



NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**ALT-RIGHT INFLUENCE ON THE RADICALIZATION
OF WHITE NATIONALISTS IN THE UNITED STATES,
ACCORDING TO SIGNIFICANCE QUEST THEORY**

by

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June 2020

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE June 2020	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE ALT-RIGHT INFLUENCE ON THE RADICALIZATION OF WHITE NATIONALISTS IN THE UNITED STATES, ACCORDING TO SIGNIFICANCE QUEST THEORY			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Forrest Cullings				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) Reaching national notoriety in the 2016 election season, the Alt-Right embodied the most recent resurgence of white nationalism in the United States. Though it lost momentum with the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally, the Alt-Right's persistence in reaching broad audiences continued online with the adoption of uncensored media platforms like 8chan. The juxtaposition between white-nationalist violence conducted before and after the Alt-Right's national appearance highlights the Alt-Right's ability to attract relatively affluent young white Americans by leveraging fringe media sites to galvanize old white-nationalist ideologies given changing political environments. Where Dylann Roof, a high school dropout, had access only to passive white-nationalist websites that spouted hateful ideologies, John Earnest and Patrick Crusius, both college students, actively participated in uncensored social media platforms on which users motivated each other to commit violence through heated hateful rhetoric and the celebration of attacks on non-whites. In line with Significance Quest Theory—which emphasizes the role of motivation, terrorism-justifying ideologies, and social networks in the radicalization process—the Alt-Right successfully spun violence-justifying white-nationalist ideologies within online social networks to reach disenchanted young white Americans, including those whose futures seemed promising, which culminated in a string of violent attacks in the summer of 2019.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Alt-Right, white nationalism, Significance Quest Theory, collective action, radicalization			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 107	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

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NATIONALISTS IN THE UNITED STATES, ACCORDING TO
SIGNIFICANCE QUEST THEORY**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

Reaching national notoriety in the 2016 election season, the Alt-Right embodied the most recent resurgence of white nationalism in the United States. Though it lost momentum with the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally, the Alt-Right’s persistence in reaching broad audiences continued online with the adoption of uncensored media platforms like 8chan. The juxtaposition between white-nationalist violence conducted before and after the Alt-Right’s national appearance highlights the Alt-Right’s ability to attract relatively affluent young white Americans by leveraging fringe media sites to galvanize old white-nationalist ideologies given changing political environments. Where Dylann Roof, a high school dropout, had access only to passive white-nationalist websites that spouted hateful ideologies, John Earnest and Patrick Crusius, both college students, actively participated in uncensored social media platforms on which users motivated each other to commit violence through heated hateful rhetoric and the celebration of attacks on non-whites. In line with Significance Quest Theory—which emphasizes the role of motivation, terrorism-justifying ideologies, and social networks in the radicalization process—the Alt-Right successfully spun violence-justifying white-nationalist ideologies within online social networks to reach disenchanted young white Americans, including those whose futures seemed promising, which culminated in a string of violent attacks in the summer of 2019.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Alt-Right	Alternative Right
AP	Advanced Placement
CFMR	Counterfinality Model of Radicalization
CoCC	Council of Conservative Citizens
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GPA	Grade Point Average
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
SLTTP	State, Local, Territorial, Tribal, and Private
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center
SQT	Significance Quest Theory

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my thesis advisors, Dr. Tristan Mabry and Dr. Carolyn Halladay, for their enormous help in the completion of this project. I especially appreciated Dr. Halladay's direct, yet always extremely helpful, suggestions on rough drafts that never failed to put a smile on my face, and Dr. Mabry's even-tempered advising approach that encouraged me through the tough writing blocks and helped me focus on the broad picture. I could not have worked with a better pair of advisors.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to all of the new friends I made over the past year who kept me sane by getting me away from my thesis to explore the Central Coast. These productive breaks provided me the release I needed to clear my head when writing became tough.

Lastly, I want to thank my family for their enduring love and support as I embark on a career in the United States Navy. You have instilled in me that which is most important in life, the love and hope of a Christian, which will continually guide my steps as a Naval Officer.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“They are the instigators, not me. I am simply defending my country from cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion.”¹ These were the words echoed in the white-nationalist manifesto published by Patrick Crusius before he shot and killed 22 innocent people in an El Paso Walmart on August 3, 2019.² The most recent label assigned to far-right extremism, specifically white nationalism, is the Alternative Right, or Alt-Right. Predominantly an online movement, it lacks a specific ideology and organized leadership structure, though some “stars” like Richard Spencer have emerged with significant followings. A range of ideological strands, including anti-liberal democracy, anti-Semitism, misogyny, and racism, coexist under the broad category of Alt-Right tenets, but the core of Alt-Right ideology is white nationalism with the main goal being the advancement of whites and the exclusion, if not eradication, of other ethnicities. The purpose of this research is to understand how the Alt-Right frames political, economic, cultural, and social issues to radicalize white Americans, sometimes to the point of committing violence, through the lens of radicalization theory, especially Significance Quest Theory (SQT).

Kruglanski et al. applied SQT to their study of violent extremism among Islamist radicals.³ SQT asserts that radicalization is a process that links three essential elements: the goal of attaining personal significance, the ideology that promotes violence as a means to attain significance, and the social process that brings individuals to adopt the goal of attaining significance.⁴ According to Islamist extremist analyst, Ali Soufan, similar

¹ Grabancijaš, “Patrick Crusius Manifesto: The Inconvenient Truth,” Grabancijaš (blog), August 5, 2019, <https://grabancijas.com/patrick-crusius-manifesto-the-inconvenient-truth/>.

² Laretta Charlton, “What Is the Great Replacement?,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/us/politics/grand-replacement-explainer.html>.

³ Arie W. Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism,” *Political Psychology* 35 (February 2, 2014): 69–93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12163>.

⁴ Arie W. Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism,” *Political Psychology* 35 (February 2, 2014): 69–93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12163>.

elements are evident in white nationalism.⁵ Furthermore, Kruglanski et al. described varying degrees of radicalization among Islamist extremists, citing McCauley and Moskalenko's pyramid model of participation in terrorism.⁶ There appears to be a similar spectrum of radicalism among the Alt-Right, with violent perpetrators making up the smallest but most radical group of individuals at the apex of this extremist pyramid.

There is abundant academic literature covering contemporary and historical far-right extremism and white nationalism in the United States as well as the radicalization of Islamist terrorists. However, little scholarly work addresses the radicalization process of white nationalists, which sometimes culminates in violent actions against other Americans. This thesis will attempt to close the gap in the literature by analyzing radicalization of American white nationalists by Alt-Right ideologies through the lens of significance quest theory.⁷

A. SIGNIFICANCE

Amid the violent rhetoric and actions of the Alt-Right, and far-right extremism in general, American lives are at stake. Recent shootings perpetrated by American far-right extremists claimed more than 35 American lives in 2018 and 2019.⁸ In contrast, only one American was killed in a domestic attack by a Muslim jihadist in 2018 and 2019 combined. Domestically, since 9/11, more American deaths are attributed to far-right attacks than Islamist jihadist attacks.⁹

Because of its predominantly online presence, the Alt-Right is hard to nail down in terms of membership. Even Alt-Right figures disagree on the size of their movement.

⁵ Ali H. Soufan, "I Spent 25 Years Fighting Jihadis. White Supremacists Aren't So Different.," *The New York Times*, August 5, 2019, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/opinion/white-supremacy-terrorism.html>.

⁶ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=689288>.

⁷ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization."

⁸ "Part IV. What Is the Threat to the United States Today?," New America, accessed August 9, 2019, <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/terrorism-in-america/what-threat-united-states-today/>.

⁹ "Part IV. What Is the Threat to the United States Today?"

Andrew Anglin, the editor of the *Daily Stormer* website, has claimed that the Alt-Right was made up of a cohesive group of four to six million people, while Brad Griffin, the founder and editor of *Occidental Dissent* website, has guessed that the movement had a core of several hundred thousand people.¹⁰ Researchers of the Alt-Right, Thomas Main and George Hawley, attempted to measure the size of the movement. In his research of Alt-Right website visits, Main concludes that the Alt-Right audience is small compared to the audience of other political orientations, but that it is still significant because it is an ideological movement with the aim of inserting its beliefs into the fabric of American politics, and the core of ideological movements is generally small.¹¹ In his study of the 2016 American National Election Survey, Hawley found that among the 3,038 white, non-Hispanic respondents, “about 28% expressed strong feelings of white identity; about 38% expressed strong feelings of white solidarity; and about 27% felt that whites suffer a meaningful amount of discrimination in American life.”¹² While these sentiments may or may not translate to exact counts of Alt-Right subscribers, they do indicate the extent to which the Alt-Right’s message might resonate with white America.

White-nationalist penetration has also manifested itself in greater political polarization, with political candidates steadily migrating to the fringe, where the Alt-Right resides. Lilliana Mason asserts that politics have become more polarized due to the two-party social sorting process defined by racial, religious, and cultural groups, which falls in line with radical ideologies promoted by the Alt-Right.¹³ Her assertion is supported by a

¹⁰ Thomas Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2018); “Occidental Dissent: Nationalism, Populism, Reaction,” *Occidental Dissent*, accessed November 26, 2019, <http://www.occidentaldissent.com/>; “Daily Stormer website Goes Dark Amid Chaos,” Southern Poverty Law Center, September 18, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/09/18/daily-stormer-website-goes-dark-amid-chaos>.

¹¹ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*.

¹² George Hawley, “The Demography of the Alt-Right,” Institute for Family Studies, August 9, 2018, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-demography-of-the-alt-right>.

¹³ Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

2014 Pew Research study that shows how political polarization has progressed since 1994, shown in Figure 1.¹⁴

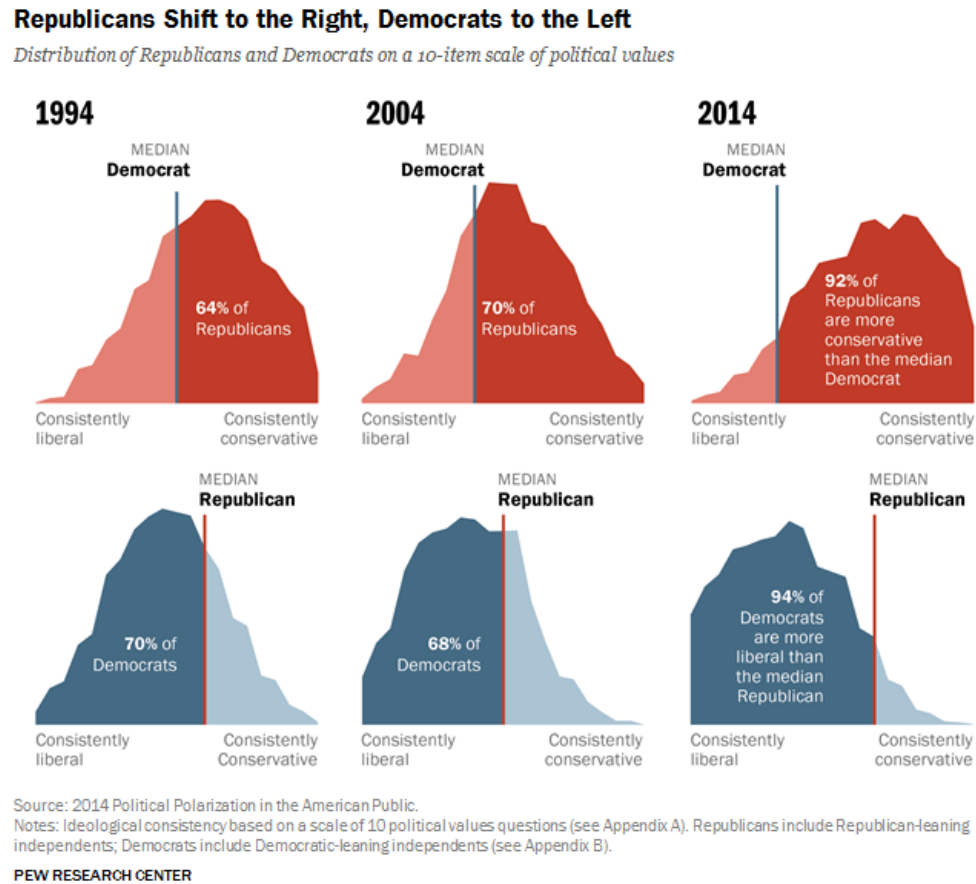


Figure 1. Political Polarization between 1994 and 2014

As the middle ground in U.S. politics dwindles, the most violence-prone extremists—such as Dylann Roof, John Earnest, and Patrick Crusius—were impelled to destructive action. A clearer sense of how and why white nationalists radicalize may help identify sources, methods, and actors which could then be used to preclude violence.

¹⁴ “Political Polarization in the American Public,” *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press* (blog), June 12, 2014, <https://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars frequently provide three components of radicalization: it is a (1) gradual process in which an individual comes to adopt (2) an extremist belief system or ideology that (3) accepts or promotes violence.¹⁵ Kruglanski et al. define radicalization as “the process of supporting or engaging in activities deemed (by others) as in violation of important social norms (e.g., the killing of civilians).”¹⁶ Radical behavior seems irrational to most observers. However, there are several causal explanations for the rational path to radicalization.¹⁷

Kruglanski et al. argue that people succumb to radical behavior when their commitment to the focal goal served by their radical behavior outweighs their commitment to other goals.¹⁸ This focal goal, according to Kruglanski et al., is the quest for significance, which they define as “the fundamental desire to matter, to be someone, [and] to have respect.”¹⁹ Other scholars define the quest for significance as, “the need for esteem, achievement, meaning, competence, control, and so on.”²⁰

¹⁵ John G. Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism : Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (Routledge, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203874738>; Scott Helfstein, “Edges of Radicalization: Ideas, Individuals and Networks in Violent Extremism,” 2012, <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA556711>; Fathali M. Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration,” *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (2005): 161–69, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161>; McCauley and Moskaleiko, *Friction*.

¹⁶ Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization.”

¹⁷ Kruglanski et al.; McCauley and Moskaleiko, *Friction*; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia, UNITED STATES: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=3441870>; Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism”; Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 11 (November 2, 2015): 958–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375>.

¹⁸ Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization.”

¹⁹ Kruglanski et al.

²⁰ Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, “The ‘What’ and ‘Why’ of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior,” *Psychological Inquiry* 11, no. 4 (October 2000): 227, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01; Viktor Emil Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, 4th ed. (Cutchogue, New York: Buccaneer Books, Inc, 1992); A. H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (July 1943): 370–96, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>; Robert W. White, “Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence,” *Psychological Review; Washington, Etc.* 66 (January 1, 1959): 297.

McCauley and Moskalenko portray radicalization as a pyramid model of participation in which most supporters, representing the base, remain passive, while those representing the apex take active, violent action.²¹ McCauley and Moskalenko's slippery slope mechanism asserts, "Small involvements in political conflict can create new forces moving an individual toward radicalization."²² Della Porta provides the following description of a slippery slope:

Once having joined an underground group, the activists would be required to participate at increasingly demanding levels of activity, whether in terms of the risk or the time involved. They usually began their careers in the underground by distributing leaflets or renting an apartment for the group. The longer they remained underground, the more likely they were to end up participating in robberies and assassinations.²³

Essentially, the slippery slope mechanism asserts that individuals radicalize gradually, in a step-by-step manner. Similarly, Fathali Moghaddam analogizes the radicalization process to a narrowing staircase, in which most people who feel relatively deprived or unfairly treated remain on the ground while a small minority ultimately join terrorist organizations and commit acts of violence.²⁴ Action takes many forms, ranging from nominal, logistical, or financial support to violent action. Moghaddam's linear radicalization model, however, has been refuted by other scholars in the field who treat radicalization as a gradual, nonlinear process that "emerges out of a convergence of several 'predisposing risk factors.'"²⁵

Kruglanski et al. identify three components that lead rational individuals to radical behavior: motivation, social networking, and ideology.²⁶ Furthermore, McCauley and Moskalenko present six mechanisms that lead to individual radicalization: personal

²¹ McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*.

²² McCauley and Moskalenko, 35.

²³ Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁴ Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism," 161.

²⁵ Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle"; Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism*; Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*.

²⁶ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization."

grievance, group grievance, slippery slope, thrill seeking, love, and unfreezing. Moghaddam likens radicalization to a five-floor narrowing staircase which focuses “on the psychological interpretation of material conditions and the options seen to be available to overcome perceived injustices” at each level.²⁷ Hafez and Mullins provide four intertwined factors that lead to violent radicalization: “personal and collective grievances, networks and interpersonal ties, political and religious ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures.”²⁸

The motivation, which can happen in one of three major ways, awakens one’s quest for significance.²⁹ Motivation can ignite aggression when one experiences personal significance loss, which Kruglanski et al. label humiliation or relative deprivation.³⁰ From an individual perspective, this happens in one of two ways. Either the individual finds him or herself poorly assimilated in society, or the individual experiences personal loss at the hands of an enemy or “out-group.”³¹

McCauley and Moskaleiko address frustration-aggression theory, which claims that experiences of pain, frustration, or discomfort leads individuals to indiscriminate aggression.³² According to them, “harm to self or loved ones can move individuals to hostility and violence toward perpetrators.”³³ However, McCauley and Moskaleiko point out that personal grievances often remain personal, and feelings of anger are often swiftly subsided, which counters the assertion that such brief emotions lead to long-term political action.³⁴

Other scholars agree that many individuals experience personal significance loss yet choose not to enact justice or revenge through violence. For example, the “ground

²⁷ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 161.

²⁸ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle.”

²⁹ Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization.”

³⁰ Kruglanski et al.

³¹ Kruglanski et al.

³² McCauley and Moskaleiko, *Friction*, 17.

³³ McCauley and Moskaleiko, 13.

³⁴ McCauley and Moskaleiko, *Friction*.

floor” of Moghaddam’s staircase to radicalization contains millions of people who “perceive injustice and feel relatively deprived.”³⁵ Only some of these individuals, Moghaddam argues, “climb to the first floor in search of solutions.”³⁶ The second floor of Moghaddam’s model is occupied by those individuals afflicted by relative deprivation who develop feelings of anger and frustration in their search for solutions and turn to leaders who express ideologies that condone violence against a culprit.³⁷ However, in line with McCauley and Moskaleiko’s assertion that anger alone does not explain engagement in long-term political action, Moghaddam asserts that angry individuals then move to the third floor, which is where individuals begin to see violence as a justified strategy.³⁸

Hafez and Mullins assert that disenchantment with one’s society may be “the landscape that frames the proximate causes of radicalization,” but they “do not find compelling any argument that suggests that they [grievances] are directly causal of behavioral radicalization.”³⁹ They also highlight identity differences that are “exploited by...sensationalist media personalities” as one of the grievances that may initiate radicalization.⁴⁰

Instead of personal significance loss leading to violence, McCauley and Moskaleiko argue that individual radicalization often occurs as a result of the blending of personal and group grievances.⁴¹ Personal grievances imply “negative identification with a group seen as perpetrators of injustice,” and group grievances imply “positive identification with a group seen as the victims of this injustice.”⁴² Kruglanski et al. identify two common threads of group grievances: anomie, or “the sense that the state is failing to provide the means for its citizens to attain their goals,” and prejudice, or “the humiliation

³⁵ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 162.

³⁶ Moghaddam, 162.

³⁷ Moghaddam, 162.

³⁸ Moghaddam, 162.

³⁹ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 961–62.

⁴⁰ Hafez and Mullins, 962.

⁴¹ McCauley and Moskaleiko, *Friction*, 32.

⁴² McCauley and Moskaleiko, 32.

of one's group and the trampling of its sacred values."⁴³ Personal and group grievances, when mixed together, create a powerful force toward radicalization.

Kruglanski et al.'s second motivator for radicalization is anticipated significance loss, or "avoidance."⁴⁴ This concept asserts that radical behavior is born in fear of humiliation or shame. Kruglanski et al. explain that "Japanese kamikaze pilots did not refuse their mission because it would bring unbearable shame and humiliation to themselves and their families."⁴⁵ In other words, radical individuals act to avoid loss of personal or group significance.

The third motivator for radicalization is the possibility of significance gain, or "incentive."⁴⁶ Kruglanski et al. assert that the pursuit of violence "affords an individual an opportunity for a considerable significance gain, a place in history, and the status of a hero or a martyr in the eyes of one's group."⁴⁷

McCauley and Moskalkenko's research reveals a similar phenomenon. They assert, "The attractions of risk-taking and status can move individuals, especially young males, to radical political action."⁴⁸ Criminological and psychological research finds young men most prone to take risks among all demographics, especially "young men who come from disadvantaged family backgrounds, have lower IQ levels, are of lower socioeconomic status, and who therefore have less opportunity to succeed in society along a traditional career path."⁴⁹ Research also finds that the presence of witnesses multiplies risk taking. McCauley and Moskalkenko assert, "By engaging in high-stakes activity, a man displays courage, self-assuredness, and strength, conveying to his audience – perhaps especially to other men – that he is the better man."⁵⁰

⁴³ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization," 75.

⁴⁴ Kruglanski et al., 75.

⁴⁵ Kruglanski et al., 75.

⁴⁶ Kruglanski et al., 75.

⁴⁷ Kruglanski et al., 75.

⁴⁸ McCauley and Moskalkenko, *Friction*, 58.

⁴⁹ McCauley and Moskalkenko, 62–74. Psychological and criminological studies are cited on page 74.

⁵⁰ McCauley and Moskalkenko, 66.

Hafez and Mullins support the significance gain argument, asserting that individuals “derive psychological and material benefits from radical associations,” and that “activism in a radical milieu...could provide restless youth with excitement or sense of purpose, or...personal empowerment and status.”⁵¹

Scholars also stress the importance of social networks in the radicalization process.⁵² Sageman argues that social affiliation is crucial in the radicalization process, particularly in the form of friendship, kinship, and discipleship.⁵³ Without networks, he argues, radicalized individuals lack “know-how and resources.”⁵⁴ Sageman asserts,

The critical and specific element to joining the jihad is the accessibility of a link to the jihad...the pool of potential mujahedin is composed of small clusters of close friends, relatives, worshippers, and disciples, who are connected through strong bonds.⁵⁵

Sageman wraps radicalization into a three-prong process that centers on social affiliation. Once socially affiliated with the group, an individual’s beliefs intensify, leading the new member to formally accept the ideology.⁵⁶ Ultimately, Sageman asserts, “It may be more accurate to blame global Salafi terrorist activity on in-group love than out-group hate.”⁵⁷

McCauley and Moskalenko’s “love” mechanism follows this logic. They find that terrorists often recruit via personal connections because there already exists a level of trust. Beyond trust, they assert, love determines who joins. This is evidenced in the phenomenon, discussed by McCauley and Moskalenko, Della Porta, and Hafez and Mullins, known as

⁵¹ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 964.

⁵² Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*; Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle”; Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*; Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism.”

⁵³ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, chap. 4.

⁵⁴ Sageman, 120.

⁵⁵ Sageman, 120.

⁵⁶ Sageman, 135.

⁵⁷ Sageman, 135.

“bloc recruitment,” in which the devotion among a group of individuals leads them all to join a group or movement simultaneously.⁵⁸

Hafez and Mullins stress the importance of interpersonal ties among “high-risk activism” groups because of the pronounced importance of trust and commitment. They confirm, “One of the most robust findings in the literature on political participation, social activism, gangs, cult membership, right-wing and left-wing terrorism, and religious extremism is that preexisting friendship and kinship ties facilitate recruitment.”⁵⁹ Hafez and Mullins and Della Porta take the social network discussion even further, asserting that radical individuals are often forced to cut ties with the rest of society when they formally join a group or movement which raises exit costs.⁶⁰ For example, defectors lose new friendships and camaraderie.⁶¹ Furthermore, defectors may face issues regarding their prior participation in extremist groups, or threats from the group itself, once they return to society.⁶² Hafez and Mullins also assert that people in preexisting networks often share a collective identity that makes recruitment easier.

Kruglanski et al.’s final piece of the radicalization puzzle is a “terrorism-justifying ideology,” which they assert is central to radicalization. According to Kruglanski et al., terrorism-justifying ideologies identify injustices inflicted on the group (grievances), individuals or groups responsible for inflicting the injustice (culprits), and effective ways of removing the injustice (methods). Such ideologies morally warrant violence through delegitimizing or dehumanizing semantics and rhetoric that implies the necessity of violence under certain circumstances.⁶³

⁵⁸ McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*; Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*; Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle.”

⁵⁹ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 964.

⁶⁰ Hafez and Mullins, 965; Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*, 12.

⁶¹ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 965.

⁶² Hafez and Mullins, 965.

⁶³ Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization,” 77.

Kruglanski et al. agree that “ideology and [social] bonds are not mutually exclusive...in that it is social bonds of some sort that bring individuals in contact with ideology.”⁶⁴ They point out that individuals may radicalize and take violent action on their own because they encountered terrorism-justifying ideologies through various communication media such as chatrooms or social media.⁶⁵ Ultimately, Kruglanski et al. argue that it is through social networks that an individual “comes to share in the violence-justifying ideology and proceeds to implement it as a means of significance gain.”⁶⁶ Hafez and Mullins confirm, “preexisting activist networks mediate the causal link between cognitive opening and ideological absorption.”⁶⁷

Hafez and Mullins support Kruglanski et al.’s argument with their discussion of “strategic framing,” which “selectively draws from shared identities...to mobilize people for action.”⁶⁸ They also assert, “Ideological narratives and themes are almost always present in the production of violent extremists,” arguing that ideologies provide disenfranchised individuals the story “that the status quo is problematic, and that fault lies with external forces.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, Hafez and Mullins assert that “ideology can facilitate the reprioritization of values so that material benefits, career, family, or personal risk take a back seat to collective identity, transcendental values, and group solidarity.”⁷⁰

Kruglanski et al. make the same argument with their “counterfinality model of radicalism” (CFMR), depicted in Figures 2 and 3.⁷¹ “Means A” positively serves the “Focal Goal” while simultaneously undermining goals C and D (signified by the plus and minus signs).⁷² Goals C and D represent two of the many alternative goals to the focal goal

⁶⁴ Kruglanski et al., 76.

⁶⁵ Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization.”

⁶⁶ Kruglanski et al.

⁶⁷ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 967.

⁶⁸ Hafez and Mullins, 968.

⁶⁹ Hafez and Mullins, 966–67.

⁷⁰ Hafez and Mullins, 967.

⁷¹ Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization,” 72.

⁷² Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization.”

and can range from earning a diploma to safeguarding one's own life. Less radicalized individuals are less likely to devalue goals C and D to achieve the focal goal, shown by the equivalent value placed on each (shown by the weight of the circle).⁷³ Highly radicalized individuals, on the other hand, place a relatively higher value on the focal goal than on goals C and D (seen in the thicker outline of the former and the thinner outlines of the latter).⁷⁴ In the cases studied, the shooters chose violence as a means for achieving significance at the expense of alternative goals.

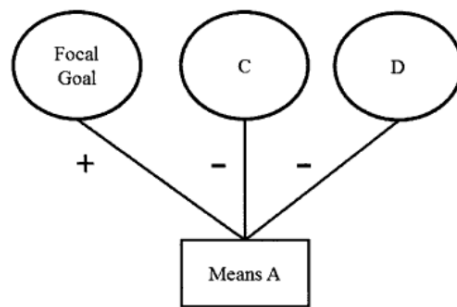


Figure 2. Counterfinality Model of Radicalization for Less Radicalized Individuals⁷⁵

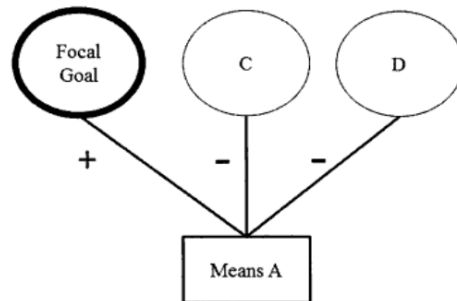


Figure 3. Counterfinality Model of Radicalization for Highly Radicalized Individuals⁷⁶

⁷³ Kruglanski et al.

⁷⁴ Kruglanski et al.

⁷⁵ Adapted from Kruglanski et al., 72.

⁷⁶ Adapted from Kruglanski et al., 72.

The fourth and fifth floors of Moghaddam's "stairway" support this discussion. According to Moghaddam, the fourth floor is where recruitment to terrorist organizations takes place. At this point, "potential terrorists learn to categorize the world more rigidly into 'us-versus-them' and to see the terrorist organization as legitimate."⁷⁷ The fifth floor of Moghaddam's model contains the few individuals who choose not only to join the terrorist organization, but also carry out violence against the enemy.⁷⁸

Hafez and Mullins add one more component to the radicalization process - enabling environments and support structures that provide "ideological support for susceptible individuals." Such venues include the Internet, social media, online chat rooms, and/or physical training camps. They make the distinction between vertical and horizontal diffusion of ideology. Vertical diffusion comes in the form of mass communication, such as social media posts by leaders or group websites, whereas ideology is horizontally diffused through online chatrooms in which individuals talk directly to one another.⁷⁹ The Internet is also effective for quickly and widely disseminating propaganda before authorities have time to remove it.⁸⁰

Hafez and Mullins and Moghaddam also highlight the role of enabling environments and support structures in the radicalization process. The former assert that individuals "may encounter the terrorism-justifying ideology through various communication media, (e.g., at an internet chat room or by exposure to extremist sermons by charismatic clerics)," while Moghaddam highlights an individual's contact with others during their transitions past the first floor of the narrowing staircase.⁸¹

While many in society face grievances, only few choose to radicalize to the point of perpetrating violence against civilians. Scholars have developed radicalization models in order to explain various degrees of radicalization among disenchanted individuals. Three

⁷⁷ Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism," 162.

⁷⁸ Moghaddam, 162.

⁷⁹ Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle," 969.

⁸⁰ Hafez and Mullins, 969.

⁸¹ Hafez and Mullins, 80; Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism."

common threads are discussed in all of their models: radicalization is a (1) gradual process in which an individual comes to adopt (2) an extremist belief system or ideology that (3) accepts or promotes violence. Several of the scholars also address the importance of venues in which violence-justifying ideologies are spread, such as the Internet, social media, and online chatrooms, as well as physical venues such as places of worship, universities, and physical gatherings.⁸² Though most of the radicalization discussion takes place in the context of Jihadist extremist, the same principles can arguably be applied to the radicalization of white nationalists in the United States.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Kruglanski et al. developed a model of radicalization which asserts that “the quest for personal significance constitutes a major motivational force that may push individuals toward violent extremism.”⁸³ Kruglanski defines radical behavior as behavior that runs “counter to common norms or concerns.”⁸⁴ In his discussion of the radicalization process, Kruglanski presents three initiators of radicalization: significance loss (perceived relative deprivation), anticipated significance loss (anticipated perceived relative deprivation), and opportunity for significance gain (incentive). Once the radicalization process is initiated, Kruglanski asserts that radicals must then identify terrorism or violence as the path to significance through violence-justifying ideologies, and they must place greater value on achieving significance than on alternative goals that are incompatible with terrorism or violence, which is often achieved when individuals band together in social networks.⁸⁵

Kruglanski et al. claim that certain ideologies identify radical activity, including violence or terrorism, as the means to achieving personal significance. “Terrorism-justifying” ideologies have three essential ingredients: grievances, culprits, and a method

⁸² Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle”; Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization”; Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism.”

⁸³ Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization.”

⁸⁴ Kruglanski et al., 70.

⁸⁵ Kruglanski et al., 74.

for removing the dishonor created by the grievance.⁸⁶ Terrorism-justifying ideologies also include moral warrants that justify terrorism or violence. Such ideologies often use semantics that dehumanize or delegitimize targets of violence and rhetoric that implies the necessity of violence against targets given certain circumstances.⁸⁷ Essentially, terrorism-justifying ideologies portray violence as moral and noble, granting violent perpetrators significance in the eyes of the movement.

Additionally, Kruglanski et al. present three social pathways to radicalization in which collective ideology serves as the common ground for establishing trust and camaraderie between strangers.⁸⁸ In some cases, an individual first perceives loss of significance, then seeks out groups of aggrieved individuals. In other cases, the personal social contact comes before the aggrieved individuals parse out terrorism-justifying ideologies. Sometimes, individuals encounter terrorism-justifying ideologies through mass communications, such as internet chat rooms or extremist sermons. Specifically, Kruglanski et al. cite mosques and other areas of assembly as places where alienated and frustrated Muslims gather and eventually radicalize. Regardless, SQT emphasizes the importance of social networks in the radicalization process.

Kruglanski et al. highlight nine psychological studies that provide empirical evidence for radicalization through SQT.⁸⁹ The first four studies found that individuals tend to become more collectivistic after experiencing personal loss of significance. The next five studies found that individuals within a group tended to display less fear of death and a greater willingness to sacrifice. Thus, Kruglanski et al. concluded that, through psychological means, individuals progress from personal loss of significance to a greater willingness to sacrifice, and coupled with a terrorism-justifying ideology, a greater tendency to commit terrorist or violent acts.

⁸⁶ Kruglanski et al., 77.

⁸⁷ Kruglanski et al., 77.

⁸⁸ Kruglanski et al., 80.

⁸⁹ Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization,” 81–83.

This thesis aims to identify, analyze, and evaluate the components of the radicalization process presented by Kruglanski et al. in the context of the Alt-Right, in order to determine the validity of applying SQT to the radicalization of white nationalists in America. Thus, this thesis addresses the motivational forces that initiate radicalization, the ideologies presented by the Alt-Right that justify violence, and the social networks that draw white nationalists to radicalization. The main hypothesis the thesis will investigate is as follows: The quest for personal significance as presented by Kruglanski et al. accounts for a vital motivational force that may drive American white nationalists toward violence, and the Alt-Right's appearance on the national stage played an integral role in motivating white nationalist violence.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

Using the framework of Kruglanski et al., motivations, ideologies, and social networks will be parsed out of several examples of Alt-Right violence in the United States to determine whether significance quest is a major motivational force for white-nationalist radicalization. This thesis relies on primary and secondary sources of information about the Alt-Right. Primary sources include written correspondence by, and online interviews with, Alt-Right figureheads, as well as posted manifestos by three white-nationalist violent perpetrators: Dylann Roof, John Earnest, and Patrick Crusius. Manifestos are heavily relied on to parse out the motivations, ideologies, and social networks of each shooter.

Secondary sources include news coverage from reputable news sources, scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals, and published books. Analysts from reputable news sources often report on primary source information that is unavailable to the public, such as online hate rhetoric, written manifestos, and interviews with Alt-Right subscribers. This information can indicate motivations to adopt white-nationalist views. Newspapers also aid in explaining Alt-Right ideology and the social networks with which Alt-Right individuals associate. Academic research was gathered from such scholarly sources as reputable journals and published books on the subject. Journal articles uncovered motivations, ideologies, and social networks associated with the Alt-Right, and the radicalization process of white nationalists. Books, such as Thomas Main's "The Rise of the Alt Right"

and George Hawley’s “The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know,” were also used to frame the history of white nationalism in the United States. Newspaper articles, journal articles and books provide a well-rounded body of literature that accounts for immediacy and rigor.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW AND DRAFT CHAPTER OUTLINE

Mirroring Kruglanski’s evaluation of Islamic extremist radicalization, this thesis will analyze American Alt-Right white-nationalist radicalization. Beginning with a brief history of white nationalism in the United States, the thesis will flow into the radicalization of three white nationalists who may have carried out public violence to achieve significance. The analysis of the selected cases can confirm or deny the existence of perceived relative deprivation, anticipated relative deprivation, or opportunities for significance gain among aggrieved individuals. Per Kruglanski et al.’s terrorism-justifying ideology component of radicalization, the thesis will then present and discuss grievances, culprits, and methods for removing dishonor identified by Alt-Right ideologies. Finally, the thesis covers the Alt-Right social networks that were integral to individual radicalization, and ultimately, violence. The thesis concludes by highlighting the Alt-Right’s role in the radicalization of Earnest and Crusius compared to Roof in light of Kruglanski et al.’s SQT.

II. WHITE NATIONALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) defines the Alt-Right as “a set of far right ideologies, groups, and individuals whose core belief is that white identity is under attack by multicultural forces...to undermine white people and ‘their’ civilization.”⁹⁰ While Alt-Right ideas are reflected in historical far-right groups, the ideology embodies two distinct differences. Unlike previous white-nationalist/supremacist groups, the Alt-Right is not a clearly defined group with shared beliefs and goals. Instead, it is made up of individuals who embrace their own a la carte-style set of far-right beliefs and goals. Adoption of a variety of far-right beliefs is a telltale sign that a white nationalist subscribes to Alt-Right affinities. Self-selected ideas provide Alt-Right radicals’ a means, such as violence, for attaining a focal goal, such as achieving societal significance.

A. RACISM AND EXTREMISM IN THE UNITED STATES

White supremacism, which embodies the root of white nationalism and the Alt-Right, is not new to the United States. In fact, some historians date white supremacism back to the nation’s inception.⁹¹ They argue that the Founding Fathers were motivated by a sense of white supremacy, and that this motivation influenced their policy making to champion the white American. They also argue that the Declaration of Independence was a white man’s document, and the U.S. Constitution “created aristocratic privilege while consolidating black bondage.”⁹² Such others as William Freehling and Lucas Morel, adopt a more benevolent view of the Founding Fathers, arguing that they focused more on preserving a union and the birth of a new nation than specifically promoting white

⁹⁰ “Alt-Right,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/alt-right>.

⁹¹ Robert McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964); Lynd Staughton, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, n.d.); William Cohen, “Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Slavery,” *The Journal of American History* 56, no. 3 (1969): 503–26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1904203>; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

⁹² William W. Freehling, “The Founding Fathers and Slavery,” *The American Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (1972): 81–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1856595>.

privileges.⁹³ Regardless, it is undisputed that many American policies throughout history have promoted whites at the expense of non-whites. For example, Danyelle Solomon et al. highlight “structural racism in the U.S. housing system” which has “exclusively benefited white households” by removing racial minorities.⁹⁴ In the early 1850s, lawmakers in New York City removed black residents from their community in Manhattan to create Central Park under the guise of eminent domain.⁹⁵ More recently, Solomon et al. point out, in the 1990s, thousands of black families were displaced in Atlanta, Georgia when lawmakers demolished a federally subsidized housing community to build Centennial Olympic Park.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, Solomon et al. assert, “For much of the 20th century, federal, state, and local policies subsidized the development of prosperous white suburbs in metropolitan areas across the country.”⁹⁷

For most of its first century, the U.S. economy relied heavily on black slaves who were denied status as citizens, or even people, and instead were treated as property of white landowners. Freehling claims that the founding fathers faced the competing claims of the black slave’s right to freedom and the white master’s right to property.⁹⁸ While the Declaration of Independence pronounced, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” the ensuing Articles of Confederation and U.S. Constitution left the power to regulate slavery to the states.⁹⁹ Thus, slavery endured legally until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865.

⁹³ Freehling, “The Founding Fathers and Slavery”; Lucas Morel, “America Wasn’t Founded on White Supremacy,” The American Mind (blog), October 17, 2019, <https://americanmind.org/essays/america-wasnt-founded-on-white-supremacy/>.

⁹⁴ Danyelle Solomon, Connor Maxwell, and Abril Castro, “Systemic Inequality: Displacement, Exclusion, and Segregation,” Center for American Progress, August 7, 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/472617/systemic-inequality-displacement-exclusion-segregation/>.

⁹⁵ Solomon, Maxwell, and Castro.

⁹⁶ Solomon, Maxwell, and Castro.

⁹⁷ Solomon, Maxwell, and Castro.

⁹⁸ Freehling, “The Founding Fathers and Slavery.”

⁹⁹ “The Constitution and Slavery,” Constitutional Rights Foundation, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://www.crf-usa.org/black-history-month/the-constitution-and-slavery>.

1. The Age of White Supremacy: The Founding of the KKK to the Civil Rights Movement

However, the experience of racial equality did not follow emancipation easily or quickly. Indeed, white supremacy persisted after the Civil War, especially in the Southern United States, and it is still evident in the adopted beliefs of those within contemporary far-right communities. One of the most notorious white supremacist groups, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), was formed by six Confederate army veterans in Pulaski, Tennessee in 1865. Originally, the group's main goal was intimidating black people physically and psychologically. However, the KKK faded after the passage of the Ku Klux Klan Act in 1871, which allowed for the federal prosecution of KKK members as terrorists.¹⁰⁰

The late 19th and early 20th century was a tumultuous time in the United States with industrialization, a world war, increasing immigration, and racial unrest. The Progressive Movement emerged as a response to the social and economic issues brought about by rapid industrialization in America and eventually became a political movement.¹⁰¹ Progressivism rejected Social Darwinism, instead advocating for better education and safe working environments.¹⁰² Progressive champions exposed rapacious corporations and political corruption, combatted American xenophobia, and implored Americans to think about the meaning of democracy.¹⁰³

The Progressive era also had a more sinister side. For example, the period saw the emergence of scientific racism, which held that “various racial groups differ in nonsuperficial ways,” according to Hawley.¹⁰⁴ Scientific—or pseudo-scientific—racism gained popular traction with the eugenics movement, espoused by Francis Galton, Madison

¹⁰⁰ “KKK (Ku Klux Klan),” Counter Extremism Project, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/ku-klux-klan>.

¹⁰¹ “The Progressive Era (1890 - 1920),” The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/glossary/progressive-era.cfm>.

¹⁰² “The Progressive Era (1890 - 1920).”

¹⁰³ “The Progressive Era (1890 - 1920).”

¹⁰⁴ George Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 101.

Grant, and Lothrop Stoddard.¹⁰⁵ Articulated by Hawley, “The eugenics movement sought to encourage supposedly superior people to breed in greater numbers, whereas other parts of the population were discouraged from having children, or even sterilized.”¹⁰⁶ The eugenics movement gained popular support in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, and was the basis for some policy decisions.¹⁰⁷ For example, in 1907, the Governor of Indiana signed the first piece of eugenics legislation that “provided for the involuntary sterilization of ‘confirmed criminals, idiots, imbeciles, and rapists.’”¹⁰⁸ While eugenics is not explicitly, or exclusively, based on race, the idea of human superiority based on heretical traits can be translated to racial superiority beliefs found in white supremacy. And, in fact, these superiority arguments manifest in Alt-Right ideologies that advocate the separation of races into ethno-states or complete removal of non-whites.

Anti-immigration sentiments also set in during the Progressive era. In 1907, the United States opened its first immigration station, Ellis Island in New York, which processed almost half of the 27 million immigrants to the United States between 1880 and 1930.¹⁰⁹ However, American attitudes toward immigration began to shift during World War I as nationalism and xenophobia strengthened. The Immigration Act of 1917 created a literacy requirement and restricted immigration from all countries adjacent to the continent of Asia that were not owned by the United States.¹¹⁰ Further, the Immigration Act of 1924 established nationality quotas on top of the existing literacy test and restrictive Asian immigration policies.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ “Social Origins of Eugenics,” Eugenics Archive, accessed January 15, 2020, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay2text.html>; Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 99.

¹⁰⁶ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 99.

¹⁰⁷ “Eugenics Movement in the United States,” Digital Public Library of America, accessed January 24, 2020, <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/eugenics-movement-in-the-united-states>.

¹⁰⁸ “Indiana Eugenics: History and Legacy,” accessed January 16, 2020, <https://www.iupui.edu/~eugenics/>.

¹⁰⁹ “Immigration Timeline,” The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., accessed January 16, 2020, <https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/immigration-timeline>.

¹¹⁰ “The Volatile History of U.S. Immigration,” HISTORY, accessed January 16, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/immigration-united-states-timeline>.

¹¹¹ “The Volatile History of U.S. Immigration.”

Immigration met, and arguably fueled, the resurgence of the KKK at around the same time. Ideologically, this Great War-era iteration of the Klan “blended xenophobia, religious prejudice, and white supremacy together with a broadly conservative moralism” and presented “a platform that demonized blacks, Catholics, Jews, Mexicans, Asians, and any other non-white ethnic immigrants.”¹¹² Though the Klan grew slowly at first, membership began to swell after World War I, reaching an estimated four to five million official members and many more supporters by the mid-1920s with its white-nationalist agenda that “ensured that forces scheming to undermine the authority of native-born white Americans would be kept at bay,” according to Joshua Rothman.¹¹³ He describes the widespread violence perpetrated by Klansmen:

They threatened bootleggers, flogged Mexicans, tarred and feathered doctors who performed abortions, and strong-armed politicians. They lynched black people, showed up on night rides to terrify prostitutes, bullied Jews, and lashed young women found riding in cars with men.¹¹⁴

Klan membership declined as the nation faced economic hardship through the Great Depression, and by the early 1950s, membership reached its lowest level since its rebirth in 1915.¹¹⁵

However, the Klan did not go completely dormant. The third significant wave of the Klan emerged during the Civil Rights Movement as many whites from the South sought to maintain segregation of whites and blacks. In this period, the Klan embraced widespread violence, especially with the discovery of dynamite as a weapon. According to the SPLC, “The Klan’s campaign of terror against the Civil Rights Movement resulted in almost 70 bombings in Georgia and Alabama, the arson of 30 black churches in Mississippi, and 10

¹¹² Joshua Rothman, “When Bigotry Paraded Through the Streets,” *The Atlantic*, December 4, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/second-klan/509468/>.

¹¹³ Rothman.

¹¹⁴ Rothman.

¹¹⁵ “Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed September 11, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/20110228/ku-klux-klan-history-racism>.

racial killings in Alabama alone.”¹¹⁶ However, the Klan broke apart at the hand of increasing FBI pressure and public indignation in the 1960s.¹¹⁷

2. The Proliferation of White Nationalism: The Civil Rights Movement to the Present

The Civil Rights Movement brought the cause of racial inequality to the forefront of American political consciousness and inaugurated an era of major change in laws and norms. Yet, every measure of progress for equality seemed to galvanize unrelenting racists to more—and more extreme—action. Radical white nationalists seek to end non-white immigration and multiculturalism in order to achieve white, racial hegemony.¹¹⁸ They decry the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 as the beginning of “White Genocide,” or “the idea that whites in the United States are being systematically replaced and destroyed.”¹¹⁹ White Genocide is an idea still embraced by the Alt-Right, though often packaged as “replacement theory,” or “The Great Replacement.”

Even a generation into the Cold-War era in the United States, white nationalism relied heavily on the symbols and literature of Hitler’s regime in Third Reich Germany, though these groups also infused their movement with anti-communist urgency. On the one hand, the extreme white-nationalist American Nazi Party, founded in 1959 by George Lincoln Rockwell, “flew swastika flags, marched in brown shirts, carried weapons, and made Nazi salutes.”¹²⁰ On the other hand, the American Nazi Party addressed an increasingly angry minority of whites alarmed at the progress of the Civil Rights Movement, seemingly at their expense. The party’s magazine, *The Stormtrooper*, spread

¹¹⁶ “Ku Klux Klan.”

¹¹⁷ “Ku Klux Klan.”

¹¹⁸ “White Nationalist,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed January 5, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/white-nationalist>.

¹¹⁹ “White Nationalist.”

¹²⁰ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 36.

racist and anti-Semitic propaganda through provocative slurs—a tactic that the Alt-Right continues with a successor publication of the same name.¹²¹

In time, the extreme right in the United States began to evolve away from backwards-looking Nazi cults. The National Alliance, formed in 1974 by William Pierce, was more fixated on the future, which members tended to imagine in bleak, apocalyptic terms.¹²² According to the SPLC, “The National Alliance (NA) was for decades the most dangerous and best-organized neo-Nazi formation in America. Explicitly genocidal in its ideology, [National Alliance] materials call for the eradication of the Jews and other races and the creation of an all-white homeland.”¹²³ Its tone was as messianic as it was menacing. Pierce couched his philosophy in the term “Cosmotheism,” by which an adherent “finds meaning by protecting and improving the white race,” as religious justification for his group’s actions.¹²⁴ Pierce is perhaps most infamous for his book, *The Turner Diaries*, a gruesome depiction of race war in which the protagonists slaughter non-whites and Jews in a bid to reclaim white America from corrupt authoritarians dedicated to enforcing an anti-white racial order. The volume allegedly informed and inspired the 1995 Oklahoma City federal building bomber, Timothy McVeigh, and it still remains part of the far-right canon.¹²⁵

In the last quarter of the 20th century, white-nationalist groups adopted a more sophisticated, often quasi-scholarly, tone and moved online. About a decade after the National Alliance was founded in 1970, the Council of Conservative Citizens (CoCC) was formed. The SPLC designates the CoCC a white-nationalist hate group. In its statement of principles, written by prominent white-nationalist Sam Francis, the CoCC asserts that “the United States is a European country and that Americans are part of the European

¹²¹ Hawley, 36–37.

¹²² Hawley, 41.

¹²³ “National Alliance,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/national-alliance>.

¹²⁴ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 42.

¹²⁵ Hawley, 42.

people.”¹²⁶ Thus, the CoCC opposes “all efforts to mix the races of mankind” and “to promote non-white races over the European-American people.”¹²⁷ Similar to the American Nazi Party and National Alliance, the CoCC holds hateful beliefs and “routinely denigrated blacks as ‘genetically inferior,’ complained about ‘Jewish power brokers,’ called LGBT people ‘perverted sodomites,’ [and] accused immigrants of turning America into a ‘slimy brown mass of glop.’”¹²⁸ On the other hand, and more in line with the Alt-Right, the CoCC also has a more refined public image, preferring American flags to extremist banners. The group not only attracts society’s dejected racists, but it also pulls in people of power and prestige, thanks in no small part to the distance maintained between its public-facing rhetoric and its actual segregationist ideas.¹²⁹ In fact, between 2000 and 2004, at least thirty-eight U.S. elected officials attended CoCC events, most giving speeches to local chapters.¹³⁰ Further, the CoCC features many local chapters that “are active in civic affairs beyond the national group’s racist agenda.”¹³¹

Like the CoCC, Stormfront holds radical right-wing beliefs while it maintains a more modern image than its white-nationalist predecessors. Founded in 1995 by Don Black, a former Alabama Klan boss, “Stormfront was the first major hate site on the Internet” and claimed “more than 300,000 registered members as of May 2015.”¹³² Stormfront uniquely organized itself as a message board where members can post and respond to each other, much like many of the Alt-Right platforms used today. Such an environment helps “develop a genuine white supremacist cyber-community,” according to

¹²⁶ Samuel Francis, “Statement of Principles,” *Conservative Headlines* (blog), May 2, 2007, <https://conservative-headlines.org/statement-of-principles/>.

¹²⁷ Francis.

¹²⁸ “Council of Conservative Citizens,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/council-conservative-citizens>.

¹²⁹ “Council of Conservative Citizens.”

¹³⁰ “Council of Conservative Citizens”; “Dozens of Politicians Attend Council of Conservative Citizens Events,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed March 24, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2004/dozens-politicians-attend-council-conservative-citizens-events>.

¹³¹ “Council of Conservative Citizens.”

¹³² “Stormfront,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed March 4, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/stormfront>.

the SPLC.¹³³ Moreover, Stormfront, like the Alt-Right, tries to remain nonsectarian, welcoming all radical right views on its platform, such as “the evils of African Americans, LGBT people, non-white immigrants, and, above all, Jews, who are blamed for most of what’s wrong in the world.”¹³⁴ However, Stormfront users are warned against posting racial slurs and violent threats in an effort to moderate the platform, lest it get disbanded for fomenting violence.¹³⁵ As far as community outreach goes, Stormfront even holds essay contests to win \$2,000 scholarships, though the funds are only available for white kids.¹³⁶

The CoCC and Stormfront represent stops on the way toward what Hawley calls “highbrow white nationalism.” These groups and individuals avoid violent rhetoric, opting instead for academic language to attract a broader membership. Similar to the eugenics movement of the early 20th century, these groups highlight erstwhile scientific research, tendentiously interpreted if not outright fraudulent, that supports “race realism,” or “human biodiversity.”¹³⁷ Race realists suggest that race is an objective biological category—that the various human races have different origins—and refute the assertion that humans descend from a common origin; the argument seeks to upend the bases of human equality with pseudo-science.¹³⁸

One of the most prominent race realists, Jared Taylor, formed the New Century Foundation in the 1990s. He is notable for producing *American Renaissance*, an academic journal that features eugenic and racist articles based on pseudo-scientific research.¹³⁹ *American Renaissance* asserts, “Of all the fault lines that divide society – language, religion, class, ideology - [race] is the most prominent and divisive. Race and racial conflict

¹³³ “Stormfront.”

¹³⁴ “Stormfront.”

¹³⁵ “Stormfront.”

¹³⁶ “Stormfront.”

¹³⁷ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 101.

¹³⁸ Koffi N. Maglo, “The Case against Biological Realism about Race: From Darwin to the Post-Genomic Era,” *Perspectives on Science* 19, no. 4 (October 2, 2011): 361–90.

¹³⁹ “American Renaissance,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/american-renaissance>.

are at the heart of some of the most serious challenges the Western World faces in the 21st century.”¹⁴⁰ Such prominent white nationalists and race realists as Peter Brimelow and John Derbyshire gather annually at Taylor’s *American Renaissance* conference to discuss racial conflict through their lenses of race realism or outright racism.¹⁴¹ The North American New Right also posts race realism rhetoric to its publications, *Counter Currents*, *The Occidental Quarterly*, and *The Occidental Observer*.

Though the term Alt-Right was coined in 2008, it did not gain national prominence until the 2016 presidential election, according to Hawley.¹⁴² At the time, presidential-candidate Trump’s hardline rhetoric on immigration fell in line with Alt-Right beliefs. The Alt-Right, Hawley argues, gained momentum through the presidential election season, but lost that momentum in August 2017 when the Alt-Right’s “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia resulted in several injuries and one death.¹⁴³ Nonetheless, Hawley points out:

Even if the term *Alt-Right* falls out of favor, the sentiments that motivated the movement still will be shared by a nonnegligible percentage of the U.S. population, and its more successful tactics will undoubtedly be used again by others.¹⁴⁴

This period of national prominence is crucial to understanding the influence of the Alt-Right in the radicalization of the perpetrators studied. Specifically, whereas Dylann Roof radicalized before the Alt-Right reached the national stage, John Earnest and Patrick Crusius radicalized during and after the Alt-Right’s period of national prominence when online fringe communities formed, and the Alt-Right’s radical ideas flowed more freely.

¹⁴⁰ “About Us,” American Renaissance, accessed September 12, 2019, <https://www.amren.com/about/>.

¹⁴¹ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 59.

¹⁴² Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*.

¹⁴³ Hawley.

¹⁴⁴ Hawley, 7.

B. ALT-RIGHT AFFINITIES AND IDEAS

The Alt-Right is a 21st century perpetuation of white nationalism in all its variety of aims and methods. Alt-Right subscribers blend old-fashioned racism with new, anti-globalist agitation. Indeed, the SPLC describes the Alt-Right as “a set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that ‘white identity’ is under attack by multicultural forces [attempting] to undermine white people and ‘their’ civilization.”¹⁴⁵ Included in the Alt-Right, argues the Anti-Defamation League, is “a range of people on the extreme right who reject mainstream conservatism in favor of forms of conservatism that embrace implicit or explicit racism.”¹⁴⁶ George Hawley describes the Alt-Right as a radical far-right movement whose milder constituents promote white identity politics and its most radical constituents seek division of the United States in order to create a racially pure white ethno-state in North America.¹⁴⁷ Overall, the fundamental driving force for the Alt-Right, scholars agree, is the protection of white identity, or white nationalism.¹⁴⁸

Thomas Main boils the Alt-Right down to four main elements. First, the Alt-Right rejects liberal democracy, or the idea that all men are created equal.¹⁴⁹ Second, the Alt-Right maintains that a society can only function properly if whites hold political dominance.¹⁵⁰ Third, because the United States has declined with the promotion of equality and liberal democracy, loyalty ought to shift from American principles to the promotion of the white race.¹⁵¹ Lastly, the Alt-Right embraces “vitriolic rhetoric” commonly found among fringe elements of the political spectrum.¹⁵² The movement “indulges in race-baiting, coarse ethnic humor, prejudicial stereotyping, vituperative criticism, and the flaunting of extremist symbols.”¹⁵³ In other words, the Alt-Right rejects

¹⁴⁵ “Alt-Right.”

¹⁴⁶ “Alt Right: A Primer about the New White Supremacy,” Anti-Defamation League, accessed September 8, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/alt-right-a-primer-about-the-new-white-supremacy>.

¹⁴⁷ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 4–9.

¹⁴⁸ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*; Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*.

¹⁴⁹ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 8.

¹⁵⁰ Main, 8.

¹⁵¹ Main, 8.

¹⁵² Main, 8.

¹⁵³ Main, 8.

equal rights and liberal democracy, two central political and cultural tenets embraced by the United States.

1. “White Genocide” or “Replacement Theory”

White nationalists broadly oppose the mixing of different races, cultures, and religions, which clashes with the United States’ reputation as a societal “melting pot” featuring large swaths of immigrants from around the world who introduce new races, cultures and religions to the country. The Alt-Right, and white nationalists in general, base their virulently hateful ideologies on “White Genocide” or “Replacement Theory.” Both theories assert that whites are losing societal and cultural significance to non-whites, specifically immigrants.

According to the SPLC, White Genocide was popularized by David Lane, a member of the white nationalist terrorist group, “The Order.”¹⁵⁴ Lane became an icon of white nationalism when he coined his “14 Words,” referring to the popular white nationalist slogan, “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children,” the SPLC continues.¹⁵⁵ According to Davey and Ebner, Lane argued that “white populations are being replaced through immigration, integration, abortion, and violence against white people.”¹⁵⁶

Replacement theory asserts that white populations “are being deliberately replaced at an ethnic and cultural level through migration and the growth of minority communities.”¹⁵⁷ White nationalists who adopt this view fear the possibility that whites are becoming minority ethnic and cultural groups in predominantly white countries. Brenton Tarrant, the shooter who attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand

¹⁵⁴ “David Lane,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed March 26, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/david-lane>.

¹⁵⁵ “David Lane.”

¹⁵⁶ Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, “The ‘Great Replacement’: The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism,” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2019, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstreamed-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf>.

¹⁵⁷ Davey and Ebner.

about a month before Earnest's shooting, titled his manifesto, "The Great Replacement," in which he grieved the rising population of Muslim immigrants to his country.¹⁵⁸ Patrick Crusius explicitly cited replacement theory in his manifesto and confessed his support for Tarrant's ideology and violence.

For the purposes of this research, White Genocide implies Jewish culpability for the eradication of white society through the promotion of non-white immigration and race mixing, and replacement theory implies the culpability of liberal democratic ideals for the same. This distinction serves to differentiate the replacement theory ideology adopted by Patrick Crusius from the White Genocide theory adopted by Dylann Roof and John Earnest, which will be discussed at length in chapters 3–5.

2. Racism and Race Realism

The Alt-Right justifies the promotion of white Americans at the expense of non-whites on the grounds that non-white races are inferior to whites. According to Hawley, Alt-Right constituents label themselves white nationalists, or "America nationalists," while refuting the label "white supremacist."¹⁵⁹ They argue that white supremacy "implies an acceptance of racial diversity, provided that whites maintain a position of privilege."¹⁶⁰ In fact, Richard Spencer explicitly denied the label.¹⁶¹ Instead, Spencer and other Alt-Right groups increasingly embrace the term "identitarian," which is perceived as a milder concept than white nationalism though it is eerily similar. Identitarian rhetoric centers on "culture" and "identity" rather than race.¹⁶² Regardless, most Alt-Right supporters agree that "race is the most important element of identity."¹⁶³ Jared Taylor, editor of *American*

¹⁵⁸ Brenton Tarrant, "The Great Replacement," accessed April 27, 2020, https://www.ilfoglio.it/userUpload/The_Great_Replacementconvertito.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 16.

¹⁶⁰ Hawley, 16.

¹⁶¹ Adam Lough, *Alt-Right: Age of Rage*, Documentary, 2018.

¹⁶² Juliette Legendre, "Far Right Groups Are Stumbling, But Their Rhetoric Is More Mainstream Than Ever" (Washington, United States, Washington: Inter-Hemispheric Resource Center Press, April 23, 2018), <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2034185509/abstract/53C909BCC5884672PQ/1>.

¹⁶³ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 17.

Renaissance, asserts that the Alt-Right denies the idea that people of different gender, race, culture, and religion are equal.¹⁶⁴ He claims,

Given the loose nature of the movement, there are people who consider themselves “Alt Right” but who disagree on one or more of these points – except one. The entire Alt Right is united in contempt for the idea that race is only a “social construct.”¹⁶⁵

As will be covered in chapter three, Roof specifically adopted a race realist perspective and vehemently railed against race mixing, which he attributes to Jewish influence.

3. Anti-Semitism

According to Davey and Ebner, subscribers to White Genocide theory specifically target Jews as the culprits trying to orchestrate population change.¹⁶⁶ The Alt-Right features several neo-Nazi groups and figureheads who spout anti-Semitic messages for their audiences. Hawley cites psychology professor Kevin MacDonald, as a key white nationalist who has perpetuated anti-Semitic feelings in the Alt-Right.¹⁶⁷ In fact, the SPLC identifies MacDonald as “the neo-Nazi movement’s favorite academic.”¹⁶⁸ Andrew Anglin, editor of the neo-Nazi website *Daily Stormer*, provided the following two anti-Semitic tenets of the Alt-Right:

- Anti-Semitism...Jews are fundamentally opposed to the White race and Western civilization and so must be confronted and ultimately removed from White societies completely.

¹⁶⁴ Jared Taylor, “What Is the Alt Right?,” *American Renaissance*, October 11, 2016, <https://www.amren.com/news/2016/10/what-is-the-alt-right-jared-taylor/>.

¹⁶⁵ Taylor.

¹⁶⁶ Davey and Ebner, “The ‘Great Replacement’: The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism.”

¹⁶⁷ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*.

¹⁶⁸ “Kevin MacDonald,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed January 16, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/kevin-macdonald>.

- White Struggle as a Global Battle...The Alt-Right views the struggle for the continued existence of the White race as a global battle between Whites and the Jews.¹⁶⁹

Both tenets are adopted by Roof and Earnest in their belief that their violent actions are part of a broader “Global Battle” against Jews.

4. Rejection of Liberal Democracy

Liberal democracy promotes equality and is therefore rejected by white nationalists. White nationalists believe that majority white countries are declining economically and culturally due to non-white immigration and broadening civil rights among non-whites, women, and religious minorities.¹⁷⁰ Though it does not have an explicit list of policy proposals, a main goal of the Alt-Right is “changing the ideological outlook of white Americans, pushing them to reject basic American values such as democracy and equality.”¹⁷¹ The Alt-Right’s main goal of infiltrating American minds matches Richard Spencer’s assertion that the Alt-Right is trying to change the world by changing how people see the world and themselves.¹⁷²

Ultimately, opposing immigration, and the assimilation of immigrants, is the Alt-Right’s driving force for pushing their virulent ideologies on working- and middle-class Americans. According to Hawley, “immigration is the Alt-Right’s primary policy concern,” coinciding with Spencer’s assertion that “[Trump] was elected because of the immigration issue, which is fundamentally an identity and race issue.”¹⁷³ Politically,

¹⁶⁹ Andrew Anglin, “A Normie’s Guide to the Alt-Right,” Daily Stormer, August 31, 2016, www.dailystormer.com/a-normies-guide-to-the-alt-right/; Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*. **Quoted from Thomas Main’s book – was unable to visit the Daily Stormer website**

¹⁷⁰ “Explainer: White Nationalism,” Facing History and Ourselves, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.facinghistory.org/educator-resources/current-events/explainer/white-nationalism>.

¹⁷¹ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 6.

¹⁷² The Atlantic, *Rebranding White Nationalism: Inside Richard Spencer’s Alt-Right*, YouTube Video, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheAtlantic/search?query=rebranding+white+nationalism>.

¹⁷³ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 8; The Atlantic, *Rebranding White Nationalism: Inside Richard Spencer’s Alt-Right*.

ceasing non-white immigration to the United States, and ridding the country of non-whites, is imperative to the movement.¹⁷⁴

Anti-immigration sentiments are rooted in the recent global rise of populism in which citizens call on their governments to protect them from the labor-market employment risks that come with an influx of cheaper immigrant labor. The assumption of the liberal democratic political design was that “the people would defer to elites as long as they delivered sustained prosperity and steadily improving living standards.”¹⁷⁵ However, as Galston highlights, this design weakened the manufacturing sector and moved economic opportunity to urban areas, neglecting the interests of the “working and middle classes in the developed economies, which had done so well in the three decades after World War II.”¹⁷⁶ These citizens now find themselves competing with immigrants for jobs and social services, and they find their cultural norms threatened by foreigners.¹⁷⁷ Such individuals, like Patrick Crusius, find replacement theory valid and compelling.

5. Misogyny

The Alt-Right also addresses gender roles in its messaging, though the misogynist component is not found in the grievances aired by the perpetrators studied. Alt-Right misogyny comes in varying degrees. Some white nationalists simply prefer “traditional” gender roles for women while others want women excluded from American politics altogether. The “traditional” role posits that white women subordinate themselves to white men and bear as many white children as possible to increase the white population.¹⁷⁸ The more radical sect of white nationalist misogynists believes that gender equality in all aspects of life is impossible because of the biological differences between men and women. Greater civil rights for women creates economic and cultural turmoil in majority white

¹⁷⁴ Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 8.

¹⁷⁵ William A. Galston, “The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2 (April 2018): 7.

¹⁷⁶ Galston, 7.

¹⁷⁷ Galston, “The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy.”

¹⁷⁸ “Explainer.”

countries, they believe.¹⁷⁹ For this reason, Alt-Right proponents oppose feminist movements.

6. Creation of an Ethno-State

The creation of a separate white ethno-state is provided as an Alt-Right solution to White Genocide and replacement theory. Richard Spencer argues that white Americans are an extension of white Europeans, and that the United States must divide and carve out a white ethno-state that is friendly to all whites.¹⁸⁰ Alt-Right figurehead and editor-in-chief of *Counter Currents*, Greg Johnson, also advocates the creation of a white ethno-state. In Johnson's words, "White Nationalism is ethnonationalism for white people. An ethno-state is a racially and ethnically homogeneous sovereign nation."¹⁸¹ Johnson posits,

Ethnonationalism is the best political system because it preserves distinct races, subraces, and cultures and allows them to evolve without the friction, distortions, and conflicts that inevitably emerge when different races and cultures are forced to share the same territory and political system.¹⁸²

Johnson advocates two important reasons whites should embrace ethnonationalism. He argues that racially and culturally diverse societies face many racially charged problems.¹⁸³ More importantly, Johnson asserts, "whites face extinction" due to low birthrates, racial mixture, and increasing non-white immigration to the United States.¹⁸⁴ By creating a white ethno-state, racially charged problems and "White Genocide" would hypothetically be solved.

¹⁷⁹ "Explainer."

¹⁸⁰ Lough, Alt-Right: Age of Rage.

¹⁸¹ Greg Johnson, "Notes on the Ethnostate," Counter-Currents Publishing, September 15, 2017, <https://www.counter-currents.com/2017/09/the-ethnostate/>.

¹⁸² Johnson.

¹⁸³ Johnson; "About Us."

¹⁸⁴ Johnson, "Notes on the Ethnostate."

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III. DYLANN ROOF

Dylann Roof's case is included in this research because his violence was motivated by white nationalism. This affinity is evidenced by the sentiments he voiced in his manifesto and in his prison journal. In both documents, Roof writes at length about the "atrocities" committed against the white population by such minority groups as African Americans, Jews, Hispanics, and Muslims, though his white nationalist sentiments skew particularly towards White Genocide and race realism.

Specifically, in line with the then-nascent theory of White Genocide, Roof concluded that African Americans are a violent race aggravated by Jewish advocacy of race mixing, and that African Americans ought to be removed from society. It is important to note that Roof did not object to non-white immigration as much as he despised the mixing of "violent" African Americans with "non-violent" whites.

Furthermore, Roof formed his ideology through his access of traditional white nationalist websites rather than through the Alt-Right fringe social media platforms that would become popular after the Alt-Right reached national prominence.

A. THE EVENTS AND AFTERMATH OF JUNE 17, 2015

Dylann Roof was 21 years old on the evening of June 17, 2015 when he walked into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina armed with a Glock .45 caliber pistol, which he bought in April of the same year, stowed in a fanny pack around his waist. According to Samuel Momodu, surviving witnesses recounted that Roof was invited in to the evening prayer service upon his arrival.¹⁸⁵ Emily Shapiro claims, after about an hour into the service, with the congregants' heads bowed in prayer, Roof silently pulled out his pistol and proceeded to shoot nine of the parishioners to death, including South Carolina Senator Clementa Pinkney, who was also the head

¹⁸⁵ Samuel Momodu, "The Charleston Church Massacre (2015)," Black Past, October 1, 2017, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/charleston-church-massacre-2015/>.

pastor at the church.¹⁸⁶ One of the survivors, Polly Sheppard, ducked under a table and began to pray aloud as the shooting progressed.¹⁸⁷ After killing the others, Roof demanded that Sheppard shut up and asked her if she had been shot yet.¹⁸⁸ When she said she had not, Roof responded, “I’m going to leave you alive to tell the story,” according to Shapiro.¹⁸⁹

Roof was captured the next morning at a traffic stop in Shelby, North Carolina, roughly 245 miles away from the site of the shooting.¹⁹⁰ Further, Shapiro asserts that authorities found in Roof’s car “a handwritten note with the names of several churches on it, a Confederate flag, a burned U.S. flag, a gun, an empty box of ammunition and a laser attachment.”¹⁹¹

An FBI interview video was shown in court depicting Roof laughing as he admitted to the shooting. Shapiro writes, “‘I am guilty,’ he said in the video, laughing.”¹⁹² While in prison, Roof continued his racist manifesto on pen and paper, showing no remorse for his actions, and during his federal trial, Roof wore shoes brandishing racist symbols, according to Shapiro.¹⁹³ Roof was indicted on 33 charges, and after less than a day of jury deliberations, he was sentenced to death.¹⁹⁴ In April 2017, Roof was transferred to Terre Haute Federal Prison in Indiana where he awaits execution.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁶ Emily Shapiro, “Key Moments in Charleston Church Shooting Case as Dylann Roof Pleads Guilty to State Charges,” ABC News, April 10, 2017, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/key-moments-charleston-church-shooting-case-dylann-roof/story?id=46701033>.

¹⁸⁷ Shapiro.

¹⁸⁸ Shapiro.

¹⁸⁹ Shapiro.

¹⁹⁰ Shapiro.

¹⁹¹ Shapiro.

¹⁹² Shapiro.

¹⁹³ Shapiro.

¹⁹⁴ Shapiro.

¹⁹⁵ Avalon Zoppo, “Charleston Shooter Dylann Roof Now on Death Row at Indiana Facility,” NBC News, April 22, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/charleston-church-shooting/charleston-shooter-dylann-roof-moved-death-row-terre-haute-federal-n749671>.

B. ROOF'S QUEST FOR SIGNIFICANCE

In line with the motivation piece of SQT, Roof's sense of personal significance loss was activated throughout his childhood, when he found himself disenchanted with society. Specifically, Roof felt his own significance, and the significance of his white peers, waning while African American significance grew. Out of his feelings of disenchantment, Roof perceived an opportunity to regain significance by eliminating African Americans and initiating a race war on behalf of whites. Tying into the terrorism-justifying ideology component of SQT, Roof's subscription to White Genocide implies that he anticipated future significance loss for himself and whites if he allowed race mixing to continue without taking action against it. Most importantly, there is no evidence that indicates Roof interacted with other white nationalists on the far-right online interactive communities that became popular after the rise of the Alt-Right. Instead, Roof absorbed white-nationalist ideas on passive websites without direct influence from like-minded peers.

1. Motivation

Accounts of Roof's childhood indicate that Roof's disenchantment with society began when he was still young. He floated through his childhood in Columbia, South Carolina leaving little impression on those with whom he came into contact. In fact, according to journalist Rachel Ghansah, "there was no birth announcement when [Dylann] arrived," and "on his birth certificate, there [was] no father listed."¹⁹⁶ Ghansah adds that one of Roof's elementary school teachers, who claims to have a good memory of her students, does not recall having Dylann in class.¹⁹⁷ Even one of Roof's closest childhood friends described him as "dull."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Rachel Ghansah won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing for her piece, "A Most American Terrorist: The Making of Dylann Roof." Her thorough account of Roof's radicalization process is heavily relied on in this portion of the thesis. Citation: Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist: The Making Of Dylann Roof," GQ, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.gq.com/story/dylann-roof-making-of-an-american-terrorist>.

¹⁹⁷ Ghansah.

¹⁹⁸ Ghansah.

Roof's elementary school principal, Ted Wachter, recounts how Roof more closely associated with the outcast group in school. "He wasn't part of the in crowd, which was more...the kids of college-educated families."¹⁹⁹ When Roof entered Rosewood Elementary, "social relationships [became] 'class driven' and [started] to 'self-sort,'" and Roof was "with the working-class kids," according to Wachter.²⁰⁰ He explained Roof's disenchantment saying, "maybe Dylann's family is a good example of downward social mobility."²⁰¹ Moreover, Wachter observed that individuals in Roof's position not only see white elites, but also "black people, coming from behind, eclipsing them."²⁰²

As Roof grew older, his feelings of displacement did not dissipate. He dropped out of high school in ninth grade and spent most of his time in his bedroom "in the company of his cats and a computer," as reported by Jennifer Hawes.²⁰³ In 2014 and 2015, Dylann worked part-time for a termite and pest control company where his coworkers described Roof as "often spaced or zoned out while working."²⁰⁴ In one instance, a retired psychologist contacted Roof after seeing a Craigslist ad he posted requesting someone to join him on a tour of Charleston.²⁰⁵ Ghansah claims that Roof alarmingly wrote that he sought anyone except "Jews, queers, or N—s," prompting the psychologist to offer Roof money if he simply watched some TED talks to "expand his worldview."²⁰⁶ In response, Roof wrote, "I am in bed, so depressed I cannot get out of bed. My life is wasted. I have no friends even though I am cool. I am going back to sleep," according to Ghansah.²⁰⁷

¹⁹⁹ Ghansah.

²⁰⁰ Ghansah.

²⁰¹ Ghansah.

²⁰² Ghansah.

²⁰³ Jennifer Berry Hawes, "Defense Experts Portray Dylann Roof as Obsessive, Delusional Loner," *The Post and Courier*, May 12, 2017, https://www.postandcourier.com/church_shooting/defense-experts-portray-dylann-roof-as-obsessive-delusional-loner/article_7b82038a-3687-11e7-8fc8-7b9f2fb39774.html.

²⁰⁴ Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist."

²⁰⁵ Ghansah.

²⁰⁶ Ghansah.

²⁰⁷ Ghansah.

Indeed, there is no evidence that Roof had any close friends. “Once, when asked if he was afraid of anything, Roof replied: people,” according to Hawes.²⁰⁸ In fact, Roof “retreated to online classes only,” and ultimately dropped out of high school in ninth grade due in large part to his “increasing anxiety about being around people,” Hawes continues.²⁰⁹ According to Ghansah, in the summer months preceding the shooting, Roof spent time with an old middle school friend named Joseph Meek who lived in a rented trailer just outside of Columbia with his mother, girlfriend, and two younger brothers.²¹⁰ While with his friends that summer, Roof “did a lot of drinking and a lot of pot smoking,” and he could “talk about shooting up a college, brandish his gun, use racist slurs.”²¹¹ It seems his friends never “took him seriously” until he committed the hate-filled, mass atrocity in June, according to Ghansah.²¹²

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of Roof’s disenchantment with society lies in a quote from his prison journal. Roof wrote, “How can people blame young white people for having no ambition, when they have been given nothing, and have nothing to look forward to? Even your most brain dead [sic] white person can see that there is nothing good on the horizon.”²¹³

Further, Roof perceived an opportunity to gain significance through violence that he hoped would initiate a reversal of White Genocide. Specifically, Roof painted his actions as brave writing, “Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.”²¹⁴ In his prison journal, Roof goes as far as accusing other white nationalists of cowardice for not taking violent action themselves. He asserts,

²⁰⁸ Hawes, “Defense Experts Portray Dylann Roof as Obsessive, Delusional Loner.”

²⁰⁹ Hawes; Ghansah, “A Most American Terrorist.”

²¹⁰ Ghansah, “A Most American Terrorist.”

²¹¹ Ghansah.

²¹² Ghansah.

²¹³ Dylann Roof, “Dylann Roof Jailhouse Journal,” January 5, 2017, 30, https://www.postandcourier.com/dylann-roof-jailhouse-journal/pdf_da3e19b8-d3b3-11e6-b040-03089263e67c.html.

²¹⁴ Dylann Roof, “Full Text Of Charleston Suspect Dylann Roof’s Apparent Manifesto,” Talking Points Memo, June 20, 2015, <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/muckraker/dylann-roof-manifesto-full-text>.

“[White nationalists] claim they will defend what is theirs, yet everything is being stolen from them in front of their eyes, and they know it. Yet they stand idle with their tails between their legs.”²¹⁵ Roof’s self-touted bravery indicates that he sought significance among those in the white-nationalist community who would eventually read his manifesto. He even created his own website, “lastrhodesian.com,” that featured fiery rhetoric and racy photos of himself promoting white nationalism to memorialize his actions.²¹⁶

2. Terrorism-Justifying Ideology

Roof’s writing and testimony reveal that he held group grievances against Jews, African Americans, and Hispanics.²¹⁷ He specifically claims to fight on behalf of the white race against these groups.²¹⁸ Roof’s lead prosecutor, Jay Richardson, claimed that “Roof’s motive was ‘retaliation for perceived offenses’ against the white race.”²¹⁹ Specifically, Roof writes, “I do feel sorry for the innocent White [sic] people that are killed daily at the hands of the lower races.”²²⁰

Thus, Roof aligns with the Alt-Right’s ideas surrounding White Genocide and its negative stance towards Jewish perpetration of race mixing, and he evokes strong feelings of racism in line with race realism. However, at odds with the Alt-Right, Roof does not emphasize the Alt-Right rejection of liberal democracy and the associated criticism of non-white immigration to the United States, signaling that such sentiments were not popularized in Alt-Right communities until the 2016 election season. Furthermore, Roof explicitly rejects the Alt-Right motive to create an ethno-state.

²¹⁵ Roof, “Dylann Roof Jailhouse Journal.”

²¹⁶ “Photos Of Dylann Roof, Racist Manifesto Surface On website,” NPR.org, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/20/416024920/photos-possible-manifesto-of-dylann-roof-surface-on-website>.

²¹⁷ Roof, “Full Text Of Charleston Suspect Dylann Roof’s Apparent Manifesto.”

²¹⁸ Roof.

²¹⁹ Jelani Cobb, “Inside the Trial of Dylann Roof,” *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/06/inside-the-trial-of-dylann-roof>.

²²⁰ Roof, “Dylann Roof Jailhouse Journal.”

a. White Genocide

As a resident of a community with a large African American population, Roof particularly attacks racial integration. He asserts in his manifesto, “How good a school is considered directly corresponds to how White [sic] it is.”²²¹ In line with his own upbringing, Roof goes on to claim that he is “fighting for these White [sic] people forced by economic circumstances to live among negroes.”²²² Furthermore, Roof grieves his belief that, in history classes, race is emphasized when malicious acts were perpetrated by whites and ignored when whites carried out historically benevolent acts.²²³ In contrast, Roof claims, “when we learn about anything important done by a black person in history, it is always pointed out repeatedly that they were black.”²²⁴ Roof also defends the United States’ history of racial segregation on the grounds that “it existed to protect us [whites] from them [African Americans].”²²⁵

Roof’s grievances about African Americans extend beyond the educational sphere. At Roof’s trial, Felicia Sanders, one of the survivors, recalled her son, Tywanza, asking Roof why he was shooting.²²⁶ Roof responded, “I have to do this, because you’re raping our women and y’all taking over the world.”²²⁷ Similar sentiments are expressed in his manifesto. In it, he claims that African Americans are “stupid and violent” and “are held to a lower standard” in society, which allows them to act obnoxiously in public.²²⁸ As a result, Roof argues, some whites retreat to suburban communities “to escape ni—ers and other minorities.”²²⁹

²²¹ Roof, “Full Text Of Charleston Suspect Dylann Roof’s Apparent Manifesto.”

²²² Roof.

²²³ Roof.

²²⁴ Roof.

²²⁵ Roof.

²²⁶ Cobb, “Inside the Trial of Dylann Roof.”

²²⁷ Cobb.

²²⁸ Roof, “Full Text Of Charleston Suspect Dylann Roof’s Apparent Manifesto.”

²²⁹ Roof.

b. Anti-Semitism

Roof has an ambivalent personal view of Jews. “Jews are an enigma,” Roof writes on the first page of his prison journal.²³⁰ On one hand, like Jared Taylor, he includes Jews in his interpretation of the white population and credits Jews for contributing worthwhile work to society. He writes, “Unlike many White naitonalists [sic], I am of the opinion that the majority of American and European jews [sic] are White [sic],” and “I would not deny for a moment that the Jews have made many wonderful, and truly great contributions to the world.”²³¹

Still, Roof writes, “But the bad outweighs the good.”²³² Specifically, he argues that Jews use African Americans and Hispanics to displace whites and destroy white culture – an article of faith among the White Genocide crowd. He argues that Jews forced racial integration, which continues to thwart whites’ aiming to reach their full potential.²³³ Specifically, Roof writes, “If the Jews had never forced integration, the blacks would of [sic] never had a chance to do as much harm to use as they have.”²³⁴ Furthermore, Roof asserts that Jews control the film, media, and publishing industries, where they exercise their bias against publishing the works of white composers, resulting in the suppression of white voices in American culture.²³⁵ Roof adds, “Obviously the other drawback of their control of the film industry, as well as every other media industry, is the introduction of vile, disgusting filth into our society.”²³⁶

²³⁰ Roof, “Dylann Roof Jailhouse Journal.”

²³¹ Roof.

²³² Roof.

²³³ Roof, “Full Text Of Charleston Suspect Dylann Roof’s Apparent Manifesto”; Roof, “Dylann Roof Jailhouse Journal.”

²³⁴ Roof, “Dylann Roof Jailhouse Journal.”

²³⁵ Roof.

²³⁶ Roof prison journal 11

c. Race Realism

In line with race realism, Roof claims that he became “completely racially aware” after researching black-on-white crime and realizing the issues facing whites.²³⁷ He continues,

Anyone who thinks that White and black people look as different as we do on the outside, but are somehow magically the same on the inside, is delusional. How could our faces, skin, hair, and body structure all be different, but our brains be exactly the same?...Negroes have lower Iqs [sic], lower impulse control, and higher testosterone levels in generals [sic].²³⁸

Roof’s race realist sentiments towards African Americans manifest in dehumanizing semantics. Roof compares African Americans to dogs. He writes, “Dogs are lower than men...This same analogy applies to black and White [sic] relations.”²³⁹ Furthermore, in his discussion about racial segregation, Roof asserts, “Integration has done nothing but bring Whites [sic] down to [the] level of brute animals.”²⁴⁰ Significantly, Roof emphasizes the race realist argument in the lens of White Genocide theory with his pronounced grievances against race mixing.

d. Rejection of Liberal Democracy

Though he claims to have limited contact with Hispanics, Roof is alarmed that “the hispanic [sic] population percentile is rising very quickly” in the United States, including in his own community.²⁴¹ As he did with Jews, Roof adopts an ambivalent stance towards Hispanics. “Hispanics are a tough issue,” he writes.²⁴² On one hand, Roof asserts that “many hispanics [sic] have significant amounts of white blood,” and that “the White [sic] hispanics [sic] are worth saving as long as they wholeheartedly identify as White [sic] and

²³⁷ Roof, “Full Text Of Charleston Suspect Dylann Roof’s Apparent Manifesto.”

²³⁸ Roof.

²³⁹ Roof.

²⁴⁰ Roof.

²⁴¹ Roof, “Dylann Roof Jailhouse Journal.”

²⁴² Roof.

align themselves in that fashion.”²⁴³ On the other hand, Roof asserts that Hispanics pose a threat to white society. “The bottom line,” he writes, “is that they [Hispanics] are our enemies, introduce crime and violence to our country, and therefore deserve no place in it.”²⁴⁴ Further, he writes, “The hispanic [sic] population is rising very quickly,” and “we have to do something before they completely overrun us,” again alluding to the Alt-Right’s rejection of liberal democratic ideals.²⁴⁵ Ultimately, Roof believes that rising minority populations “drag us [whites] down and definitely [sic] keep us from reaching our full potential.”²⁴⁶

e. Ethno-State

In his manifesto, Roof explicitly rejects the Alt-Right concept of creating a white ethno-state in the United States. He writes, “The whole idea is pathetic and just another way to run from the problem without facing it.”²⁴⁷ Instead, Roof asserts that whites can regain supremacy in the United States if [we] do not “wait any longer to take drastic action.”²⁴⁸ Hawes asserts, “After his arrest...Roof clung to his belief that he would start a race war and be freed from jail by white nationalists.”²⁴⁹ Conclusively, Roof’s actions affirm his belief that African American violence must be met with his own violence on behalf of whites.

3. Roof’s Lack of Social Networks

According to Heidi Beirich, director of the SPLC’s Intelligence Project, ““Most white supremacists [sic] killers spend a long time indoctrinating in the ideas. They stew in it. They are members of groups. They talk to people. They go to rallies. Roof doesn’t have

²⁴³ Roof.

²⁴⁴ Roof.

²⁴⁵ Roof.

²⁴⁶ Roof.

²⁴⁷ Roof, “Full Text Of Charleston Suspect Dylann Roof’s Apparent Manifesto.”

²⁴⁸ Roof.

²⁴⁹ Hawes, “Defense Experts Portray Dylann Roof as Obsessive, Delusional Loner.”

any of this.”²⁵⁰ Over the course of two and a half years, Roof underwent complete online radicalization while sitting at his computer.²⁵¹ Of the perpetrators studied, Roof seems to be the only one who passively radicalized by consuming ideologies spread on websites such as the Council of Conservative Citizens (CoCC), the Daily Stormer, and Stormfront.

In his manifesto, Roof asserts that his journey to “racial awareness” began on the CoCC website, where he read “pages upon pages” about black on white crime. According to Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the CoCC is a “crudely white supremacist group” that opposes multiculturalism and race mixing.²⁵² The second of the CoCC’s 14 principles reads, “We also oppose all efforts to mix the races of mankind...and to force the integration of the races.”²⁵³

After the shooting, it was also discovered that Roof frequented the neo-Nazi website, “The Daily Stormer.” The SPLC describes the Daily Stormer as a “white supremacist, neo-Nazi and antisemitic racist group.”²⁵⁴ According to SPLC, a user with the username, “AryanBlood1488,” posted on The Daily Stormer’s website, and many of the user’s comments lined up with the narrative presented in Roof’s manifesto.²⁵⁵ For example, on the site, the user claimed, “I have serious, great respect for the CofCC because they are the ones who woke me up to black on white crime in the beginning,” of which a similar sentiment was also expressed in Roof’s manifesto.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ Ghansah, “A Most American Terrorist.”

²⁵¹ Ghansah.

²⁵² “Council of Conservative Citizens.”

²⁵³ Francis, “Statement of Principles.”

²⁵⁴ “Daily Stormer website Goes Dark Amid Chaos.”

²⁵⁵ Keegan Hanks, “Dylann Roof May Have Been A Regular Commenter At Neo-Nazi website The Daily Stormer,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2015/06/21/dylann-roof-may-have-been-regular-commenter-neo-nazi-website-daily-stormer>.

²⁵⁶ Hanks; Roof, “Full Text Of Charleston Suspect Dylann Roof’s Apparent Manifesto.”

It is also evident that Roof posted to another neo-Nazi website, “Stormfront,” under the username, “LilAryan.”²⁵⁷ According to the SPLC, Stormfront was founded in 1995 by Don Black, “a former Alabama Klan Boss and long-time white supremacist,” and “was the first major hate site on the Internet.”²⁵⁸

C. ANALYSIS

Roof’s case highlights SQT’s emphasis on motivations and terrorism-justifying ideologies in the radicalization process. Specifically, Roof’s troubled upbringing reveals his disenchantment with society, which resulted in his clinging to white identity. Additionally, Roof foresaw the opportunity to gain significance in the white-nationalist community by “bravely fighting” on behalf of whites. Thus, Roof retaliated against African Americans for their purported role in whites’ loss of significance in America.

As Kruglanski et al. assert, terrorism-justifying ideologies give individuals a means to attain significance.²⁵⁹ Through Roof’s terrorism-justifying ideologies, which he adopted while conducting passive research on white-nationalist websites, Roof determined that the eradication of African Americans was the means to attaining significance. Roof’s pronounced frustration regarding the mixing of African Americans and whites in America sets his case apart from the cases that follow.

The role of social networks marks the most significant variation between Roof and the cases that follow. Roof’s case proves that violent “lone wolves” could radicalize online absent social interaction with other white nationalists.

²⁵⁷ Bill Morlin, “Dylann Roof Sentenced to Death for Racist Killing Spree at South Carolina Church,” Southern Poverty Law Center, January 11, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/01/10/dylann-roof-sentenced-death-racist-killing-spree-south-carolina-church>.

²⁵⁸ “Stormfront.”

²⁵⁹ Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization.”

IV. JOHN EARNEST

“To my family and friends. I can already hear your voices. ‘How could you throw your life away? You had everything! You had a loving family. You had great friends. You had a church. You were doing well in nursing school. You could have gone so far in your field of study. You could have made so much money and started a happy family of your own.’”²⁶⁰ These were the words in the “open letter,” or manifesto, Earnest left on 8chan, a far-right fringe social media website, before carrying out his shooting at a synagogue in Poway, California. Where Dylann Roof showed tangible signs of social disenchantment from an early age, Earnest was reportedly nurtured in a loving family with friends and potential for future opportunity. In fact, Earnest was enrolled in college, pursuing his desired degree. Earnest’s radicalization and violence highlights the Alt-Right’s ability to attract relatively affluent white Americans and even radicalize them to drastic action.

Similar to Roof, Earnest radicalized entirely online. However, Earnest spent a significant amount of his time on 8chan, as opposed to passive white-nationalist websites, where other Alt-Right empathizers communicated white-nationalist ideas and conspiracies. One significant feature of fringe social media sites is the celebratory culture surrounding white-nationalist violence. It is apparent that Earnest embraced this culture and was fueled by the opportunity to make a name for himself among his online peers. With the material Earnest absorbed online, he adopted the Alt-Right theory of White Genocide and a hatred of Jews. Earnest’s allusion to online video games in his manifesto also raises the question of online video gaming as a social networking platform that leads to radicalization – another feature absent in Roof’s case.

One more distinct feature of Earnest’s radicalization is his Christian justification for violence, painting Jews as a corrupt and violent force in society and throughout world history. Damon Berry argues that most of the important contemporary leaders of the American white-nationalist movement have refused to incorporate Christianity into their

²⁶⁰ John T. Earnest, “John-t-Ernest-Manifesto-8chan-Pol-April-27-2019-an-Open-Letter,” April 27, 2019, <http://archive.org/details/john-t-ernest-manifesto-8chan-pol-april-27-2019-an-open-letter>.

ideologies.²⁶¹ In a discussion on Christianity and the Alt-Right, George Hawley highlights the 1980s Christian Identity movement, “which was a heretical movement asserting that white Europeans were God’s only truly chosen people”²⁶² However, he adds, “Christian Identity is mostly irrelevant now, and [he is] aware of no significant person on the Alt-Right who endorses it.”²⁶³

A. THE EVENTS AND AFTERMATH OF APRIL 27, 2019

John Earnest was 19 years old on April 27, 2019, when he walked into the Chabad of Poway Synagogue brandishing an AR-15, which he picked up the previous day, during Passover services. He managed to shoot four congregants, killing one, before the rifle malfunctioned and he fled the scene. While Earnest fled the scene, an off-duty Border Patrol agent, serving as the congregation’s security officer, shot at Earnest’s Honda Civic. Earnest proceeded to report himself to the authorities in a chilling 911 call, in which he claimed he was defending white people from Jews and waited for the police to arrest him on the side of the road.²⁶⁴

About three weeks after the shooting, Earnest “was indicted by a federal grand jury on civil rights, hate crime, and firearm charges in connection with the murder of one person and the attempted murder of 53 others at the Chabad of Poway Synagogue on April 27 and the March 24 arson of the Dur-ul-Arqam Mosque in Escondido.”²⁶⁵ A week later, Earnest pleaded not guilty to the 113-count indictment. Earnest’s family refused to pay Earnest’s

²⁶¹ Damon T. Berry, *Blood & Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism*, Religion and Politics (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2017).

²⁶² *Christianity and the Alt-Right, Present*, Georgetown University Discussion on Christianity & Alt-Right (Georgetown University, 2018), <https://www.c-span.org/video/?453306-4/christianity-alt-right-present>.

²⁶³ *Christianity and the Alt-Right, Present*.

²⁶⁴ Elliot Spagat, “Recording Details Synagogue Shooting Suspect’s 911 Call,” AP NEWS, September 20, 2019, <https://apnews.com/57ad98ecaf434931ab63b65365421eed>.

²⁶⁵ “California Man Indicted for Federal Hate Crimes Related to Poway Synagogue Shooting and Arson of Escondido Mosque,” United States Department of Justice, May 21, 2019, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdca/pr/california-man-indicted-federal-hate-crimes-related-poway-synagogue-shooting-and-arson>.

legal costs and released a statement expressing shock, shame, and sadness for the families affected by the shooting,

Our son's actions were informed by people we do not know, and ideas we do not hold. Like our other five children, he was raised in a family, a faith, and a community that all rejected hate and taught that love must be the motive for everything we do. How our son was attracted to such darkness is a terrifying mystery to us.²⁶⁶

B. EARNEST'S QUEST FOR SIGNIFICANCE

Similar to Roof, Earnest's radicalization began with his social disconnect among peers, highlighting disenchantment with society, and he saw his act of violence as an opportunity to gain significance within his new-found white-nationalist community. However, in contrast with Roof, Earnest grew up with many siblings and both of his parents, and he was an accomplished student and piano player who, it appears, had a promising future ahead of him had he not radicalized. In other words, per SQT's counterfinality model of radicalization (CFMR), Earnest had several alternative "goals" that could have pulled him away from the focal goal of regaining significance by carrying out violence on behalf of the white race.

Similar to Roof, Earnest subscribed to White Genocide theory, which emphasizes anticipated significance loss for whites if inaction persists. In other words, this terrorism-justifying ideology provided Roof and Earnest with a means, violence, to attaining significance for himself and whites as a whole. Both cite the role of Jews in promoting race mixing and destroying white culture in such American creative industries as publishing and film. However, where Roof emphasizes the atrocities committed against whites by "lesser" African Americans, Earnest emphasizes Jewish culpability for a wide variety of historic and contemporary atrocities committed against white European descendants and Christians including their "enslavement" of other races and promotion of mass immigration. In other words, per SQT, the "culprits" identified by Roof and Earnest varied between African Americans and Jews.

²⁶⁶ Mario Sevilla, "Family of Poway Synagogue Shooting Suspect John Earnest Release Statement," KGTV, April 29, 2019, <https://www.10news.com/news/local-news/family-of-poway-synagogue-shooting-suspect-john-earnest-release-statement>.

Finally, like Roof, Earnest radicalized entirely online. However, per SQT's emphasis on social networks, Earnest's case highlights the Alt-Right's penetration into social media platforms to create formidable social networks for the purpose of spreading radical ideas and fueling violent behavior among its constituents.

1. Motivation

Of the shooters studied, Earnest's case is the most difficult to tie to societal disenchantment. Earnest grew up with five siblings and both parents in Rancho Peñasquitos, a suburb of San Diego.²⁶⁷ He attended Mt. Carmel High School, where his father taught physics and science.²⁶⁸ At Mt. Carmel, Earnest maintained A grades, swam for the varsity swim team, and was an avid piano player. According to one of Earnest's classmates,

I think we all just perceived him as very shy. He played piano at the talent show every year and was absolutely amazing. He kept to himself most of the time and honestly it was hard to know what he was thinking. He was very clear about his political ideologies in our AP government class. He's a staunch hard-right conservative who's driven by Christian values.²⁶⁹

During his senior year, Earnest was among 30 students recognized by a local program called F.A.C.E., or the Fraternity of Academic and Civic Excellence, for his academic achievements. Earnest's biography on the program's Facebook page features a picture of him dressed in a suit and tie and an entry that highlights Earnest's accomplishments and ambitions.²⁷⁰ The entry reads, "In addition to earning a 4.31 GPA, he [Earnest] practices the piano for hours and is also part of the varsity swim team...In the future, John wishes to graduate college with a biophysics major as well as continuing [sic]

²⁶⁷ Jennifer Van Grove, "Who Is John Earnest, the Suspect in the Poway Synagogue Shooting?," The San Diego Union-Tribune, April 27, 2019, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/public-safety/story/2019-04-27/who-is-john-earnest-the-suspect-in-the-poway-synagogue-shooting>.

²⁶⁸ Van Grove.

²⁶⁹ Julie Makinen et al., "California Synagogue Shooting: Who Is Suspect John T. Earnest?," USA Today, April 28, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/04/28/california-synagogue-shooting-who-suspect-john-t-earnest/3608583002/>.

²⁷⁰ "FACE Fraternity of Academic & Civic Excellence," Facebook, September 14, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/FACESeniors/photos/a.917779318367418/937756876369662/?type=3&theater>.

his musical education.”²⁷¹ To this end, Earnest enrolled at California State University, San Marcos as a nursing student after graduation.²⁷²

On the surface, at that time, Earnest appeared to be a put-together, ambitious individual. However, the accounts of some of his high school classmates paint a different picture. One prior classmate, Molly Brown, described Earnest as someone who “kept to himself. Was very introverted and didn’t really smile that often.”²⁷³ In their Advanced Placement (AP) government class, Brown claimed, Earnest “came out of his shell a little bit more and openly talked about his opinions in class,” in which “he seemed to subscribe to a lot of the alt-right viewpoints.”²⁷⁴ Earnest was apparently known for his conservative views in class.²⁷⁵

However, another student in his class who identifies as a political conservative remarked, “He didn’t really reveal himself to be a radical individual at the time,” adding, “Conservatives have it rough here.”²⁷⁶ In online posts after the shooting, other high school classmates described Earnest as the quiet student who would sit in AP classes listening to music with his hands in pockets and, without taking any notes, still aced exams.²⁷⁷

Little is known about Earnest’s life in college other than the fact that he made the dean’s list both semesters as a freshman, and he “lived at home and saw his parents every day,” according to one of Earnest’s college and former high school classmates.²⁷⁸

²⁷¹ “FACE Fraternity of Academic & Civic Excellence.”

²⁷² Julie Makinen and Tom Kiskien, “San Diego Synagogue Shooting: What We Know about Suspect John Earnest,” USA Today, April 27, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/04/27/san-diego-synagogue-shooting-what-we-know-suspect-john-earnest/3605339002/>.

²⁷³ “Synagogue Shooting Suspect’s Former Classmate Speaks Out,” CBS Los Angeles, April 29, 2019, <https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2019/04/29/synagogue-shooting-suspect-former-classmate/>.

²⁷⁴ “Synagogue Shooting Suspect’s Former Classmate Speaks Out.”

²⁷⁵ Scott Glover and Ashley Fantz, “Synagogue Suspect’s Homicidal Hatred a Surprise to Classmates,” CNN, April 30, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/30/us/california-synagogue-attack-john-earnest/index.html>.

²⁷⁶ Glover and Fantz.

²⁷⁷ Glover and Fantz.

²⁷⁸ Elliot Spagat, “Suspect in Synagogue Attack Stuns Family with Radical Turn,” Business Insider, April 29, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/suspect-in-synagogue-attack-stuns-family-with-radical-turn-2019-4>.

Similar to Roof, Earnest indicates his belief that his actions would be celebrated within his online community, highlighting an opportunity for significance gain as a motivator for his violence. He writes, “Every single White [sic] man has everything to lose by doing nothing, and everything to gain by taking action.”²⁷⁹ He adds, “I’d rather die in glory or spend the rest of my life in prison than waste away knowing that I did nothing to stop this evil.”²⁸⁰ Signing off his manifesto, Earnest expresses his hope to “inspire many more” attacks saying, “Your sacrifice will be remembered. Always.”²⁸¹

2. Terrorism-Justifying Ideology

White Genocide forms the foundation of Earnest’s ideology, but he also alludes to the other Alt-Right ideas and affinities—anti-Semitism, race realism, rejection of liberal democracy, and the creation of an ethno-state. Ultimately, Earnest identified Jews as primarily responsible for white significance loss, and he uses dehumanizing semantics and rhetoric implying the necessity of violence to justify his targeted violence against Jews.²⁸²

a. *White Genocide*

In his manifesto, Earnest identifies two groups to which he belongs, Europeans and Christians.²⁸³ Embracing White Genocide theory, Earnest emphasizes Jewish “crimes” against whites and Christians. In his words, “You cannot love your own race if you do not hate those who wish to destroy it.”²⁸⁴ Using derogatory names for Hispanics and African

²⁷⁹ John T. Earnest, “John-t-Ernest-Manifesto-8chan-Pol-April-27-2019-an-Open-Letter.”

²⁸⁰ John T. Earnest.

²⁸¹ John T. Earnest.

²⁸² It is important to note that Earnest also attempted to burn a mosque before his shooting at the synagogue. However, Earnest’s manifesto was not published until immediately before his attack on the synagogue, and Earnest focuses most of his attention on Jewish guilt in his manifesto. For these reasons, Earnest’s apparent grievances against Muslims, and his attack on the mosque, is not emphasized in this research.

²⁸³ John T. Earnest, “John-t-Ernest-Manifesto-8chan-Pol-April-27-2019-an-Open-Letter.”

²⁸⁴ John T. Earnest.

Americans, Earnest asserts that they are Jewish pawns being used to replace whites.²⁸⁵ “Every Jew currently alive plays a part in the destruction of my race,” Earnest writes.²⁸⁶

Earnest also blames Jews for corrupting the souls of Christians with sin and perversion.²⁸⁷ Specifically, Earnest claims that Jews lead Christians astray with their “peddling [of] pornography.”²⁸⁸ Quoting five Bible verses, Earnest argues that Jews are inspired by Satan and his demons.²⁸⁹ He goes as far as saying God understands his reasoning for carrying out his attack saying, “My God does not take kindly to the destruction of His creation. Especially one of the most beautiful, intelligent, and innovative races that He has created [whites]. Least of all at the hands of one of the most ugly, sinful, deceitful, cursed, and corrupt [Jews].”²⁹⁰

b. Anti-Semitism

Earnest’s grievances against Jews are not novel; neo-Nazi groups and anti-Semites have raised the same grievances against Jews for decades, and he seemed to echo some of these earlier screeds in his own musings. “Their crimes are endless,” he writes.²⁹¹ Earnest accuses Jews of deceiving the public, enslaving nations in debt, starting wars, endorsing Marxism and Communism, enslaving women in sin, peddling pornography, endorsing politicians who support mass immigration, promoting race mixing, genocide, persecuting Christians, sexual perversion, and murdering the [Jesus] Christ.²⁹²

In line with SQT, which emphasizes the role of dehumanizing semantics and rhetoric implying the necessity of violence in forming terrorism-justifying ideologies,

²⁸⁵ John T. Earnest.

²⁸⁶ John T. Earnest.

²⁸⁷ John T. Earnest.

²⁸⁸ John T. Earnest.

²⁸⁹ John T. Earnest.

²⁹⁰ John T. Earnest.

²⁹¹ John T. Earnest.

²⁹² The full list of Earnest’s grievances against Jews can be found on the first two pages of his manifesto: John T. Earnest.

Earnest refers to Jews as “vile anti-humans” and a “squalid and parasitic race.”²⁹³ He also asserts, “It is unlawful and cowardly to stand on the sidelines as the European people are genocided [sic] around you. I did not want to have to kill Jews. But they have given us no other option.”²⁹⁴

c. Race Realism

Unlike Roof, Earnest does not emphasize Jared Taylor’s ideas surrounding race and race realism. Instead, he opts for a more paleo-fascist religious racism, often referring to Jews as a despicable “race” that manipulates non-white races to advance the destruction of non-Jewish whites. As a proclaimed Christian, Earnest includes people of all races in the fight against Jews writing, “To my brothers in Christ of all races. Be Strong.”²⁹⁵ On the other, he rejects race mixing and claims that Hispanics and African Americans are “useful puppets for the Jew in terms of replacing Whites,” a nod to White Genocide.²⁹⁶

d. Rejection of Liberal Democracy

Though Earnest does not emphasize the role of the U.S. government and its ideals in destroying the white race, his case does reveal far-right animosity towards the U.S. government. In his manifesto, Earnest uses derogatory adjectives to describe President Trump and political conservatives, calling Trump a “Zionist, Jew-loving, anti-White, traitorous cocksucker” and political conservatives “useless, spineless cowards.”²⁹⁷ Addressing the U.S. government’s role in perpetuating White Genocide, even if Earnest’s statements were short and ambiguous, appears to be a novel development in Earnest’s case.

e. Ethno-state

Though Earnest does not mention the possibility of peacefully creating a white ethno-state in the United States as a solution to the problems posed by White Genocide, he

²⁹³ John T. Earnest.

²⁹⁴ John T. Earnest.

²⁹⁵ John T. Earnest.

²⁹⁶ John T. Earnest.

²⁹⁷ John T. Earnest.

advocates violence to that end. Through his own act of violence, Earnest hoped that his act “will inspire others to take a stand as well.”²⁹⁸ Further, he writes, “And when this revolution starts gaining traction (if I am not killed) I expect to be freed from prison and continue the fight,” alluding to a coming race war that will inevitably racially divide the country.²⁹⁹ Thus, Earnest does promote the division of the country across racial lines, in essence advocating ethnonationalism.

3. Social Networks

The rise and fall of Alt-Right prominence between the 2016 presidential election and the 2017 Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally coincided with the rising popularity of fringe social media sites, like 8chan, which seemingly became a significant Alt-Right contribution to white-nationalist radicalization. Charlottesville prompted public criticism of traditional social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter for allowing users to incite hate on their platforms, leading these sites to suspend users associated with the far-right.³⁰⁰ In response, far-right communities created uncensored fringe social media platforms like 8chan, and they brought their hateful ideologies with them. In fact, according to Wells and Lovett, 8chan “calls itself ‘the darkest reaches of the internet.’”³⁰¹ It was on 8chan, in particular, that Earnest was able to absorb and adopt a wide range of Alt-Right ideas and conspiracies in one place that would fuel his own radicalization. Wells and Lovett observe that Earnest posted to 8chan shortly before the shooting saying, “I’ve only been lurking for a year and a half, yet, what I’ve learned here is priceless.”³⁰²

²⁹⁸ John T. Earnest.

²⁹⁹ John T. Earnest.

³⁰⁰ Kianna Gardner, “Social Media: Where Voices of Hate Find a Place to Preach,” Center for Public Integrity, August 30, 2018, <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/social-media-where-voices-of-hate-find-a-place-to-preach/>.

³⁰¹ Georgia Wells and Ian Lovett, “‘So What’s His Kill Count?’: The Toxic Online World Where Mass Shooters Thrive,” The Wall Street Journal, September 4, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/inside-the-toxic-online-world-where-mass-shooters-thrive-11567608631>.

³⁰² Wells and Lovett.

Wells and Lovett also assert, “Mass shooters are revered on the forums,” and, “Posts encourage attacks against mosques, synagogues and immigrants.”³⁰³ They continue, “Hateful ideologies [are] used to incite violence, forming a chain of influence that appears to have led from one mass shooting to the next.”³⁰⁴ Earnest cited prior shooters, such as Brenton Tarrant and Robert Bowers, as individuals who directly inspired his attack and asserted that he began planning his attack shortly after Tarrant’s shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand.³⁰⁵ In fact, Earnest cited Brenton Tarrant’s shooting as inspiration for his own attack, going as far as formatting his manifesto and attempting to livestream his shooting online like Tarrant.³⁰⁶ In turn, it took Earnest only four weeks to plan and carry out his attack.³⁰⁷ In addition, Earnest devotes a portion of his manifesto to encouraging future acts of violence and providing tips to future violent perpetrators. He instructs future shooters to avoid using electronics and to wear new clothes that can be disposed of after the shooting.³⁰⁸ He also recommends that violent perpetrators consider using flamethrowers adding, “napalm is more effective than gasoline if you want Jews to really light up like a menorah.”³⁰⁹

Earnest’s case also raises the question of online video gaming as a source of social networking that can lead to radicalization, though the link between video gaming and radicalization in Earnest’s case is a little more obscure and relies on speculation and assumption. He writes in his manifesto, “I had the help of a man named Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg. He was kind enough to plan and fund this whole operation – the sly bastard.”³¹⁰ Kjellberg, also known as “PewDiePie,” is a famous online personality who has more than 100 million YouTube subscribers to his channel which features videos of him “playing

³⁰³ Wells and Lovett.

³⁰⁴ Wells and Lovett.

³⁰⁵ John T. Earnest, “John-t-Ernest-Manifesto-8chan-Pol-April-27-2019-an-Open-Letter.”

³⁰⁶ John T. Earnest.

³⁰⁷ John T. Earnest.

³⁰⁸ John T. Earnest.

³⁰⁹ John T. Earnest.

³¹⁰ John T. Earnest.

video games while giving an expletive-strewn running commentary.”³¹¹ Though no firm evidence seems to exist that the Internet star assisted Earnest in his violence, there is evidence that white nationalists, particularly those on the Alt-Right, utilize video games as social networking platforms, sometimes leading to the radicalization of moderate individuals.³¹² Earnest analogizes Minecraft, a computer game in which players can create online worlds out of virtual blocks, to the real world in which others like him have the opportunity to take control.³¹³ Specifically, Earnest writes,

It is so easy to log on to Minecraft [go out into your community] and get away with burning a synagogue (or mosque) to the ground if you’re smart about it. You can even shoot up a mosque, synagogue, immigration center, traitorous politicians, wealthy Jews in gated communities, Jewish-owned company buildings, etc., and get away with it as well. If your goal is strictly carnage and the highest score – I’d highly recommend you look into flamethrowers...³¹⁴

Though Earnest’s reference to a famous online video-gamer and Minecraft are ambiguous, a loose connection can be drawn between video gaming and Earnest’s radicalization.

C. ANALYSIS

Two distinct features highlight the impact of Alt-Right influence on Earnest’s radicalization, the use of fringe social media sites and the ability to attract comparatively affluent young individuals. At the time of Roof’s radicalization, fringe social media sites were still novel. In fact, white nationalists used traditional social media sites, like Twitter and Facebook, and an online video gaming chat room called “Discord” to coordinate the “Unite the Right” rally.³¹⁵ However, many users who associated with the far-right were

³¹¹ “PewDiePie,” Biography, December 16, 2019, <https://www.biography.com/personality/pewdiepie-felix-kjellberg>.

³¹² Megan Condis asserts that “it is not about the content of the games themselves but about the way the culture that surrounds gaming provides particularly fertile soil for sowing the seeds of resentment that grow into hate.” For more information, see Megan Condis, “From Fortnite to Alt-Right,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 2019, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/opinion/gaming-new-zealand-shooter.html>.

³¹³ Clive Thompson, “The Minecraft Generation,” *The New York Times*, April 14, 2016, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/magazine/the-minecraft-generation.html>.

³¹⁴ John T. Earnest, “John-t-Ernest-Manifesto-8chan-Pol-April-27-2019-an-Open-Letter.”

³¹⁵ Gardner, “Social Media.”

suspended or removed from traditional social media sites after the Charlottesville rally, so they migrated to uncensored fringe social media platforms. It was on one of these platforms, 8chan, that Earnest found a community of white nationalists who spouted hateful ideologies and promoted and celebrated violence carried out against Muslims, Jews, and immigrants.

With the popularization of fringe social media sites came two features that enhanced and expedited Earnest's radicalization and were unavailable to Roof. First, white-nationalist discussion on 8chan provided Earnest a single platform on which he could consume a wide range of Alt-Right hateful ideologies. From these discussions, Earnest could then conduct further research as he pleased. In contrast to Roof, Earnest was not required to visit multiple passive websites to frame his own ideology. Second, fringe social media platforms provided a community and culture that celebrated and promoted violence. The manifestos of prior shooters proliferated on the sites along with images and claims implying martyrdom of the violent perpetrators.

Additionally, Earnest's radicalization highlights the Alt-Right's ability to attract young and comparatively affluent individuals. Roof was a high school dropout whose upbringing indicates that he suffered from societal disenchantment for most of his life. Roof also indicated that he had no hope for a promising future. Earnest, on the other hand, indicates that he grew up in a "loving family" and had many friends. Further, he graduated at the top of his class in high school and earned dean's list recognition in his first year of college, indicating that his future was promising if he did not go down the path of radicalization. In other words, in line with Kruglanski et al.'s CFMR, Earnest placed significantly more weight on removing perceived injustice through violence than on other life priorities, such as earning an education and eventually raising a family.

V. PATRICK CRUSIUS

Crusius provides a second case of white-nationalist radicalization after the Alt-Right reached national prominence in 2016–2017. Similar to Earnest, Crusius earned his high school diploma and enrolled in college hoping to earn a degree and enter the American workforce. Yet, like his predecessors, Crusius found himself socially disconnected as he started down the road of radicalization. Thus, he found a community of like-minded individuals on 8chan, highlighting the Alt-Right’s exploitation of fringe social media platforms in the radicalization process leading up to his shooting of an El Paso Walmart.

Crusius’s case significantly diverges from the previous two on the ideological front. While he subscribed to White Genocide theory, Crusius did not exclusively blame an ethnic or religious group. Instead, Crusius blamed government policy, in which corporate entities exercise influence, for promoting immigration at the expense of white interests, highlighting the Alt-Right’s ability to capitalize on political happenings to aggravate individuals to the point of violence. Specifically, the Alt-Right exploited the charged political discourse surrounding the issue of immigration through the United States’ border with Mexico to fuel hate among its constituents.

A. THE EVENTS AND AFTERMATH OF AUGUST 3, 2019

Patrick Crusius was 21 years old when he walked into an El Paso Walmart with his newly acquired AK-style assault rifle and killed twenty-two shoppers, injuring another twenty-four. Roughly twenty-five minutes before the shooting commenced, Crusius posted his manifesto that decried Hispanics, who he claimed “pose a threat to American racial and cultural identity.”³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Michael Davis, “The Manifesto Posted On 8chan By Alleged El Paso Shooter Minutes Before Attack,” The Middle East Media Research Institute, August 6, 2019, <https://www.memri.org/reports/manifesto-posted-8chan-alleged-el-paso-shooter-minutes-attack>.

Six weeks before the shooting, Crusius moved out of his grandparents' home, though it was unclear where he was staying.³¹⁷ Two days before the attack, Patrick had dinner with his sister at their grandparents' house, and the following night, before the ten hour drive to El Paso, Patrick had dinner with his parents.³¹⁸ Reportedly, none of his family members detected any changes in Crusius' behavior during the outings.³¹⁹ Generally, however, Patrick's family "worried he was a little lost, with few friends, but thought he wasn't any more aimless than many others his age."³²⁰

Patrick Crusius "has been charged with 90 federal charges, including 44 federal hate crimes."³²¹ He is being currently held in prison without bond and kept on suicide watch in isolation from other prisoners.³²²

B. CRUSIUS'S QUEST FOR SIGNIFICANCE

Like his predecessors, Crusius's quest for significance was motivated by societal disenchantment, and he sought retribution through violence. Similar to Roof, evidence of Crusius's disenchantment with society dates to his early childhood and continues through high school. It seems Crusius began flirting with ultra-conservative ideas in high school, shifting casual conversations with classmates towards such subjects as police brutality and white supremacy. In his manifesto, Crusius projected his perceived significance loss into the future, expressing that his desired future no longer existed.

³¹⁷ Jack Healy and Sarah Mervosh, "El Paso Suspect Ordered Gun and Moved Out in Weeks Before Attack," *The New York Times*, August 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/08/us/el-paso-suspect.html>.

³¹⁸ Erin Ailworth, Georgia Wells, and Ian Lovett, "Lost in Life, El Paso Suspect Found a Dark World Online," *Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.wsj.com/articles/lost-in-life-el-paso-suspect-found-a-dark-world-online-11565308783>.

³¹⁹ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

³²⁰ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

³²¹ Molly Smith, Aaron Montes, and Daniel Borunda, "Man Accused of Killing 22 People in El Paso Walmart Shooting Charged with Hate Crimes," *USA TODAY*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/02/06/el-paso-walmart-shooting-patrick-crusius-federal-hate-crime-charges/4680916002/>.

³²² Smith, Montes, and Borunda.

Ultimately, White Genocide theory provided Crusius with an explanation for his perceived bleak future. Unlike his predecessors, who blamed African Americans and Jews for destroying the white race, Crusius found the U.S. government and corporate America guilty of advancing their own interests at the expense of whites. Thus, seeking to regain significance for himself and whites, Crusius violently targeted Hispanics, whom he characterized as the puppets of the deplorable, self-interested U.S. government.

Crusius conceivably adopted his terrorism-justifying ideology while immersed in the fringe social media arena, the Alt-Right's primary social network. Fueled by his online peers, Crusius posted his manifesto to 8chan, the same platform frequented by Earnest, and carried out his violence hoping to gain significance within his community and inspire other whites to do the same.

1. Motivation

Crusius grew up in a majority white suburb in Allen, Texas with his older brother, Blake, and twin sister, Emily. However, his parents divorced while Crusius was in middle school, reportedly due in part to his father's alcohol and drug abuse.³²³ Like Roof, Crusius was a socially isolated individual who kept to himself and had few friends. One elementary school classmate who used to play basketball and soccer with Crusius during recess remembers Crusius as "a nice kid," though the two fell out of touch after elementary school.³²⁴ Neighbors and classmates pinned Crusius as "strange" and "off."³²⁵ One neighbor reported seeing Crusius playing outside, by himself, with an ax.³²⁶ Another former neighbor, Leigh Ann Locascio, "described Crusius as 'very much a loner, very standoffish' and someone who 'didn't interact a whole lot with anyone.'"³²⁷ Locascio's

³²³ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, "Lost in Life, El Paso Suspect Found a Dark World Online."

³²⁴ Adam Elmahrek, Melissa Etehad, and Matthew Ormseth, "'Very Much a Loner': What We Know about El Paso Shooting Suspect Patrick Crusius," Los Angeles Times, August 4, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-08-03/what-we-know-about-patrick-crusius-el-paso-rampage>.

³²⁵ Healy and Mervosh, "El Paso Suspect Ordered Gun and Moved Out in Weeks Before Attack."

³²⁶ Healy and Mervosh.

³²⁷ Elmahrek, Etehad, and Ormseth, "'Very Much a Loner.'"

son, who attended school with Crusius, said ““He wouldn’t talk to people. No one really knew him.””³²⁸

Crusius’s social isolation continued into high school. One high school classmate claimed, ““He didn’t necessarily have a lot of friends. He just shied away from a lot of people, no matter who they were.””³²⁹ Paige Nunnally-Rowley, who also attended the same high school and community college as Crusius, said, ““He didn’t necessarily have a lot of friends...He just shied away from a lot of people, no matter who they were.””³³⁰ Even Crusius’s older brother, Blake, described Crusius as an introverted person who made friends online because of the Internet’s anonymous and less intimate nature.³³¹

When he did interact with others, Crusius’s interpersonal interactions were often negative. Throughout junior and senior high school, Patrick sat alone on the bus and often “spoke negatively of other kids who played sports or joined the school band.”³³² One of Crusius’s high school classmates, Jacob Wilson, pointed out,

Crusius was ‘very strong-minded’ in class and would try to ‘take charge,’ but other kids refused to work with him because he was ‘irritable and had a short temper.’ He was often ‘picked on’ because of how he spoke, and because he wore what looked like hand-me-down clothes.³³³

Along those same lines, “Another neighbor recalled that the suspect [Crusius] often gave terse ‘yes/no’ answers and was often late for school because the clothes he wore did not feel right to him.”³³⁴ Another high school classmate, “who has African-American, Brazilian, and Cuban heritage,” recalled that Crusius sometimes shifted casual conversations “to ask her views about the Second Amendment, white supremacy or police

³²⁸ Elmahrek, Etehad, and Ormseth.

³²⁹ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, “Lost in Life, El Paso Suspect Found a Dark World Online.”

³³⁰ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

³³¹ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

³³² Elmahrek, Etehad, and Ormseth, ““Very Much a Loner.””

³³³ Elmahrek, Etehad, and Ormseth.

³³⁴ Healy and Mervosh, “El Paso Suspect Ordered Gun and Moved Out in Weeks Before Attack.”

brutality.”³³⁵ Nonetheless, Patrick graduated high school in Plano, Texas with a class of more than 1,000 in 2017.³³⁶

Crusius reveals his feelings of disenchantment in his online sentiments and manifesto as well. He posted on his LinkedIn page, “‘I’m not really motivated to do anything more than what’s necessary to get by. Working in general sucks, but I guess a career in Software Development suits me well.”³³⁷ At the time, he worked as a bagger in a local supermarket.³³⁸ In his manifesto, Crusius grieves the cost of education and limited job opportunities for educated Americans writing, “My whole life I have been preparing for a future that currently doesn’t exist.”³³⁹

After high school, Patrick enrolled in Collin College, a community college located about twenty minutes from Plano, and moved in with his grandparents.³⁴⁰ Crusius was reportedly fond of his grandfather, talking at length with him about current events, history, and politics.³⁴¹ His grandfather “‘never got the impression that Patrick was going to a dark or strange place.”³⁴² However, further evidence indicates that Crusius’s persona online, “‘where he spent some eight hours a day,” did not match his in-person persona.³⁴³

Like Earnest, Crusius immersed himself in the uncensored online fringe culture, where he consumed hateful ideologies and celebrated mass shootings. Prior to his shooting, Crusius added his manifesto to 8chan, where Earnest and Tarrant also left their final words, knowing that it would be circulated on the site and that his actions would be celebrated by his online peers. Crusius highlights his heroism in his final signoff writing, “I am honored

³³⁵ Healy and Mervosh.

³³⁶ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, “Lost in Life, El Paso Suspect Found a Dark World Online.”

³³⁷ Tim Arango, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, and Katie Benner, “Minutes Before El Paso Killing, Hate-Filled Manifesto Appears Online,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/patrick-crusius-el-paso-shooter-manifesto.html>.

³³⁸ Arango, Bogel-Burroughs, and Benner.

³³⁹ Grabancijaš, “Patrick Crusius Manifesto.”

³⁴⁰ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, “Lost in Life, El Paso Suspect Found a Dark World Online.”

³⁴¹ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

³⁴² Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

³⁴³ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

to head the fight to reclaim my country from destruction.”³⁴⁴ Wells and Lovett confirm Crusius’s foresight, “Commenters on the site celebrated. ‘The new guy deserves some praise, he reached almost a third of the high score,’ one [8chan user] wrote, a reference to the largest death toll in any mass shooting.”³⁴⁵

2. Terrorism-Justifying Ideology

Similar to Roof and Earnest, Crusius lamented race mixing and immigration. He asserted that the white race will no longer be significant in the United States at the current rate of non-white immigration, a nod to White Genocide theory. Unlike his predecessors, who blamed African Americans and Jews, Crusius found fault with the self-serving U.S. government and American corporatism for perpetuating White Genocide by encouraging non-white immigration.

While the previous perpetrators addressed a wide range of white-nationalist ideologies in their manifestos, Crusius committed solely to his view that Hispanic immigration is destroying the white race and that the government, in which corporations have significant influence, is responsible for allowing Hispanic immigrants to ethnically and culturally replace American whites. Crusius offered the creation of an ethno-state as a solution to White Genocide, but like his predecessors, he opted for the violent alternative. Ultimately, Crusius targeted Hispanics at a Walmart near the Texas-Mexico border because he claimed he could not bring himself to kill his “fellow Americans,” even if they were to blame for destroying the white race.

a. White Genocide

In line with Alt-Right White Genocide theory, one of Crusius’s central grievances is the increasing Hispanic immigration to Texas, which he argues has contributed to the replacement of whites in the United States. He writes, “This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas...I am simply defending my country from cultural and ethnic

³⁴⁴ Grabancijaš, “Patrick Crusius Manifesto.”

³⁴⁵ Wells and Lovett, “‘So What’s His Kill Count?’: The Toxic Online World Where Mass Shooters Thrive.”

replacement brought on by an invasion.”³⁴⁶ Unlike Earnest, who blames Jews for manipulating minority races in an effort to destroy white ethnicity and culture, Crusius blames the U.S. government and corporatism for allowing this “replacement” to perpetuate. In fact, Crusius does not mention Jews at all in his manifesto, indicating that he did not subscribe to White Genocide theory that emphasizes the “Jewish problem.”

For government and corporate faults, Crusius expresses that targeting such institutions would have made a more pronounced statement. However, it is apparent that Crusius valued his white identity more than the opportunity to make such a statement. He writes, “Even if other non-immigrant targets would have a greater impact, I can’t bring myself to kill my fellow Americans. Even the Americans that seem hell-bent on destroying our country.”³⁴⁷ Thus, Crusius targets Hispanics while blaming the government and corporations in his manifesto.

b. Anti-Semitism

In contrast to Roof and Earnest, Crusius does not address the “Jewish problem,” or the idea that Jews are responsible for destroying the white race by promoting immigration and race mixing. Crusius does not even mention or allude to Jews in his manifesto.

c. Race Realism

Unlike Roof and Earnest, Crusius’s manifesto does not feature dehumanizing semantics to describe Hispanics or other racial minorities. In fact, he credits non-white Americans for their contribution to building the country.³⁴⁸ However, Crusius does mention that he opposes race-mixing writing, “I am against race mixing because it destroys genetic diversity and creates identity problems.”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Grabancijaš, “Patrick Crusius Manifesto.”

³⁴⁷ Grabancijaš.

³⁴⁸ Grabancijaš.

³⁴⁹ Grabancijaš.

d. Rejection of Liberal Democracy

Based on Crusius's violent actions and rhetoric, it is apparent that Crusius "fought" to defend three groups – white Americans, the working class, and his college student peers – against the ethnic and cultural replacement brought on by increased immigration. Crusius rails against government- and corporate-endorsed immigration on the grounds that the Democratic party is guilty of "pandering heavily to the Hispanic voting bloc" and that Republican-supported corporate America hopes to staff low-wage labor with immigrants and broaden the American consumer base.³⁵⁰ "The inconvenient truth," writes Crusius in his manifesto, "is that our leaders, both Democrat and Republican, have been failing us for decades."³⁵¹

Democrats, he argues, unanimously support immigration because they intend to leverage the Hispanic vote to achieve and maintain political power.³⁵² Republicans, on the other hand, are at least "divided" over the immigration issue, though this does not let them off the hook in Crusius's mind.³⁵³ He asserts, "Many factions within the Republican Party are pro-corporation. Pro-corporation=pro-immigration."³⁵⁴ Defending the working class, Crusius asserts that corporations lobby for increased immigration in order to fulfill demands for cheap, low-skilled labor.³⁵⁵ Thus, low-wage jobs are filled by immigrants rather than working-class Americans. However, Crusius finds more fault in the children of migrants who, he argues, desire to fulfill the "American Dream" by going to college and entering the skilled job market. Greater competition in the skilled job market requires students to spend more time in college to obtain better credentials. He points out that a bachelor's degree is vital to compete in the job market, and with increasing tuition prices, "This has led to a generation of indebted, overqualified students filling menial, low paying,

³⁵⁰ Grabancijaš.

³⁵¹ Grabancijaš.

³⁵² Grabancijaš.

³⁵³ Grabancijaš.

³⁵⁴ Grabancijaš.

³⁵⁵ Grabancijaš.

unfulfilling jobs.”³⁵⁶ Though Crusius recognizes that immigrants are not the only culprit, he reinforces their contribution to this issue.

Crusius mentions two more faults of corporate America and the government that have contributed to greater destruction of the country. “Corporations,” Crusius asserts, “are heading the destruction of our environment by shamelessly overharvesting resources” and polluting the environment with oil drilling operations and the construction of “inefficient cities” which “destroys millions of acres of land.”³⁵⁷ Crusius also lists America’s wasteful consumer culture, which is supported by corporatism and enhanced by immigration, as another contributing factor to environmental erosion.³⁵⁸ Beyond environmental issues, Crusius cites the corporate advancement of automation which, he argues, destroys American jobs.³⁵⁹ “The government,” Crusius argues, “is unwilling to tackle these issues beyond empty promises since they are owned by corporations.”³⁶⁰

e. Ethno-State

Crusius alludes to three potential solutions to the problems associated with greater racial diversity perpetuated by Hispanic immigration: race mixing, genocide, or the creation of separate ethnic territories. However, Crusius sidelines the idea of race mixing, and he asserts that “the idea of deporting or murdering all non-white Americans is horrific.”³⁶¹ Crusius seems to side with the third potential solution—the creation of an ethno-state. “The best solution,” he claims, “would be to divide America into a confederacy of territories with at least 1 territory for each race.”³⁶² He asserts, “This physical separation

³⁵⁶ Grabancijaš.

³⁵⁷ Grabancijaš.

³⁵⁸ Grabancijaš.

³⁵⁹ Grabancijaš.

³⁶⁰ Grabancijaš.

³⁶¹ Grabancijaš.

³⁶² Grabancijaš.

would nearly eliminate race mixing and improve social unity by granting each race self-determination within their respective territory(s).”³⁶³

Yet, Crusius opts for violence. Because of the wastefulness created by corporatism and consumer culture, Crusius argues that “the next logical step is to decrease the number of people in America using resources.”³⁶⁴ Thus, he writes, “I have to do this before I lose my nerve.”³⁶⁵ His manifesto also reads, “If you take nothing else from this document, remember this: INACTION IS A CHOICE. I can no longer bear the shame of inaction knowing that our founding fathers have endowed me with the rights needed to save our country from the brink destruction [sic].”³⁶⁶ Justifying his own actions, Crusius asserts that that government “has killed a whole lot more people for a whole lot less” with its support of “imperialistic wars that have caused the loss of tens of thousands of American lives and untold numbers of civilian lives.”³⁶⁷

3. Social Networks

The account of Crusius’s involvement on 8chan reflects Earnest’s case. Disenchanted from society, Crusius turned to the Internet in search of a community. On 8chan, Crusius found a group of anonymous individuals who spouted hateful ideologies and violent rhetoric lamenting the issues Crusius highlights in his manifesto. Like Earnest, Crusius found and adopted the ideas expressed in Brenton Tarrant’s manifesto, titled “The Great Replacement.”³⁶⁸ The first line of Crusius’s manifesto reads, “In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto.”³⁶⁹ Further, Crusius also calls future shooters to action in a portion of his manifesto knowing that the document would circulate on 8chan

³⁶³ Grabancijaš.

³⁶⁴ Grabancijaš.

³⁶⁵ Grabancijaš.

³⁶⁶ Grabancijaš.

³⁶⁷ Grabancijaš.

³⁶⁸ Grabancijaš.

³⁶⁹ Grabancijaš.

and other fringe sites. He writes, “Remember: it is not cowardly to pick low hanging fruit...Attack low security targets...If a target seems too hot, live to fight another day.”³⁷⁰

C. ANALYSIS

Crusius’s case is similar to Earnest’s case on several levels, but its differences highlight other Alt-Right ideological frameworks that motivate radicals to violence. Like Earnest, Crusius was enrolled in college when he decided to carry out his shooting. However, accounts of Crusius’s upbringing and interactions with peers indicates that societal disenchantment may have played a larger role in his radicalization. Unlike Earnest, Crusius did not have communities with which he was tied, such as a “loving family” or a group of friends. Instead, Crusius seemed to bond most with his grandfather. Thus, Crusius turned to fringe social media to find a crowd with whom he could connect. Furthermore, the decision made by both Earnest and Crusius to include their sources of inspiration and instructions to future shooters in their manifesto confirms Wells and Lovett’s claim that fringe social media sites, which became popular after the 2017 Charlottesville rally, are integral in motivating white nationalists to carry out violence.

Crusius’s ideology sets him apart from Earnest and Crusius, and it highlights the Alt-Right’s ability to capitalize on government policies to aggravate disenchanted individuals. President Trump’s promise to reform immigration policy and build a border wall between the United States and Mexico was championed by those on the Alt-Right, thrusting the issue of the rising non-white immigrant population into the Alt-Right’s ideological mix. Crusius’s targeting of Hispanic immigrants indicates the adaptation of Alt-Right ideology to the political environment. Where Earnest developed an extreme hatred towards Jews, Crusius espoused a negative view of the government and corporatism with resentment towards Hispanic immigrants. As a result of this evolution, the number of potential targets for Alt-Right white nationalists spread to include Hispanics in addition to African Americans and Jews.

³⁷⁰ Grabancijaš.

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VI. IMPLICATIONS

In light of the cases of Roof, Earnest, and Crusius, it is clear that Significance Quest Theory adequately captures the radicalization process of white nationalists in the United States and that the Alt-Right's appearance on the national stage played an integral role in motivating white-nationalist violence. The rise of the Alt-Right in 2016 enabled the radicalization of relatively affluent individuals, reinvigorated White Genocide sentiments, and prompted the creation of online echo-chambers for white nationalists to spout hateful ideas. The Alt-Right's developments played a role in radicalizing at least two Americans to the point of violence in the summer of 2019, John Earnest and Patrick Crusius. According to SQT, moderate people succumb to radical behavior when their commitment to attaining significance outweighs their commitment to such other life goals as earning a college degree or getting married. SQT breaks the radicalization process into three components—motivations, acceptance of terrorism-justifying ideologies, and interaction with social networks—that are evident in all three cases.

Motivations—like perceived personal or group significance loss, perceived future significance loss for oneself or one's group, and/or perceived opportunities for significance gain—initiate the radicalization process, according to Kruglanski et al.³⁷¹ Through the accounts of their peers and the words in their own writing, evidence shows that Roof, Earnest, and Crusius perceived personal and group significance loss. On a personal level, all three perpetrators displayed a heightened level of disenchantment with society. Their own writing indicated discontentment with their current situation, and their peers reportedly portrayed them as outcasts who often kept to themselves. Yet, while Roof dropped out of high school, Earnest and Crusius were enrolled in college, highlighting the Alt-Right's ability to radicalize relatively affluent individuals to the point of violence. Furthermore, all three perpetrators recounted the loss of significance among white Americans at the hands of greater societal significance among non-white Americans, which aligns with SQT's perceived group significance loss. For example, Roof, Earnest, and

³⁷¹ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization."

Crusius express enmity for race mixing and mass immigration, asserting that both phenomena weaken and destroy white communities while promoting African Americans, Jews, and Hispanics. Their sentiments are captured in the Alt-Right's White Genocide theory.

White Genocide theory also has a forward-looking feature. Thus, it ties in well with Kruglanski et al.'s second radicalization motivator, anticipated significance loss, which asserts that individuals may take drastic action in an attempt to prevent future loss of significance.³⁷² In the case of White Genocide theory, it seems that Roof, Earnest, and Crusius were at least partially motivated to carry out violence against non-whites in an effort to halt or prevent future race mixing and mass immigration. Additionally, White Genocide theory and similar ideas represent the white-nationalist strain of SQT's terrorism-justifying ideology component of radicalization which pins responsibility for significance loss on specific individuals or groups.

Roof specifically lamented rising significance among African Americans because he believed that race mixing kept white Americans from reaching their full potential. Roof also cited Jews as culprits for destroying white culture with their political prowess and the power they hold over creative industries, such as literature and film. Similarly, Earnest accused Jews of destroying white significance with their grip on political power and the media, which, according to Earnest, they use to promote race mixing and mass immigration. Earnest also accused Jews of historically and currently persecuting Christians, blaming them for murdering Jesus Christ and endorsing sexual perversion through the pornography industry. Crusius also subscribed to White Genocide theory, but his focus centered on the role of the government and corporations in perpetuating mass immigration which, according to Crusius, destroys future prospects for white Americans. Though Crusius did not specifically blame Hispanics in his manifesto, he targeted them for violence in his attack because he foresaw the Hispanic population overtaking whites as the majority race in his home state of Texas; he further claimed that he could not bring himself to commit violence against white Americans. Though the Alt-Right ideologies adopted by

³⁷² Kruglanski et al.

each perpetrator resemble historic white-nationalist ideologies, Crusius's accusations against the government and corporations highlight a shift in the Alt-Right's ability to frame political discord in such a way that it fuels hatred among its constituents. Crusius's case highlighted that such mainstream issues as immigration policy animated the Alt-Right's White Genocide theory to reach larger audiences. Specifically, immigration became a point of increased political and societal divide during the Trump administration as migrant caravans of asylum-seekers from South and Central America formed and headed toward the United States.³⁷³ For example, the separation of migrant children from their families, a consequence of the "zero tolerance" policy adopted in 2018 by then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions, was covered extensively in the media and sparked controversy along political lines both in the government and the populace between 2017 and 2019.³⁷⁴ Ultimately, the cases studied demonstrate that white-nationalist ideologies remain in tact long after specific hate groups or leaders lose publicity, and that the Alt-Right spins white-nationalist ideologies to justify the hateful affinities adopted by violent perpetrators.

Kruglanski et al. also identify opportunities for significance gain as a potential motivator for radicalization and violence.³⁷⁵ In other words, perpetrators may perceive violent behavior as an opportunity to gain a heroic status in their community. Opportunity for significance gain fits well with Kruglanski et al.'s social network component of radicalization which asserts that social ties enhance feelings of camaraderie and loyalty within the group.³⁷⁶ Within his white nationalist community, Roof lamented the inadequacy of his peers to take action in defense of American whites. Thus, in an effort to gain significance, Roof touted his violence as an act of bravery among white nationalist "cowards." Similarly, Earnest and Crusius seemed to believe that their actions would earn them honor and praise in their online communities. Unlike Earnest and Crusius, Roof was

³⁷³ Marisol Florez, "Migrant Caravans to the U.S. Border," National Conference of State Legislatures, January 4, 2019, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/migrant-caravans-to-the-u-s-border.aspx>.

³⁷⁴ "US: Family Separation Harming Children, Families," Human Rights Watch, July 11, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/11/us-family-separation-harming-children-families>.

³⁷⁵ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization."

³⁷⁶ Kruglanski et al.

limited to passive white-nationalist websites where he absorbed and adopted white nationalist sentiments.

Following the 2017 Charlottesville Rally, Alt-Right social networks blossomed on uncensored social media sites. The emergence of 8chan and other uncensored social media allowed for interaction between individuals from around the world, evidenced by Earnest's reference to Felix Kjellberg, a famous Swedish video-gamer who articulates hateful white nationalist sentiments. Furthermore, social media allowed for the widespread diffusion of manifestos that included calls to action and instructions for future violent perpetrators. Earnest and Crusius posted their manifestos, which included instructions on how to conduct future attacks, to 8chan in an effort to inspire others. They also cited the actions and beliefs of previous violent perpetrators in their manifestos indicating that they were motivated, at least partially, by previous shooters. Ultimately, the cases studied demonstrate the increased significance of online social networks, which became popular with the rise of the Alt-Right, in white-nationalist radicalization.

A. HOMELAND SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the Alt-Right has lost much of its national zeal since 2016, white-nationalism has proven its resiliency through U.S. history and can be expected to undergird future far-right sentiments that contribute to the radicalization of individuals to the point of violence. Understanding such motivations that initiate radicalization as personal and group grievances may support the identification of potential radical behavior. Specifically, disenchanted white Americans who voice grievances about their own position or the position of whites in America may be more prone to adopting terrorism-justifying ideologies and interacting with radicals online, which may then lead them to violence.

As the political gap widens and political parties move toward the fringe, future white-nationalist movements can be expected to fuel hatred among white nationalists by galvanizing white-nationalist sentiments of old and spinning political controversies to promote White Genocide theory. Additionally, white nationalists will likely continue to leverage uncensored echo-chambers offered by online environments to circulate hateful rhetoric and encourage violence.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) emphasized the threat of domestic extremism in its “Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence” report, which was published in September 2019.³⁷⁷ Listed below, the DHS identified five “guiding principles” for building on past success while anticipating and addressing future threats:

1. **Understand and Adapt to the Threat Environment:** As threats against the Homeland evolve, the Department must adapt its intelligence capabilities to new security landscapes and craft innovative responses.
2. **Understand Positive and Potentially Malicious Uses of Technology:** Technology can provide important new solutions to the challenges of terrorism and targeted violence. But technological developments can also magnify these challenges. Technological advances influence how people radicalize to violent extremism and mobilize to violence; empower violent extremists to portray attackers as role models; provide attackers with new tactical avenues and means of destruction; and create vulnerabilities to information operations, including by foreign states, that are designed to enhance the attractiveness of violent extremist causes.
3. **Collaborate with Domestic and International Partners:** Terrorism and targeted violence often transcend national boundaries. The Department must address these threats with interagency and international collaboration, including effective intelligence and information sharing, as well as capacity building.
4. **Emphasize Locally-Based Solutions:** No matter the threat, mobilization to violence occurs at the local level across the country. The Department must support communities’ efforts to SLTT ensure they are equipped to play a central role in vital tasks like identifying signs of violent extremism and “off-ramping” susceptible individuals before they mobilize to violence.
5. **Uphold Individual Rights:** The Department must defend individual rights, including privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties.³⁷⁸

These principles apply to countering both terrorist operations by foreign terrorist actors and acts of violence perpetrated by domestic extremists, and they should continue to guide the homeland security apparatus into the future.

³⁷⁷ “DHS Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence,” Department of Homeland Security, September 20, 2019, <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/dhs-strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-and-targeted-violence>.

³⁷⁸ “DHS Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence.”

As evidenced in the cases studied, especially the cases of Earnest and Crusius, online platforms play a significant role in motivating acts of violence. The homeland security apparatus should continue to bolster technological capacity to root out suspicious online behavior while emphasizing the protection of civil liberties. While law enforcement has minimal authority to act on suspicious online behavior, due to civil liberties afforded American citizens by the First Amendment, investigators should still try to infiltrate chatrooms and monitor conversations to ensure malicious plots are not formed behind the veil of the Internet and attempt to engage online individuals who appear to be on the path toward radicalization.

Beyond law enforcement efforts, tackling such a broad issue as radicalization takes a community effort. Strengthening collaboration between federal and state, local, territorial, tribal and private (SLTTP) enterprises can more effectively reach broader audiences on a community level. Specifically, public awareness campaigns that educate U.S. citizens on the signs of radicalization may enhance community efforts to identify suspicious behavior and report that information to stakeholders that can engage radical suspects.

B. OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Though far-right radicals have claimed more American lives than foreign terrorists since 9/11, the radicalization of white nationalists remains under-studied. The academic community can help combat domestic security threats posed by radical white nationalists with an active role in the first and second principle laid out in the DHS Framework. Specifically, further academic study surrounding the evolving threat environment and the role of technology can enhance the homeland security environment's understanding of domestic threats, which will more effectively guide adaptation.

This thesis highlighted the role of uncensored social media websites and previous violent perpetrators in inspiring and guiding the attacks of John Earnest and Patrick Crusius. Further, referencing Brenton Tarrant in both of their manifestos, Earnest and Crusius uncovered the transnational character of white-nationalist radicalization. Future research covering the transnational nature of white nationalism can enlighten homeland

security's understanding of international influence on domestic threats and guide an international framework for identifying domestic extremists and preventing violence.

The DHS Framework also cited the perpetration of foreign-guided information operations that fuel extremist sentiments. In response, the Framework established two “priority actions” to combat disinformation campaigns: creating “a media/information literacy toolkit” and bolstering “information sharing about foreign disinformation campaigns.”³⁷⁹ Future research investigating the role of foreign-guided disinformation campaigns in radicalizing domestic white nationalists can inform a wider range of potential security responses.

C. CONCLUSION

Reaching national notoriety in the 2016 election season, the Alt-Right embodied the most recent resurgence of white nationalism in the United States. Though it lost most of its physical momentum with the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally, the Alt-Right’s persistence in reaching broad audiences continued online with the adoption of uncensored media platforms like 8chan. The Alt-Right’s revival of historic white nationalist ideologies, like White Genocide, race realism, anti-Semitism and the rejection of liberal democratic ideals, indicates that white-nationalist ideas and affinities will persist in the future and continue to play a role in the radicalization process of American whites.

The radicalization cases of three white nationalists, one of which radicalized before the Alt-Right reached national notoriety and two that radicalized afterwards, reveal the Alt-Right’s influence in white-nationalist-motivated radicalization and violence. The passive consumption of white-nationalist material online fueled the radicalization and ultimate violence of Dylann Roof, a high school dropout. John Earnest and Patrick Crusius, on the other hand, actively partook in online white-nationalist communities where they were propelled to violence by interaction with other radicals and calls to action in the manifestos of previous white-nationalist violent perpetrators, like Brenton Tarrant. Further, Earnest

³⁷⁹ “DHS Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence.”

and Crusius committed violence while enrolled in college, indicating the Alt-Right's ability to attract relatively affluent young Americans.

Significance Quest Theory, which highlights motivations, terrorism-justifying ideologies, and social networks as the three main components of the radicalization process, is an adequate model for studying the radicalization of white nationalists. Through the motivation lens of SQT, it appears Roof, Earnest, and Crusius were motivated by personal and group grievances, anticipated future grievances, and/or perceived opportunities to gain significance. From a terrorism-justifying ideology perspective, all three shooters subscribed to White Genocide theory, though each individual emphasized various white-nationalist affinities, such as race realism, anti-Semitism, and anti-liberal democracy, more than others. Because Roof's radicalization preceded the Alt-Right's rise to national notoriety and subsequent migration to fringe social media platforms, the social network component of SQT was more pronounced in the cases of Earnest and Crusius. The Alt-Right's social media presence marks a novel shift in white nationalism's ability to rapidly disseminate hateful rhetoric among large swaths of sympathizers across the globe.

Every society has its disenchanted individuals, and white-nationalist ideologies have stood the test of time. Further, attempts to remove hate speech from traditional social media platforms only prompted the standing up of uncensored fringe social media platforms where users remain anonymous. As social networks have adopted a malleable instantaneous anonymous online environment, detection of potential radical violent perpetrators has become more challenging. Nonetheless, the homeland security and academic communities have a role to play in the prevention of future white-nationalist-motivated attacks. Specifically, further research on white-nationalist radicalization can help shape effective homeland security policies to root out potential violent perpetrators. In the meantime, the federal homeland security apparatus should continue to enhance its technological abilities and engagement with SLTTP entities to root out violent plots. An integrated approach that combines federal and SLTTP entities, as well as the American public, can subdue white-nationalist violence.

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