

**PROUD BOYS  
AND THE WHITE  
ETHNOSTATE**

**HOW THE ALT-RIGHT  
IS WARPING THE  
AMERICAN IMAGINATION**

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Alt-right women are traversing a tightrope, and they seem to believe it's a sturdy one gripped firmly by their white male heroes. Yet the experiences of women like Faucheux, who unwittingly left social media under clouded circumstances and now, only with the protection of a wedding ring, can plot her return, reveals the precariousness of this balancing act. Nevertheless, any examination of the alt-right must explore the networked and affective domains of white nationalist women. As wobbly as their position may be, they inarguably are one of the movement's greatest assets.

CHAPTER 6  
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## NORMALIZING NATIONALISM

*Alt-Right Creep*

In the late 2010s, the alt-right's mantra is normalization. The movement strives to earn a badge of respectability, an effort that has been redoubled by the perceived need to carve out distance from the “bad optics” associated with Charlottesville.<sup>1</sup> The more restrained alt-righters know that they cannot grow the movement without an image makeover. These days the alt-right fathers try with exasperation to rein in their hormonally driven angry sons, who breathe energy into the movement but also end up setting things ablaze and shitting with such exaggeration that they threaten to sink the entire ship. The benevolent patriarchs would prefer that less airtime was granted to race baiters like Christopher Cantwell, who was arrested for three felony assaults at the 2017 Unite the Right rally and hosts the rabid *Radical Agenda*, and more attention paid to suit-and-tie spokesmen and well-groomed foot soldiers. Such upstanding white nationalists carry a big alt-right stick, but they do not shout, salute, or scuffle. Yet it is nearly impossible to enforce the boundaries between neo-Nazism and the alt-right when they coexist in a Venn diagram of overlapping individuals and groups that are hyperlinked online, and when white power references brim under the surface.

This concerted push to rebrand brings to mind white nationalists in the early 2000s who realized that hoods and swastikas were alienating

rather than attracting potential followers. Stormfront, for instance, the oldest white supremacist website and message board, was founded in 1995 by former Ku Klux Klan leader Don Black, who foresaw the potential of the internet as a vehicle to disseminate racism.<sup>3</sup> Cognizant of the Rights major image problem, due in part to the insights of his son, Derek, who later disavowed white nationalism, in 2008 Black prohibited the swastika and Klan symbols from the website. His mentor and collaborator David Duke endorsed this removal as “a no brainer to me. Avatars that promote or satirize lynchings or mass murder, or that promote NS [National Socialist] or Klan symbology, only get in the way of our most fundamental task: the task of awakening, educating, motivating and organizing our people around the world.”<sup>4</sup> Duke, once a KKK Grand Wizard and an unwavering headline presence in white nationalism since the 1970s, recognized, if only for public relations reasons, the strategic importance of redesigning the face and symbols of the movement in the twenty-first century.

This defanging helped propel the migration of white power icons to multiplying online spaces such as 4chan (/pol/), 8chan, Reddit (r/...TheDonald), and, most recently, Gab and BitChute, where they have proliferated with abandon.<sup>5</sup> Five minutes of lurking in these virtual communities yields a panoply of symbols and references, to iron crosses, black suns, ancient runes, numerals such as eighty-eight for “Heil Hitler” (H is the eighth letter of alphabet) and fourteen for the adage coined by the Order’s David Lane (“we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”), as well as invocations of the Kali Yuga and the Golden Age. These anonymous realms are inhabited by racist agitators, avatars, and aliases, and contain digital chasms drenched in blood-curdling ripples and depraved cartoon depictions of the death and dismemberment of Jews, blacks, immigrants, and women.

Today the alt-right is a movement with one foot planted in recalcitrant white supremacy and neo-Nazism, and the other foot walking in step with ethnonationalism, identitarianism, and “white identity politics.” Although the former incarnation is far from defunct and carries a transgressive charge that some alt-righters find irresistible, many of the new disciples of white nationalism consider it a relic of the twentieth century. Gone are the days of insular organizations like the KKK or Aryan Nations, the latter of which holed up in compounds in remote regions of the West with big caches of guns and ammunition, waiting for raids and

raiture.<sup>6</sup> As the Southern Poverty Law Center commented in its review of hate and extremism in 2017, “It’s clear that the new generation of white supremacists is rejecting the hooded movement that was founded after the Civil War.”<sup>7</sup>

The alt-right is more international, suited-up, and image conscious than its predecessors. It strives to fine-tune its skills of dissimulation and its techniques for winning over “normies” and infiltrating mainstream institutions. Contemporary admonitions are “Don’t carry a Nazi flag” and “Care about how you look.”<sup>8</sup> Selling the brand is at the top of the agenda. At the second Scandza Forum in Stockholm, Sweden, in spring 2018, white nationalist torchbearers Jared Taylor, Greg Johnson, and Patrick Casey all addressed in some way how the movement should employ advertising techniques for the purposes of product persuasion and marketing.<sup>9</sup> Many alt-righters sneer, if hypocritically, at the tattooed rabble-rousers who take to the streets to confront protestors or carry out acts of carnage like the massacre of eleven Jewish parishioners at the Temple of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh in fall 2018. These kinds of actors are lampooned as cosplayers, LARPer, and trigger-ready maniacs who defame the movement and do “nothing to advance our cause and much to set us back.”<sup>10</sup>

One comment posted to a July 2018 Identity Europa podcast talking stock of the alt-right captured this attitude: “We need to, with our actions, show the people around us that we are not ‘Nazis’ running around with baseball bats and being thugs. We are not thugs, we are gentlemen and honorable people.”<sup>11</sup> As James Allsup, a leader in Students for Trump during the 2016 election who affiliates with the alt-right, explains, it is a serious detriment if “the public face of identitarianism is a slack-jawed obese guy, you know, throwing up Roman salutes in a strahlhelm.” More than ever, alt-righters want to prove that they “are not the caricature the media puts out there” but rather “are normal young men and women who want to raise our kids in a nation that looks more like the nation our parents and grandparents grew up in.”<sup>12</sup>

The push to normalize nationalism is plainly visible at in-person alt-right gatherings. In Tennessee in spring 2018, tucked away from media intrusion by the likes of *Huffington Post*, which requested but was denied access, American Renaissance held its sixteenth annual meeting with the theme “Courage and Perseverance.” The program included eight speakers and reports from the leaders of Identity Europa, Counter-Currents’,

publishing arm, the anti-immigrant VDARE, and *Occidental Quarterly*, run by the anti-Semite Kevin MacDonald.<sup>13</sup> About two hundred fifty people listened to a standard fare of talks on the menace of Muslim immigration in Europe, the ostensible plight of Boers/whites in South Africa, and the biological basis for racial differences in IQ and other human traits. In addition, much due was paid to rising identitarian movements in Europe. There was consensus that the alt-right is at a crossroads of countervailing forces, disseminating a message that they believe will resonate with an increasing number of white people, while fighting against the headwinds of media censure and deplatforming: “More people than ever are joining our cause, and science reveals new findings that support us almost every week. Across the West, there is a palpable sense of white people awakening to their identity and destiny. At the same time, we face unprecedented repression.”<sup>14</sup>

The trend of “normalizing nationalism” is exemplified by Identity Evropa (recently rebranded the American Identity Movement), an explicitly identitarian group whose mission as an expressed “non-violent organization” is “to create a better world for people of European heritage—particularly in America—by peacefully effecting cultural change.”<sup>15</sup> Sporting a scrubbed, well-dressed image that favors preppy clothing, Identity Evropa appeals to millennials and Generation Z, who hit the ground for guerrilla theater and flash mobs, although it claims a generational range extending to middle-aged members. Its recruits are expected to join community action projects like cleaning up debris at local parks and donation drives for the Purple Heart Foundation. Identity Evropa is the cutting edge of the alt-right, refashioning European-style ethnonationalism for the American context. This group has seen significant growth, from a single founding chapter in 2017 to fifteen chapters and counting as of fall 2018.<sup>16</sup>

More specifically, Identity Evropa embodies the transition from the twentieth-century white power movement to the twenty-first-century alt-right. In order to keep out the LARPerS and ruffians, its application requires verification that, in addition to being of European descent, its members have no felonies and bear no tattoos.<sup>17</sup> IE spokesmen like to describe their organization as packed with “high agency men” and “carefully selected high quality people.” On a segment of the *Identitarian Action* podcast focused on anti-immigration activism on the San Diego-Tijuana border, the conversation veered several times into the centrality of fitness

and bodybuilding. Participants agreed that IE members must stay in tip-top shape by exercising—preferably weight training and martial arts—because in their organization, “there shouldn’t be anyone who is obese. There shouldn’t be anyone who is out of shape.”<sup>18</sup>

Reflecting the alt-right’s fixation on fitness, the Golden One (aka Marcus Follin), a Swedish bodybuilder who maintains a popular YouTube site, was an invited speaker at the American Renaissance meeting. Cultivating an image of himself as a blond-haired and blue-eyed Thor ready for a World Wide Wrestling match, the Golden One flexed his biceps and stressed physique and self-care. His YouTube channel, started in 2012, features workout routines, often performed in natural settings and against backdrops that evoke Nordic mythology.<sup>19</sup> The Golden One implored men to adhere to a regimented lifestyle and shared his eight rules for self-regulation, the first two of which are “We should always dress well, appropriately to the occasion,” and “We should be fit and pursue the ideal of a healthy mind in a healthy body.”<sup>20</sup> Following these regimens will help mainstream “the radical notion that it’s OK to be white, the radical notion that we don’t want to be replaced in our own nations.”<sup>21</sup>

All the speakers at the flagship alt-right meetings in 2018 were men. Despite homage paid to wholesome white families and communities, the drive toward normalization is utterly male-centric. The number of female attendees at alt-right meetings is exceedingly low. A photograph taken at the Identity Evropa conference, for instance shows only two women among the seventy attendees.<sup>22</sup> If the alt-right is consistently anything, it is a white fraternity in which men perform for other men, and the expectation is that women will stay on the margins, serve as helpmates, or, if they are vocal, remain on script online endorsing traditionalism and patriarchal arrangements.

Recent developments have rearranged the cast of the alt-right, particularly with regard to figurehead Richard Spencer. Media coverage gives the impression that Spencer remains the de facto leader of the alt-right. However, his star has faded among alt-righters considerably. Spencer is dismissed, even considered radioactive, viewed as a blowhard who has sided up to déclassé agitators and made tactical errors. For example, Greg Johnson (who, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, is known for cantankerous squabbling) criticized Spencer in 2014 for stubbornly holding a conference in Budapest, even after the government stated it

would cancel the event and arrest participants. Johnson did not participate, and Spencer was imprisoned for a short while in Hungary.<sup>22</sup> RamZPaul, who hosts the weekly YouTube show *Happy Homelands*, rebuked Spencer for Haligate and for aligning with the Daily Stormer, the website run by Andrew Anglin, one of the most active purveyors of neo-Nazism online: “I warned Richard about the dangers of associating with these Hollywood Nazis privately and in a video response to him. But he insisted on doing a podcast with Anglin the week after Heligate.”<sup>23</sup> Spencer has taken the most heat for co-organizing the 2017 Charlottesville rally, which Paul Kersey, the Yogi Berra of white nationalists, knew was doomed from the beginning. The event was premature and badly planned, said Kersey: “The great travesty of Charlottesville was the iconography that was used to promote the event, and a lot of the flyers that came out. There was no coherent message.”<sup>24</sup>

Spencer’s ventures, such as Altright.com, *Radix Journal*, and the National Policy Institute, have seen little activity since 2017. From breakout status as the alt-right emperor in the early 2010s, Spencer has become something of a pariah on the sidelines, banned from twenty-six European countries. In summer 2018 he was remanded from Iceland back to the United States en route to a conference in Poland.<sup>25</sup> Although Spencer counts a respectable 78,000 followers on Twitter and occasionally appears on alt-right YouTube livestreams, he is more character actor than leading man. There are figures, like the Americans RamZPaul (Paul Ramsey) and Nick Fuentes, the British Mark Collett, the Scottish Millennial Woes (Colin Robertson), the Swedish Henrik Palmgren, and the French Canadian J. P. Gariépy, who are more involved in blogging, vlogging, hosting shows, and speaking at alt-right gatherings. Spencer is given his due as a foundational figure and continues to be admired by some but is repeatedly criticized as narcissistic or off point in online comments on Twitter, Facebook, Gab, and other fora.

The void left by the sunset of Spencer, against the backdrop of continued post-Charlottesville regrouping, has prompted some critics to suggest that the alt-right has peaked.<sup>26</sup> It would be more accurate to say that the alt-right has gone full circle, back to where it was in 2015, before the boom of 2016, the bust of 2017, and the triage of 2018. Nevertheless, over this period, the alt-right has expanded horizontally, shored up

publicly by social media networking and behind the scenes by private chat platforms such as Discord and secret Facebook groups.

Paradoxically, shock-and-awe news reporting that confates neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and the alt-right has worked to infuse alt-right messages and vocabulary into the mainstream.<sup>27</sup> Many alt-righters are more optimistic than ever. Kersey thinks their “nameless movement” can capitalize on current political “disharmony,” and Casey asserts that “things are moving in the right direction.”<sup>28</sup> Taylor, who traveled to Poland, France, and the Netherlands after the Scandza Forum in fall 2018 to give a series of lectures, reported that his trip was “tongue invigorating” because he was met by adulating crowds of “young, attractive, accomplished, well-informed people who see the world identically.” He claims that twenty years earlier a similar trip would have involved giving speeches to rooms of listless “geezers.” Now Taylor finds in these European countries young people who are “fully racially wide awake.”<sup>29</sup> Johnson was giddy about Unite the Right 2, declaring it “good for white identity politics.” In part he was relieved that the “marchers were peaceful and mostly presentable,” conferring respectability to the movement. On *This Week on The Alt-Right* in early 2019, Mike Enoch, who runs the white nationalist website The Right Stuff, which is home to the podcast *The Daily Shoah*, enthusiastically described 2018 as a great year because “so many babies were born” and alt-right in-person communities grew by leaps and bounds.<sup>30</sup> Even if Alt-Right 1.0 is dead, there is great hope for Alt-Right 2.0, as long as it doesn’t jump the neo-Nazi shark.<sup>31</sup>

#### CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY

As the alt-right continues to strive toward normalization with the end goal of conducting a “mass seduction of society,” there are several political and demographic trends in American society that suggest the future is conducive to alt-right creep.<sup>32</sup> It is reassuring to learn that the portion of the American population estimated as alt-right is very small. According to researcher George Hawley, who wrote the book *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* and has mined survey data to produce some of the only demographic analysis of the alt-right, 6 percent, or eleven million, of the two hundred million whites in America have beliefs that would classify them as white

nationalists.<sup>33</sup> Extracting data from 3,083 non-Hispanic whites sampled in the 2016 American National Election Survey (ANES), Hawley identified three questions that could be correlated with alt-right sympathy: 1) a strong sense of white identity; 2) a belief in white solidarity; and 3) a feeling of white victimization. To be placed in the alt-right camp, respondents needed to indicate that these three beliefs were “very” or “extremely” important to them, criteria that produced a convergence of 6 percent.

Although it is prudent to set a stringent bar to qualify as alt-right or white nationalist, it is eye-opening that significantly higher percentages of the sample agreed with at least one of the three statements, with 27 percent expressing feelings of white victimization, 28 percent of white identity, and 38 percent of white solidarity. The strongest correlations with alt-right sentiments were among people with low-income levels (\$29,000 or less annually), no college degree, and who were divorced. Respondents over sixty-five years of age were the most likely to take alt-right ideas to heart. White women were slightly more likely than white men to identify with these beliefs, underscoring the appeal of conceptions of heritage, ancestry, and racial preservation to white women and the prospect of more female converts.<sup>34</sup>

A 2017 Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted in conjunction with the University of Virginia Center for Politics found similar patterns.<sup>35</sup> This survey included a sample of 5,360 adults of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, including 2,255 Democrats, 1,915 Republicans, and 689 independents. Only 6 percent said they supported the alt-right, and even fewer, 4 percent, endorsed neo-Nazis, compared with 32 percent support for Black Lives Matter. Nevertheless, 31 percent agreed with the statement that “America must protect and preserve its White European heritage.” A larger percentage, 59 percent, concurred that “political correctness” jeopardizes Americans’ freedom to “speak our minds.” Survey results reveal awareness of persistent racism and solid backing for racial equality, with 82 percent believing that all races are equal and 55 percent that racial minorities are under attack in the United States. However, a noticeable 39 percent believe that “white people are currently under attack in this country,” with 21 percent of Democrats in agreement compared to 63 percent of Republicans.<sup>36</sup>

Beyond looking at beliefs about white victimization or threatened European heritage that might resonate with the alt-right, there are overarch-

ing attitudinal trends that indicate openness to authoritarian and populist politics. Recent political opinion surveys in the United States and several European countries have found that younger people are not sanguine about or even particularly invested in democracy as a political system. They are more likely to gravitate toward either the left or right side of the political spectrum than the center, and, troublingly, “almost half of millennials [have] expressed approval for a ‘strong leader.’”<sup>37</sup> Memories of World War II and the Holocaust, which set the stage for the post-war global order of human rights, are fading as the “greatest generation” dies.<sup>38</sup> Countries such as Hungary and Poland have enshrined ethnonationalism as the foremost principle for nationhood, forging more space in Europe for the acceptance of anti-immigration policies and xenophobic political parties.

In a related vein, political scientists have analyzed data tracking associations between perceived normative threats and authoritarianism in Europe, and conclude that the seeds of illiberalism and anti-democratic populism are encased in “advanced liberal democracies.” In short, democracy is not a bulwark against authoritarianism, which can manifest when circumstances allow: “there is remarkably little evidence that living in a liberal democracy generally makes people more democratic and tolerant.”<sup>39</sup> Political psychologist Karen Stenner suggests that authoritarianism is driven less by an “aversion to change but by an aversion to complexity,” a disposition that raises formidable questions about how American democracy will weather growing multiculturalism in the coming decades.<sup>40</sup> Geopolitically, developments around the world, including the rise of autocratic leaders and support among younger generations for military-style governments, suggest that “the long century during which Western liberal democracies dominated the globe has ended for good.”<sup>41</sup> Populism does not intrinsically lean to the right, nor precipitate fascism, but the variants of national populism taking hold in the United States and Europe are animated by a toxic combination of xenophobia and a potent sense of dispossession among whites. This solidifying wave of national populism, characterized by a deep distrust of liberalism and political insiders and by existential concerns about demographic change, reflects, according to scholars Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, not the “last howl of rage” from old white men soon to be replaced by tolerant Millennials<sup>42</sup> but rather a “new era of political fragmentation, volatility, and disruption.”<sup>43</sup>

Compounding these unnering trends is intensifying partisan polarization in the United States, which is linked first and foremost to divergence between Republican and Democratic voters when it comes to racial make-up and racial attitudes. This trend, which started in the 1970s, reached an all-time high in the 2016 election and shows no sign of abating. Over the past fifty years, the Republican electorate has become whiter and more conservative; its Democratic counterpart has become multiracial. For instance, from 1976 to 2012, as America's diversity increased, nonwhite Republican voters participating in presidential elections rose slightly from 4 percent to 10 percent. In comparison, nonwhite Democratic voters shot up from 15 percent to 45 percent over the same period.<sup>48</sup>

Conventional wisdom has suggested that economic resentment breeds racial discrimination, and that can explain voters who opposed Obama in the 2008 and 2012 elections, and backed Trump in the last presidential election. However, Alan Abramowitz, author of *The Great Realignment: Race, Party Transformation, and the Rise of Donald Trump*, concludes that the reverse is true. Racial division is the principal explanation for the widening ideological, regional, and demographic crevasse between Democrats and Republicans, propelled by ratcheting racial resentment among Republican voters. According to Abramowitz, "The key to Trump's success in the 2016 Republican primaries was the dramatic increase in racial resentment among GOP voters between the 1980s and 2010s that created a receptive audience for his racist appeals."<sup>44</sup> The sociologist Arlie Hochschild witnessed these sentiments firsthand when conducting her ethnographic study of the everyday experiences, emotional outlooks, and political affiliations of poor whites in rural Louisiana, who were attracted to Trump as the "identity politics candidate for white men."<sup>45</sup>

An integral and troublesome dimension of this racism is the animus of whites against Latina/os, the country's largest ethnic group. Indeed, the noticeable shift of whites from the Democratic to the Republican Party over the past several decades is correlated with proliferating negative stereotypes of Latina/os: "There is an ongoing and often-repeated threat narrative that links the United States' immigrant and Latino populations to a host of pernicious fiscal, social, and cultural consequences."<sup>46</sup> Trump has taken this anti-Latina/o sentiment to unprecedented heights, enacting a "zero tolerance" policy on the US-Mexico border that has separated parents and children and circumscribed criteria for asylum,

and called for an end to due process for border crossers, a right secured by the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>47</sup> In the 2016 election, Republican voters, the vast majority of whom are white, were particularly swayed by Trump's "calls for deportation of undocumented immigrants and a ban on Muslim immigration, along with his proposal to build a wall along the Mexican border."<sup>48</sup> This dynamic is illustrated by a Pew Research poll that found that though Democrats opposed the border wall by an 84 percent margin, Republicans supported it by 63 percent.<sup>49</sup> Anti-Latina/o and anti-immigrant racism is transposed to Muslims, and has analogues throughout Europe, where right-wing parties have surged in the past decade, driven by concerns about "migrant invasions" and the abasement of European culture.<sup>50</sup> Xenophobic parties are winnings seats in Sweden, France, and the Netherlands, and ethnonationalist leaders have been elected in Poland and Italy; this advancing right-wing flank is exerting pressure on Germany and the European Union to shut the gates to migrants and refugees.<sup>51</sup>

The alt-right wants to take advantage of these partisan and racial divides, to locate whites and Republicans who might be receptive to its message and to use political mechanisms, where possible, to expand its reach. Allsup, for example, is less interested in the metapolitical than in crafting political messaging that will get white nationalist results.<sup>52</sup> On one hand, alt-righters want to stealthily detect their brethren by testing the waters among friends and family. One tactic is to dog-whistle issues and drop the names of "our guys" like Ann Coulter, Tucker Carlson, and Steve Sailer in casual conversation and assess reactions. On the other, the alt-right strategy is to build capacity through local politics, joining the PTA or the transportation board, and infusing alt-right values one local institution at a time. As one alt-righter said in an *Identitarian Action* podcast, it is "only a matter of time until the next Flint water crisis," and when it arrives, white nationalists need to be prepared to capitalize on the moment and attain greater visibility and legitimacy.<sup>53</sup>

In the meantime, the alt-right devotes a great deal of its airtime to loudly conveying data drawn from the US Census, which projects that by 2050, if not earlier, the population will transform from majority white to a racial plurality, a realignment already consolidated in California and Texas. Americans who identify as white only (with no Hispanic or multiracial heritage) are having fewer children, and white men, in particular,

are dying at higher rates than previously, a phenomenon that has raised public-health concerns.<sup>54</sup> Armed with this information and relying on the most constricted interpretation of the category “white”—as exclusively non-Hispanic whites—alt-righters view the mid-twenty-first century as the point of no return. Their claims actually have been facilitated by changes to the US Census, which, starting in 2000, adjusted how it counts populations and racial groups and designs its projection series. According to political scientists who have studied political attitudes around census information, “These changes have generated an unintended exaggeration of the pace of future white decline.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, how census projections have been presented and disseminated in recent years has given the impression that “demographic change was accelerating toward the threshold of a majority-minority society.” Notably, if Hispanic, an ethnic category, were conflated with white in racial demographic projections, then whites would remain the majority until 2060. And if whites with any multiracial heritage were included (i.e., white mother and black father), then whites would remain the majority for the foreseeable future.

Based on the most reductionist of demographic projections, alt-righters clang the bell of white extinction: “If present trends are not reversed, whites will disappear as a distinct race.”<sup>56</sup> It is significant that white nationalists are not a minuscule minority when it comes to negative assessments of America’s unfolding demographic transition. A poll conducted by the nonpartisan Public Religion Research Institute found that when asked the broad question “Do you think the likely impact of this coming demographic change will be mostly negative or mostly positive,” the majority of Americans, 64 percent, responded that it would be positive. Yet nearly one-third, 31 percent, indicated they thought it would be deleterious. More striking, while 85 percent of Democrats responded affirmatively to this question, half of Republicans (50 percent) believe that diversity is detrimental.<sup>57</sup> How information about census projections is worded in surveys has an impact on whether whites evince apprehension about demographic changes, including the terminology “majority-minority,” which imparts the idea that whites will fall from demographic grace and become outnumbered by minorities. One study, for example, found that “information about the ‘majority-minority’ racial demographic shift increases whites’ sense that their racial group’s societal status is in jeopardy, which, in turn, leads to greater support for politically conservative parties, policies and

candidates.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, the language of demographic transition—how such projections are phrased—is critical to political discourse, and terms like “majority-minority” are more conducive to the alt-right than ones accentuating ethnoracial plurality.

#### ASSAULTING CIVIC NATIONALISM

One of the most disconcerting facets of the alt-right is how it seeks to undermine civic nationalism in the United States. The line between civic nationalism and ethno- or racial nationalism is being abraded to the point of erasure. Although Democrats and Republicans often take differing positions on a wide range of issues, these frequently are articulated through the frameworks of civic nationalism, which is “premised on an ideological commitment to a common destiny and government through shared civic institutions.”<sup>59</sup> After all, the “Southern strategy” shrewdly employed by politicians such as Richard Nixon repackaged white racism against blacks into a set of coded phrases like “states’ rights” and “law and order” in order to stay grudgingly within, not exceed, the bounds of civic nationalism. The racial meanings of these euphemisms might have been an open secret, but blatant racial nationalism as the primary motor of politics was frowned upon.<sup>60</sup> These days, racial nationalism, which “derives its force from a sense of kinship and a myth of shared ancestry that is thought to predate statehood” has gained substantial traction in America and across the world.<sup>61</sup>

America has always been a racial state, a nation founded on slavery and white supremacy, that only recognized African Americans as citizens in 1868 (“all persons born or naturalized in the United States”) and kept the tenets of the Naturalization Act of 1790, which reserved full-fledged citizenship for “free white persons,” on the books until 1952. Civic principles—as embodied in the US Constitution and milestone legal precedents—have offered tools for people marginalized and relegated to second-class citizenship to fight for their rights and for a more inclusive society, no matter how partial those victories might have been.<sup>62</sup> The boundaries of civic nationalism have been transgressed again and again in American history when racism or xenophobia erupted, for example, with the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act or during the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Nikhil Pan Singh suggests that America has



oscillated rumbustiously between its noble universalizing abstractions and a “persistent regression” to exclusionary white nationalism.<sup>63</sup>

In the current moment, the forces of regression are bracingly strong, and intensifying. According to Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, authors of *How Democracies Die*, Trump, like authoritarian leaders past and present who came to power not through a coup d'état but legally, through the ballot box, is implementing policies and behaving in ways that severely undercut American democracy. Specifically, Trump has met in spades the four warning signs formulated by these two scholars to identify incipient authoritarianism. He has rejected “the democratic rules of the game,” denied “the legitimacy of his opponents,” countenanced or promoted violence, and shown a “willingness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media.”<sup>64</sup> In the current context, cherished principles of rights and liberal subjecthood, codified in the Constitution and in law, are under grave assault.<sup>65</sup> As this ground buckles, the alt-right eagerly eyes and eggs on the eclipse of civic nationalism and its replacement, whether through abrupt or gradual means, with ethnonationalism, culminating in a white “homeland of our own.”<sup>66</sup>

Terminating birtright citizenship, which Trump has proposed doing by fiat in the form of an executive order, epitomizes these trends, as does the policy of “extreme vetting” for potential immigrants and citizens.<sup>67</sup> Yet such exacting scrutiny wins support from both self-identified civic and racial nationalists. In a recent YouTube debate hosted by Allsup, civic nationalists were represented by a member of the fraternal group the Proud Boys and racial nationalists by a host of *The Daily Shout*. Yet rather than displaying disagreement, this debate quickly lapsed into a consensus that “every single person should be vetted to the most extreme standard” and that “mass immigration of any group” should never be permitted.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, British white nationalist Mark Collett was very pleased with Trump’s comments in summer 2018 about immigration changing Europe’s culture for the worse; in a YouTube video montage with voice-over Collett told subscribers, referring to the right-wing British National Party, that Trump’s jeremiad “sounds like a headline from a Nationalist leaflet.”<sup>69</sup> Increasingly, white nationalist anti-immigrant positions are becoming mainstream. Our country has become home to dehumanizing policies and practices that involve the open-ended detention of more than four-teen thousand children in camps at the US-Mexico border, emulating

strategies of racial containment in the proposed white ethnostate, which specifically targets nonwhite children for expulsion.<sup>70</sup> Nastily caricatured as “anchor babies,” children born in the United States to undocumented parents, who received right-wing scrutiny in the past, have become “suspect citizens” seen as diminished and unworthy.<sup>71</sup>

Ethnonationalism is built on “blood and soil” antipathy to the Enlightenment and the worship of an imagined prelapsarian time of tribal solidarity, before the existence of social contracts, citizen subjects, and human rights. As Casey of Identity Europa told the audience at his organization’s inaugural meeting in 2018, identitarianism’s objective is to supplant equality with hierarchy, individualism with duty and responsibility, and progress with what benefits white people.<sup>72</sup> More succinctly, American Thinker, an alt-right avatar, tweeted, “Defeating egalitarianism is the total victory.”<sup>73</sup> Such a transformation entails a repudiation of the foundational tenets of equality, liberty, and justice for all. The alt-right’s screeds against globalism, often grossly anti-Semitic, capture this thirst for archaism, as does its gender politics, which foregrounds patriarchal roles in which men are warriors, protectors, and providers and women are wives, breeders, and nurturers. Nevertheless, the alt-right is not simply on a nostalgia trip about the halcyon days. It expresses great interest in adapting modern technologies, scientific and informatic, into Faye’s “archofuturism,” a term fetishized by many on the alt-right, including Casey, whose blog *Reactionary Futurism* clarifies his view: “I value the past, but I have no desire to try to return to it.”<sup>74</sup>

It should not be forgotten that the alt-right has subcultural appeal because it can tell a tidy and compelling story, in which racial groups are collective actors and the social strife and complexity generated by multiculturalism, feminism, and demographic change can be overwhelmed by *Volk* cohesion and closeness. Some alt-right fantasies about the white ethnostate, for example, disclose a sentimental thirst for connection and community: “There is an intense, uncontrollable longing that marks our daily lives. We know there is something out of place. From the moment we are born, it is there.”<sup>75</sup> This itching for belonging resembles what Michael Ignatieff described in his peregrinations to six regions of the world in the early 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the thawing of the Cold War. In places as distinct as Croatia and Serbia, Quebec and Kurdistan, he chronicled the stirrings of a new brand of ethnic nationalism,

realized most profoundly when it tapped into “full belonging” or “the warm sensation that people understand not merely what you say but what you mean,” which is possible “only when you are among your own people in your native land.”<sup>76</sup> For now the ethnostate is only accessible virtually, through the web and on platforms like Twitter and YouTube. *Counter-Currents* thus likes to talk about developing an expandable and resilient “electronic ethnostate” that can act as a fortress and digital arena from which white nationalists can lob their “missives, arrows, and ravens” as they prepare for an actual homogenous homeland.<sup>77</sup>

As these cravings illustrate, virtual domains allow for mediated, interactive, and shared modalities of connection and identity formation. As is the case with online communities, the alt-right benefits from the “soft, networked structures of feeling” that draw users to internet spaces.<sup>78</sup> The alt-right enjoys and exploits the affective dimensions of the online platforms, which enable the enactment of everyday practices of meaning making, through speech, image, and meme utterances, and through the habituation and repetition that reinforces underlying ideologies and assumptions.<sup>79</sup>

Alongside the alt-right’s noisy vitriol, anger, and mordancy, then, is a complementary if contradictory quest for authenticity, wholeness, and boundedness, which is narrated individualistically through tales of pulling and expressed collectively through parables of metapolitical awakening. Alt-righters want to come home, to the safety and sameness of their tribe. Yet for all its sentimentality, alt-right storytelling is buttressed by a harsh dualistic worldview: order over chaos. Dominance hierarchies rigidly tied to male and female, and all racial groups, imagined as discrete populations, in their separate places. Neatness, order, and control are fascist hallmarks of the alt-right mindset.

In closing, I’d like to bring this analysis back home to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where this project started. Recently Austin, an African American colleague who has been active in antiracist struggles at the University of Michigan campus and nationwide, shared with me a letter, with no return address, that had been surreptitiously left at his apartment complex by someone who managed to enter the locked entry door. Written by “Iron Mitten” (an avatar that combines a neo-Nazi nod to Iron’s relevance in Third Reich iconography with a visual representation of Michigan’s geographic mitten shape), a tweeter who trolled Austin and other colleagues

in 2016 when we spoke out against the plastering of racist flyers on our campus, this three-page letter is a testament to the influence of alt-right thinking on a Michigander. Iron Mitten offered Austin the alt-right version of a backhanded compliment for his antiracist work—“you sincerely care about your people, and that is something I respect”—followed by a litany of white nationalist talking points about the impending demise of white people and the inherent violence of blacks.

Iron Mitten, like other alt-righters discussed in this chapter, is optimistic about the future, stating, “We have slaughtered the sacred cows of the left with memes made of humor and facts,” and emphasizing that more and more “normies” are grasping the truth about biological racial differences and the ramifications of the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Act. He warns Austin, writing, “My views will be normalized and almost mainstream [in] a few short years if Tucker Carlson is any indication, and I suspect you will miss the days when White people had been distracted with individualism.”<sup>80</sup> Iron Mitten states that he wants to write a book about the alt-right, assuring Austin he will have “a spot in the acknowledgments.” A good portion of the letter focuses on the need, due to racial disharmony and differences, to create a black ethnostate: “The most simple and peaceful solution is to choose a black ethnostate: ‘The most the largest Black populations and make them into the Federated Black States of America or something to that effect.’ Although one lone letter, stalkingly delivered to a single person, is not evidence of extensive alt-right creep, this communication captures the ripple effects, and interlocking noxious beliefs, of an avatar with real-life ambitions. This letter contains many of the concepts, ideas, and keywords explored in this book and can serve as an admonition of the pernicious mind-set and emotional valences of white nationalism in the twenty-first century.