Seize the Center: A Critique of the The Alt-Right, Including Tyler Durden's Advice Robert S. Griffin www.robertsgriffin.com

The alt(alternative)-right, this categorization, this title, very prominent these days, presumes to provide a label, that identifies, ties together, brings together, a lot people and activities that have the same basic outlook. What anybody or any collectivity, any entity, calls himself/herself/itself is of major importance, because it shapes how they see themselves and what they do; affects how others see them and behave toward them, including who signs up with them and who goes the other way; and it has an impact on what they accomplish. To illustrate, The Tea Party enlisted soccer moms and established politicians, received a fair amount of positive mainstream media coverage, shaped public discourse, and affected election outcomes and public policy. Would this movement have achieved these same results had it had decided to call itself the alt-ight? A question to ponder.

This writing takes an analytical look at the alt-right, and not just at what this thrust calls itself and the implications of that; it also considers how the alt-right conducts its business and where that leads, and it offers recommendations about the alt-right's place in the white racial movement as a whole. For me personally, writing this has been a way to clarify what I think about the alt-right and how I personally fit with it.

I'll start with the term right in alt-right. Two things about it of note: First, right is on one end of the ideological/cultural/political spectrum. There's right, center, and left, and right is over on the side; it's not in the middle. Second, right is pejorative. If somebody says you're a rightist, or a right-winger, most likely they aren't paying you a compliment. There is the Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies at the University of California at Berkeley.

You can check out the Center's web site, or you can take my word for it that its title legitimizes attacking people, organizations, and activities those involved with it don't like. In sum, right is a red flag.

And there's the alt (alternative) part of alt-right. inclusion of the word alternative in a designation connotes that there are two or more ways of looking at something and/or doing something, and that this individual or group is one of those ways; that is to say, he/it is a way, not the way. I'm trying to think of any other movement, any corporation, anything, that has deemed it a good idea to attach alternative to what it calls itself, which underscores that it isn't the only game in town. Have there been any alt-progressive organizations? It's back in the '70s and Steve Jobs is starting a computer company and he is deciding what to call it: There were already Altair computers around (I looked it up). Jobs thinks, I'll call my company The Alt-Altair, because my computer is an alternative to the Altairs out there now. But then he thinks, I should try to establish my own identity, plus I don't want people thinking about Altairs every time they think of my company--so I'll go with Apple. Get my drift?

I'm having major trouble figuring out why people would identify themselves in a way that sets them up to be marginalized and demonized—we are getting booted in our backsides enough as it is without choosing to wear alt-right kick-me signs--and that punches up the fact that they are but an option. With the alt-right title, we are announcing that, indeed, we are a rightist movement, and ceding the central ground, and the whole left half of the spectrum, to those who oppose us. We are implying that to accept our ideas and join up with us you have to see yourself as right wing and to a greater or lesser extent feel outside the mainstream society, and most people don't.

One way to be successful at anything is to take into account how others who have been successful at this same thing went about it.

Three successful movements in recent decades have been the black civil rights movement in the 1950s and '60s, the modern feminist movement, and the gay rights movement.

I'll start with what these three movements didn't do. None of them called themselves the alt-left. Martin Luther King didn't say, "As a member of the alt-left, I offer—as the best alternative, really—that there be racial integration in America." Feminism didn't bill itself as a leftist movement. Gay marriage wasn't pitched as a left wing alternative. These successful movements were careful to stay away from any self-labeling that might be problematic for them. "I'm a Communist, but don't let that get to you, just listen to my good ideas"--none of that. Hubert Humphrey was a proud liberal and it got him the vice-presidency and a presidential nomination, but the people in these three groups saw that that handle wasn't doing to work for them and shunned it.

All three successful movements went straight for the center, the mainstream, of American life, where they knew the action is; they didn't come on as fringe types. These successful movements attended closely to the manner in which they presented themselves. They knew how to play to their audience(s). They used language, arguments, and approaches that resonated with the mass public. Those front and center in the black civil rights, feminist, and gay rights movements were appealing, reasonable, credible, accessible, comforting, and likeable.

And they most certainly didn't present themselves as an alternative. What they were for was *it*, period. It was *the* true, decent, fair, equitable, just, good, moral thing to do. It was *the* American thing to do. What they advocated was the right thing, the *only* thing, to do if you wanted to be respectable. To be against what they were insisting upon—their pitches were couched as imperatives—was no less than shameful. If you were unable to go along with it, you were obliged to get over on the side and out of the way—the right side, over there, that'd be good.

These successful movements associated themselves with attractive, convincing, and emotion-evoking images—they could

be called in today's parlance memes. The civil rights movement got a lot of mileage out of the image of four little black girls who were killed in a KKK church bombing in 1963 in Birmingham, The gays had Ryan White, an Indiana teenager who HIV/AIDS infected from contaminated blood became a treatment—that is to say, he wasn't gay; Americans watched Ryan die and it tore at their heartstrings. The gay movement also has had the casts of "Will & Grace" and "Transparent," which personalized, humanized, and legitimized its arguments. The Alt Right has Pepe the Frog, which goes over big among young men with gleams in their eyes and affinities for Twitter, and that's good, but Pepe comes across as a scary menace to the general public, and that's not good.

All three of these successful movements had radical, in-your-face components. The black movement had H. Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Huey Newton and the Black Panthers, and Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. There were the radical feminists. The gays had the ACT UP group. Arguably, all of these more hard-edged individuals and organizations contributed to the cause, but I would argue that if were only these groups it is highly questionable whether these causes would have succeeded as they did. Would there have been a voting rights act or public accommodations law if the black civil rights movement had been, in the public's perception, just The Black Panthers? Not likely. Martin Luther King and those like him had to be there.

Important in this context, none of the more extreme components in these movements were condemned or expelled by the, call them, respectable components. At the same time, however, the more acceptable people and organizations in these movements didn't openly embrace or identify with the radical elements. They didn't have an overarching movement title—say, alt-left—that linked them and what they were doing to these more confrontational and threatening personages, groups, and activities. They basically stayed clear of their rough-and-tumble compatriots

and went about the business of making their own appeals. Back to the Martin Luther King example, he represented himself and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, nothing more than that.

A last point, these successful movements avoided identifying themselves with, or linking their fates to, individual politicians or a political party. These successful movements kept the focus on the cause, not politics. Martin Luther King didn't talk about Lyndon Johnson; he talked about civil rights for black people. The gay rights movement didn't intertwine itself with, say, Bill Clinton to the point that if Clinton wasn't your man you were disposed to think that gay rights wasn't your cause. The women's movement kept the attention on women's interests, not the Democratic Party, and if you were on their side, whichever party you favored, wherever you were on the political spectrum, welcome aboard. Certainly individuals within these movements were politically active, but the movements as movements, and their leadership, stayed on message, whether it was black civil rights, women's rights, or gay rights.

The lesson in this is that it may have been best to take advantage of the Trump candidacy by noting where we agree with him, but not, as I believe the alt-right led the way in doing, have gotten so tight with him that we alienated the many people who have major problems with him.

So far I'm been questioning the wisdom of taking on an alt-right identity. I also wonder about its accuracy. Are we, or enough of us anyway, rightists? My answer: no.

I'll begin with myself. In the last fifteen years, I've written three books about race from the perspective of European, white, Americans, and have produced perhaps a hundred articles for periodicals dealing with race, and I've maintained a personal website of my writings, a good percentage of which have dealt with race, and I've advocated for white people. To be sure, I've been called an extremist and an outlier by those who oppose what I

have expressed as a way to discredit and marginalize me. But in my own mind I've never seen myself as a fringe sort, on the cultural/political right, anything like that.

I've never really labeled myself as anything, but if I had to, terms that come to mind are centrist, American traditionalist, core American, white analyst and advocate, Jeffersonian, or simply a Republican. I admire conservative philosopher Russell Kirk, Senator Robert Taft from back in the 1940s and '50s, and Calvin Coolidge—those aren't fringe people. I've gotten a great deal from individualist philosopher and novelist Ayn Rand. I've gained a lot from Gore Vidal's writings. At the moment, I'm in the middle of Nicholson Baker's new book on his month as a substitute schoolteacher, *Substitute*.² I check out ESPN.com the first thing in the morning. In my own eyes, I'm conventional, middle of the road, the guy down the street from you. I see nothing radical or extreme about caring about the status and fate of white people. Right, or right wing, or alt anything, doesn't fit me, it's not me.

And I see some central figures in the white racial movement who seem to be being put in the alt-right camp, or are putting themselves in it, or are being associated with it, somewhere in there, who are centrists like me—not right at all. I'll cite three examples here, and they can correct me if I'm off base.

There's Jared Taylor, founder of the American Renaissance web site. His remarks at an alt-right press conference on August 12, 2016, included this:

What is the Alt Right? It is a broad, dissident movement that rejects egalitarian orthodoxies. These orthodoxies require us to believe that the sexes are equivalent, that race is meaningless, that all cultures and religions are equally valuable, and that any erotic orientation or identification is healthy. These things we deny. The Alt Right is also skeptical of mass democracy. It opposes foreign aid and foreign intervention–especially for "nation building."

I asked myself, what is rightist about this? It comes off to me as core, conventional, accepted, common sense thinking in America from its founding all the way up to recent decades, at which time point powerful forces altered the through line, the basic direction, the central narrative, of this country. America was founded on the idea of equal individual rights, not egalitarianism. Historically, this nation has recognized that people and groups are different from one another, including qualitatively different; some Until recent times, the sexes are better and worse than others. as equivalent, nor was weren't viewed race considered meaningless—and science still hasn't gone along with those cockeyed notions. The Founders were very skeptical of mass democracy, which is why we pledge allegiance to the flag and to the republic for which it stands, not to the democracy for which it Foreign intervention, nation building?--entangling stands. alliances, George Washington.

Jared's paragraph, and Jared generally, I know him and his truly remarkable work well—and I mean this as a compliment—is as American as apple pie. Alt-right? I don't think so.

Another presenter at this same alt-right news conference was Peter Brimelow, author and founder of VDARE.com. Peter, at significant personal cost, has courageously and with great effectiveness brought attention to the negative, even disastrous, impact of the current immigration patterns on America. Peter was one of just three people in front of the journalists at the news conference, though in his remarks he did seem to distance himself personally from the alt-right:

It happens that immigration is one of the issues that the Alt Right is deeply interested in. I have a number of writers who are members of the Alt Right, very prominent members, obviously much younger than I am: James Kilpatrick, Alexander Hart, and Washington Watcher, for example. These people all live in Washington. They work in institutions in Washington. They may be your colleagues. They may be sitting next to you at this conference. But they do not wish to show their faces. These are

people who have careers, who have families to support and so on, and they simply cannot speak out on this issue of public policy and expect to go unpunished in the Land Of The Free. So that's why I am here—to speak for them. I'm too old to care!²

If I read Peter's comments correctly, he was there to help some people out. He doesn't see himself as a rightist, and that makes sense to me, because he isn't. He's smack dab in the middle of the spectrum. I pieced together this quote from one of Peter's writings and the statement of purpose for VDARE.com he authored:

John Jay in The Federalist Papers wrote that Americans were "one united people, a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs." . . . The National Question is, in short, how long can the U.S. continue as a coherent nation-state in the face of current immigration policy. ... Human differences are not social constructs. It is only with an honest consideration of race and ethnicity, the foundations of human grouping, that human differences can be explained and their social consequences understood, whether those differences are philosophical, cultural or biological. VDARE.com stands on the side of science in publishing coverage of the ongoing discovery and research in the realm of human differences. The racial and cultural identity of America is legitimate and defensible . . . ³

There is nothing right wing about any of this. It's the people that disagree with Peter that are fringy, not Peter.

And, the third example, there is Kevin Macdonald, who spoke at a recent alt-right conference in Washington, D.C. Dr. Macdonald, who is the editor of The Occidental Observer and its companion journal *The Occidental Quarterly*, had a distinguished university career as a tenured full professor and now holds the esteemed rank of professor emeritus. In an impressive number of

books and short writings during his university years and still, Kevin has produced informed, documented, insightful, and groundbreaking analyses and critiques of Jews as a group and Jewish-gentile relations.

Predictably, this activity has resulted in his being subjected to unwarranted and cruel attempts to dismiss him as an irrational, malevolent anti-Semite and relegate him to a peripheral and ineffectual public identity and existence. But there is nothing right, or left, about Kevin's writings about Jews. He is making factual claims that are either true or untrue, and he is offering inferences from those claims that are either justified or not and worthy or not. In my view, he should be offering his expressions for the consideration of the mass public without him and his expressions attached to a label that will prejudice his audience's interpretations and conclusions. Kevin has nothing to gain (nor do I, by the way) presenting himself to the world as a member of the alt-right.

A big problem with an alt-right identification for Kevin is guilt by association: it puts him in a category and with people who also write about Jews within which, with whom, he doesn't belong, and that serves to grease the skids for those who want to discredit and marginalize him ("He's one of *them*!). A prime illustration of this phenomenon, a very visible part of the alt-right is The Daily Stormer web site.⁶ A sampling of its recent articles:

"Greasy Neocon Kike David Frum Says Whites are Losing Race War"

"CBS Jew Les Moonves Makes Ridiculous Excuses for Decline in Monkey Ball [National Football League] Ratings"

"I'll Put an Ass Up Your Boot" – Filthy Jew Terrorist Max Boot Goes Off the Rails on Twitter"

"Rampaging Old Grizzled Kike Ginsburg Apologizes to Evil Negroid Kaepernick."

"Diabolical Kike Dan Senor Deletes Pussygate Tweets After Being Accused of Leaking Tape."

"Weasel Shill Paul Jewsef Watson Says ISIS Hurts Jews."

The three examples just mentioned—Taylor, Brimelow, and Macdonald—and there are a number of others that space prevents me from citing, have the potential to be as appealing to people in the center and left as they are to people on the right. The three successful movements didn't say they were left or right (nor did Donald Trump in his presidential campaign), which would have defined themselves out of the central arena in American life and alienated the people who didn't identify with whichever side they chose in the left-right dichotomy.

I'm not sure we thought hard enough about this alt-right label before we got on board with it. It doesn't cost anything to create options in any area of life; we can always reject them. What are some names for our movement, or elements of it, from other left/right—e.g., frames of reference than better/worse, American/un-American, or good for whites/bad for whites? It's a challenge to be creative: The Tea Party wasn't an obvious choice, nor was Black Lives Matter. The American renaissance movement is one possibility for us. Coming up with names for a movement is a good thought experiment—one that could result in the conclusion that it is better not to have a single overarching name.

I don't want to leave the impression from the preceding section that I think The Daily Stormer and its founder and principal writer Andrew Anglin should be condemned or excluded. To the contrary, I see Anglin serving a positive function in the white racial movement, or alt-right, whatever you want to call it, if you want to call it anything. He is blowing holes in the long-standing taboo against speaking with anything but reverence and deference

toward Jews and blacks. He's a living example that you don't have to walk on eggshells and kowtow around them. His style isn't my style, and I don't think his approach goes over well across the board, with the general public, but for my money, he deserves a place at the table; just not at the head of the table, and I suggest that you think twice about sitting next to him at that table when people can see you.

If a movement is to be successful, it needs places in it for a wide range of people, including women (how many women can you name in the alt-right?), university students, and solid folks of the sort that are working at Fidelity and forming families and establishing positive reputations and places in the community and coaching Little League teams and attending piano recitals. The word is that more people have joined up with the alt-right than ever before, but who are they, and just as important, who *aren't* they? I don't know, I'm just asking.

I spent my working life around university students and I think I know them well, and of course I'm generalizing here, but based on my experience with them, their most central motivating impulse is to be decent and fair and just. (Which is why the idea of social justice resonates so well with them.) They want to be good people. They don't want to be on one end or the other of the social/cultural/ political spectrum; rather, they want to be safe and accepted and respected in the middle of wherever they are, in the dorm or in the community; they want to belong. They want to be seen as being OK people, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. Political correctness in universities matches up well with students' basic impulses.

What appeals most effectively across the board with university students is . . . sincerity, respectfulness, niceness, and humility. I'm from Burlington, Vermont and way, way back I took a community education course from a very young Bernie Sanders. Bernie was an unemployed single parent then, barely getting by on unemployment benefits. He was tall and upright,

not hunched over as he is now, and he had an abundant mound of I can't remember what the course was about; dark curly hair. perhaps labor history. I do remember Bernie saying pretty much the same things he is saying now. During the course, he didn't strike me as the brightest person around, or the most informed, but one thing that stood out about Bernie was his sincerity. He truly believed in what he was saying. And he connected with me in a respectful way; he didn't come off as a self-consumed hot shot. I got the distinct impression that I mattered to Bernie. He was kind to me in that course. He was a nice guy. All these years later, it could be that the young people who flocked to Bernie this past election cycle responded to the same qualities I experienced in him those many years ago. The obvious point, what I'm describing in Bernie isn't Donald Trump, and it doesn't characterize the current rhetoric emanating from the core of the alt-right.

I suppose the alt-right label and the Trump candidacy did result in greater visibility for this movement, whatever it is to be called. But the question is, what kind of visibility has it been? I don't hold to the notion that all publicity is good publicity. I have a concern that the alt-right/Trump thrust this past year or so has too often been the occasion for those of us on this side of the cultural/racial divide, Alt-right and Trump adherents or not, getting smeared. I read a lot of the following sort of thing, and I worry that some of us are unwittingly setting up all of us for it:

... anti-Semitic, racist against blacks and Hispanics, sexist, and bigoted against the disabled, and ready to hold the door while Pepe the Frog feeds his opponents, including a large contingent of conservative and liberal Jewish journalists subjected to unimaginable invective by the Alt-Right, into the ovens.⁵

In fact, I'm trying to think of one positive reference to the alt-right I've read of seen in the central arena of dialogue and debate this whole past year.

A November 22nd, 2016 article in CNN reported:

Richard Spencer, a white supremacist and leading figure in the alt-right, delivered a racist and anti-Semitic address to a gathering of the group's members in which he declared, emphatically, "Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!" Spencer's chants prompted some audience members to raise their right hand in an apparent Nazi salute.

This same CNN piece quotes Donald Trump as saying, "I don't want to energize the group, and I disavow the group. It's not a group I want to energize, and if they are energized, I want to look into it and find out why." ⁶ If you are condemned by the President-Elect of the United States, especially after you have cozied up to him and seen him as friendly to your cause, you've got a big problem. At the very least, it should give you pause.

Some people have told me that the issues I raise here are just getting at a branding problem, what we call this movement. One said that alt-right is just another name for white nationalism. I see it as broader concern than that. To employ a super market metaphor, I'd call it a branding, packaging, and product problem, all three—how we are putting our product on the shelves, as it were, for the public to see and for ourselves to see, which includes the brand name but also includes what the package looks like and what's in the box.

As far as I can see, there is nothing new about the alt-right product itself; what's in the box. Those vocal in the movement seem convinced that they are offering something new and improved, so to speak, but as far as I can tell, the substance, the content, is no different from before. Despite knowing references to Guillaume Faye and such, I don't see anything in the alt-right rhetoric that William Pierce wasn't talking about thirty years ago, or that central figures in the movement currently—including the three prominent ones I referred to above—aren't saying now.

White nationalism certainly isn't new: it was in the subtitle of a book I wrote on Pierce,⁷ and see old writings by Harold Covington.⁸ Plus, white nationalism, including the call for a separate living space for whites, isn't inherently right. Did the desire for a Jewish ethno-state in the Middle East automatically make someone a member of the right? Couldn't a leftist believe in the formation of the state of Israel? White nationalism is an idea, and it can take many forms, and it's either a good idea or a bad one; but it isn't imperative to plunk it down somewhere along the left-right continuum, which implies that to adhere to it you have to see yourself at that particular place on the spectrum.

What is distinctive about the alt-right is the name and the means it employs and its tone (I'm calling that packaging): the big one, social media; and its relatively more strident approach (although here again, nothing new about this basic tact—check into Tom Metzger and his White Aryan Resistance⁹); and there's a touch of ageism I pick up, that somehow it's cooler to be young and sending out Tweets than old and reading Chekhov short stories. There is nothing inherently wrong with this packaging, as I'm calling it, or its product. It sells well with some customers, particularly young men disposed toward social media, and it pays off for some people, including those who make their names through it. As far as I'm concerned, keep the alt-right brand, packaging, and product on the shelves, fine.

But, and it's the thesis here; don't make the alt-right packaging the central, or only, one because it tends to make the packages, and the precise contents of those packages, of everyone concerned about the status and fate in European heritage, white, people look the same when they really aren't, and shouldn't be; there are many ways of conducting racial/cultural business, not just one. It turns away people who potentially would buy what we are selling, or start, or continue, producing their own product for this cause. It doesn't market well with the general public, especially women. And, to switch metaphors, it sets us up to be punching bags. You can take just so many punches before they start taking

their toll. Another piece of conventional wisdom (along with all publicity being good publicity) that isn't true is Neitzsche's maxim that that which doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Some things that don't kill you leave you so damaged that you wish you were dead.¹⁰

Vitally important, the centrality of the alt-right keeps us just where our adversaries want us: way over on the scorned, beyondthe-pale, ineffectual fringe of American life. One thing I feel sure of is that if those who oppose us had a vote on what name we should chose and how we should conduct ourselves, they would have voted for the Alt Right and what the key players in the altight are now doing. The people who want to supplant and destroy us don't want us soberly competing with them in the center of American life, because they know we could do it very well indeed, because the reality is just the reverse of what is currently going on: we are central and they are marginal. It's as if we have internalized our oppression: we've been told so insistently and for so long that we are bad and should stay off the playing field and go stand on the sideline and talk among ourselves that we have bought the message and are acting accordingly even when we really don't have to and it's not in our interest to do so.

The alt-right makes use to a Red Pill metaphor (which represents living in reality rather than comfortable delusion), drawn from the 1999 film, The Matrix." I'll end this with another popular culture reference, from the film "Fight Club," which came out the same year as "The Matrix." The scene, two young men who haven't met before (or they don't think they have; it's complicated) sitting next to each other on an airplane: The Narrator (played by Edward Norton); and Tyler Durden (played by Brad Pitt).

Narrator: Tyler, you are by far the most interesting single-serving friend I've ever met... See, I have this thing: everything on a plane is single-serving.

Tyler Durden: Oh, I get it. It's very clever.

Narrator: Thank you.

Tyler Durden: How's that working out for you?

Narrator: What?

Tyler Durden: Being clever.

Narrator: Great.

Tyler Durden: Keep it up then. . . . Right up.

Lately, there seems to have been the enlistment of a good number of clever guys into the white cause, and I'm with Tyler Durden, if cleverness is working for them, they should keep it up—right up, with an emphasis on right if that's what they want. We need clever guys, we really do. I think this whole business comes down to each of us doing what works for us as the unique individuals we are. The alt-right label and its approach don't work for me, so I'm not involving myself with them. But if they work for you, absolutely, keep it up, or do something else; whatever best gets you through your life, whatever squares with your being, whatever you think is the most ethical thing to do, do it. But think hard about it; don't just go with what is in the wind at the moment. The title of the recent alt-right Conference was Become Who We Are. I believe a lot us are centrist white Americans and we ought to become that.

End Notes

- 1. Jared Taylor, "Remarks From the Alt Right Press Conference Last Month," posted at http://www.amren.com.
- 2. Peter Brimelow, "At That Alt Right Press Conference: I'm Glad My Young Wife Is A Texan And Knows How To Shoot," posted at http://www.vdare.com.
- 3. Drawn from two sources: Peter Brimelow, "Time to Rethink Immigration," originally published in National Review magazine, June 22, 1992; and the statement of purpose for VDARE.com authored by Mr. Brimelow. Both are available at http://www.vdare.com.
- 4. http://www.dailystormer.com.

pp. 42-46.

- 5. Peter Lee, "Trump: We Wish the Problem Was Fascism . . . But It Is Really Racism," posted on *The Unz Review*, October 19th, 2016. http://www.unz.com
- 6. http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/22/politics/donald-trump-disavow-groups-new-york-times/index.html
- 7. Robert S. Griffin, *The Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds: An Up-Close Portrait of White Nationalist William Pierce* (Authorhouse, 2001).
- 8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Covington
- 9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom Metzger (white supremacist)
- 10. See the November, 2012 thought "On Nietzsche's Maxim" in my web site, www.robertsgriffin.com.