



The New Right on American Campuses: Challenges for Higher Education

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THE NEW RIGHT ON AMERICAN CAMPUSES: CHALLENGES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Barbara Franz

Abstract: *This paper arises out of a very contemporary problem that is plaguing higher education: how the notion of 'free speech' is being misused to hamper truly scholarly debate and encourage hate and fear primarily through misinformation. To understand how this issue has arisen and become important, the paper explores the origins and growth of a loose group of disgruntled pro-white far-right reactionaries (DPWFRR), who market themselves using the term 'Alt Right.' Free speech is but one of many of their 'concerns' and perhaps not a central one. The intellectual ambitions and financial foundations of these groups on the one hand and the identity needs of young people on the other hand serve as explanatory frameworks to understand the attraction of students to the DPWFRR's digital networks. This paper reveals the underlying depth of the problem and suggests that institutions and staff have a clear (though difficult) path ahead if there is to be a powerful and effective revolt against this popular reactionary right-wing network.*

Keywords: *academia; free speech; 'Alt Right'; misinformation; doxing; TPUSA; DPWFRR*

Introduction

During the Spring semester 2019, I became a target of the conservative student group Turning Point USA (TPUSA) and the right-wing online outlet Campus Reform for refusing to advertise a TPUSA event entitled "The Myth of White Privilege."¹ Consequentially, Campus Reform doxed me, publishing my email address and work phone number, which encouraged a slew of offensive calls and emails from right-wing trolls. TPUSA's argument was that I infringed upon the group's rights to free speech and did not allow for a 'fair representation of all view points' (Sabes, 2019).

This is part of a broader phenomenon that has affected higher learning. Scholars have shown that education and accurate information about ethnic, racial, or religious 'others' can, under certain conditions, help prevent prejudice and stereotyping (Grossman et al., 2016: 35). Positive intergroup interactions also function—under certain conditions—as a protective factor (e.g., Peucker, 2011; Pedersen et al., 2011). Moreover, while there is broad agreement on the need to recalibrate policies in the areas of multiculturalism and education, a number of studies have highlighted the association between higher levels of formal education and lower levels of prejudice (Carvacho et al., 2013; Henry et al.,

¹ I merely contended that it was inappropriate for a Political Science department to *advertise* such an event, as it would be for an Astronomy department to advertise a flat earth society event. The event took place as planned, with a very large showing of minority students who opposed the event.

2017; Roebroek and Guimond, 2015).² However, in today's higher education venues, students are frequently encouraged to adhere to models of market-driven trade specialization that go hand-in-hand with a civic and social science illiteracy (Giroux, 2014). Along these lines, some studies suggest that formal education itself no longer guards against racism or prejudiced attitudes (Dhont and Hodson, 2014). However, education still serves a role in relation to other protective factors, such as increased opportunities for intergroup interaction and higher levels of knowledge about minority groups (Grossman et al., 2016, Peucker, 2011, Dhont and Hodson, 2014). Yet, when it comes to the popularity of new right-wing politics, institutions of higher learning and other traditional educational outlets are under attack.

Indeed, higher education cannot be assumed to be any less of a battle ground in today's polarized political and cultural climate than other places of social interaction, such as social media and the neighborhood bar. A 2018 poll conducted by McLaughlin & Associates on behalf of Yale's conservative William F. Buckley Program, found that 61 percent of conservative students nationwide said they were intimidated to share beliefs contrary to their professors. At the institution I teach, a March 2019 survey, with 345 respondents, found that 41 percent of students who self-identified as conservative shared these feelings. The survey results also suggest that 18 percent of liberal students and 37 percent of moderates felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in the classroom. Nationwide, 53 percent of liberal and moderate students reported the same feeling (Barnes et al., 2019). Is free speech on campuses in crisis?

Diversity and free speech remain the cornerstones of academic freedom and civic progress. What is at danger today is the quality of civic discourse. Universities and the interactions within such institutions ought to be modeling ways to engage in serious dialogue, and should inculcate certain habits of mind into society, such as evidence-based argumentation and welcoming complexity and nuance in politics, science and society. The university is society's best hope for serious civil discourse to blossom. Civic discourse is the kind of discourse upon which a participatory democracy ultimately depends. As the survey results listed above clearly attest, the students' 'feelings' are at the center of the debate. Feelings are sometimes like 'fake facts'—they can be manipulated by a range of drivers, including 'Alt-Right' groups, through their propaganda (Wirz et al., 2018).

This paper is based on a literature review of the current research on reactionary new right networks, specifically the work of Lewis (2018), Marwick & Lewis (2018), Angela Nagle (2017), J.J. Berger (2018) and George Hawley (2017, 2018 and 2019). It also draws from a small qualitative study of YouTube videos, a number of online message boards, such as 4chan and 8chan, webzines, such Taki Magazine and Reddit, and The Right Stuff, and social media accounts of 'Alt-Right' personalities and organizations, on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.³

² But, of course, there is also evidence to the contrary. See, for example, Kuppens and Spears (2014)

³ In this qualitative study, I read comments on message boards, especially 4chan and 8chan, but also visited right wing sites such as the The Daily Beast, Daily Caller, the Right Stuff and Taki Magazine during the months of January through

The loose group of disgruntled pro-white, far-right reactionaries—from here on referred to as DPWFRR—has strategically adopted the label of ‘Alt-Right’ in order to ‘uphold the existing racial order wherein whiteness occupies a dominant, central position that affords symbolic, social, and material privileges at the direct expense of communities of color’ (Hartzel, 2018: 18).⁴ Today’s digital web and algorithms, aided by cable news networks, amplify and systematically move the white supremacist and racist talking points into the mainstream of political discourse (Daniels, 2018).⁵ The ‘Alt Right’ thus has been positioned as a rhetorical bridge between mainstream public discourse and white supremacy in order to enable the latter arguments to maneuver into mainstream public discourse. The formations of so-called pro-white rhetoric ‘attempt to reason that open affirmations of white pride and pro-white political positions are not necessarily white supremacist but, rather, are justifiable expressions of white racial consciousness’ (Hartzel, 2018: 22). The DPWFRR uses a number of digital groups and forums and promotes itself using the label ‘Alt-Right.’ Their sites ‘role-play’ supporting political activism and advocacy for white Americans, but their rhetoric is very different from traditional political discourse in that it is based on ‘fantasising: and their fundamentally reactionary fantasy is of the reversal, or undoing, of modernity’ (Kelly, 2017a: 69).

The DPWFRR’s extremist commitment to free speech, as exemplified in TPUSA’s pronouncements, is strongly tied to the polarized discourse against political correctness. In this format, commitment to ‘free speech’ can also serve as an on-ramp for far-right radicalization. In DPWFRR communities, political correctness is seen as censorship and an assault on free speech. The claim that free speech is limited on campuses arises out of a popular conspiracy theory that ‘cultural Marxism’ is a Jewish conspiracy to weaken Western civilization; the right-wing purports to be engaged in a culture war against these far left ‘cultural Marxists’ (Marwick & Lewis, p. 5). While initially associated with the Frankfurt school, the label of cultural Marxists today is used to describe a range of critical academics, journalists, and feminists. This conspiracy theory claims that the left is winning the war. Members of the DPWFRR are known to vociferously object to journalists, academics, and public figures who do not support a platform for speech that may be offensive, non-factual, or even ideologically skewed. Such individuals or institutions are then represented as enemies of freedom of speech.

June 2019. I followed alt-right personalities, especially Richard Spencer, Milo Yiannopoulos, Andrew Anglin, as well as Ann Coulter, Robert Beale, and Paul Ramsey, usually by watching YouTube videos. The qualitative study was designed to provide some guidelines for a larger, broader comparative research project focusing on social media, micro blogs and online games as teen influencers. The key questions driving this project are what elements within digital media environments and society spur recruitment to radical right-wing groups, and what elements in young peoples’ backgrounds and identities cause them to be drawn to these retrograde, radicalizing sites and ideologies. In addition the final papers of my students Gina Viola, Justin Mittleman and Stephen Neukam in my course on Nationalism during the Spring semester 2019, provided some background information for this paper.

⁴ In this paper I refer to the members of DPWFRR groups as far right and reactionary right. I use the term ‘Alt Right’ in quotation marks when referring to the groups’ marketing and branding functions.

⁵ While it is clear that they connote differences, I use the terms white supremacist, white nationalist and pro-white synonymously in this text, because while emphasizing various ‘solutions’ to the perceived current ‘problems’ all of them roughly adhere to the belief that white people are superior.

For some young people, the right-wing digital groups and forums seems to fill a need for community and belonging. Young people attracted to the ‘Alt Right’ have been known to identify themselves as unhappy online forum dwellers (Beran, 2017). They may see themselves as ‘beta males’—who consider themselves weak, compromised, fragile, or pathetic (Marwick & Lewis, p.7)—and often ‘neets’—not in education, employment, or training. What attracts young people to DPWFRR groups is that the group, like its most popular meme, Pepe the Frog, is vulgar, ironic, and goofy.⁶ Appropriated by white supremacists, anti-semites and racists—Pepe was depicted as anti-gay, misogynist, anti-Semitic, racist frog—and became the unofficial mascot of the DPWFRR. Young right-wing fans engage in various levels of involvement in the movement. While members of these cohorts often lack an understanding of historic and socio-political context, some may truly believe the group’s core white supremacist, misogynist, and anti-Semitic claims. These young people can be found in many classrooms today. And some are members of the student organization Turning Point USA.

Turning Point USA and What Happens if you get Doxed

The conservative non-profit organization Turning Point USA (TPUSA) was founded as a non-profit organization by the 18 year old Charlie Kirk in 2012. TPUSA’s slogan is ‘Standing behind free markets and limited government’ and the organization seeks to ‘identify, educate, train, and organize students to promote the principles of freedom, free markets, and limited government.’ In 2016 TPUSA added the Professor Watchlist. In order to place professors on the watchlist the operating procedures of the organization is first to accuse a professor of an offense and then use that incident as an opportunity to define TPUSA members as being in the defensive; in my case the TPUSA campus chapter claimed I was not granting them their freedom of speech. Then in order to rectify ‘the professor’s misdeed’ the organization calls for repercussions, that can include a broad spectrum of actions, from the repression of academic freedom to the firing of individual professors. But the watchlist is not the only mechanism of harassment that the organization has at its disposal.

The TPUSA chapter located at the institution I work for does not (yet) subscribe to the Professor Watchlist. Instead of listing me there, the campus chapter student president tipped off *Campus Reform*, one of the principal distribution centers of slanted right-wing news about academia. The two organizations are linked. For example, Rider’s TPUSA president is also one of the New Jersey correspondents of *Campus Reform*. *Campus Reform* usually puts college faculty on the defensive by publishing articles alleging liberal bias and indoctrination. *Campus Reform* is operated by the Leadership Institute, a well-established conservative advocacy group that is led by Morton C. Blackwell who calls most of higher education ‘a left-wing indoctrination center’ (Schmidt 2015). Blackwell set up *Campus Reform*

⁶ Pepe the Frog was created by American cartoonist Matt Furie in 2005. It was uploaded to 4chan with a catchphrase in about 2006, became a popular meme by combining Pepe’s face and catchphrase to fit different scenarios and emotions, such as melancholy, anger, and surprise. Brittan Heller (2019) argues that the crudely drawn comic-book amphibian that originated as a mascot for slackers was repeatedly altered by white supremacists for racist, homophobic and anti-Semitic memes, and was classified by the Anti-Defamation League as a hate symbol in 2016. However, recently Pepe was repurposed by protesters in Hong Kong to promote a pro-democracy message that had nothing to do with white supremacy or anti-Semitism. Most protesters instead seem to understand the frog to be a symbol of youth and were unaware of his link to the ‘Alt-Right’ (Heller 2019).

as an online social network in 2009 and turned it into a ‘news site’ in 2011. *Campus Reform* claims it has 305,667 followers on Facebook, and its YouTube channel has more than 59 million views. As in my case, when Rider’s TPUSA president informed *Campus Reform* to follow up on my purported attempt to stifle the group’s freedom of speech, it only took one person to ‘expose’ a faculty member attempting to engage in what the group believes is suppression of freedom of speech and liberal indoctrination.

The first article that covered my purported malfeasance included both allegations that I suppressed the group’s freedom of speech and that I have a strong liberal bias. Written by the Mississippi Senior Correspondent Adam Sables (2019), the story with the title ‘Poli sci dept nixes “White Privilege is a Myth” student event ad, cited “fake facts,”’ using an email I sent to the TPUSA president in response to his repeated requests for an explanation of why I refused to advertise the event. The TPUSA chapter president clearly was baiting me, but I felt that I had to respond and to justify and explain my refusal. I sought to send a short uncontroversial explanation of why the Political Science department cannot advertise an event to its majors and minors that proclaims a false reality that is not based on scientific facts or a clear understanding of history. While there is a great deal of diversity in the viewpoints held by serious scholars on many topics (and the debate between scholars is what makes up much of academic discourse in the social sciences), no serious student of American history can support the claim that white people in the USA have not enjoyed advantages and that White privilege is nothing but a myth. Therefore, like a chemistry department chair asked to advertise an event on alchemy, or a physics department chair asked to advertise a perpetual motion machine company in which students are selling shares, it would have been irresponsible and contrary to the spirit of serious academic endeavor for our political science department to have advertised their talk. Of course, one would expect fellow faculty members and the administration of the university to have supported a faculty member in the face of these attacks—but that was not what happened.

In this article, Sables cites a number of comments from the TPUSA Rider chapter’s leadership, as well as comments from one Rider professor and one administrator who vehemently disagreed with my decision and condemned me for making it and for being a socialist. A diligent researcher, Sables also cites the website Rate My Professor, where a number of students apparently felt that I try ‘too hard to push her left-wing opinions’ but know ‘the subject matter quite well!’ Sables’ article includes an embedded link to my professional webpage (Sables, 2019).

What was most disturbing at first about this article was its statements by a fellow faculty member, who functions as the faculty advisor of TPUSA, and by the one administrator, who stated that my refusal to advertise a white nationalism event was ‘antithetical to Rider’s values’. Sables cites the associate vice president of marketing and communications, who labeled my decision not to advertise the event as ‘inappropriate’ stating that it ‘does not reflect the university’s values regarding free speech and open dialogue. Turning Point USA’s event is happening as planned’ (Sables, 2019). And indeed, the institution advertised the event on posters and TV screens all over campus. The administration uncritically adopted the position of TPUSA and called my refusal to advertise an event that was clearly designed to race-bait, dog whistle and spread disinformation, as a refusal to adhere to the university’s values

regarding free speech. In the name of freedom of speech, the university put itself squarely in support of an organization that advocates illiberal thinking, anti-Semitism and racism. Perhaps this should not have come as such a big surprise, considering that the administration and the student government clearly were duped into granting TPUSA the status of a student organization on campus in 2018, without doing even a modest amount of vetting. In 2018, TPUSA was already a well-established national organization with its Professor Watchlist, and lawsuits, provocations and harassment incidents at various U.S. universities.

Wendy Lynn Lee (2017) emphasizes that TPUSA's free market and libertarian language in its mission statement not only represents one of its goals, but it also 'functions as effective cover for far more repressive aspirations.' The Professor Watchlist and the organization's efforts to see TPUSA local chapter members elected to student government positions in their respective universities, and TPUSA's demonstrably white nationalist political agenda all point toward the ultimate goal of remaking the academy into an ideologically driven 'training depot for future economic nationalists' (Lee 2017). My experience supports the well-known notion that TPUSA's mission involves the intimidation and repression of professors. Not only does the Watchlist challenge academic freedom and free speech, its designers also 'have no idea what goes on in the classroom' (Lee, 2017).

In my case, within hours of the publication of the *Campus Reform* piece, which included an embedded link to my professional contact information, people began calling me at work and emailing me. I remember speaking to a woman from Minnesota who told me that her two sons 'who are white' experience real discrimination on a daily base, and that people like me needed to be removed from teaching and from the country. After a while I stopped picking up the phone. But the emails kept on coming. Most were angry one-liners, some sent anonymously, sometimes picking up on the university's stance in support of TPUSA. For example, 'William Schieber' wrote: 'Yoy fucking Libtards are destroying America, I'm glad the dean told you to shove it. My kids would never be allowed to go to your snowflake school.'

Four days after the *Campus Reform* article was published, on March 9, 2019, Rob Shimshock picked up the story in a *Campus Unmasked* video entitled 'Prof: Not Believing White Privilege Is Like Flat-Earth.' In this video, he quotes my explanation for refusing to advertise the event that went through the local news: that, as a social scientist, advertising a 'White Privilege is a Myth' event is the same as an astronomy department advertising a 'flat-earth event'. More emails appeared in my inbox. For example, 'Jason Chapman' wrote: 'The alt-left sure does love it's current privilege of authoritarian censorship. Best, Jason' and 'Marko Swasta' explained:

"White privilege" - other than originating in grievance studies - is an inherently illiberal, anti-white concept that has nothing to do with objective reality. As someone who seems to believe in it, that makes you - explicitly - an anti-white racist. Congrats! With that said, let's be honest here. There's a reason you aren't living among diversity of Africa. After all, to whom would you sell your anti-white narratives, other than ethno-masochistic white people like yourself?

In order to be able to sleep, I stopped reading emails after 6pm. While, for me personally, this was sufficient to block the Alt-Right noise that was trying to infiltrate my life, what disturbed me much more was the stance of the institution I teach for. Throughout that week not one administrator felt the need to reach out to me, with the exception of the Dean of Fine Arts who told me I should get Campus Security involved. The president of the campus chapter enjoying his moment in the sun, stated in *The Rider News*:

There are no exceptions for hate mail and threatening messages regardless of who it is being directed to...That being said, many faculty members are subject to many positive and negative reactions from the public outside of Rider as a direct result of their actions for any given matter and it's moments like these that should be a moment of reflection (Neukam and Lupo, 2019).

While vague and poorly phrased, for me, this statement has an ominous undertone, and implies a somewhat threatening stance toward professors. It implies an intimidation that sought to encapsulate the threat 'watch what you say in your classrooms because it might have consequences for your day-to-day lives!'. I'm a tenured faculty member and don't scare easily, but this event and the lack of support or follow-up by the administration had consequences. I became unsure about my work, my relationship to my students, and most importantly, whether I was misreading my students' reactions in the class room. Were they genuine? Or did they pretend in order to get good grades? I very distinctly got the impression that the colleagues in my department were tiptoeing around the question of how to deal with this situation. I'm sure all of us became more cautious in what we said in our class rooms and possibly watered down our critical analysis. One of my Political Science colleagues vehemently disagreed with my decision, arguing that we could have attracted the students associated with TPUSA to Political Science and recruited them to become majors, had we just continued to advertise their events. He pragmatically claimed that any students, even 'right-wing snowflakes' are better than no students in these days of high drop out and low retention rates. And of course, he had a point.

However, universities' aligning with TPUSA, through the establishment of campus chapters and through aligning with TPUSA's thin first amendment claims, implicitly send a message to their faculty that sounds somewhat like this:

If you want to avoid being named, and potentially harassed, humiliated, or threatened by local or national members of Turning Point/Professor Watchlist, you better be careful that what you teach doesn't challenge their anti-gay, anti-Muslim, anti-feminist, anti-Semitic, climate change denial, anti-racial equality, economic nationalism. Your tenure and future promotion or other academic/publishing prospects may be in jeopardy (Lee, 2017).

I received two emails that referenced the consequences of TPUSA's presence on campus for minority students and faculty. The first email from a fellow faculty member, who is also one of the few minority professors at Rider, was sent to me in mid-March and included the following paragraph:

The angry letter sent to you, as quoted in the March 13th Rider article, makes me feel unsafe. The fact you are going unsupported by the administration makes me feel unsafe. My students also feel unsafe. We are fearful because these types of events invite people who actually believe white supremacy is a myth. These people are ignorant about the history and laws of our country and some are violent and full of hate.

The second email from a graduate student arrived months later in September 2019 and challenged the campus administration to take a closer look at TPUSA's race-baiting practices and its efforts to normalize hate speech. To my knowledge, there was no follow-up by the administration to any of these messages.

As far as I know, the administration never took a (public) stance in defense of academic freedom. However, my perspective changed because of what actually happened during the TPUSA event and surrounding this event. On the day the 'White Privilege is a Myth' event was held on campus, a number of faculty members from Sociology and Criminology, Political Science, and History organized a counter event, entitled 'Seeing Privilege.' This event, while it was held on campus at the same time when the 'White Privilege is a Myth' event occurred, was well attended by students, faculty and administrators. The event consisted of a panel discussion with a long Q&A period about what it means to be privileged, or to be disadvantaged, in America today. I attended both this event and the event put on by TPUSA. I have to admit what impacted me a lot more than the academically disciplined science-based 'Seeing Privilege' panel discussion was the TPUSA event itself. When I entered the large hall where the 'White Privilege is a Myth' event took place, I was stunned. The room was packed with students. However, about two-thirds to three-quarters of the attendees were minority students. And they were challenging the speakers' ideas and beliefs. Dozens of students lined up patiently to get to the microphone to ask their questions, which were usually well-supported with statistical data, very convincingly questioning the speakers' assumptions. I was in awe, felt vindicated, and my confidence as a teacher received a boost. Clearly I was doing the right thing. Above all, my job was not to tell students how to act in the world but to help them understand the world in which they make choices.

Not all faculty members have been that lucky. In at least one reported case, a professor at Orange Coast College in California received death threats after being blacklisted on the Professor Watchlist. According to the Orange County Register, psychology instructor Olga Perez Stable Cox went into hiding after a secretly recorded video of her calling Donald Trump's election 'an act of terrorism' became public. The Watchlist currently names 258 names (TPUSA, 2020), most with photos, from more than 120 institutions across the country. Each name has an associated profile, listing their so-called 'infractions,' documented with links to articles, often from *Campus Reform* or other conservative news outlets. With few exceptions, such as the 200 Duke University professors who, in a show of solidarity, signed a letter to TPUSA in December 2016 asking to be included on the list, faculty members have not (yet) organized to engage in a coordinated pushback ('A letter to the Professor Watchlist' 2016). The American Association of University Professors also engaged in some efforts to challenge the list. Personally, I received one note of support from Matthew Boedy, faculty member at the University of North Georgia, who is on the list and who blogs in order to debunk Charlie Kirk's public

statements. What is needed is a much stronger solidarity among academics to show, as the letter of the Duke University faculty members outlines, that:

We will not tolerate our colleagues being subject to policing of their work, their thoughts and their teaching (...) We will not repeat the passivity of the past, when intellectuals were blacklisted for disagreeing with a particular agenda. When you challenge them, you challenge us.

As a result of having taken the position against advertising TPUSA events to majors in my department, a discussion among the administrators at Rider ensued for the following months about the need to guarantee free speech on campus, and what sort of speech free speech actually is. Nothing was done in order to confirm to the faculty that academic freedom at this institution was valued and had not been breached. Indeed, the next campus-wide TPUSA event, appropriately entitled ‘Hate Speech is a Myth’ was advertised by the administration all over campus in various electronic and other outlets.

TPUSA: How to attract the Wealthy Right Wing as a 501(c)3

TPUSA claims to be the ‘largest and fastest growing youth organization in America’ with chapters on 300 campuses and a presence on over 1,500 college campuses (TPUSA webpage). The claim to be ‘largest and fastest growing’ does not come as a surprise, if the experience on my campus is the standard operating procedure. All students who register for events are apparently treated as new members and receive messages about all TPUSA events. Thus, the organization is indeed huge, but the numbers are misleading: the majority of students at my campus who attended were critical of the event’s premise and its speakers Brandon Tatum and Anna Paulina, and came to debunk the lies and propaganda of the presenters, but, in order to attend, they were required to register—and all of them, having registered, now seem to be counted by TPUSA as ‘members’. The student profile of the university includes 18% African American and 19% Hispanic students, with an overall minority student population of 50%, in the freshmen class of 2019 (Rider University 2019). One cannot help but wonder how a group like TPUSA managed to get established on a campus with this demographic profile.

Jane Mayer’s (2017) research into the group’s activities uncovered that TPUSA in coordination with Ginni Thomas, the wife of the Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, campaigned for Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio’s presidential bid in 2016. Kirk’s personal friendship with Don Trump, Jr. developed later (Gumbel, 2019), and culminated in Kirk joining Trump on his book tour across the country promoting *Triggered: How the Left Thrives on Hate and Wants to Silence Us*, in an effort to continue ‘winning America’s culture war.’

Because TPUSA is a 501(c)3, the organization is not required to disclose its donors. However, it is public knowledge that it is funded by a variety of right-wing mega-donors with a history of flooding the political process with money, including the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Ed Uihlein Family Foundation, Foster Friess, Mike Leven and various Koch brothers-affiliated groups, such as

the Foundation for Economic Education, DonorsTrust and the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation (Sourcewatch.org). According to Alex Kotch (2017) TPUSA raised \$5 million in 2016, and \$8.2 million in 2017 (Markay, 2018). For the fiscal year ending June 2018 TPUSA reported contributions and grants of \$10.8 million (Propublica). TPUSA is funded mostly by wealthy conservative business owners, at least in part to amplify their donors' thinly-veiled neoliberal objective to further limit the reach of government regulation with slogans like 'Big Government Sucks!'

The Southern Poverty Law Center categorizes TPUSA as 'Alt Right lite.' For some of us, TPUSA represents the DPWFRR's entry point into our daily lives.

The Rise of the disgruntled pro-white, far-right reactionaries (DPWFRR)

The 2015 Presidential campaign of Donald Trump coincided with the amplification of traditional white supremacist and nationalist arguments by disgruntled pro-white, far-right reactionaries known as the 'Alt Right'. The term itself was initially used among a group of paleoconservative academics, such as Paul Gottfried and Colin Liddell in 2008 when the white supremacist Richard Spencer, a prep-school educated Duke graduate student drop-out, heard it at the annual conference of the Mencken Club, a white nationalist organization based in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. The term 'Alt Right' prompted the open affirmation of pro-white far-right rhetoric, often dressed in edgy memes and GIFs. The construction of the 'Alt Right' allowed white supremacist and nationalist ideas to enter the mainstream public discourse and, by reframing these ideas, it normalized the distinctly white nationalist arguments as 'alternatives' to mainstream politics and political correctness (Hartzell, 2018).

The objective of DPWFRR's agitation was twofold: to recruit members, and to develop techniques that facilitated breaking into the mainstream media and public discourse. Retrospectively, they have been quite successful at both. The groups have evolved beyond the Internet's dark corners, such as 4chan, *Reddit*, *Taki's Magazine* and *The Right Stuff*, and flooded YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and mainstream media to successfully manipulate public opinion by spreading disinformation. J. J. Berger (2018: 51) estimates that the total number of such right-wing accounts both in Europe and the United States (including bots and shock puppets—single users who control multiple accounts) exceeds 200,000, labeling his estimate 'a baseline minimum and extremely conservative.' TPUSA is one of the prominent platforms that allow for local right-wing influencers and manipulators to propagate the ideological underpinnings of DPWFRR.

George Hawley traces the groups' roots to 2008, when Spencer became the managing editor of the *Taki Magazine* (2017: 54, 57-58). Until 2015 a loosely affiliated aggregation of message boards existed, such as 8chan, blogs, podcasts, forums, and web magazines, such as *Radix*, *Counter-Currents*, and *American Renaissance*, that discussed cultural and political ideas. In the USA today the DPWFRR consist

broadly of Gamergaters⁷, various hate groups, such as the manosphere, the men's rights movement (MRM), conspiracy theorists, and neo-Nazi groups often in association with Nazi blogs such as *Fash the Nation* and the *Daily Stormer*. With the 2017 'Unite the Right' rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, it became clear that the rise of these groups was 'both a continuation of a centuries old dimension of racism in the U.S. and part of an emerging media ecosystem powered by algorithms' (Daniels, 2018: 61). Rebranding white supremacy and anti-Semitism as 'Alt Right' allowed ideas long seen as unacceptable to the mainstream media to seep into the public discourse.⁸

Once DPWFRR's messages and methods, such as posting inflammatory messages ('trolling') became linked with so-called hyper-partisan sites, such as the *Fox News*, *Daily Caller*, *Breitbart*, and *Info Wars*, the groups went national if not global, and their messages were amplified. Benkler and colleagues (2017) describe hyper-partisan sites as 'combining decontextualized truths, repeated falsehoods, and leaps of logic to create [a] fundamentally misleading view of the world' (Benkler et al., 2017). This includes not only fake news, but also propaganda rooted in an ideologically-driven worldview. This played into the hands of members of the DPWFRR who, often as early adopters, are looking for the vulnerabilities in new technologies as spots into which their ideology can be inserted (Daniels, 2018: 63).

In addition, alternative media outlets such as YouTube, with its more 1.5 billion users (Nicas 2018), have become popular vehicles to host extreme right-wing shows and channels. For example Prager University (PragerU), an online video portal created by the conservative talk radio host Denis Prager, explains the warped worldview of the extreme right in simple videos with themes, such as police are not biased against black men; man-made climate change is debatable; why we should oppose animal rights and the \$15 minimum wage; and that the gender wage gap does not exist (Openheimer, 2018). According to Mark Oppenheimer (2018), almost one-third of the US population has watched at least part of a PragerU video via Facebook or YouTube and the organization has currently more than 3.6 million followers on Facebook. PragerU manages to deliver right-wing arguments in simple and often misleading packages that even young liberals are willing to open. PragerU is one of a number of a savvy, ambitious, ideologically targeted efforts to win over young people.

The Trouble with the Term

⁷ Gamergate began as a controversy about ethics in video game journalism. Shortly after releasing a video game called *Depression Quest*, Zoe Quinn, the designer of the game, was accused of trading sex for favorable reviews of the game (Moldbug, 2016). Angry gamers left thousands of comments on Twitter and 4chan. This began a sustained campaign against Quinn and other women who came to her defense (Hawley 2017, 47).

⁸ For example, David Rubin hosts *The Rubin Report*, a right-wing talk show on YouTube. He was formerly part of *The Young Turks Network*, which gives Rubin credibility (*The Rubin Report* 2017). In the November 9, 2017 show Rubin hosted the far-right, white nationalist podcaster Stefan Molyneux. Throughout the interview, Molyneux promoted ideas of scientific racism that have been used to justify racial hierarchies and oppression for centuries. Lewis (2018) points out that by letting Molyneux speak without providing a legitimate and robust counterargument, Rubin provides a free platform for white supremacist ideology on his channel (Marwick & Lewis, p. 11).

For many observers, the ‘Alt-Right’ label describes a ‘vivid, largely online subculture of trolls who reveled in their racist ugliness, often claiming it was an antidote to the reign of political correctness, which they saw as ruining the country’ (Nguyen, 2017). In their Essay ‘An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the At-Right,’ the Breitbart writers Yiannopoulos and Allum Bokhari, define the ‘Alt Right’ as consisting of four groups the authors believe made up the ‘amorphous blob’ of the movement that fueled Trump’s rise: ‘identity politics-loathing intellectuals, migrant-wary “natural conservatives,” the twentysomething-year-old-white-man “meme team,” and, of course, the militaristic, white-supremacist “1488ers”’(Nguyen, 2017).⁹

Both academics and journalists have articulated understandable concerns surrounding the use of the term ‘Alt Right’. The term has been used by those who identify themselves as members of this group in order to repackage old forms of white supremacy, ultra-nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism and misogyny. If we, as academics, use the term, are we unintentionally aiding them in their ‘rebranding’ effort, both hiding the movement’s vile roots and helping them make it more acceptable and ‘edgy’? Shaya Tayefe Mohajer (2017) cites the *Associated Press Handbook* stating that the term primarily may be used as a ‘public relations device to make its supporters’ actual beliefs less clear and more acceptable to a broader audience.’

I agree with those who point out that the term ‘Alt Right’ represents a rebranding of these old forms of bigotry and instead use the term DPWFRR when not directly referring to the network’s misleading representation that helps attract many young people who would not, for example, have been drawn to join the Nazi party. I do not seek to diminish the real dangers posed by the extremist groups who have now cloaked themselves with this term.

The Attraction of the ‘Alt Right’

Some students and other young people may be predisposed to right wing ideas; they may also be attracted by the DPWFRR’s shock-value, edginess and popularity (Hawley, 2017, Nagle, 2017) and they may see the porous multi-pronged network as an career opportunity. Those young people who have been pre-exposed to racist, white supremacist or misogynist ideas may sincerely believe one or more of the ideological stances of the DPWFRR. Studies have shown that a relatively high percentage of young people growing up in right-wing households are influenced by their parent’s political extremism (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing 2005; Beck & Jennings 1991; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers 2009). Using longitudinal data from Germany, Avdeenko and Siedler (2016) show a strong intergenerational association in far right-wing attitudes, specifically between sons and parents. The percentage of Americans who consider themselves conservative has changed little over time. Historically this number hovers around 40 percent (Saad, 2020). In addition, there is considerable evidence that suggests that America’s

⁹ 1488 is a symbol of the older white national socialist movement. it consists of a number that combines white nationalist David Lane’s “Fourteen Words” (“We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”) and a code for “Heil Hitler” (H is the eighth letter of the alphabet).

Republican ideology has moved substantially to the right in the past 20 years (Chinoy, 2019). One cannot underestimate the substantial parental influence on the political views of young people.

What is important to understand is that the DPWFRR's leaders consist of chic individuals and so-called influencers¹⁰, such as the previously mentioned Canadian far-right, white nationalist podcaster Stefan Molyneux, the provocative sexy and gay Yiannopoulos and conspiracy theorist Mike Cernovich (the #PizzaGate huckster). These people are not like those 'stodgy Bush-era Republicans' (Klein 2018). Instead they are cool, smoke weed, take psychedelics and support same-sex marriage. Thus the 'Alt-Right' vanguard adopt identity signals associated with previous countercultures, but the actual content of their message of course reinforces exclusivist racial and gendered hierarchies (Lewis, 2018).

Another group of young people might see the various right-wing groups as an opportunity, in terms of their socioeconomic and political future. They feel they could become influencers and celebrities themselves. For young aspiring professionals, such as TPUSA Rider chapter's president and individuals like Candice Owens, the former Communications Director of TPUSA, the network provides a number of venues for career building. For example, PragerU showcases more than 130 young video presenters, who receive a \$1,000 stipend but the bigger pay-off is certainly the increased publicity (Oppenheimer, 2018). For example, the American singer Joy Villa explains in a 5:17 video why everybody should stand for the National Anthem (PragerU, 2017). Another example for seemingly easily obtainable national fame is the 'news' website *Campus Reform* that focuses on criticizing and doxing academics and others involved in higher education. It currently lists 72 correspondents who apparently report from various universities.

Owens' career shows that in today's hashtag- and followers-dominated world of hypermedia, raw ambition trumps a lack of education. Clearly lacking the historic and political facts to contextualize her message, Owens was video-taped speaking at the TPUSA launch event in London in December 2018, where she said:

If Hitler just wanted to make Germany great and have things run well -- okay fine... so in thinking about how it could go bad down the line, I don't really have an issue with nationalism... The problem is he wanted, he had dreams outside of Germany. He wanted to globalize, he wanted everybody to be German, everybody to be speaking German, everybody to look a different way (Sommer, 2019).

After the video surfaced, Owens said that she was merely trying to point out that Hitler was—by her definition—not a nationalist, but a 'globalist.' She acted as though she were naive and unaware of the clear anti-Semitism implicit in her statement. While some well-informed members of the general public can see through a statement like this, others may not—but the reactionary right-wing groups to whom it is addressed certainly understand the underlying anti-Semitic intent. Thus, Owens dog-whistles to DPWFRR and other reactionary right-wing groups, by stating expressions that send one message to an outgroup while at the same time sending a second (often controversial or inflammatory)

¹⁰ In the following text I refer to influencers also as provocateurs, niche celebrities or micro celebrities.

message to right-wing ingroups. Dog-whistle inference is listener-based and the members of the right-wing ingroups certainly understand that the statement that ‘Hitler just wanted to make Germany great’ is being used by Owens as a justification for the Holocaust, and the Nazis’ killing of socialists, communists, Jehovah witnesses, homosexuals, and others.

But dog-whistling or voicing such nonsense has not stopped anybody from making a career within the ‘Alt Right.’ Indeed it is encouraged. Owens, like Yiannopoulos, is what Lewis (2018) calls a ‘micro celebrity’ or ‘niche celebrity,’ whose fans admire her as an ‘Alt Right’ personality. Through the ‘conscientious calibration’ of their online persona these content creators become influencers in their communities— people who shape public opinion and cajole their audience on far-right ideology (Lewis, 2018). They build trust with their audiences by stressing their relatability, their authenticity, and their accountability to those audiences (Lewis, 2018). However, in turn these celebrities often reject institutional and journalistic accountability and factuality.

Contextual Knowledge

Social media platforms, such as YouTube and individual provocateurs reject traditional journalistic and academic credibility markers in favor of the intimacy of participatory media. Many of these niche celebrities use the digital media system to develop an appealing, countercultural social identity. A recent study on youth news consumers also found that they trust ‘user-generated’ content more than legacy media sources (Madden, Lenhart, Fontaine, 2017). As a consequence many young people are affected by exposure to conspiracy theories and other forms of misinformation due to their daily prolonged exposure to new technologies and digital media.

With a lack of contextual or historic background knowledge and information regarding, for example, the current political, economic and security situation in Latin American countries, simplistic answers to new developments often sound most convincing. For example, conspiracy trumped complex economic and security reasons in explaining why people from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador chose to risk their lives in order to go on a 2,000 mile journey in their attempt to reach the USA. Instead, millions of users of digital media, and later mainstream media, read that the liberal billionaire George Soros was paying migrants and refugees from the Northern Triangle to come to America. Within hours the story was traded up from obscure Internet corners to several Trump Facebook groups and it was finally mentioned by a number of Congressmen and family members of the Trump family; within days other public figures like Ann Coulter propagated the story, until finally even outlets like the *New York Times* covered it and more than an estimated 800 million people were exposed to the story (Heath, Wynn, Gyunn 2018). Numerous conspiracy and misinformation campaigns regarding Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, or the Civil Rights struggle and enduring structural and other forms of racism in the USA feed into a lack of basic historic and political knowledge of digital media users. The lack of historic contextual comprehension is of course not only a problem for America’s youth but also for the US population in general. This is why events like the ‘White Privilege is a Myth’ are put on at American university campuses in the first place.

There is often a key event that convinces people to become believers. They are taking the 'red pill,' and begin to subscribe to the core convictions of racism, anti-Semitism, or misogyny (Hawley 2019).¹¹ For example, one such radicalized individual depicted the terrorist who attacked the mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand on March 15, 2019 as Jesus Christ. This depiction appeared on the message board 8chan.¹² The attacker, who had filmed his killing spree and posted it on Facebook, had claimed in his manifesto that he was inspired by white supremacists from half a dozen countries, including by Candice Owens and Donald Trump as a 'renewed symbol of white identity' (Abdelaziz, Shahid Ahmed, and Robins-Early, 2019). Doubtless, this attack gave an additional boost to white supremacy, racism and Islamophobia (Lin, 2019).¹³

Many 'Alt Right' celebrities depict on YouTube their own redpilling experience (in which they abandoned older, progressive politics). For example, 'Blonde in the Belly of the Beast' posted 'My Red Pill Journey' on YouTube, describing when she decided it was not the behavior of white school administrators that caused black students at her high school to 'self-segregate,' drop out, become pregnant, and behave aggressively.¹⁴ She then discusses going to university and reading Western classics, which led her to develop a 'deep, lasting reverence and loyalty to Western civilization' and 'a sense of pride for being descended of Western people.' Blonde claims that, thanks to her redpilling, her life became better: she says she became better educated, ate well, exercised, and took care of herself (Blonde, 2017). This includes acting 'more feminine' and smoothing out relationship issues she had because she had been 'too dominant' in the past (Lewis, 2018).

As Blonde in the Belly of the Beast's shows, the tropes of racism and white supremacy can be clothed in the context of a positive-sounding autobiographical anecdote and, transmitted via social media, influence the identity development of others. Blonde's experience also shows that those who lack contextual knowledge are especially vulnerable to redpilling.

Identity Formation

For many, to belong to the 'Alt Right' is a badge of pride. The need to belong is crucial for the identity formation of young people. Therefore, they are drawn to what appears to be a youth movement that promises a group to belong to, gives purpose to ones' life, and provides the option to identify with a larger objective. What is often attractive is also the provocativeness and violent vulgarism, rather than the DPWFRR's message. This is not to say that a person cannot eventually be redpilled because the

¹¹ The red pill is a reference from the movie the Matrix, in which the hero Neo is given a choice between taking the red pill, and learning the true nature of reality, or taking the blue pill and remaining ignorant of truths that are hidden from most others. Had Neo chosen the blue pill he would have remained unaware of the deeper truths of reality. Taking the red pill in contrast, leads to a meaningful life that provides constant challenges and dangers. For 'Alt-Right' ideologues, most Americans live ignorant lives and do not comprehend the truths that are right in front of them. But some have redpill experiences and are liberated from the fictitious reality and join the group.

¹² 8Cchan is also the message board where the attacker had posted his manifesto. Cited in: Justin Mittleman (2019) 'The Alt-Right: A Modern Confederacy' unpublished paper.

¹³ Tony Lin shows that Islamophobia is not a white phenomenon only but that anti-Muslim hate speech escalated in the aftermath of the Christchurch attack even in China.

¹⁴ These are tropes that are common among white supremacist depictions of black people (Daniels 1997).

‘worst sorts of extremism begins with a search for camaraderie and tribe; the adoption and hardening of truly extreme ideological views come later’ (Nagle, 2017a). In essence, many young people are driven by unfulfilled but healthy psychological needs—e.g., the need to belong and be cool—as well by identity development criteria.

‘Alt Right’ influencers successfully infuse racist, white nationalist and misogynist content into social media events that also provide platforms to develop a social identity for themselves and their audience. They do so by constructing a rhetorical bridge between white nationalism and mainstream public discourse (Hatzell, 2018). Although many in this community see themselves as ‘social underdogs’ and feel like outsiders because they reject progressive values, the network provides them with a sense of countercultural cache. Like Rider’s TPUSA, the DPWFRR groups often describe themselves as victims of racial, gender, and class oppression posed by the gendered, sexualized, and racialized ‘other.’ Lewis (2018) argues that niche celebrities purposefully craft a shared identity based on hipness and edginess, and they denote a countercultural identity that largely draws signifiers from youth movements of the past. For example, an editor of *Infowars*, Paul Joseph Watson, made a video explicitly stating these appeals, called ‘Conservatism is the New Counter-Culture.’ In the video, he draws comparisons to the New Left countercultural activists of the 1960s and the punk rock scene of the 1980s (Watson, 2017, Lewis, 2018). However, their political views are radically different from the countercultures from which they draw their connotation: they are fundamentally reactionary, attempting to reverse much of the much of the anti-discriminatory laws and achievements of the past 100 years.

Daniel Kreiss (2018) argues that *Fox News* and *Breitbart* have been so successful in part because they provide a metaphorical ‘family’ to those who reject mainstream news. This family provides ‘a sense of identity, place, and belonging; emotional, social, and cultural support and security; and gives rise to political and social affiliations and beliefs.’ Similarly, the ‘Alt Right’ network creates community through social media.

Ideological testimonials, as the above outlined red-pilling journey of the Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, are a popular method among more extremist influencers to create community. However, the subtleties of the tropes in Blonde’s redpilling experience are easily lost in the attention economy of the 21st century. Many of the right-wing provocateurs managed to establish themselves as supposed freethinkers and as outsiders even as they are promoted by well-funded organizations whose explicit objective is to promote libertarian ideals on behalf of wealthy donors. Yiannopolous and Bokhari wrote in their article that those claiming to identify with ‘Alt Right’ were no more bigots than death metal devotees in the 1980s were actually Satanists (Beauchamp, 2016). Just as the kids of the 1960s shocked their parents with promiscuity, long hair and Rock’n Roll, so too do the right-wing network’s young meme brigades shock older generations (Lewis, 2018). However, today identity signals affiliated with previous countercultures paradoxically align white-supremacist, misogynist hyper-traditional ideals with the rebellious positioning of past countercultural movements.

It is also important to realize that processes of identity formation are artificial, as Max Weber already pointed out a century ago (Banton, 2007). The processes of group belonging and identity formations

are man-made and socially constructed. They are based on a subjective belief in a shared communality and community. Weber insisted that it was not the community that created the belief, but the belief that created the community. If the belief creates the community and if there are internal as well as external factors at work in the process to generate identity, activist scholars and teachers can make a difference.

The Technology Trap

The ‘Alt Right’ attracts people through seemingly edgy and provocative representations of many of the network’s key aspects, such as the cult of masculinity, fear of difference, and hostility toward democratic politics and critical thinking (Ambedkar, 2017), using technology that tends to cultivate extremism. For example, although YouTube is frequently ignored or underestimated in its impact on the rise of disinformation and far-right groups, evidence suggests that YouTube’s algorithm draws viewers to content that is more extreme than what they started with (Nicas, 2018).¹⁵ A search on YouTube for ‘social justice,’ produces results that, for example, include a video from PragerU entitled ‘What is Social Justice?’ hosted by Jonah Goldberg, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. In it, Goldberg echoes libertarian critiques of social justice in the format of an educational video. Other results produced by this search include a video from the libertarian YouTube channel ReasonTV titled ‘Stossel: Jordan Peterson vs. “Social Justice Warriors”’ and a video from the right-wing influencer Roaming Millennial titled ‘Why Social Justice is CANCER’ (Lewis, 218: 31). In fact, Lewis points out that all of the top 10 video of her search results for ‘social justice’ were criticisms of social justice from reactionary channels.

While catalyzed by technology, radicalization on YouTube is fundamentally a social problem. YouTube monetizes influence for everyone, regardless of how harmful their belief systems are. The platform, and its parent company Google, have allowed racist, misogynist, and harassing content to remain online – and in many cases, to generate advertising revenue – as long as it does not explicitly include slurs. The implications of this strategy go beyond the fact that Google seeks to capitalize on controversies in order to bring in viewers. It also means that, when viewers actually engage with the content, they see it framed as lighthearted, entertaining, rebellious, and fun. This can be highly attractive to young audiences embracing a countercultural identity, but it fundamentally obscures the impact that issues have on vulnerable and underrepresented populations (Lewis, 2018).

YouTube is just one example; Massive disinformation campaigns target millions of people on other platforms as well, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Investigative journalists have shown that a Russian page called ‘Blacktivist’ has more Facebook likes than the real Black Lives Matter group (Lapowsky, 2018). Technology is changing the media and public discourse, because of the way the web distorts information. Many videos which present themselves as news in fact use content strategies

¹⁵ For example, a search for information on flu vaccine on YouTube recommends anti-vaccination conspiracy videos (Tufekci 2018). As Zeynep Tufekci (2018) points out, this is good for business, because Google, which owns YouTube, is an advertising broker, selling users’ attention to companies that will pay for it. The longer viewers stay on YouTube, the more money Google makes.

derived from marketing and advertising. It is algorithms that, aided by cable news networks, amplify and systematically move white supremacist talking points into the mainstream of political discourse in order to provoke feelings, memories, emotions, and social ties (Daniels, 2018).

DPWFRR have successfully spread right-wing ideologies through online communities and inspired many young (sometimes politically naive) cohorts to join and create other radical groups, such as the Proud Boys and Incels (Stern, 2019). Many endeavour to become provocateurs or fancy themselves as micro celebrities jumping onto the right-wing bandwagon. The current constellation allows for a much broader mainstreaming of the exclusionary, racist, anti-Semitic and misogynist narratives in the political arena. For the reasons outlined above, the 'Alt Right's' popularity among the youth groups, on- and offline should not be underestimated.

Conclusion

In the days of the Trump presidency, we live in a very polarized reality. The political and cultural choices are rigid and tight— you either belong with us or with 'the others.' Arguably, more fluidity in terms of belonging was possible during the Obama presidency. In extremist political climates, it may be useful to emphasize nuances and teach complexity rather than simplistic populism. For example, one can be passionately pro-choice and not be pro-abortion; one can be for a fair immigration policy and not be for open borders; one ought to be outraged by seeing toddlers torn from their parents and being put in cages and yet can oppose a free entry-for-all border policy (which is a myth and does not exist). Academia should be a place where these fine differences should be emphasized in an effort to teach complex realities. Activist scholars and teachers can make a difference.

As the department chair, I had no obligation to advertise an event that has nothing to do with political science or scientific inquiry in general. However, others have argued I did not give a well-deserved platform to the TPUSA, a student group that is lavishly funded by non-academic donors, and certainly has held very well publicized events on campus in the past (Kotch 2017). Recall that, in response to my refusal to advertise the TPUSA event, the VP of marketing and communications told *Campus Reform*, that the university is committed to free speech and my 'decision was inappropriate and does not reflect the university's values regarding free speech and open dialogue' (Sabes, 2019). The university spokesperson clearly did not grasp that instead of factual information and informed discourse, this event (as most such events) exposed students to propaganda and identity politics under the mantle of free speech. In the name of fostering diversity, this spokesperson apparently sees the college's role as promoting any kind of speech. Does this include the speech of recruiters for ISIS and the KKK? Of course not. Moreover, whether the university allowed the event to occur or not, it was certainly not appropriate for an administrator to maintain that a political science department was obligated to advertise it.

This paper has examined factors that have contributed to the rise of the 'Alt Right' and student groups such as TPUSA. Both the wealthy conservative business magnates who fund these groups (using them to attempt to further limit the reach of government regulation) such as the conglomerate that owns

Google Alphabet Inc. and various Koch brothers-affiliated groups, such as the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, and the older exponents of racism and white supremacy—represented by authors such as Gottfried—KKK and neo-Nazis are getting young people who join these groups to, often unwittingly, do their bidding. In the current climate, and with the advent of current web-based technology, DPWFRR groups such as TPUSA were able to maneuver into the mainstream by effectively recruiting members and distributing misinformation. TPUSA also attacks faculty members they target, through the Professor Watchlist and aggressive doxing, making these faculty members feel threatened and under siege. Any responsible and aware administration should be supportive of their faculty members and defend them in the face of such attacks.

Freedom of speech in academia should not mean the unchecked promulgation of lies, and racist, anti-Semitic, and misogynistic propaganda. Just as an Astronomy department should not be expected to advertise (and endow) a campus meeting of the Flat Earth Society, a Political Science Department should not be expected to advertise an event such as ‘The Myth of White Privilege.’ There is a very real distinction between the practice of free speech that is based on reason and evidence-based rationality versus hate speech, fear-mongering, and the use of delusional ‘alternate facts.’ The university should not be used to lure students into the DPWFRR’s parallel universe of conspiracy theory, in which one is supposed to accept the ‘truth’ of white supremacy, ethnonationalism and the claims surrounding the fiction that men are oppressed in the present-day patriarchal society.

Digital technology facilitated DPWFRR groups to move into the mainstream and to brand their reactionary ideologies as edgy and provocative ‘Alt-Right’. However, by mainstreaming misogynist, racist and white-nationalist ideas, the network also normalized white supremacist and other reactionary beliefs, therewith attempting to ‘uphold the existing racial order wherein whiteness occupies a dominant, central position that affords symbolic, social, and material privileges at the direct expense of communities of color’ (Hartzell 2018, p. 14).

In this paper, I have focused on the rise of DPWFRR groups and how young people have been drawn into them; how such a group, TPUSA, uses doxing and a Professor Watchlist as tools of intimidation against professors; how an out-of-touch administration, who misunderstands the intentions of these groups and the meaning of freedom of speech can contribute to the problem by failing to take a clear stand in order to support its professors. Beyond the scope of this paper, but worthy of consideration, is whether groups such as TPUSA and events such as ‘The Myth of White Privilege’ should be permitted on campuses at all.

Is there a positive side to holding an event such as ‘The Myth of White Privilege’ on a university campus? At the event at Rider, there was a large turnout of predominantly minority students, who were better informed and more intellectually insightful than the presenters. Through their insightful questions, this audience revealed the presenters’ lies and debunked their propaganda. The result was that astute analysis based on evidence won out over the presenters’ attempt to promulgate racist thinking.

Yet, can we count on the student body at every university having such informed students who can repudiate the kind of propaganda presented at ‘The Myth of White Privilege’? At a university that does not have such a student body, might gullible students who attend an event like this be drawn in by the ‘Alt Right’s’ repackaging and rebranding of racist ideas?

Finally, as one who has experienced being doxed, I would advocate for legal remedies that address doxing; the invasion of privacy, and the intimidation and harassment that it promotes should not be a weapon available for use against anyone. Well-meaning people can have different points of view and engage in discussion and debate on the issues; doxing, or the threat of it, does not belong in civil discourse.

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