

A Haven for Hate:



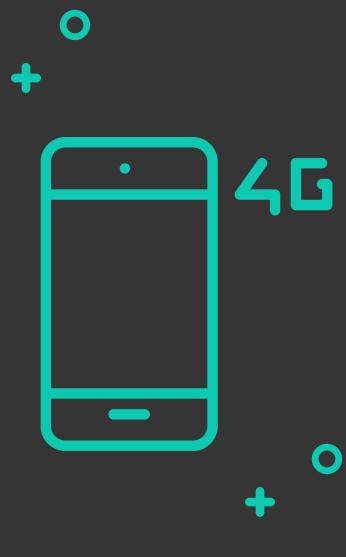
Reading "Twitter & White Supremacy: A Love Story"

By JESSIE DANIELS

OVERVIEW:

Many were shocked when hundreds of white supremacists gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the summer of 2017 to protest the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee. The public display of swastikas, Confederate battle flags, and anti-Muslim banners caught many Americans off guard, but perhaps not as much as President did when he appeared to excuse the racist marchers by saying that there were "very fine people on both sides." Public displays of bigotry began to go out of style in the United States after the civil rights movement. But online, racism and bigotry have flourished in cyberspace.

Jessie Daniels (b. 1961) is Professor of Sociology at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She is a nationally recognized expert on racism and technology. Her publications include *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights* (2009) and *Digital Sociologies* (2016), which she edited with Karen Gregory and Tressie McMillan Cottom. This selection originally appeared in *DAME* magazine.



VOCAB/BUZZWORDS/NOTABLE FIGURES

USE THIS LIST AS YOU READ TO HELP WITH TERMINOLOGY YOU MAY NOT RECOGNIZE

- **Jim Crow:** Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation in the South from the end of the Civil War until the civil rights movement of the 1960s.
- **Arab Spring in 2010:** Refers to a series of peaceful and violent revolutions that spread across North Africa and the Middle East beginning in December 2010.
- **Black Lives Matter/BLM:** An international movement that began following the killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in 2013 and that campaigns against violence, racism, and police brutality directed at African Americans.
- **4chan and Reddit:** Popular anonymous Internet message/image boards that are frequented by alt-right extremists, hackers, and trolls.
- **Pepe the Frog:** Originally appearing in *Boy's Club*, a comic by Matt Furie, Pepe the Frog became a popular racist meme after it was appropriated by the alt-right in 2015. (We'll learn more about Pepe later in the semester in the documentary *Feels Good Man*)
- **Anti-Defamation League:** Also known as the ADL, an international Jewish nongovernmental organization that fights anti-Semitism and bigotry.
- **“normie”:** A derogatory term for a boring “normal” person, originally popularized by trolls and members of Internet subcultures on sites like 4chan and Reddit.
- **Overton window:** Created by conservative activist Joseph P. Overton (1960–2003), a technique for categorizing the public acceptability of an idea along a range of six degrees or levels: Unthinkable, Radical, Acceptable, Sensible, Popular, and Policy.
- **Southern Poverty Law Center:** Also known as the SPLC, an American nonprofit legal advocacy organization supporting civil rights litigation and antiracist research.
- **Richard Spencer:** American white supremacist (b. 1978) who was a featured speaker at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which resulted in the death of one and the injury of nineteen when a white nationalist sympathizer drove his car into a crowd of antiracist counterprotesters.
- **Blue-check-verified account:** On Twitter, a blue checkmark next to an account's name indicates that it is authentic.
- **Milo Yiannopoulos:** Pen name of Milo Hanrahan (b. 1984), a conservative British political commentator and writer who is known for his critiques of feminism, Islam, social justice, and political correctness.
- **Breitbart:** Founded in 2007 by Andrew Breitbart, Breitbart News Network is a far-right American news website that features conspiracy theories, misleading stories, and content that has been considered misogynist, racist, and xenophobic.
- **Rose McGowan:** American actress, model, singer, and author (b. 1973) who, in 2017, alleged that movie producer Harvey Weinstein had raped her in 1997 and who subsequently became a leading figure in the #MeToo anti-sexual assault movement.
- **Gamergate:** Often interpreted as a misogynist backlash against women working in technology, the Gamergate controversy involved a coordinated online group harassment campaign in 2014 directed against video game developers Zoë Quinn and Briana Wu and feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian. (Gamergate is also the topic of one of the readings from next week, "Zoe and the Trolls")

As Jessie Daniels explains in this selection, the Internet has fostered the resurgence of hate and intolerance in America and has made attitudes and behaviors that were unthinkable a generation ago part of our daily discourse. It has also given rise to a new group of alt-right national figures, like Milo Yiannopoulos, Richard Spencer, and Andrew Anglin, who exploit the web's reach and anonymity to spread their gospel of hate.

WHAT IS THE "ALT-RIGHT"?

The Alternative Right, commonly known as the 'alt-right,' is a hate-movement of a contemporary group of white nationalists that supports white supremacy and anti-semitism. The 'alt-right' adopts a set of far-right ideologies and claims such as the "belief that white identity is under attack by multicultural forces using 'political correctness' and 'social justice' to undermine white people and 'their' civilization" ([Southern Poverty Law Center](#)). Social media platforms like Twitter have provided a virtual soapbox for those who hold far-right, isolationist, misogynist, and xenophobic views. Pairing this with some clever re-branding by this movement's new leaders, and a recipe for mainstreaming views once thought to be fringe has emerged in the form of the "alt-right."

Leaders in the movement use the term "alt-right," instead of white supremacist or neo-Nazi, because they want to come across as normal—as a respectable viewpoint on the right of the political spectrum. In August of 2020, a white nationalist organization called The Right Stuff (TRS) announced the formation of a new political party they dubbed The National Justice Party "which includes a cluster of known white supremacists and has a platform shaped around a conspiracy theory suggesting that whites are being deliberately eliminated in the U.S." ([Southern Poverty Law Center](#))

WHY TWITTER?

We all know by now that internet culture, especially social media, allows people to behave badly (think back to the re-enactment in *The Social Dilemma* where the young girl was bullied and berated about her ears on a picture she posted). However, anonymous internet culture escalates this bad behavior ten-fold. Sites like Twitter, 4chan, Reddit, that offer relative anonymity to their users have provided enough cover for users to feel emboldened enough to use racial slurs, threats, intimidation tactics and many of the other examples Daniels lays out in her article--all without fear of consequences in their everyday lives.

Although Daniel's article clearly states that this presence of White Supremacy online has existed for almost as long as the world wide web itself, the growth and acceleration of these movements in the past 5 years is astounding. And as their base grew larger so did their willingness to forego anonymity and take their cause "offline".

WHITE SUPREMACY & THE INTERNET



Below is a collection of videos that provide a little more information on the presence and online extremist organizations (like "the Alt-Right") and how these groups used anonymous online platforms like 4chan and Twitter to organized physical rallies like the 2017 "Unite the Right" Protest in Charlottesville and, most recently, the riot at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th, 2021.



"How the Internet is fueling the Alt-Right Movement"

"Memed into the Public Domain: The Battle for Pepe the Frog"

"How Capitol Rioters Openly Planned the Insurrection in Plain Sight"



QUESTION TO CONSIDER FOR FURTHER INQUIRY:

In both the short documentary *Charlottesville: Race and Terror* that you watched in this week's module, as well as footage from the Capitol riot mere weeks ago, the presence of images that made popular by memes (whether they were original content or images like Pepe or the Gadsden flag that have been reappropriated by many fringe conservative groups) is quite notable. Whether they were printed on flags, t-shirts, or signs, the iconography of the America far-right can be seen in almost all of the footage from the U.S. Capitol insurrection. **Why are memes like Pepe the Frog effective tools for spreading hate online? What other memes have you encountered that appear to be associated with racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, or other forms of bigotry?**

But it's not just visual icons that many of these fringe groups re-appropriate. We also seen a resurgence of antiquated rhetoric that may not appear as insidious as it actually is to someone unaware of the historical connotations. In the *Vice* documentary on Charlottesville, there is footage of the protesters chanting "Jews will not replace us"--which doesn't too much analysis to understand the meaning. However the average person might not understand the significance of one of the more disturbing moments wherein the tiki-torch wielding mob chants "Blood and Soil".

This English rendition of Nazi Germany's most fervent chant, "*Blut und Boden!*" Originally devised as a slogan of 19th-century German nationalists and popularized by Nazi ideologue *Richard Walter Darre*, the phrase is intended to invoke patriotic identification with native national identity, and built on a foundation of virulent anti-Semitism and racism. It later became a key component of Adolf Hitler's "*Lebensraum*" program, seeking to expand territories occupied by Germans, that was a major factor in the Holocaust. The slogan has been adopted by the alt-right, particularly its openly neo-Nazi element, to emphasize its own nativist and eliminationist agenda.

More info can be found at the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#)

WHAT'S NEXT?



Although Daniels' article was published in 2017, the growing presence of online extremist groups seems to have only gotten bigger in the last three years. In fact, the contemporary socio-political climate in this country has become so divided during the Trump administration that it seems almost inevitable that more people would go searching for like-minded communities.

Moreover, when the Covid-19 pandemic forced society to forego our normal social interactions for the safety of our fellow citizens, many people turned to online communities to find human connection and conversation --resulting in things like echo chambers, science-deniers (like "flat-earthers") and cultish groups like QAnon (which we will talk more about next week).

Some say this was a perfect storm: A worldwide pandemic that threatened the global economy and left many unemployed, broke and homeless; a seemingly endless string of racially-motivated homicides by police officers on BIPOC citizens causing riots, protests and calls to defund and demilitarize the police; a conservative government administration that was pushing mis/disinformation and using Twitter and other social media platform to incite its' fan base to take action that ended in a historical insurrection on Capitol Hill. ([see this timeline for more info on how that played out](#))

But it's vital that we acknowledge the role our old friend the Algorithm plays in this story. During an interview with Joe Rogan, Tristan Harris--who you all should remember from *The Social Dilemma* explains in detail just how pointed and powerful the algorithms that drive content on these hyper-addictive sites are by using an example of teenage girls and dieting:

70% of YouTube's "watch time" comes from [users watching] the recommendations on the right hand side. Here's an example: if you're a 13 year old girl and you opened a dieting video on YouTube, the algorithms are going to show recommended videos based on what other 13 year old girls who watch teen dieting videos watch. So what did it show?-- It showed anorexia videos because those were better at keeping the teen girls attention....

Basically the girl click the dieting video, and the YouTube algorithm wakes up and says 'Hey, I've got like a hundred million other voodoo dolls a 13 year old girls, right and they all tend to watch these these other videos. I don't know what I just know that they have this word #thinspo... I'm really inspired for anorexia!...not because [something told these algorithms] that these are good for them or helpful for them. It just says these [videos] tend to work at keeping their attention. " (*Joe Rogan Experience #1558* 00:32:38 - 00:34:17)

In the interview, Harris goes on to explain how these algorithms choose content using another example: A Car Crash

Imagine driving down the highway and you pass a bad car crash. The cars around you slow down and everyone is looking at the car crash (this is where the term "rubbernecking" came from, because everyone will twist their necks trying to see it).

Now imagine Facebook and Google and YouTube are all on the same highway, and they are all trying to figure out what to show you to keep your attention, and they see this happening...how will they not assume the whole world wants to see car crashes?

So the algorithm are told to show us car crashes...and because the algorithm is an A.I program without the power to understand human emotions (like empathy, fear or curiosity) or philosophical ideals (like what is morally good or bad to show teenage girls) it feeds us the thing it's be told we want...and we keep watching. Crash after crash after crash....



OTHER REFERENCES

FOR ANYONE INTERESTING IN PURSUING THIS TOPIC FUTUER: HERE IS A LIST OF SOURCES DANIELS QUOTES IN HER ARTICLE

(NOTE: This list is NOT in MLA format and is organized by the order in which quotes appear, not alphabetically by author's last name.

- Michael Barbaro: “Interview with Former White Nationalist Derek Black,” *The Daily* (podcast), *New York Times*, August 22, 2017.
- Peter J. Breckheimer II, “A Haven for Hate: The Foreign and Domestic Implications\ of Protecting Internet Hate Speech Under the First Amendment,” *HeinOnline*, 2001–2002.
- Olivia Nuzzi, “How Pepe the Frog Became a Nazi Trump Supporter and Alt-Right Symbol,” *Daily Beast*, May 26, 2016.
- J. M. Berger, “Nazis vs. ISIS on Twitter: A Comparative Study of What Nationalist and ISIS Online Social Media Networks,” George Washington University Program on Extremism, September 2016.
- J. M. Berber, “How White Nationalists Learned to Love Donald Trump,” *Politico Magazine*, October 25, 2016.
- Ben Kharakh and Dan Primack, “Donald Trump’s Social Media Ties to White Supremacists,” *Fortune*, March 22, 2016.
- Jay Hathaway, “More Than Half of Trump’s Retweets are White Supremacists Praising Him,” *New York Magazine*, January 27, 2016.
- Stephen Hiltner, “Seven Takeaways from the Times Journalists Who Cover Trump,” *The New York Times*, October 13, 2017.
- Brittney Cooper, “Jemel Hill Called Donald Trump a White Supremacist. Where’s the Lie?”, *Cosmopolitan*, September 15, 2017.

(MORE) QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How has the Internet fostered the popularity of white supremacist groups, according to Daniels? How often have you encountered racist propaganda on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter or social messaging platforms like 4chan or Reddit? In general, would you agree that sites like Twitter and Reddit have offered racists a “haven for hate” (Daniels 1)
- Why has racism taken root on sites like Twitter, Reddit, and 4chan? What steps have social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube taken to limit racist postings? What do you think should be done, if anything, to discourage the growth of racism on the Internet?
- Noting that President Trump has repeatedly retweeted well-known white racists and that he enjoys a large racist following, Daniels suggests that the president has helped to “push the window of acceptable political discourse further along the path from hate speech to violence” (Daniels 11). To what extent would you hold Trump personally responsible for legitimizing racist thinking since the beginning of his 2016 presidential campaign?
- **Connecting with other Readings:** How does the Internet seem to be changing our attitudes about people with differing backgrounds, cultures, genders and beliefs?

