

## The Emergence of the Alt-Right

Prior to the 2016 presidential election season, only a handful of political die-hards followed the machinations of a new political ideology called the alternative right, or Alt-Right. So how did this political faction spring from obscurity to occupy center stage in American politics? The conservative movement, the Republican Party, and American politics in general are today in a crisis that is both reflected in and caused by the crystallization of the Alt-Right.

Before the extraordinary presidential election of 2016, the Alt-Right went unnoticed by the general public and was of interest primarily to observers of right-wing extremism. That situation changed when in the heat of the campaign, Donald Trump chose Stephen K. Bannon, former editor of the web outlet *Breitbart News*, as his campaign CEO. Bannon himself described *Breitbart News* as “the platform for the Alt-Right.”<sup>21</sup> Hillary Clinton immediately criticized Trump for embracing the “emerging racist ideology known as the ‘Alt-Right.’ . . . A fringe element has effectively taken over the Republican Party.”<sup>22</sup>

Suddenly the Alt-Right went from obscurity to infamy. Many commentators responded to Clinton’s speech. Liberals, moderates, and mainstream conservatives praised the speech, while Alt-Right outlets criticized it as irrelevant and low-energy. But public awareness of the new movement

shot up, with Google searches of the term “Alt-Right” spiking immediately after Clinton’s remarks and then falling but staying at a much higher level than before.<sup>3</sup> The Alt-Right had arrived.

Why is the Alt-Right so widely perceived as a new threat to Republicans and indeed the republic? At first glance, Alt-Rightism seems to be no more than a collection of well-known far-right talking points. It supports the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants and protectionist trade policies. It opposes feminism, diversity, globalism, gun control, and civil rights. Are such positions, which have been staples of the conservative movement for years and about which reasonable people may differ, any more problematic now than they have ever been? Is the Alt-Right’s heated rhetoric really more problematic than the conspiracy-mongering and race-baiting found at the fringes of the right for decades?

In fact, the Alt-Right is far more radical and dangerous than the right-wing extremism of past decades. For it is the underlying ideology of the Alt-Right, rather than its controversial policy positions, that merits concern. In the following statements, prominent Alt-Rightists sum up their ideology:

James Kirkpatrick (contributor, *VDARE*): “The Alt Right is . . . a refusal to accept the frame imposed by those who are hostile to us on issues like morality, politics, and culture. . . . Key concepts: A) a critique of egalitarianism; B) a recognition that liberal ‘morality’ is a tactic to acquire or safeguard power; C) a recognition of HBD [human biodiversity].”<sup>4</sup>

Jared Taylor (editor, *American Renaissance*): “What is the Alt Right? It is a broad, dissident movement that rejects egalitarian orthodoxies. These orthodoxies require us to believe that the sexes are equivalent, that race is meaningless, that all cultures and religions are equally valuable, and that any erotic orientation or identification is healthy. These things we deny. The Alt Right is also skeptical of mass democracy. It opposes foreign aid and foreign intervention—especially for ‘nation building.’”<sup>5</sup>

Hateful Heretic (contributor, *The Right Stuff*): “The Alt-Right is the right wing stripped of any superstitious belief in human equality and any admission of the left’s moral authority; it is the right in full revolt against the progressive establishment.”<sup>6</sup>

Richard Spencer (editor, *Radix Journal*): “The Alt-Right is . . . serious opposition to, not just the left, but also the conservative status quo. . . . The alt-right would agree that . . . race is the foundation for identity. . . . Almost all people in the Alt-Right have an awareness of Jewish influence . . . and . . . [are] skeptical of it.”<sup>7</sup>

Kevin MacDonald (editor, *Occidental Observer*): “It’s legitimate for white people to identify as white and pursue interests as white Americans.”<sup>8</sup>

Mike Enoch (editor, *The Right Stuff*): “The . . . Alt-Right . . . [is about] race realism . . . [and] Jewish power, its affect on our political world geopolitics, United States politics, global politics, everything.”<sup>9</sup>

Greg Johnson (editor, *Counter-Currents Publishing*): “The Alternative Right means White Nationalism. . . . White Nationalism[’s] . . . self-evident corollary [is] anti-Semitism.”<sup>10</sup>

Andrew Anglin, editor of the *Daily Stormer*, an Alt-Right website visited more than 900,000 times each month, gives the basic tenets of the movement as follows:

Anti-Semitism . . . Jews are fundamentally opposed to the White race and Western civilization and so must be confronted and ultimately removed from White societies completely.

White Countries for White People . . . The end goal of the movement is to establish pure White racial states in all formerly White countries. . . . We believe in mass deportations of all non-White immigrants. . . . This would include, in America, a repatriation to Africa of the descendants of slaves (or an allocation of autonomous territory for them within our current borders).

Scientific Racism . . . The Alt-Right does not accept the pseudo-scientific claims that “all races are equal. . . .”

Opposition to Feminism and “Gender Equality,” Support for Traditional Families . . . The claim that “men and women are equal” is looked at as entirely ridiculous by the Alt-Right.

Endorsement of White History . . . We view Whites as the creators and maintainers of Western civilization.

Cultural Normalization . . . The Alt-Right seeks . . . authoritarian

measures to deal with addictive drugs, pornography, crime and other degenerate social ills.

Commonsense Economics . . . Physically remove Jews. . . . Most in the movement would support a type of free market socialism.

White Struggle as a Global Battle. The Alt-Right views the struggle for the continued existence of the White race as a global battle between Whites and the Jews.<sup>11</sup>

Brad Griffin, editor of the website *Occidental Dissent*, who often writes under the pen name Hunter Wallace, describes the Alt-Right's "three hallmark characteristics" as follows:

Realism: I mean that [the] Alt-Right is non-ideological and analyses almost every question from the perspective of whether or not it is true. . . . The Alt-Right looks at the question of racial equality, demands to see the evidence, and draws the conclusion it is just a bunch of bullshit. . . . The evidence for racial equality is less plausible than Medieval alchemists trying to turn lead into gold.

Identity: . . . The Alt-Right's analysis of history and biology has led us to the conclusion that human beings ARE NOT primarily individuals. On the contrary, we are tribal beings who invariably divide the world into in-groups and out-groups, and those tribes have always been in a primordial struggle for DOMINANCE. . . . The timeless struggle for DOMINANCE between rival groups is why we have POLITICS.

Iconoclasm: Third, the Alt-Right has a strong Nietzschean streak. Even if many of us have studied Nietzsche at one point in our lives and moved on as we grew older, we still tend to relish creating mischief. We enjoy smashing idols.<sup>12</sup>

Peter Brimelow is the founder and editor of *VDARE*, which is named after Virginia Dare, whom he identifies as "the first white child of English parents' born in America."<sup>13</sup> He describes himself as a "godfather" of the Alt-Right<sup>14</sup> and offered this definition of the movement:

The Alt Right is the name sometimes given to the group of websites and individuals who have broken with the corrupt, cowardly, intellectually bankrupt, Establishment Right. VDARE.com is often included in it. . . .

The Alt Right surfaces issues that the Establishment Right won't touch—of course most notably, from VDARE.com's point of view, immigration.<sup>15</sup>

Alt-Right leaders, relative to neo-Nazis or Ku Klux Klan supporters, are intellectually and rhetorically sophisticated. Jared Taylor, editor of the *American Renaissance* website, holds degrees from Yale and the Institut d'études politiques, Paris. On his site, Taylor published "An Open Letter to Cuckservatives"—the Alt-Right's insulting term for mainstream conservatives—laying out his beliefs.

In the letter, Taylor denies the notion that "the things you love about America . . . are rooted in certain principles." Rather, "they are rooted in certain people." That is, white people: "Germans, Swedes, Irishmen, and Hungarians could come and contribute to the America you love," Taylor says. "Do you really believe that a future Afro-Hispanic-Caribbean-Asiatic America will be anything like the America your ancestors built?" White nationalism is more important than inalienable rights because "even when they violate your principles, white people build good societies. Even when they abide by your principles, non-whites usually don't."<sup>16</sup>

Richard B. Spencer of the National Policy Institute, who went to the University of Chicago and the University of Virginia, is openly anti-American. In an interview with the *New York Times*, he said, "America as it is currently constituted—and I don't just mean the government; I mean America as constituted spiritually and ideologically—is the fundamental problem. . . . I don't support and agree with much of anything America is doing in the world." He despises "cuckservatives" because "we've recognized the bankruptcy of this ideology, based on 'free markets,' 'values,' and 'American exceptionalism.'"<sup>17</sup>

In short, this new strain of reactionary thought goes beyond the garden-variety racial prejudice of yore—which certainly was bad enough—to a root-and-branch rejection of American political principles. The Alt-Right is a form of radical Gnosticism as fundamental in its rejection of the American democratic tradition as the Communist Party line of the 1930s and the most fevered effusions of New Left radicalism of the 1960s were.

Alt-Rightism is in essence a political ideology rather than a movement, constituency, or interest group. This book is primarily an analysis of Alt-Right ideas—their development, dissemination, and implications for

American political discourse. The movement's history and personalities are taken up in the course of exploring and evaluating its thought. The book's main thesis is that the Alt-Right represents the first new philosophical competitor in the West to democratic liberalism, broadly defined, since the fall of communism. The main challenges to democratic liberalism now come not from the radical left, as was the case in the latter half of the twentieth century, but from the radical right.

The distinctive features of Alt-Right thought can be summed up as the following:

- ◆ A rejection of liberal democracy. The Alt-Right holds, in essence, that all men are *not* created equal and concludes that liberal political principles, broadly understood, are obsolete.
- ◆ White racialism. A polity can be decent only if the white race is politically dominant.
- ◆ Anti-Americanism. As racial equality has displaced white dominance, the United States of America has declined and no longer merits the allegiance of its white citizens; they should transfer their loyalty to the white race.
- ◆ Vitriolic rhetoric. The propensity for intemperate language often found at the ends of the political spectrum is taken by the Alt-Right to lengths previously seen only among fringe elements. The movement rejects the standard ethics of controversy and indulges in race-baiting, coarse ethnic humor, prejudicial stereotyping, vituperative criticism, and the flaunting of extremist symbols.

### Plan of the Book

Is the Alt-Right big enough to be important? A possible objection to this entire project is that the Alt-Right is so extreme that it is isolated, with no influence on mainstream politics. It is sometimes argued that the Alt-Right has no more connection with mainstream conservative movements than left-wing extremists—communists, for example—have with mainstream liberals. Chapter 2 addresses this concern through an analysis of traffic to web political magazines of various ideological orientations, including the

Alt-Right. The finding is that Alt-Right web magazines have a considerable audience, one comparable in size—as measured by web traffic—to those of established organs of left, right, and centrist opinion. The rise of the Alt-Right is simply this dissemination of its ideas, which is widespread relative to that achieved by other antidemocratic ideologies of the near past and present and represents a toehold gained in American political discourse.

Chapters 3 and 4 concern the intellectual roots of the Alt-Right. Chapter 3 describes the development of what might be called a proto-Alt-Right. The ideological origins of the Alt-Right can be traced back to the appearance of the *National Review* in 1955 and the effort of its founder, William F. Buckley, to define a mainstream conservatism consistent with the American liberal democratic order. Especially early on, those efforts were not always entirely successful. But eventually Buckley cobbled together a rightist ideology that emphasized traditional values, capitalism, and anticommunism, and drove out of the movement anyone to the right of that consensus. But by the early twenty-first century, exiles from conventional conservatism had embraced a more radical rightism than ever before and had organized themselves to make a successful challenge for leadership of the conservative movement. Chapter 4 looks at the crystallization of the Alt-Right as a distinct political ideology during the period 2000–16. How the political shocks of the early twenty-first century and the rise of the new communication medium of the internet contributed to the weakening of traditional gatekeepers of American political discourse is discussed. Some of the Alt-Right intellectuals who took advantage of that new discourse habitat are profiled.

Chapters 5 through 9 look at the ideology of the Alt-Right today. Chapter 5 discusses how to think about political ideologies. Chapter 6 considers the Alt-Right's rejection of American political philosophy as it is expressed in such foundational documents as the Declaration of Independence, the *Federalist Papers*, the Constitution, and other accounts. Chapter 7 looks at the racialism of the Alt-Right, and chapter 8 explores the movement's anti-Americanism. Chapter 9 looks at a variation on Alt-Right ideology that might be called "Alt-Lite," that is, the somewhat watered-down version of the Alt-Right's ideology that is most notably disseminated by *Breitbart News* and that outlet's former editor and former White House adviser, Steve Bannon. Donald Trump is also considered a purveyor of Alt-Lite ideas.

Chapter 10 considers what the rise of the Alt-Right implies for American democratic discourse and sketches a political vision that more effectively responds to some of the concerns the Alt-Right has identified. The Alt-Right is wrong in thinking the nation is dominated by what it calls a “managerial oligarchy,” which amounts to saying that America is practically a totalitarian regime. A correct diagnosis is much simpler: American politics is unduly influenced by the very rich. Through constitutional and political reform, America needs to get much better at redistributing the wealth generated by its economy so as to compensate and reintegrate the interests that temporarily lose out in the inevitable processes of globalization and capitalist creative destruction. Better redistribution requires a political system less dominated by gridlocked factions and more responsive to ideas that can override group interests. An American political process in which public ideas are stronger than they are now—stronger relative to other resources, such as money, votes, and organization—would improve democratic accountability and make the system more responsive to nonelite groups in general, including the “Middle American Radicals,” or white working class, with whom the Alt-Right is sympathetic.

Absolutely the worst possible response to the challenges of economic restructuring is that forwarded by the Alt-Right: fragmenting still more the already blooming, buzzing confusion of American interest group politics by further subdividing the polity into the windowless, irreconcilable monads of racially defined identity groups. The likely consequences of the radically racialist form of identity politics espoused by the Alt-Right are disorder, violence, and economic shrinkage. Vastly more promising is a political order in which all interests accept a liberal democratic framework, acknowledge each other’s legitimate aspirations, and remain open to persuasion by convincing public ideas.