

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329659511>

# The Alt-Right as a Revolt against Neoliberalism and Political Correctness: The Role of Collective Action Frames

Article in *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* · December 2018

DOI: 10.1163/15691497-12341507

CITATIONS

3

READS

1,306

1 author:



Luigi Esposito  
Barry University

38 PUBLICATIONS 296 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Political Correctness in the Era of Trump: Threat to Freedom or ideological Scapegoat? [View project](#)



Neoliberalism, Economic Radicalism, and the Normalization of Violence [View project](#)



BRILL

PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT  
AND TECHNOLOGY 18 (2019) 93-110

PERSPECTIVES  
ON GLOBAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
AND  
TECHNOLOGY  
brill.com/pgdt

# The Alt-Right as a Revolt against Neoliberalism and Political Correctness: the Role of Collective Action Frames

*Luigi Esposito*

Barry University

*lesposito@barry.edu*

## Abstract

This article addresses how the alt-right has developed its guiding principles or “collective action frames” in opposition to two hegemonic ideologies: neoliberalism and political correctness. Two central points are made. First, calls among many alt-righters for white Americans to regain a sense of racial identity and “white pride” is effectively a rebellion against neoliberal market forces that erode tribal loyalties, national boundaries, and cultural uniqueness by encouraging open borders, multiculturalism, and individualistic forms of agency associated with competition and consumerism. Second, the challenge to white identitarianism by neoliberal globalization is compounded by an ideology of political correctness that, although at odds with neoliberalism, has presumably further disempowered whites. Because political correctness emphasizes egalitarianism and how all cultures are equally valuable, any agenda to advance white interests is dismissed as racist and unacceptable. The argument is made that despite their tensions, both neoliberalism and political correctness have inspired alt-right collective action frames related to race realism, anti-egalitarianism, and white genocide. Some reflections are offered about why this discussion is relevant to the present and future of US politics and society.

## Keywords

alt-right – anti-egalitarianism – collective action frames – cultural Marxism – identitarianism – multiculturalism – neoliberalism – political correctness – race realism – white genocide – white nationalism

## 1 Introduction

Among the many controversies surrounding the US presidential election in 2016, one that received quite a bit of attention was Trump's appeal to white nationalists associated with the so-called "alt-right." Short for "alternative right," the term refers to an amorphous movement comprised of various far-right groups and individuals. Virtually everyone who identifies with the alt-right opposes the sort of individualism and color-blindness associated with mainstream conservatism in favor of an agenda that rejects multiculturalism, and openly prioritizes the promotion of white identity, white pride, and white interests (e.g., Hawley 2017; Shaw 2018). Western civilization, according to proponents of this movement, is an expression of white genes, as different races are genetically predisposed to different abilities and cultural proclivities, and consequently build very different types of societies (Taylor 2011). Therefore, while most alt-righters reject the idea of "white supremacy," they do believe that the preservation of the white race is a requisite for preserving Western culture and Western societies.

Openly expressing these aims, of course, is largely considered unthinkable within mainstream US society. As a result, alt-righters, like actors in other social movements, have been involved in generating alternative interpretative frameworks that challenge dominant conceptions of social reality. The aim, in effect, is to shift what many in the alt-right refer to as the "Overton window." First developed in the mid-1990s by Joe Overton of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, the Overton window, also known as the "window of discourse," is a theory which posits that there is a range (or window) of ideas and policies that the public will accept at any given moment (Lehman 2012). The scale ranges from "popular" to "unthinkable." Much like LGBTQ activists, who have popularized what was once considered radical or unthinkable (e.g., the idea that gender is not necessarily binary, fixed, or rooted in biology), those associated with the alt-right similarly seek to challenge and expand current boundaries of acceptable discourse, or shift the so-called Overton window, so that white advocacy and a rejection of globalism and multiculturalism is rethought as sensible rather than radical or unthinkable.

My central argument in this article is that in their quest to challenge dominant conceptions of social reality and standards of acceptable discourse—including the normative status of multiculturalism, globalism, and racial egalitarianism—the alt-right has employed "collective action frames" that have, to a significant extent, been developed in opposition to two central and, in many ways, contradictory ideologies: neoliberalism and political correctness.

Within the literature on social movements, collective action frames refer to the values, beliefs, and meanings of reality that social movement actors develop as a way to garner support for their political and social goals. According to Benford and Snow (2000), the development of collective action frames is “a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements” (pg. 612).

This discussion proceeds as follows. First, I introduce the alt-right and how this movement developed. Second, I provide an overview of both neoliberalism and political correctness, and how these two ideologies have significant influence in terms of shaping dominant forms of social, cultural, economic, and political discourse. Third, after addressing in more detail what is meant by collective action frames, I discuss how some of the alt-right’s frames are, to a large extent, developed and employed in response to the hegemonic status of both neoliberalism and political correctness. Lastly, I offer a few reflections about the future of the alt-right movement and its relevance to the present and future of US politics and society.

## 2 Primer on the Alt-Right

Although there is debate about the origin of term “alternative right,” many people credit Richard Spencer with coining the term in 2008, which was later shortened to “alt-right.” Spencer is widely recognized as one of the leaders of the alt-right, currently manages Alt-Right.com, and heads the National Policy Institute (NPI), an alt-right think tank. Other well-known voices associated with the alt-right movement include the editor of *American Renaissance*, Jared Taylor; editor of *Counter Currents*, Greg Johnson; evolutionary psychologist Kevin McDonald; author and blogger Theodore Beale (also known as Vox Day); youtubers Mike “Enoch” Peinovich and Colin Robertson (otherwise known as “Millennial Woes”), and identitarian groups such as “Identity Evropa.”

Although the individuals noted above disagree on various issues, they all deride mainstream conservatives (who they often refer to as “cuckservatives”) for, among other things, giving too many concessions to progressives, and refusing to stand for white interests (Day and Eagle 2016). Alt-righters are also careful to distinguish themselves from the so-called “alt-light” (people like Milo Yiannopolous, Paul Watson, Ben Shapiro, Jordan Peterson, and others) who espouse some conservative principles, but reject identity politics. Also important to note is that contrary to the negative images often ascribed to neo-confederates, neo-Nazis, or Ku Klux Klan members as inbred bumpkins,

toothless rednecks, or psychotic skinheads, the alt-right is primarily comprised of college-educated, white men who genuinely believe in the need for racial tribalism and white advocacy in a globalizing world governed by consumerism, multiculturalism, and anti-white hostility (Hood 2018).

According to several sources, the dissemination of alt-right ideas, particularly among young people, was first made possible by a subversive, underground, Internet sub-culture associated with image/message boards such as 4chan and 8chan (Hawley 2017; Neiwert 2017; Shaw 2018; Wendling 2018). These are boards where people can post messages anonymously and have, for years, been hubs not only for white supremacists and white nationalists, but also for anti-feminists, paleoconservatives, neo-reactionaries, neo-monarchists, trans-humanists, men's rights advocates, and conspiracy theorists of all sorts. The alt-right in particular flourished in this Internet milieu beginning in 2013, as alt-right agitators cleverly employed a series of memes to champion the cause of white nationalism. Perhaps the best known example of these memes is "Pepe the frog," a once-innocuous cartoon of a green anthropomorphic frog that the alt-right appropriated and turned into a white nationalist icon. Through this and similar memes, alt-right "trolls" were able to ridicule or demonize liberals, progressives, and mainstream conservatives, while conveying far-right, white nationalist messages in a seemingly youthful, jocular, but nonetheless effective manner (Hawley 2017).

While the so-called alt-right already had a significant Internet presence by 2013, it was in 2016 that this movement entered the national political scene. First, when Steven Bannon, who was then executive chairman of Breitbart News, and would shortly thereafter become senior counselor to President Trump, told reporters that Breitbart was "a platform for the alt-right." And second, when Hillary Clinton gave a speech in Reno, Nevada in August of 2016 in which she associated the Trump campaign with the alt-right.

So why or how did the alt-right go from being an obscure, Internet sub-culture to a significant, social-political movement? More specifically, why or how did the guiding principles or collective action frames of the alt-right resonate with significant numbers of white Americans? While several writers have sought to answer these questions, none has directly addressed the rise of the alt-right as a revolt against two specific ideologies that are perceived as a menace to white interests: neoliberalism and political correctness. What follows, accordingly, is a discussion of these two ideologies and their relevance to the development of the alt-right's main objectives or collective action frames that catapulted this movement into the national political scene.

### 3 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism can be regarded as an ideology, a set of policies, and a form of governmentality predicated on the assumption that the market should be the organizing center of all human life (Brown 2015; Esposito 2011; Giroux 2008; Harvey 2005). This perspective was developed in the early- to mid-twentieth century by a group of thinkers—notably Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman—who were reacting against Keynesianism and similar theories calling for a regulated economy and a strong welfare state. Drawing from classical liberal principles and neoclassical economics, neoliberals focus on the individual, and contend that, under conditions of freedom, all persons are rational actors who are driven towards competition, and constantly make calculations on what will serve their best interests.

In fact, within neoliberal market societies, human actions and institutional practices are guided primarily by “market rationality,”—e.g., evaluating the costs and rewards of all decisions, actions, and objectives according to a “calculus of profitability” and “returns on one’s investments” (Brown 2015). Promoting market rationality involves making the government as small as possible, opening national borders to the free flow of capital and goods, and implementing policies of deregulation and privatization in an effort to maximize competition and individual freedom.

Neoliberals believe this process of free competition and profit-driven behavior will ultimately generate prosperity for all. As people are given the opportunity to naturally exercise their liberty by competing with others in a relentless pursuit for private gain, everyone is incentivized to maximize their full potential, thereby stimulating economic growth, and encouraging a rise in the standard of living. Throughout, however, the primary unit of analysis is the individual. As Margaret Thatcher, who was a staunch supporter of neoliberalism famously described, “there is no such thing as society, there are only individual men and women.” Therefore, because only individuals matter, all problems are regarded as private troubles to be resolved at the marketplace. Thus, for example, fear about one’s safety is resolved by purchasing firearms or security systems; unemployment is resolved by attaining more marketable skills, and concerns about water purity are resolved by purchasing bottled water.

In other words, it’s up to the individual to resolve their own problems, particularly through competition and consumerism. What this also suggests is that people are understood as individual entrepreneurs and consumers rather than members of any particular group. In fact, under neoliberalism, social bonds or

any sense of commitment to any particular group—this includes family obligations, friendship commitments, and national loyalties—are all regarded as impediments to personal freedom and success. As Antonio Negri once noted, thoughts and actions that are motivated by collectivism are discouraged and punished in a market society (Qui 2016:26). After all, to remain competitive in a market-driven society, individuals are expected to move to where the jobs are, prioritize their personal interests over collective interests, and adjust their personal lives to whatever the market demands, irrespective of how their actions affect others (Esposito 2011). Failure to dislodge oneself from relations or commitments that are not valued in the market is assumed to be risky, unproductive, and a recipe for failure. In short, the neoliberal emphasis on market rationality encourages an erosion of social bonds in favor of calculating, self-serving, autarkic individuals.

#### 4 Political Correctness

Although there is no unified or uncontested definition of political correctness (PC), it is, in its most basic form, a set of linguistic norms, practices, and policies that seek to challenge the alienation and marginalization of socially and economically disadvantaged groups (Esposito and Finley 2018). These include poor people, women, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ people, and the disabled. During the early- to mid-twentieth century, the term “politically correct” came into use among leftists to deride the orthodoxy prevalent among hard-line supporters of the Communist Party (Kohl 1992).

By the 1970s, the term “political correctness” was adopted by the New Left, and often used sarcastically to refer to fellow leftists who were being self-righteous, and failed to see the world outside their own political ideology (Hall 1994; Perry 1992). During the late 1980s and 1990s, “political correctness” was appropriated by the right, who gave the term its current pejorative meaning. By that time, the term PC became associated with a type of leftist-progressive puritanism that prevents people from speaking their minds and/or voicing uncomfortable truths that might “offend” members of marginalized groups/communities (Esposito and Finley 2019). Violating what is considered politically correct results in severe consequences like legal sanctions, public shaming, losing one’s job or career, etc.

Among many on the far right, one common (albeit highly controversial) claim is that the presumed tyranny associated with PC, especially as it pertains to today, is a manifestation of “cultural Marxism,” and can be traced to the work of Marxists such as Georg Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, and, subsequently,

the strand of Critical Theory developed by the Frankfurt School. For example, according to William Lind (2000) of the right-wing think tank formerly known as The Free Congress Foundation (currently known as The American Opportunity Foundation), the emergence of cultural Marxism can be traced to World War I. Traditional Marxists had been convinced that with the onset of World War I, the working classes throughout Europe would come together and overthrow their governments. After all, workers would realize that they “had more in common with each other across national boundaries than they had in common with the bourgeoisie and ruling class in their own country” (pg. 1). However, when the war broke out in 1914, workers from various Western European countries rallied around their flags, and eagerly went to war with one another. And while a revolution did eventually take place in “backward” Russia, it became clear that in most of the more industrialized and stable societies of Western Europe, the necessary class consciousness that was a requisite condition for a proletariat uprising was missing. All this spurred Marxists like Lukacs and Gramsci to figure out what had gone wrong. They both concluded that it was the culture in developed, Western societies that stood in the way of class consciousness and revolutionary change. The goal of Marxists, therefore, became to delegitimize and destroy Western culture.

According to various accounts, this aim to destroy Western culture was subsequently taken up by the Frankfurt School (Lind 2000; McDonald 2002; William 2016). Starting from the premise that the locus of domination in the modern world shifted from the economy to the cultural realm, the Frankfurt writers—many of whom were Jewish, fled the Nazis, and attained academic posts at major US universities—focused on how the “culture industry” and its attending values had a “pacifying, repressive, and stupefying effect on people” that also presumably sustained relations of oppression between different groups (Ritzer 2010:285). Consequently, the Frankfurt writers developed a critique of Western culture that was intended to de-legitimize and ultimately destroy social structures and values systems that they demonized as corrupt and oppressive. Thus, for example, moral relativism, sexual permissiveness, and multiculturalism were encouraged, while patriotism, nationalism, Christianity, hierarchy, patriarchy, sexual restraint, the nuclear family, and ethnocentrism were all attacked as an effort to promote a cultural Marxist agenda that would systematically destroy Western civilization (e.g., Kimball 2007; Lind 2000; William 2016).

From the perspective of many far-right critics, it is precisely this agenda that currently drives weak immigration laws, and allows for the ongoing influx of non-whites into majority white countries, thereby further compromising Western civilization in the name of tolerance, multiculturalism, and diversity.



While it is important to emphasize that all these points are highly controversial and even regarded by many as part of a right-wing conspiracy theory (Berkowitz 2003; Jeffries 2017:6-7), they are widely espoused by most proponents of the alt-right, who believe that political correctness is an outgrowth of this strand of “cultural Marxism.” The fact that one of the most famous of the Frankfurt writers, Herbert Marcuse, called for “repressive tolerance”—an intolerance towards ideas of the right and increased tolerance towards those on the left—further shows, in the view of many alt-righters, that the legacy of the Frankfurt School and cultural Marxism is behind the alleged shutting down of right-wing or “politically incorrect” ideas on college campuses, the corporate media, and the mainstream culture industry in the West.<sup>1</sup>

Another central intellectual influence underlying what is known today as PC lies in the so-called “linguistic turn” in philosophy and literary criticism, a movement associated with deconstruction, or, more generally, “postmodernism” (Choi and Murphy 1992). Although there has been a great deal of debate about what is philosophically meant by postmodernism since the 1980s, its most basic tenet lies in the assumption that what is understood as “truth” or “reality” is necessarily contingent, rooted in linguistic habits, and hence open to different interpretations. In effect, there is no metanarrative to define reality, and hence all so-called social facts are jointly constructed phenomena (i.e., “social constructions”) that, far from universal or ahistorical, are predicated on shared meanings or assumptions that are variegated, mutable, and contextually determined.

Far more than simply an academic exercise, this critique advanced by postmodernists has profound political implications. Indeed, throughout much of Western history, relations of inequality and oppression have typically been justified by making claims to some pure or “universal” truth associated with nature, biology, God, or science. Thus, for example, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity are all systems that have been, at one time or another, legitimized under the claim that they are biological realities rooted in a “natural” order. From this perspective, patterns associated with whites dominating blacks, or men dominating women, or homosexuals being regarded as pathological, are not assumed to be predicated on any ideology or political agenda, but rather constitute part of a universal structure that is apolitical.

---

1 While the implied break from “neutrality” in the idea of “repressive tolerance” is often regarded as controversial, for Marcuse (1965), when tolerance is “neutral” and granted equal weight to both sides of the political spectrum, the status quo is left intact, as such tolerance is “practiced by the rulers as well as by the ruled, by the lords as well as by the peasants, by the sheriffs as well as by their victims” (pg. 84).

Activists often dismissed as politically correct attack this idea of timeless, non-contingent bases for truth, knowledge, and order not to undermine reality, but to suggest that there is no purely objective, non-contestable basis of knowledge on which to legitimize things like racial supremacy or cultural superiority. These activists draw from these basic premises to extricate the legacy of classicism, racism, sexism, and homophobia from current language, norms, and value systems.

Gleaning from articles, lectures, and interviews with alt-right leaders/spokespersons, it is clear that those associated with the alt-right movement have developed “collective action frames” in opposition to the two aforementioned ideologies. Before addressing these specific frames, however, a bit more detail about what is meant by collective action frames and the framing process is necessary.

## 5 Collective Action Frames

Various scholars have emphasized how social movement actors are involved in establishing a “schemata of interpretation” that might help orient their collective identity, objectives, and activities. Within the literature on social movements, these are often referred to as “collective action frames” (Benford and Snow 2000). Through the development of these frames (an activity denoted by the verb framing) actors in social movements actively give meaning to the world, identify the sources of their problems, develop ways to manage their grievances, and articulate their vision.

Understanding this framing process involves delving into the production of mobilizing ideas and meanings that legitimize the aims of a social movement (Bakker 2011; Benford and Snow 2000). Of particular importance is the primacy given to human agency in understanding this process. As suggested by Benford and Snow (2000), rather than simply “the carriers of extant ideas and meanings that grow automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies,” social movements actors are actively involved “in the production and maintenance of meanings for constituents, antagonists, and by-standers and observers (pg. 613).” In the case of the alt-right, a series of frames have been developed as a critical response to basic assumptions and versions of social reality associated with neoliberalism and political correctness that are oppositional to identitarianism, white racial collectivism, and white advocacy. These frames are central to shaping and giving coherence to the alt-right’s social and political agenda. I will focus here on three specific frames: the primacy of racial identity, anti-egalitarianism, and white genocide.

## 6 Race Realism and the Primacy of Racial Identity

One frame that is at the core of the alt-right movement is the notion that race is real. Jared Taylor (2011), for example, emphasizes the importance of “race realism,” or the idea that race points to far more than simply outward physical appearances and is correlated with temperament, IQ, and ability. Richard Spencer (2016) refers to race as an “extended family” comprised of people who have common genetic and cultural ties, and who share a common civilization. And Vox Day (2016) regards race as a “genetic nation” that has the right to exist and protect its own interests.

Among virtually all the leading voices of the alt-right, there is a call for what is often referred to as identitarianism. Rooted in the identitarian movement of the French New Right, which is itself a complicated movement full of different factions, identitarian ideology within the context of the alt-right in the US is premised on the idea that race is the foundation of all identity. Central to the alt-right, therefore, is an emphasis on white identity as the basis for a type of racial collectivism that is antithetical the sort of atomized, individualistic society encouraged by neoliberalism. In effect, the emphasis on white pride or white identity resonates with supporters of the alt-right because racial tribalism is regarded as an antidote to the neoliberal emphasis on competitive individualism and self-serving behavior that presumably threatens the interests of whites. As Colin Roberston, otherwise known as “Millennial Woes” (2017) puts it, in a globalized market society characterized by self-serving, profit-driven behavior, the alt-right emphasizes the interest and survival of one’s race (meaning one’s people) over narrow, individualistic interests. Similarly, Richard Spencer (2018) suggests that by stressing white identitarianism, the alt-right seeks to counteract the global free market encouraged by neoliberalism, which destroys cultures and racial/ethnic identities as it turns all people into an interchangeable mass of consumers.

Furthermore, the emphasis on racial identity among alt-righters is also a rebellion against political correctness and the notion that race is simply a social construction. Political correctness, according to proponents of the alt-right, is a type of ideological tyranny that is also being used to deprive white people in the US and around the world of their identity, history, and sense of worth. Indeed, the idea that race is a social construction is regarded as an effort among “social justice warriors” to trivialize racial differences so as to justify miscegenation, ignore the unique contributions of white people, and undermine white societies. It is by employing the ideology of political correctness that progressive leftists and mainstream conservatives can condone black, Latino, Asian, or native American pride, but yet demonize white pride as racist, and conflate

white advocacy with white supremacy. In this sense, the emphasis among supporters of the alt-right to place race at the center of their agenda is also, at least in part, a rebellion against the PC agenda to promote racial neutrality and color-blindness, which is anathema to white interests.

## 7 Anti-Egalitarianism

A second major collective action frame of the alt-right is a rejection of egalitarianism, particularly the idea that all races are equal. Because the races are assumed to have average differences in intelligence, abilities, and behavioral tendencies, racial inequalities are neutral outcomes rooted in nature (e.g., Taylor 2011). At first glance, this might sound perfectly compatible with neoliberalism, as central to this ideology lies the assumption that human hierarchies are simply a function of the presumably neutral market. That is to say, where people stand in society is simply a reflection of their abilities, work ethic, and talents, as everyone eventually gets what they deserve as they compete in the marketplace. Yet according to supporters of the alt-right, there are some serious problems with this neoliberal notion of market neutrality.

First, the so-called “free market” under neoliberalism is not really a free market, as there remains an “activist” government in place, a so-called deep state guided by political correctness that promotes the dogma of “racial equality.” It does so through policies like affirmative action and other measures that guarantee outcomes and violate the natural hierarchy of a society.

Second, the tendency under neoliberalism to prioritize corporate profits over everything else encourages a type of market economy that leads to job loss, economic insecurity, and social despair among large numbers of white workers. In effect, far from guaranteeing a type of economy in which all people get what they deserve as they compete freely, capitalism under neoliberalism often puts white workers in Western countries at a significant disadvantage vis-à-vis cheap, non-white labor both domestically and overseas. The consequences are not only material but psychological, as the job insecurity and stagnant wages fostered by neoliberal capitalism represent a threat to what W.E.B. Du Bois referred to as the “wage of whiteness,” or the subjective feelings of superiority that whites have traditionally felt in relation to non-whites (Rangel 2018). Indeed, significant numbers of white workers are feeling what sociologist Michael Kimmel (2017) refers to as “aggrieved entitlement,” or a sense that the “benefits to which you believe yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by unseen [neoliberal market] forces ...” (pg. 3). Many in the alt-right believe that this feeling of “loss” is a direct result of how the current

market system is a break from the natural order of things (i.e., natural racial hierarchies that are antithetical to egalitarianism) and “rigged” in favor of non-whites.

And third, even if the market is thoroughly deregulated, many supporters of the alt-right see this as extremely problematic, as de-regulation itself discourages racially conscious laws, policies, and practices that might protect white interests in favor of mindless competitors or consumers who care exclusively about their superficial self-interests. Stated simply, as it pertains to the question of race, de-regulation is synonymous with color-blindness, which is oppositional to racial identitarianism. This transformation of potentially race conscious citizens into mindless consumers, combined with the orthodoxy of political correctness that trivializes race as a mere social construction, and equates white advocacy with white supremacy, makes fighting for white interests extremely difficult.

It is through this process of eliminating racial loyalties in the name of individualism, color-blindness, and egalitarianism that whites are superficially stripped of their cultural and genetic advantages in prevailing social structures, and increasingly denied their rightful place in society. In this sense, the emphasis on white identity politics among those on the alt-right is also partly a response against neoliberal capitalism and political correctness, which they claim skew natural hierarchies among people and are ultimately antithetical to white interests.

## 8 White Genocide

Another central collective action frame of the alt-right is to challenge what is often referred to as the threat of “white genocide” (Feshami 2017; Johnson 2017). White genocide in this context does not pertain to the wholesale slaughter of white people, but rather to social, cultural, and economic forces that are presumably leading to the demographic displacement of whites in the US and other majority white countries. Other terms used by supporters of the alt-right that refer to this presumed trend are “the great erasure,” or “the great replacement,” a term coined by the French writer Renaud Camus. In short, whites are increasingly becoming a dispossessed minority group.

Here again, at the heart of this presumed existential threat to white people are forces associated with both neoliberalism and political correctness. According to many advocates of the alt-right, neoliberal free trade agreements like NAFTA have encouraged wealth concentration at the very top of the class ladder, and have not benefited a majority of people in this country.

At first glance, this alt-right critique of neoliberalism is very similar to the critiques one finds on the left. The major difference, however, is that proponents of the alt-right see neoliberalism primarily as a threat to average white Americans and a threat to Western culture.

Namely, as neoliberal globalization encourages the free flow of capital and goods, national borders become increasingly eroded, thereby leading to an influx of non-white immigrants into the country, and compromising America's white heritage and identity. The relentless quest for cheap labor is not limited to outsourcing, but rather to opening national borders, and reaping the benefits of the cheap labor coming in. What the alt-right calls for, however, is not simply to protect jobs, but to protect white identity from non-white invaders who come into the country, outbreed white Americans, and dilute this country's European heritage. This is why Trump's criticisms of NAFTA and promises to "build a wall" resonated so well with the alt-right.

The threat of this presumed influx of non-white immigrants into the country by neoliberal forces is compounded by the prevailing ideology of political correctness and its emphasis on diversity and equality. According to proponents of the alt-right, politically correct terms like diversity, pluralism, and multiculturalism are actually code words for white displacement and white disempowerment. Therefore, initiatives striving for greater diversity are actually efforts to reduce the number of white people, particularly white males, when it comes to hiring, promotions, college admissions, scholarships, business loans, etc.

Furthermore, the forces of neoliberal capitalism, combined with the sort of radical feminism that is bolstered by political correctness, has also led large numbers of white women to forgo having families for the sake of remaining competitive in the job market. As discussed by Greg Johnson (2017), as women, and particularly white women, become increasingly competitive and career oriented, they are having less white children, which, in turn, demographically compromises the white race. Alt-righters fear these trends will ultimately displace whites in this country. To not actively oppose these trends, therefore, is to be complicit in the alleged "white genocide" currently underway.<sup>2</sup>

---

2 Another factor presumably encouraging white genocide that is ancillary to this discussion has to do with the so-called "Jewish question." Originating among European anti-Semitic movements in the late nineteenth century, the Jewish question pertains to the question of how much influence Jews have in society, to what extent Jews are advancing their interests at the expense of white gentile interests, and what to do about Jewish influence. According to many in the alt-right, while Jews are largely an insulated and ethnocentric group, they have used their disproportionate influence in the media, education, politics, etc., to push for diversity and multiculturalism in white societies so as to weaken white racial consciousness,

## 9 Conclusion

Why is this discussion important? After all, some might argue that the alt-right is no longer a significant political or cultural force in the US. While the number of people who identify with the alt-right is debatable, it seems clear that the movement has recently experienced a series of setbacks. Particularly since the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia on August of 2017, the alt-right has often been associated with angry, foaming-at-the-mouth white racists holding up tiki-torches, asserting they will “not be replaced,” and unleashing violence on anyone who opposes their agenda. Furthermore, for the past year, there has been a lot of in-fighting among alt-right leaders, various alt-right sites and videos have been de-monetized, Richard Spencer’s website “Alt-Right.com” has been dropped by domain registrar GoDaddy, alt-right Twitter and PayPal accounts have been terminated, and some of its leaders, including Mike Enoch and Richard Spencer, are currently facing lawsuits for allegedly plotting and/or encouraging the violence that took in Charlottesville (which led to dozens of people being injured and the death of 32-year-old, Heather Heyer).

Important to understand, however, is that while the alt-right appears to have lost much of its momentum, the collective action frames developed by proponents of this movement do seem to resonate with a significant segment of the US white population. Several factors might help explain this. First, there has been a revival of scientific racism that gives credibility to “race realism” and therefore validates many of the alt-right’s claims about the primacy of racial identity (e.g. Evans 2018; Klein 2018). As an example, Charles Murray’s and Richard Herrnstein’s 1994 book, *The Bell Curve*, in which the authors claim that poor people, and especially poor blacks and Hispanics are, on average, inherently less intelligent than whites and east Asians, has recently re-gained popularity (in Klein 2018). Various other books (e.g., Wade 2015) have also been published in recent years that start from the premise that there are evolutionary and genetic bases for racial disparities in intelligence, wealth, educational attainment, crime rates, and other areas. Although these claims are said to have been largely debunked (e.g., Turkheimer et al. 2018), they are once again a common topic in both scholarly and popular discussions about race relations. Furthermore, the current fascination with genetic ancestry tests available through companies like 23andme and Ancestry.com has further encouraged a

---

demonize white advocacy, and pathologize anti-semitism. This is all done to preserve Jewish power and ensure the survival of Jewish people in Western societies. Among alt-righters, perhaps the most widely celebrated account of Jewish influence is Kevin McDonald’s (2002) book, *The Culture of Critique*.

resurrection of essentialist racial reasoning (Zhang 2016). Although these tests do not tell us anything about ability or behavior, they inadvertently reinforce the idea of race as a biological fact, which is at the core of the alt-right's predilection for identitarianism and "race realism."

Second, there is truth to the idea that white Americans will no longer be a numerical majority in the US within the next several decades. As a result, many whites in the US are uneasy about the prospect of becoming a minority group. The fact that openly expressing this fear is either dismissed or demonized as "racism" by the current emphasis on political correctness further encourages racial resentment, and reinforces among many white Americans a sense of racial tribalism and what Herbert Blumer (1958) referred to as "a sense of group position" (i.e., defining one's group in relation to other groups). The claim that many whites view themselves as members of a discriminated group is supported by empirical evidence, including one 2017 poll from NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, which found that over half of whites (55 percent) surveyed believe there is discrimination against white people in the US (Gonyea 2017). Another poll, the Ipsos Poll associated with Thomson Reuters and the University of Virginia Center for Politics, polled over 5,300 Americans and found that 31 percent believe the US must protect and preserve its European heritage (Ruiz-Grossman 2017). What these polls seem to indicate is that ideas often associated with the alt-right are by no means entirely marginal.

Third, the ravages of neoliberalism on all workers, including white workers, has magnified white Americans' anxieties about their place in US society. As has been well-documented, outcomes promoted by the neoliberal economy like wage stagnation, de-unionization, outsourcing, automation, and economic insecurity has made many white American workers receptive to alt-right beliefs related to the dangers of immigration, multiculturalism, and globalism. President Trump himself, of course, tapped into these fears with his promises to reject political correctness, build a wall, abandon the Trans-Pacific Partnership, renegotiate NAFTA, follow an "America first" agenda, and "make America great again," which some argue is codeword for "making America white again" (Rangel 2018).

Considering all of the above, it is clear that while the alt-right might currently be in a state of crisis and a majority of white Americans do not support white supremacy, many do support views that are consistent with the alt-right. More research is needed on how neoliberalism and political correctness have intersected to create a social, cultural, political, and economic context that is fertile for ideas related to white victimhood, white resentment, and white nationalism. Further exploring and deciphering these connections might



promote deeper understandings of the alt-right and similar movements that will surely continue to develop in the United States and other Western societies in the future.

## References

- Bakker, Janel K. 2011. "Molding Mission: Collective Action Frames and Sister Church Participation." *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 9:11-20.
- Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movement: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:611-639.
- Berkowitz, Bill. 2003. "Cultural Marxism Catching On." Intelligence report for the Southern Poverty Law Center. Retrieved May 10, 2018. (<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/cultural-marxism-catching>).
- Blumer, Herbert. 1958. "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position." *Pacific Sociological Review* 1:3-7.
- Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books.
- Choi, Jung M. and John W. Murphy. 1992. *The Politics and Philosophy of Political Correctness*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Day, Vox. 2016. "What the Alternative Right Is." Vox Popoli blog, August 24. Retrieved May 3, 2018. (<https://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/08/what-alt-right-is.html>).
- Day, Vox and John Red Eagle. 2016. *Cuckervative: How Conservatives Betrayed America*. Kouvola, Finland: Castalia House.
- Esposito, Luigi. 2011. "Neoliberalism and the Market Society." pp. 29-48 in *Toward a Post-Market Society*. Edited by John W. Murphy and Karen A. Callaghan. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Esposito, Luigi and Laura Finley. 2019. *Political Correctness in the Era of Trump: Threat to Freedom or Ideological Scapegoat?* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. (forthcoming).
- Evans, Gavin. 2018. "The Unwelcome Revival of Race Science." *The Guardian*, March 2. Retrieved June 1, 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/02/the-unwelcome-revival-of-race-science>).
- Feshami, Kevan A. 2017. "Fear of White Genocide." Lapham's Quarterly, September 6. Retrieved May 10, 2018. (<https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/fear-white-genocide>).
- Giroux, Henry. 2008. *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Gonyea, Don. 2017. "Majority of White Americans Say They Believe Whites Face Discrimination." National Public Radio. October 24. Retrieved June 2, 2018.

- (<https://www.npr.org/2017/10/24/559604836/majority-of-white-americans-think-theyre-discriminated-against>).
- Hall, Stuart. 1994. "Some Politically Incorrect Pathways Through PC." pp. 164-184 in *The War of Words: The Political Correctness Debate*. Edited by Sarah Dunant. United Kingdom: Virago.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hawley, George. 2017. *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hood, Gregory. 2018. "The New Kulaks: Whites as an Enemy Class." pp. 3-14 in *A Fair Hearing: The Alt-Right in the Words of its Members and Leaders*. Edited by George T. Shaw. Budapest, Hungary: Arktos Media Ltd.
- Jeffries, Stuart. 2017. *Grand Abyss Hotel: The Lives of the Frankfurt School*. New York: Verso.
- Johnson, Greg. 2017. "White Genocide." Counter Currents, June 30. Retrieved May 6, 2018. (<https://www.counter-currents.com/2017/06/white-genocide-2/>).
- Kimball, Linda. 2007. "Cultural Marxism." American Thinker, February 15. Retrieved May 3, 2018. ([http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2007/02/cultural\\_marxism.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2007/02/cultural_marxism.html)).
- Kimmel, Michael. 2017. *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. New York: Nation Books.
- Klein, Ezra. 2018. "Sam Harris, Charles Murray, and the Allure of Race Science." Vox, March 27. Retrieved June 1, 2018. (<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/27/15695060/sam-harris-charles-murray-race-iq-forbidden-knowledge-podcast-bell-curve>).
- Kohl, Herbert. 1992. "Uncommon Differences: On Political Correctness, Core Curriculum, and Democracy in Education." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 16: 1-16.
- Lehman, Joseph. 2012. "A Brief Explanation of the Overton Window," Mackinac Center for Public Policy. Retrieved June 3, 2018. (<https://www.mackinac.org/OvertonWindow>).
- Lind, William S. 2000. "The Origins of Political Correctness." Speech given at the Accuracy in Academia Conference, February 5. Retrieved June 12, 2018. (<https://www.academia.org/the-origins-of-political-correctness/>).
- Marcuse, Herbert. 1965. "Repressive Tolerance." pp. 81-117 in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*. Edited by Robert P. Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr., and Herbert Marcuse. Boston, MA: Beacon.
- McDonald, Kevin. 2002. *The Culture of Critique*. Bloomington, IN: 1st Books Library.
- Neiwert, David. 2017. *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump*. New York: Verso.

- Perry, Ruth. 1992. "A Short History of the Term Politically Correct." pp. 71-79 in *Beyond PC: Towards a Politics of Understanding*. Edited by Patricia Aufderheide. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press.
- Qiu, Jack Linchuan. 2016. *Goodbye iSlave*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Rangel, Salvador. 2018. "Making Whiteness Great Again: Retooling White Supremacy in the Era of Global Capital." Global Studies Association Conference, June 8. Washington DC: Howard University.
- Ritzer, George. 2010. *Sociological Theory, 8th edition*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Ruiz-Grossman, Sarah. 2017. "Most Americans Oppose White Supremacists, But Many Share Their Views: Poll." Huffington Post. September 16. Retrieved June 3, 2018. ([https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/reuters-poll-white-supremacist-views\\_us\\_59bc155fe4b02da0e141b3c8](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/reuters-poll-white-supremacist-views_us_59bc155fe4b02da0e141b3c8)).
- Shaw, George T. 2018. *A Fair Hearing: The Alt-Right in the Words of its Members and Leaders*. Budapest, Hungary: Arktos Media Ltd.
- Spencer, Richard. 2016. "Richard Spencer Texas A&M." Retrieved May 2, 2018. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-Pg4xlbAGY&t=1420s>).
- Spencer, Richard. 2018. "#Killstream: Richard Spencer on Karl Marx." Retrieved May 3, 2018 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Js2N-WR9KU&t=197s>).
- Taylor, Jared. 2011. *White Identity: Racial Consciousness in the 21st Century*. United States: New Century Books.
- Turkheimer, Eric, Kathryn P. Harden, and Richard E. Nisbett. 2018. "Charles Murray is Once Again Peddling Junk Science About Race and IQ." Vox. May 18. Retrieved June 2, 2018. (<https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/5/18/15655638/charles-murray-race-iq-sam-harris-science-free-speech>).
- Wade, Nicholas. 2015. *A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race, and Human History*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Wendling, Mike. 2018. *Alt-Right: from 4Chan to the White House*. London, UK: Pluto Press.
- William, Michael. 2016. *The Genesis of Political Correctness*. Lexington, KY: Michael William.
- Woes, Millenia. 2017. "Individualism vs. Racial Collectivism." Retrieved May 2, 2018. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66FYjtG5k2w>).
- Zhang, Sarah. 2016. "Will the Alt-Right Promote a new Kind of Racist Genetics?" The Atlantic, December 29. Retrieved June 5, 2018. (<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/12/genetics-race-ancestry-tests/510962>).