Truth*.

³⁸ Cai and Landon, “Attacks by White Extremists Are Growing. So Are Their Connections.”

³⁹ Forscher and Kelly, “A Psychological Profile of the Alt-right.”

aside the racist, misogynist, and xenophobic complaints of the movement as illegitimate and destructive, there is an animating sense of class that might be tapped. Many of the racist and sexist claims of the alt-right serve to explain the lack of a future that many in the movement feel and that sense of class injustice might be driven other more productive directions—directions that not only improve their situations but also those of others as well. If the left could articulate an alternative analysis that could explain their economic situation that was coherent, intelligible, and offered an ameliorative path forward, I would have to imagine it would be quite attractive to the alt-right alternative: fevered ranting leading to depression, suicide, and a murderous trip to a big box store with a loaded AR-15 and an unhinged political manifesto.

Unfortunately, mainstream leftist politics in the United States (read: the Democratic Party) is not a terribly useful place to turn for aid. David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* serves as a useful primer of the abandonment of class issues by the British and American left and the resultant consequences for the working class. While this essay is focused on the propaganda of the alt-right and it is beyond its focus and allotted space to offer a sustained critique of the American and European left, Harvey's argument that neo-liberalism has become the guiding doctrine of the Democratic Party offers some explanation. Harvey defines neo-liberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."⁴⁰ While the right first introduced neo-liberal practices into popular politics in the 1970's and 80's, by the time of Clinton in the United States and Blair in Britain in the 1990's, the mainstream left of both parties had been largely subsumed by neo-liberalism.⁴¹ The spread of neo-liberal politics has driven the left away from an analysis of class politics, which would be critical of the market system and could articulate alternatives, and moved it towards just the kind of identity politics supporting market participation that infuriates the alt-right: the racial and gender politics of the alt-right, though abominable, are precisely an attempt to formulate a politics outside of the priority of neoliberalism whether in its rightist or leftist guise.

While it would be false to argue that the Democrats are responsible for the alt-right, it is more than a coincidence that the alt-right rose amongst lower- and lower-middle-class white men

⁴¹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

as the Democrats moved away from the class politics that could articulate and ameliorate their problems. Corporate control, environmentalism, and automation—as can also be seen in the El Paso shooter’s manifesto—are concerns of many in the alt-right, but those problems in the alt-right are wrongly blamed on people of color and women. The alternative class-based analysis of these problems was certainly not articulated by Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, or Joseph Biden and it should not be a tremendous surprise that the politics and social views of white supremacists and misogynists have come to disaffected young white men when the neo-liberal left (and neo-liberal right) has not.

The members of the alt-right frequently announce that they do not feel they have a future; a politics of class that offers a realistic roadmap to that future—meaningful work, a steady place to live, and the ability to have a family—would undoubtedly draw off energy fueling the alt-right. At the very least, a focus on class in popular leftist politics would provide a better alternative than currently exists for competing with the propaganda of the alt-right for the allegiance of these young white men. One could hope that building solidarity with women and people of color on issues of class would stymie the ideas that the prosperity of the two groups are in conflict and build solidarity rather than hate. Short of outreach that offers solutions for the real problems facing the lower-class—white or otherwise—there is no reason to expect anything other than movements like the alt-right to continue to draw in more recruits. If the Christchurch and El Paso mass shootings are any indication, we might expect the movement to metastasize and intensify as the competition for ever more radical displays becomes the new normal and goes global.

This is not to say that there are not strains of thought and activism in the Democratic party devoted to class. While the left of *Jacobin* and *The Atlantic* are probably too strongly aimed at college educated, older, and more prosperous readership to appeal to most on the alt-right there are some seeds in the Democratic Party that could be grown. The Sanders campaign and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have demonstrated promise in drawing in young audiences. Predictably, they have been pilloried for this and their supporters labeled ‘Bernie Bros.’ More generally, the Democratic Party apparatus has worked tirelessly against the Sanders campaign and the DSA in 2016 and 2020 and it has not proven itself an ally of leftist politics outside of corporate friendly neo-liberal formulations. It remains the case that the various

strains of socialism in the Democratic Party are minority strains and are certainly not being geared up by the Party for a mass appeal to disaffected youth.

More problematic but also potentially more promising than either Sanders or the DSA for appeal to young white men is the so-called “dirtbag left,” which uses some of the tactics of the alt-right—meme making, doxxing, trolling—but also runs the risk of devolving into just the same kind of propagandistic discourse that the alt-right has. The spiral of the alt-right into impotence and rage is a warning to political organizers in the age of the Internet, especially to those sharing many of the structural features of the alt-right like the “dirtbag left.” The propagandistic relations driving and entrapping the alt-right are not just a threat to far-right movements but to any politics constituted online. Any online political organizing that is built around a competition for clicks is at risk of its movement devolving into a propagandistic back and forth. The consequences of that back and forth—fantastic and inflationary social analyses and the undermining of relationships capable of producing ameliorationist organizing—are in no way limited to the alt-right. Any politics or social movement that gets constituted through propagandistic relations will also likely see the turn to hallucinatory claims as the need for more shocking images, symbols, and phrases become necessary to capture increasingly jaded audiences. This focus on producing clickbait not only results in an inflationary dystopianism but also comes at the expense of effective political strategizing, analysis, and planning. Serious thought will have to be put into how to use online organization in ways that do not undermine the goals of the movement that is pursuing it, left or right.

References

- Altemayer, Bob. *The Authoritarians*. Self-published: 2006.
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxxylK6fR81rckQxWi1hVFFRUDg/view>.
- andcallmeshirley. “Deus Vult,” *Know Your Meme*, May 2019.
<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/deus-vult>.
- Anti-Defamation League. “Racist Hand Signs: Okay Hand Gesture.”
<https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/okay-hand-gesture>.
- arnoldbusk, “Amerimutt / Le 56% Face – Ethnostate Applications,” *Know Your Meme*, January 2019. <https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1341278-amerimutt-le-56-face>.
- BBC News. “Elliot Rodger: How misogynist killer became “incel hero,”” April 26, 2018,
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43892189>.
- Beiner, Ronald. *Dangerous Minds: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.
- Bernays, Edward. Interview with Adam Curtis. *Century of the Self*. Directed by Adam Curtis.

- London: BBC, 2002. DVD.
- Bernays, Edward. *Crystallizing Public Relations*. Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 1923.
- Bokhari, Adam and Milo Yiannopoulos. "An Establishment Conservative's Guide to the Alt-Right," *Breitbart News*, March 29, 2016. <https://www.breitbart.com/tech/2016/03/29/an-establishment-conservatives-guide-to-the-alt-right/>.
- Bump, Philip. "Hillary Clinton plans to tie Donald Trump to the "alt-right" and the worst of the Web," *Washington Post*, August 23, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/08/23/hillary-clinton-plans-to-tie-donald-trump-to-the-alt-right-and-the-worst-of-the-web/>.
- Cai, Weiti and Simone Landon. "Attacks by White Extremists Are Growing. So Are Their Connections," *New York Times*, April 3, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/03/world/white-extremist-terrorism-christchurch.html>.
- Crusius, Patrick. *An Inconvenient Truth*, August 3, 2019. <https://grabancijas.com/patrick-crusius-manifesto-the-inconvenient-truth/>.
- Cutlip, Scott. *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, a History*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994.
- Forscher, Patrick and Nour Kelly, "A Psychological Profile of the Alt-right," *PsyArXiv Preprints*, November 7, 2019. 10.31234/osf.io/c9uvw. See also their preregistration for expanding the above study at <https://mfr.osf.io/render?url=https://osf.io/cqvm5/?action=download%26mode=render>.
- Hankes, Keegan and Alex Amend, "The Alt-Right Is Killing People," *Southern Poverty Institute*, February 05, 2018. <https://www.splcenter.org/20180205/alt-right-killing-people>.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hawley, George. *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- Jones, John Price and David McLaren Church. *At the Bar of Public Opinion*. New York, Inter-River Press, 1939.
- Jouvenal, Justin. "Her son, facing murder charges, is being called an "alt-right killer." This mother blames herself," *The Washington Post*, 27 March, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/her-son-facing-murder-charges-is-being-called-an-alt-right-killer-this-mother-blames-herself/2018/03/26/6e4326c4-02a9-11e8-bb03-722769454f82_story.html?utm_term=.5d1385951e96.
- Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage, 1993.
- Lee, Ivy L. *Human Nature and the Railroads*. Philadelphia: E.S. Nash and Co., 1914.
- Le Bon, Gustave. *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. London: Been, 1896.
- Main, Thomas. *The Rise of the Alt-Right*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018.
- Marantz, Andrew. *Antisocial: Online Extremists, Techno-Utopians, and the Hijacking of the American Conversation*. New York: Viking, 2019.
- Marchand, Roland. *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- McInnes, Gavin. "THE PROUD BOYS ARE NOT RACIST THE PROUD BOYS ARE NOT RACIST," YouTube video, June 6, 2017. <https://youtu.be/DpWQHCCmb3c>.
- Nagle, Angela. *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-right*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2017.
- New York Times. "Gamergate is Everything," eds. Susan Rigetti and Marx Strasser, August 15,

2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/15/opinion/what-is-gamergate.html>.
- Niewert, David. *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump*. New York: Verso, 2017.
- Niewert, David. "Is that an OK sign? A white power symbol? Or just a right-wing troll?," *Southern Poverty Law Institute*, September 18, 2018. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/09/18/ok-sign-white-power-symbol-or-just-right-wing-troll>.
- Rodger, Elliot. "My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger," hosted at DocumentCloud, May 23, 2014. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1173808-elliott-rodger-manifesto.html>.
- Triple Zed, "Beta Uprising Now," *Know Your Meme*, January 2016. <https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1025431-beta-uprising>.
- Wilson, Jason. "Who are the Proud Boys, "western chauvinists" involved in political violence?" *The Guardian*, July 14, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/14/proud-boys-far-right-portland-oregon>.
- Wimberly, Cory. *How Propaganda Became Public Relations: Foucault and the Corporate Government of the Public*. New York: Routledge, 2020.
- Wimberly, Cory. "Trump, Propaganda, and the Politics of *Ressentiment*." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2018): 179.