

Affective White Necropolitics: The Alt-Right's Fear of White Genocide

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Abstract: The American Alt-Right is a white nationalist social movement which is responding to feelings of fear associated with racialized death. The movement has portrayed its cause as a response to pluralistic policies and philosophies aimed at “white genocide” which they define as the state-sponsored elimination of white people. The Alt-Right’s existential fear is a feeling which has developed due to a combination of apprehensions regarding white demographic displacement and white social death; the manner in which white Americans (and their concerns) are treated as nonexistent. I analyze the Alt-Right’s concept of white genocide as a form of felt legitimacy; while perceptions of white necropolitics are not factually supported, the feeling of existential anxiety is genuine. I argue that the Alt-Right is only comprehensible as a social movement if we consider its affective content and its existential origins and I conclude that scholarship on far-right politics, in general, will require not only institutional and policy solutions, but also engagement with existential anxiety.

The Alt-Right gained mainstream notoriety in the United States thanks to media coverage of the movement during the 2016 United States Presidential campaigns of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Clinton brought attention to the Alt-Right during a speech in Reno, Nevada where she connected Donald Trump, his campaign CEO Steve Bannon, and the Alt-Right movement (Ohlheiser and Dewey 2016). While Clinton overstated the relationship between Trump and the Alt-Right, the movement quickly rose from a largely irrelevant, online-based collection of far-right miscreants and was propelled into the limelight. The Alt-Right is a social movement united by one core political belief: white nationalism. Unlike paleoconservatism, its intellectual predecessor, or the Tea Party (the most recent right-wing movement in the United States), the Alt-Right is an identity-based social movement that views the world through a racial lens.

The primary concern for the Alt-Right is the preservation and flourishing of the white race. The Alt-Right maintains an arcane belief in race “science” which is euphemistically referred to within the movement as “human biodiversity” or HBD (Hawley 2017; Wendling 2018). HBD is the pseudoscientific belief that different groups of people have different traits, and these traits are attached to genes which sort people into well-defined racial and ethnic groups. Because the Alt-Right argues that race is a biological reality, the movement views different races as distinct and mutually exclusive, thus one cannot simultaneously be white and Black.

Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant identify race as a master category which they define as “a fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture of the United States” (2015, 106). Alt-Right founder Richard Spencer ironically echoes Omi and Winant in stating that “Race isn’t just some issue. It isn’t just some little thing that we might want to pursue here and there. It’s this core idea that really informs everything” (Main 2018, 170). Omi and Winant, call race a way of “making people up” because the

notion of race lacks any scientific basis. The Alt-Right, while it sees race as a master category, denies the biological and physiological sciences that repudiate race realism. The Alt-Right sees race as a biologically determined master category and thus, where heterogeneity exists, politics is understood as racial competition. Spencer, in a speech to reporters in Washington, D.C. publicized this position by stating “Race is real, race matters, and race is the foundation of identity” (Harkinson 2016).

For the Alt-Right, humans are primarily racialized subjects, and mutually exclusive racial groups are in a Hobbesianesque battle for political power. Their solution to the problem of tenuous racial cohabitation is the establishment of racially pure ethnostates wherein each state’s polity is comprised solely of a single racial group which implies that the United States ought to be a country wherein the entirety of the populace is racially codified as purely white (Hawley 2017, Main 2018, Wendling 2018, Hosang and Lowndes 2019). This desire for racial homogeneity is why the Alt-Right is best understood as a primarily white nationalist movement and why it is dedicated to defining and policing the bounds of whiteness through HBD.¹ Although the Alt-Right is also defined by its opposition to feminism, Islam, Judaism, Black Lives Matter, political correctness, “globalism,” and establishment politics, the Alt-Right is primarily a white nationalist movement dedicated to the creation of racially pure ethnostates, and it is this racipolitical goal that binds the otherwise loosely ideologically aligned movement.

While the Alt-Right’s goal of compulsory racial separation is unambiguous, it is less obvious how the Alt-Right has successfully garnered popular support. In 2017, journalist Donna Minkowitz went

¹ It is not necessarily appropriate to classify all Alt-Right supporters (or the movement) as white supremacist. While white nationalism is the primary unifying factor of the movement, white “supremacy” is contested (Hawley 2017). Jared Taylor even argues that the East Asian “race” is superior to the white race (Sussman 2014, Lewis 2017). There are white supremacists, including neo-Nazis within the Alt-Right, but the movement’s separatist goals render it more clearly white nationalist than white supremacist. I agree with Phillip Gray who states that “this current form of nationalist identity is separatist rather than imperial” (2018, 141).

undercover at Jared Taylor's American Renaissance conference.² Minkowitz, following the event, stated that "the most important thing for progressive people to do in this period is to figure out what attracts people to alt-right movements. We can only stop them if we know what's attracting people" (Bader 2017). Interviews, surveys, and polling all might be useful methods in explaining why individuals support the Alt-Right. However, I propose viewing the Alt-Right's recruitment and support through the lens of melodramatic discourse which can help clarify the movement's framing, and helps explain how their efforts are effective at garnering support.

Melodrama as a Theoretical Lens

Swedish graduate student Patrik Hermansson infiltrated the Alt-Right (and other white supremacist, white nationalist, and neo-Nazi groups) on behalf of the anti-fascist advocacy organization *Hope Not Hate*. Following his undercover exposé, *Undercover in the Alt-Right*, he conducted an "Ask Me Anything" question and answer session on the popular news aggregator and discussion platform Reddit. When asked by participants what thought was driving people towards far-right political groups Hermansson responded,

The real question is what makes white men, many of whom are middle class and/or relatively well educated, decide that they - not ethnic minorities - are in fact the real victims in society. The whole movement is consumed with a sense of victimhood. They genuinely believe that white men are the most oppressed people in society. (2017)

² Besides running American Renaissance, Taylor is a central figure within the Alt-Right and has been a prominently featured speaker at events such as the Northwest Forum (Lewis 2017)

Scholar Thomas Main likewise states that the Alt-Right “is under the delusion that whites have been entirely disposed of power” (2018, 167). Hermansson and Main both note that this phenomenon is occurring – white people (mostly men) are openly stating that it is they who are the oppressed victims in contemporary American society – but neither can explain why white people express this feeling or why they become attracted to far-right political groups.

Elisabeth Anker (2014) provides us with a mechanism for interpreting the Alt-Right’s politics of white victimization and its potential attractiveness; melodramatic political discourse. Anker, in *Orgies of Feeling*, argues that contemporary American political discourse deploys an exaggerated moral dichotomy of good and evil, and frames the United States as an innocent victim in order to justify the expansion of state power, especially following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The title of Anker’s work – *Orgies of Feeling* – refers to the titular Nietzschean concept which Anker defines as a form of “affective displacement.” She explains that “Orgies of feeling describe a counterintuitive attempt to ameliorate confusing feelings of powerlessness by imposing intense affects of victimization—including terror, pain, sorrow, helplessness, and shock—upon the self” (Anker 2014, 15). Rather than addressing preexisting feelings of powerlessness, Anker explains that these “new and more painful affects minimize earlier and more confusing affects of helplessness” by overwhelming and suppressing the initial feelings, and by presenting this more intense victimization as something which can be fought against and overcome (ibid). This oversimplified melodrama contrasts a good United States with an evil Other, and this drama overshadows more banal, and yet complex examples of day-to-day powerlessness and subjugation in anxious American minds.

Orgies of feeling help to shape political discourse as the virtuous and innocent victim is portrayed as resisting an evil enemy oppressor, in the name of liberty and freedom; the victim struggles and fights for emancipation from unjust pain and suffering. Anker’s primary contemporary focus is on

the state's melodramatic discourse as an orgy of feeling following 9/11, as the melodrama of terrorism affectively displaced the population's more mundane experiences of vulnerability which she chiefly attributes to neoliberalism.³ I will argue that the Alt-Right utilizes a similar discursive tactic without relying on – and perhaps even opposed to – the existing state.

Political theorist Corey Robin argues that the American right is responding to:

a combination of stagnating wages, rising personal and household debt, and increasing precarity—coupled with the tormenting symbolism of a black president and the greater visibility of black and brown faces in the culture industries ... The future of the United States as a minority-majority nation exacerbates this anxiety. (2017, 243)

The socioeconomic and political concerns Robin notes are undoubtedly complicated issues, the causes of which exceed the knowledge base of most Americans. Although Anker refers back to neoliberalism, it would be highly presumptuous to assume that an average, white, American who is anxious over economic precarity and sociocultural – namely racial – demographic changes, has both the background knowledge and the analytic tools at their disposal to deconstruct their shifting milieu. The realities of economic deregulation, outsourcing, technological advancements in automation, moneyed interests with disproportionate political influence, corporate and political deunionization efforts, the emergence of the gig economy, boom-and-bust cycles of capitalism, stagnant minimum wage laws, ongoing and historic international conflicts, global repopulation, an expanded social tolerance of an array of identity

³ I would say that neoconservatism has likewise played a role in creating many of the conditions that impact Americans as militaristic intervention has undoubtedly had economic impacts, and has led to more recent global repopulation. Neoliberal economics and neoconservative intervention may work hand-in-hand in some of the examples which follow.

groups, and the new language that tolerance requires all may contribute to a reality that is confusing and perhaps frightening for many white Americans.

Melodramatic discourse simplifies complex conditions and renders them a battle of good versus evil. The simplicity of resisting a melodramatic evil may be more appealing than responding to the aforementioned host of complicated, and perhaps seemingly disparate socioeconomic, cultural, and political challenges. The simplicity of the melodrama,

promises that overwhelmed subjects can overcome their vulnerability by dramatic counter-acts of force, acts that melodrama equates with the achievement of freedom. In promising that freedom is forthcoming for virtuous sufferers, melodrama implies that complex global vulnerability and interdependence can be overcome by expressions of state power reasserting U.S. global might, which will then reflect back to American individuals their own sovereignty.

In melodrama's narrative temporality, however, sovereign freedom can only be achieved *after* an overwhelming experience of vulnerability, powerlessness, and pain. (Anker 2014, 13)

While Anker again focuses on state power, and specifically the expansion of power within the United States' federal government, I am utilizing her melodramatic lens to explain a similar phenomenon in the Alt-Right; a non-state actor. I show that key Alt-Right figures likewise deploy melodramatic narratives to legitimate the use of force, in the purported name of freedom (or, likewise, emancipation or sovereignty). While the United States government appealed to eradicating an evil, terroristic Other, the

Alt-Right affectively displaces social, cultural, economic, and political apprehensions with the existential anxiety that is the result of an evil Other plotting “white genocide.”⁴

Freedom, in the post-9/11 melodrama involves an elimination of a terroristic Other by simultaneously expanding the United States’ government’s domestic power, and through flexing the nation’s muscle abroad by exerting its military prowess. It is ironic that melodramatic discourse frames the expansion of state power as *necessary* for the future procurement of freedom, which bucks the conventional tradeoff between security and freedom as classically described in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. In the United States, the expansion of federal powers was framed as essential in eliminating the evils of terrorism, such that America’s liberty could be further stabilized in an otherwise tumultuous international climate. I will argue that the Alt-Right similarly frames the procurement of a future freedom as justifying the movement’s intermediary tactics including, but not limited to, violence and killing. The Alt-Right’s future freedom is portrayed as only possible by removing the Other, whether through peaceful means or, if necessary, through the most abhorrent forms of violence. In this respect, the Alt-Right simultaneously self-identifies as victims of racial violence, while endorsing self-defensive racial violence as an acceptable political method in procuring a theoretical future in which violence will be unnecessary.

⁴ The idea of “white genocide” is logically attached to the similar notion of the “Great Replacement” – the idea popularized by far-right novelist and thinker Renaud Camus – that white people are being racially replaced by nonwhite populations through liberal democratic immigration policies. Camus is not the first anti-replacement thinker, but his theory of the Great Replacement has influenced the Alt-Right’s “white genocide” terminology, and his influence is worth noting (Feola 2020).

The Alt-Right's Melodrama

While the American social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes may be respectively altering, Alt-Right intellectuals are affectively displacing these aforementioned confusing concerns with a more intense but perhaps simpler and more coherent discourse on “white genocide.” The Alt-Right is not advocating for a genocide of white people, but the concept instead depicts white people as innocent targets and victims of an evil plot of ongoing racial extermination. The Alt-Right defines its enemy as those who support and enact white genocide which is understood as “the belief that whites are in imminent danger of cultural, political, economic, and even physical annihilation by some combination of Jews, immigrants, Muslims, African Americans, white liberals, feminists and communists” (Atkinson 2018, 310-311). White genocide is thus simply “the notion that the ‘white race’ is directly endangered by the increasing diversity of society” (Berger 2016, 3). It is an oversimplified melodrama of good versus evil wherein the enemy is a conglomeration of purportedly anti-white groups that promote policies aimed at eliminating the white race which, in turn, is portrayed as inherently good due to its victimized status.⁵ The term white genocide is explicitly existential in nature, and it expresses heightened fears over the supposedly diminished value of white life, the imminent mortality of white life, and the sociocultural disempowerment of white people. Those who perpetrate white genocide include an opaque conglomerate of Others which must be stopped by any means, including through violent resistance, in order to save the white race. The notion of white genocide has been embraced by prominent Alt-Right figures, and disseminated to their followers as significant white nationalist and supremacist “Recruitment focused on the theme of white genocide” (Berger 2016, 4).

⁵ Michael Feola offers a similar list to Atkinson as he lists “women, feminists, liberals, Blacks, Muslims, multiculturalists, globalists, corrupt political elites, and cosmopolitans of all stripes” (2020, 12). Media studies scholar Viveca S. Greene (2019) also includes the mainstream media among those the Alt-Right has included as “the enemy” as mainstream media is viewed as exacerbating the enemy’s genocidal aims.

Greg Johnson, a central figure in Alt-Right intellectual circles, has stated that “white extinction is the *intended* result of the policies we oppose” (P Gray 2018, 144). For Johnson white genocide is not inevitable, but he rather insists that it is already occurring and has been occurring since desegregation as he states, “When tens of thousands of whites fled American cities and lost tens of millions in property because of desegregation, that was ethnic cleansing” (Johnson 2010). Johnson has likewise stated “Whenever we talk about diversity, increasing diversity. That is always a euphemism for having fewer white people” (Holland et al. 2018, 26:00). Johnson has framed white genocide as a policy or set of policies responsible for the racial demographic shifts in the United States (which have seen people of color increase as a proportion of the population), and the Alt-Right’s goal – securing a white ethnostate – serves to reverse demographic displacement, and prevent white genocide. In this melodrama, Johnson portrays white people as innocent victims of a shadowy and implicitly evil plot to eliminate the race from the United States, and the Alt-Right’s political goal is implicitly good as it seeks to save the innocent white victim by securing its existence and livelihood within racially defined state boundaries. Johnson is not the only prominent Alt-Right supporter deploying the notion of resisting white genocide.

Richard Spencer expressed similar existential fears of white genocide in defining the movement in 2017. In his “meta-political manifesto for the Alt-Right movement” Spencer explains that “The so-called ‘refugee crisis’ is an invasion, a war without bullets, taking place on the fields of race, religion, sex, and morality. At stake is Europe’s very identity—whether the continent will be the locus of our people’s shared story, or become just another Islamic outpost” (2017). Failure to resist the perpetrators of white genocide, Spencer later argues, will lead to a “thoroughly miscegenated and thus homogeneous and ‘assimilated,’ nation, which would have little resemblance to the White America that came before it” (Serwer 2019). Like Johnson, Spencer describes white people as uniquely victimized and targeted by an evil Other which is plotting the downfall and extermination of the race through an unalterable demographic change in the American (and European) population.

Similarly Andrew Anglin, editor of the *Daily Stormer*⁶, in his forum post “A Normie’s Guide to the Alt-Right” defines “white genocide” and the related notion of “white countries for white people.” Anglin explains that white genocide involves “flooding White nations with non-Whites” and this process “amounts to a form of calculated genocide against a racial group” (Anglin 2016). Anglin, like Johnson and Spencer, expresses a concern that “non-White immigration into White countries will lead to a destruction of White culture, the White social order and ultimately an extermination of the White race” (ibid). Once again white people are presented as innocent victims of a genocidal plot that aims at erasing white sociocultural contributions and ultimately, white lives. This affect – this feeling of racialized existential anxiety – resonates with the Alt-Right, and other far-right supporters.

J.M. Berger conducted research on white nationalist social media for The Program on Extremism at George Washington University and concluded that “Social media activists tweeted hundreds of times per day using repetitive hashtags and slogans associated with this trope” (Berger 2016, 3). Given Berger’s research, there may be nearly countless examples of less prominent Alt-Right supporters and anonymous online posters who explain their cause as a response to the white genocide. Greg Johnson’s Counter-Currents website and forum has numerous examples of posts and comments which are responding to fears of white genocide. One poster “Quintilian” (2017), explains in his review of the film *Interstellar* that “It is the white race that is the indispensable race.” Quintilian’s review is similarly titled “The Future Is White” and the author argues that *Interstellar*’s use of a white male as the earth-saving protagonist is consistent with the Alt-Right’s understanding of race realism. One commenter on Quintilian’s review who uses the pseudonym “Collition” (2017), juxtaposes this notion of white indispensability and heroism with a strawman argument wherein the poster notes that “the leftists will always say that the White race is the cancer of humanity and that the world would be better off w/o

⁶ One of the most prominent American neo-Nazi websites and message boards on the internet.

us.” Another poster, Spencer J. Quinn (2016), noted support for Trump’s presidency but also states that he has remained fearful of white “demographic demise” leading to “white irrelevance” which is similar to, if not synonymous with, white genocide. Quinn’s statement is echoed prominent Alt-Right contributor Jared Taylor who explains that “I voted for Donald Trump for one reason only; his policies, if implemented, would slow down the dispossession of whites in the United States” (Vice 2017). Yet another Alt-Right supporter and Twitter user @genophilia⁷ called for a boycott of the movie *The Force Awakens*, a sequel in the *Star Wars* saga, due to the trailer featuring Black actor John Boyega. The post stated, “#BoycottStarWarsVII because it is anti-white propaganda promoting #whitegenocide” (Greene 2019, 50).

Similarly, political scientist George Hawley interviewed members of a group claiming to speak for Anglin’s *Daily Stormer* who explained that “The core concept of the [Alt-Right], upon which all else is based, is that Whites are undergoing an extermination, via mass immigration into White countries” (2017, 141). Well known Alt-Right blogger “Vox Day” (2016) likewise wrote that “The Alt-Right believes we must secure the existence of the white people and a future for white children.” Vox Day is quoting the “14 Words” which are popular white supremacist and white nationalist slogan. Alt-Right sympathizer Roosh V, in his post “The White European Culture Is Dead” (2017), details his fear of white demographic displacement by hypothesizing that Muslims will first invade the global West, adopting technology and customs, and eventually reproducing at higher rates than Westerners (before Africans eventually do the same to Muslims).

Johnson, Spencer, and Anglin all promote the white genocide conspiracy theory to their followers, and fears or anxieties surrounding white genocide may be affectively displacing more confusing, yet more commonplace socioeconomic and political concerns Americans frequently face. Alt-

⁷ Meaning love of one’s race.

Right supporters participate in forums hosted by these key Alt-Right intellectuals, and regurgitate and recirculate the fears of existential demise due to the white genocide being conducted by an amorphous Other. Scholar Annie Kelly neatly details the relationship between the Alt-Right's existential fear of white genocide and its melodramatic content,

The white genocide conspiracy theory veils a support for eugenics and nativism in dramatic declarations of victimhood, but it also points a finger at a shadowy perpetrator. White genocide is seen as a deliberately engineered phenomenon, evidence for which can be found in television advertisements which show mixed-race couples or children, articles which might discourage women from having children early in life, and, of course, site visitors' anecdotes from their previous relationships. (2017, 73)

While Alt-Right supporters may not be alone in expressing existential anxieties surrounding white genocide, it is a central theme of the movement.⁸

Philosopher Achille Mbembe notes that,

a generalizing and democratizing of the affect of fear are taking place, backdropped by deep mutations, for starters in our regimes of belief, and consequently also in the stories that people tell themselves. These stories need not be grounded in truth. Henceforth, what is true is not what has effectively happened or taken place but what is belief. (Mbembe 2019, 30)

It is insufficient to counter the affect of white genocide with facts. What Mbembe and Hermansson call "belief" and Anker calls "affect" are nearly synonymous with respect to their explanatory capabilities.

⁸ As I am arguing that the Alt-Right is a social movement, it is not clear that the White Genocide Project is, for example, directly tied to the Alt-Right. The White Genocide Project is very similar in its portrayal of the melodramatic plot of good versus evil (white people versus a genocidal conglomerate), but the relationship between the movement and Project is opaque.

The Alt-Right believes they are racial victims, and they experience the affect of existential anxiety as demonstrated in their frequent use of the term white genocide. Alt-Right supporters feel that their lives are imminently precarious due to evil, anti-white conglomerate seeking the demise of the white race, whether or not empirical evidence supports said claims. These feelings may affectively override the more complicated (and thus confusing) yet banal concerns supporters experience in their social, cultural, economic and political worlds. The feeling of fear due to existential anxiety surrounding white genocide leads to the Alt-Right's embrace of racially homogenous solutions, and violent tactics to achieve movement goals. The actions undertaken by the Alt-Right are justified as a legitimate response to this affective existential concern, regardless of its factual content or lack thereof.

The Felt Legitimacy of the Alt-Right

Anker employs the term "felt legitimacy" to describe "an affective experience of authorizing state power" without a clear catalyst for the affect (2014, 111). Rather than a singular spark, an overwhelming and general fear of "terrorism" following 9/11 led many Americans to embrace domestic assaults on civil liberties (such as the PATRIOT Act), and a unilateral "war on terror" that lacked clearly defined ends, and which subverted international norms. The painful and confusing daily experiences of vulnerability that existed in the American milieu prior to 9/11 were affectively displaced by the "spectacular, agonizing" affect of terrorism (Anker 2014, 150). In turn, Americans viewed themselves as collective victims of an evil enemy, and the populace viewed all state efforts to rid the country and world of such a grave threat as legitimate.

One might suggest that post-9/11 militarism was merely a right-wing, or war hawk phenomenon, yet Judith Butler is careful to remind us that many progressives joined the "good,"

American side of the melodrama. Many, like the more hawkish neoconservatives in political power at the time, endorsed the United States' expansion of federal powers, and international war on terror as legitimate means to eradicate the evil Other. Butler, however, is critical of these expressions of felt legitimacy as she states that,

The United States, by using the term [acts of terror], positions itself exclusively as the sudden and indisputable victim of violence, even though there is no doubt that it did suffer violence. But it is one matter to suffer violence and quite another to use that fact to ground a framework in which one's injury authorizes limitless aggression against targets that may or may not be related to the sources of one's own suffering.

The point I would like to underscore here is that a frame for understanding violence emerges in tandem with the experience, and that the frame works both to preclude certain kinds of questions, certain kinds of historical inquiries, and to function as a moral justification for retaliation. (2020, 4)

The melodramatic frame wherein the United States is uniquely victimized by terrorism and thus innocent and good, and wherein a conglomerate of terrorists is an aggressive and evil Other which hates American freedoms and culture, affectively displaced more frequent forms of subjugation and powerlessness resulting from neoliberalism. Many Americans, in turn, unified around this affect of American vulnerability, and supported nearly any means to eradicate the Other. Felt legitimacy, which was weaponized for domestic state expansion and international militarism following 9/11, is likewise useful in interpreting the Alt-Right's stated means of procuring racially homogeneous ethnostates.

Richard Spencer, in his speech at the 2016 National Policy Institute (NPI)⁹ conference following Donald Trump's electoral victory stated "As Europeans ... No one mourns the great crimes committed against us. For us, it is conquer or die. This is a unique burden for the white man" (Spencer 2016). Annie Kelly states that "When Spencer invokes 'our lived experience ... being a young white person in twenty-first century America, seeing your identity being demeaned', he is adapting a familiar far-right tactic: a reversal of left-wing progress is cloaked in a narrative of white victimization" (2017, 73). Spencer, however, does not frame white opposition (those committing white genocide) as an irresistible force. Instead, Spencer utilizes the melodramatic discourse of white genocide to frame the Alt-Right as having only one tactical choice; "good" white people will either conquer the "evil" Other or white people will die due to ongoing white genocide. Whiteness for the Alt-Right is, as Michael Feola argues, "a good to be both celebrated and defended" (2020, 3). If death is the result of white inaction, the Alt-Right's supporters – overwhelmed by affective existential anxiety – endorse sadistic means of resistance.

George Hawley notes that "Withing the Alt-Right, commentary on race ranges from calls for massive ethnic cleansing, through violent means if necessary, to new restrictions on nonwhite immigration into the United States" (2017, 16). Richard Spencer has endorsed a "peaceful ethnic cleansing" of the United States "entirely humanely and entirely through financial incentives", yet his language has supported murder and violence (Wendling 2018, 22). Andrew Anglin has been specific that Jews "must be confronted and ultimately removed from White societies completely" by physical means (2016), while Greg Johnson likewise stated that Jews ought to be expelled from the United States and sent to Israel (Holland et al. 2018, 31:20). For Johnson, those Jews who refused to leave the United States would be frozen out of socioeconomic and political society such that continuing to live in the country would be rendered *de facto* impossible. At other times, Johnson has suggested that "more

⁹ NPI, despite its innocuous name, is a white nationalist organization which made Spencer its president in 2011.

draconian measures” might be plausibly necessary to rid the nation of non-white people. Johnson has suggested that a “bounty” be placed on non-white people who attempted to remain in the United States as he explains, “‘But there would be violence! There would be a race war!’ the defeatists will bleat. Of course there would be” (Johnson 2010). While Johnson admits that “there would be white casualties” in the effort to achieve an all-white United States, the violence is melodramatically framed as “us” white people versus “them” nonwhites (ibid).

Jason Jorjani spoke perhaps most bluntly in support of violence as he was filmed by Patrik Hermansson saying that Pakistan “needs to be destroyed in a nuclear war and that nuclear conflict will probably take out a lot of the Muslims in that area. Because they will side with Pakistan and they’ll be considered an internal enemy and then there will be a purge. It will be awful, but we will take control of India at the cost of a few hundred million people” (Holland et al. 2018, 40:13). In another clip from the same interview hosted in a related *New York Times* article, Jorjani stated “It’s going to end with the expulsion of the majority of the migrants. Including citizens who are of Muslim descent, generally speaking. That’s how it’s going to end. It’s going to end with concentration camps and expulsions and war” (Singal 2017). While Anker speaks of felt legitimacy as an overwhelming affect weaponized in support of state expansion in the domestic sphere and militarism abroad, the Alt-Right has weaponized resistance to white genocide in support of collective violence against the evil Other perpetrator.¹⁰

Although it may be easy to theoretically justify hypothetical violence in the future, Alt-Right supporters have also excused or endorsed actual instances of violence, most notably the murder of Heather Heyer. The Unite the Right rally occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11th and 12th,

¹⁰ To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that it is temporally unique in America’s history that nonwhites are framed as a racial Other, as Charles Mills (1997), for example, notes that this has been the case since the construction of race as a social category in the colonial era. I am arguing that Anker’s discursive melodramatic framing is one way to understand the effectiveness of said strategy in the current era.

2017. The stated purpose of the rally was to protest the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee from what was then known as Lee Park in Charlottesville. On August 12th, James Alex Fields Jr. weaponized his 2010 Dodge Challenger by driving through a crowd of counter-protesters, injuring 35 people, and killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer. Unite the Right was primarily organized by Jason Kessler who has spent time writing on *VDARE*, an anti-immigration website which often publishes articles by white nationalists and white supremacists. The rally was attended by numerous individuals and organizations associated with the Alt-Right including but not limited to Richard Spencer and Mike Enoch (both of whom were scheduled as speakers), and activists from the *Daily Stormer*.¹¹

Vincent Law posted on the Alt-Right's website prior to the Unite the Right rally and clarified that the intention of the rally was to resist white genocide. Before the rally, Law asked readers, "will you stand up for your history, your race and your way of life?" (Law 2017). Law wanted Alt-Right supporters to assemble in Charlottesville to "defend White heritage" as the movement left the internet and took to the streets (ibid). The Unite the Right rally was supported and attended by the Alt-Right and was portrayed as defending against white genocide and promoting white people and white culture. Alt-Right supporters, beyond protesting a statue's removal, personified affective fears of white genocide, and endorsed violent resistance against this existential threat.

The pre-rally feelings of existential anxiety, and the need to protect white people and white culture materialized in Charlottesville. Scholars Joe Phillips and Joseph Yi explain that what united the right in Charlottesville was an overarching narrative that I have argued is attached to affective fears of white genocide. Supporters were connected by the belief that "'Non-privileged' whites are victims of

¹¹ Other invited speakers included Alt-Right supporters Augustus Invictus and Christopher Cantwell. Attendees included (but were not limited to) Alt-Right supporter Brad Griffin of *Occidental Dissent*, a coalition of neo-Nazi, neo-fascist, neo-Confederate, and white nationalist organizations known as Nationalist Front, a neo-Nazi organization named Vanguard America which spring from the Alt-Right, and supporters from many affiliated and unaffiliated organizations.

unfair governmental policies such as affirmative action, sanctuary for illegal migrants, and the cultural cleansing of ‘white history’ (e.g., Columbus to Confederacy)” (Phillips & Yi 2018, 222). At the rally, Alt-Right supporters explained that they were “dedicated to the preservation of white heritage and identity” (Phillips & Yi 2018, 223) and this fear of white genocide was explicated by those at the rally who chanted “you will not replace us” and similarly “Jews will not replace us” (Shaohua 2017). Similarly the Alt-Right’s affective existential anxiety can be seen in its appropriation of Black Lives Matter’s namesake as protesters in Charlottesville chanted “White lives matter” (ibid). The Alt-Right’s appropriation of the idea “white lives matter” is a public assertion that the lives of white people have value and should be treated appropriately. These slogans express the affect of racialized existential anxiety, and the overwhelming fear of white genocide led Alt-Right supporters to excuse or even defend the murder of a white woman in the name of the future freedom of the white race.

In the wake of Heather Heyer’s murder, Richard Spencer classified the Alt-Right as non-violent but refused to condemn James Alex Fields Jr. in Heyer’s murder (R Gray 2017). Unite the Right, Spencer said was “really beautiful” and he blamed Charlottesville’s mayor, and the governor of Virginia for not appropriately policing the rally (ibid). Greg Johnson was similarly dismissive and said, “I think what’s happened at Charlottesville is more of an opportunity than a crisis” (Holland et al. 2018, 48:27). Even more harshly, posts on the *Daily Stormer* championed the death of Heyer as one poster stated that “Most people ... are glad she is dead, as she is the definition of uselessness. A 32-year-old woman without children is a burden on society and has no value” (Duff 2018, 18). Jason Kessler, Unite the Right’s primary organizer, posted on Twitter that “Heather Heyer was a fat, disgusting Communist. Communists have killed 94 million. Looks like it was payback time” (Pearce 2017). While some within the Alt-Right have since condemned the attack, there were clearly Alt-Right supporters who felt that the death of the opposition – even when the opposition was white – was acceptable for the advancement of their political *telos*; the procurement of racially homogeneous ethnostates.

One may reasonably challenge my argument that existential anxiety regarding white genocide has the capacity to overwhelm what Anker identifies as neoliberal forms of vulnerability; is this affective existential anxiety sufficiently overwhelming enough to replace neoliberal qualms, and to lead Alt-Right supporters to endorse violence and murder? Terror Management Theory (TMT) suggests that yes, existential anxiety can be a significant enough feeling to lead some people to embrace radical political positions, and even support for organizations including Al Qaeda (McBride 2011). If this is the case, then the existential anxiety surrounding white genocide can help explain the Alt-Right's justification of Heyer's death as a necessary action.

TMT is based on the work of anthropologist Ernest Becker, whose work centered on death, and human responses to mortality or finitude. TMT is couched in the notion that humans have a natural instinct for self-preservation, and therefore if their mortality is threatened, humans may respond with defensive mechanisms including "worldview defense, self-esteem striving, and suppression of death thoughts" (Niemiec et al. 2010, 344). With respect to the Alt-Right – which claims to be working towards preserving purportedly vulnerable white people suffering from a supposed white genocide – scholars have repeatedly shown that "after reminders of mortality, people show greater investment in and support for groups to which they belong" (Greenberg et al. 2001, 113). Furthermore, as psychologists Eva Jones and Immo Fritsche explain, "In the context of existentially threatening conflict" a category to which white genocide belongs, "hostile stereotypes of adversary groups may be sustained or even become stronger" (2013, 545). White Americans, specifically, have been shown to "become attracted to White supremacist beliefs and organizations to serve terror management needs" (Greenberg et al. 2001, 128). Mortality salience, "the degree to which an individual is aware of his mortality" (McBride 2011, 563) is correlated with ideological defensiveness, and exposing white individuals to the term "white genocide" can heighten the salience of mortality, increase hostility towards outgroups (nonwhite

Others) and thus increase the likelihood of a defensive response.¹² The use of the emotionally provocative term “genocide” may be intended for such strategic purposes.

Michael Walzer, who considers military intervention during only the most egregious of offenses, leaves room for “dirty hands” during times of supreme emergency. The determination of supreme emergency is, in Walzer’s latter works, akin to genocide (physical and, to an extent, cultural), as he states, “A supreme emergency exists when our deepest values and our collective survival are in imminent danger” (2004, 33). Only under these circumstances can typical moral considerations with respect to interventionist violence be temporarily set aside. While I am not suggesting that the Alt-Right utilizes (or necessarily is aware of) Walzer’s argument, the choice of the word “genocide” may be intentional as it helps to raise levels of mortality salience among sympathizers, and may lead supporters to thus endorse even otherwise unacceptably violent means for immediate racial self-defense. Because the Alt-Right frames its cause as a response to ongoing white *genocide*, a supporter may infer that the killing of ideologically opposed civilians, such as Heather Heyer, is a justifiable form of resistance.

The Alt-Right has affectively displaced everyday social, cultural, economic, and political concerns with the more overwhelming notion of white genocide. TMT suggests that some people, when exposed to existential catalysis, clutch more tightly to their preexisting beliefs and ingroup identities. More specifically, research has shown that some white Americans take these defense mechanisms to the extreme and endorse white supremacist beliefs and organizations. While I have been careful to define the Alt-Right as white nationalist, and not necessarily white supremacist, suggesting that this

¹² This may be especially true for those who already believe in, or are ideologically attached to notions such as “reverse racism” which has become prevalent among white Americans. Scholars Michael Norton and Samuel Sommers (2011) in their article “Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing” find that white Americans believe that anti-white bias is more prevalent than anti-Black bias in the United States. White Americans think that more progress has been made towards racial equality than Black Americans and white Americans also believe that as Black people have made gains, white people have been caused to suffer losses.

aforementioned phenomenon can lead white people to sympathize with the Alt-Right is in line with existing research. The Alt-Right has utilized the language of white genocide as a means of affectively displacing everyday oppression, and has framed its cause in melodramatic terms as a movement of innocent white people fighting against an evil Other committing the highest of existential crimes; racial genocide. Within the context of this supreme emergency, resistance may require actions that could otherwise be viewed as morally impermissible – such as violence and murder – but they are necessary tactics to securing a future freedom from oppression through the permanent removal of the Other from society.

Alt-Right Melodrama and The Permanence of Violence

The Alt-Right, as a white nationalist movement, supports rigid ethnostate borders that function as impenetrable walls of racial separation and enclaving. While Achille Mbembe is responding to the literal construction of concrete border walls, wire fences, and other security structures, his argument resonates in explaining the Alt-Right's racio-political project of separation. He states that,

A separation wall is supposed to resolve a problem of excess of presence, the very presence that some see as the origin of situations of unbearable suffering. To regain the feeling of existing henceforth depends on breaking with that excess presence whose absence (or indeed disappearance pure and simple) will be no means felt as a loss. This also means accepting that there is nothing common to be shared between us and them. The anxiety of annihilation thus goes to the core of contemporary projects of separation. (2019, 43)

The Alt-Right views race as a scientific fact and there is thus “nothing common” between racial groups. The white race is portrayed as suffering from genocide (“annihilation”) and its immediate affects

("anxiety"), and the Alt-Right defends its political project (racially homogeneous ethnostates) as the only means of securing the race's future existence. This project requires the elimination of all Others who, by existing within state bounds, create the condition of "unbearable suffering" through demographic and cultural displacement. Racially homogeneous ethnostates would, by definition, create the protective borders that keep the "excess presence" of the Other out of the nation-state.

Mbembe likewise helps to explain the Alt-Right's justification of violence as he states,

Short of being able to stop it or destroy our enemies, it will, it is argued, ineluctably lead to the death of the ideas that we, not so long ago, held to be sacrosanct. Because we are in the precise position of being a victim to an external attack, it is within our rights to retaliate, especially as such retaliation is simply, when all is said and done, an honorable form of legitimate defense. (2019, 31).

Although Mbembe is primarily discussing international political violence and political struggles, his analysis is again applicable to the Alt-Right, and consistent with Anker's melodramatic lens. Movement supporters argue that, absent the full removal of the evil, enemy Other, the white race will remain threatened by and susceptible to racial genocide. Given that white people are, within this frame, innocent victims (potential or actual), any tactics – regardless of the degree of violence or murder they involve – are justified in defending vulnerable members of the race from genocidal extermination; the highest of crimes.

Anker explains that when federal political expansion and international war are legitimated through orgiastic feelings, the results may "deepen the conditions of unfreedom that they are deployed to resist" (2014, 19). Americans' banal, neoliberal "unfreedoms" were affectively displaced with the melodramatic discourse on terrorism. In turn, many Americans endorsed "war, surveillance, occupation,

the truncation of civil liberties, the criminalization of dissent, the militarization of domestic politics, and the heightened levels of individual regulation” (ibid) as the means to procure a future freedom from the evil, terroristic Other. The Alt-Right similarly faces a paradoxical dilemma wherein everyday unfreedoms are displaced by affective white genocide, which in turn legitimates ceaseless violence as the means to precuring a future freedom from the evil, genocidal Other.

The Alt-Right’s view of HBD is in direct contrast to contemporary biological and physiological understandings of race. While scientists denounce biological race as a folk concept, the Alt-Right is opposed to scientific consensus (Smedley and Smedley 2005, Omi and Winant 2015, Hawley 2017). Nevertheless, the “Jewish Question” is a point of contention within the Alt-Right which highlights the difficulty the movement has in defining race and policing racial bounds. Political scientist Phillip Gray notes this internal disagreement in his study of the Alt-Right by stating that the movement is unclear on if “Jews are viewed as an intentional, collective racial enemy” (2018, 144). As such, the Alt-Right is divided on whether Jews can assimilate into white societies or whether Jews ought to face expulsion or even execution. Jared Taylor, for example, is less overtly anti-Semitic than many of his Alt-Right peers, and he believes that European Jews can possibly assimilate into white, American society (P Gray 2018).

Greg Johnson has conversely expressed blatantly anti-Semitic views. As previously noted, Patrick Hermansson, in an undercover meeting with Greg Johnson, filmed Johnson explaining his belief that Jews ought to be expelled from the United States and sent to their ethnostate; Israel (Holland et al. 2018, 31:20). Richard Spencer¹³ voiced similar views to Greg Johnson in declaring his support for Israel as a Jewish ethnostate (Sommer 2017). Andrew Anglin, as previously noted, believes that Jews are biologically and socio-politically distinct from the white race and cannot coexist within the same nation-state as white people (Anglin 2016). As the aforementioned perspectives on the Jewish Question

¹³ While Johnson and Spencer largely detest one another, they agree on a solution to the “Jewish Question.”

highlights, the Alt-Right is internally divided on exactly where the boundaries of whiteness ought to be drawn. Despite internal disagreements, the movement is united in the goal of defining the bounds of whiteness, and in enforcing white, racial purity.

While the Alt-Right desires an all-white ethnostate, determining who is and is not acceptably white will be, due to the amorphous and socially constructed nature of races, literally impossible. As such, deciding who is appropriately fit to live within the confines of their theoretically racially homogeneous ethnostate would be equally problematic. Yet the tranquility of the theoretical state would be threatened by anything less than racial purity because, as we have already seen, those who demographically displace white people are viewed as an evil Other perpetuating white genocide. Lastly, those who participate in white genocide must be removed and eliminated, by force if necessary. Violence and murder of racially codified white people has even been deemed justifiable by the Alt-Right if the white victim is a member of the ideological, rather than racial opposition. Without any actual biological or physiological indicators of race – and ideologically irrespective of their existence – everyone can be viewed with suspicion, anyone can be depicted as a racial or even ideological Other threatening white genocide, and thus all individuals may be subjected to state violence, *within the Alt-Right's theoretically racially homogeneous ethnostate*.

Political theorist Ronald Beiner argues that the contemporary, global far-right has been intellectually influenced by two existentialists, namely Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Beiner details that both Nietzsche and Heidegger traffic in an existential response to a situation akin to what Émile Durkheim calls anomie; modernity's rejection or destruction of once cherished socioethical standards and objectives. Although the future Alt-Right state may not be wholly theorized in its shape or institutional substance, Richard Spencer and Greg Johnson respectively believe in a form of autocratic

rule as both are influenced by their respective far-right interpretations of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Thus it would plausibly be Spencer or Johnson reigning as the chief executive; an Alt-Right Führer.

For Nietzsche, the aimlessness, or “horizonlessness” of modernity caused life to become purposeless. In turn, Nietzsche rejected the emptiness of modernity and embraced a pre-modern culture, including a hierarchical sociopolitics rooted in “rank order, slavery and oppression” (Beiner 2018, 45). Rejecting Christian egalitarianism and returning to a caste-based aristocracy was, for Nietzsche, the solution to the banality of modern life. Heidegger was similarly responding to the existential homelessness, or the “limitless alienation” of modernity (Beiner 2018, 100). He presents a standard for judging human civilizations which amounts to determining “to what extent those cultures or civilizations measure up to the question of Being, the question of what it means to be—not ‘what does it mean for you or me to be?’ but ‘what does it mean for beings or entities in general to be?’” (Beiner 2018, 71). Heidegger preferences the culture and civilization that he believes was closest to recapturing the pre-modern philosophical fascination with being, which was Nazi Germany. For Heidegger, modernity’s vapid egalitarianism could only be replaced by a non-nationalistic form of the Volk that could serve as an adequate replacement for Dasein.¹⁴ In all, Beiner argues that “Nietzsche, no less than Heidegger, hates modernity and wants to see it disappear” (2018, 115). Beiner is correct as key Alt-Right thinkers embrace these far-right interpretations of Nietzsche and Heidegger. In turn, one can safely assume that Spencer and Johnson may envision themselves as the future rulers of their idealized racially pure ethnostate.

Richard Spencer has cited Nietzsche’s critique of Christian egalitarianism as being particularly important in developing his belief system (Hawley 2017). In an interview with Graeme Wood of The

¹⁴ Non-nationalistic because Beinger interprets Heidegger’s Volk as “more heroic” if it expands beyond the bounds of any singular nation, including Germany (2018, 96).

Atlantic (once Spencer's high-school classmate) Spencer noted that he was "red-pilled by Nietzsche" (Wood 2017).¹⁵ Even more directly, Greg Johnson reviewed Beiner's book and explained that the work is valuable to anyone who "wants to understand why Nietzsche and Heidegger are so useful to the New Right" (2018). Given Spencer's and Johnson's respective far-right readings of Nietzsche and Heidegger, they may envision themselves as the leaders of the new Volk, or the heads of a new, white aristocracy who will determine the human content of their proposed all-white ethnostate.

Ironically for movement supporters, endorsing the Alt-Right's melodramatic discourse leads not to a freedom from everyday forms of subjugation or unfreedom, nor from a freedom from purportedly white genocidal policies and tactics. Instead, on its own terms, the Alt-Right's racio-political project justifies and democratizes state biopolitical surveillance for the purpose of policing racialized bodies so that only "purely" white people are found living within national borders. The racio-political project also justifies state terror by means of expulsion, violence or murder on suspicion of non-white (or anti-white) racial impurity. For Anker, American participation in the discursive melodrama of terrorism legitimated and reinforced, rather than addressed, neoliberal unfreedoms. For the Alt-Right, participation in the discursive melodrama of white genocide likewise legitimates and reinforces permanent state surveillance at the hands of an autocratic leader, and condones violence – even towards white people – so that "white genocide" may never again threaten the white population.

¹⁵ To be "red-pilled" is to be awoken to the purported reality of Alt-Right thinking. The term is lifted from the movie *The Matrix* wherein the protagonist, Neo, is given the opportunity to take a blue pill and return to his illusory fantasy life, or a red pill that will awaken him into reality.

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