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## Speaking post-truth to power

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In a YouTube interview, social studies teacher Tianna Dolichov suggested that teachers come together through social media. She posted her own frustrations with the limits of textbooks. She insisted others should share experiences with curriculum and teaching for change. She tried to organize an activist teacher network that would have ultimately founded culturally sustaining alternative schools. As a critical media literacy instructor, I would have been inspired by her call for classroom teachers to use alternative and social media to call for critical pedagogy and radical systemic change—had Dolichov not been a member of the Alt-Right and an avowed White supremacist.

The Alt-Right are an online racist group where multiple characters from the “intellectual dark web” or White identitarian right come together; trolls, incels, men’s rights activists, and ironic gamers intersect with right populist movements, Neo-romantic reactionaries, and Christian nationalists. Not limited to a hidden far-right separatist group, their articles, videos, memes, and posts circulate to a broader audience, moving from sites like 4chan and Reddit, though to Facebook and YouTube. Their ludic, ironic racism borrows from the postmodern, playful, provocative style once associated with the artistic left—what NRA spokeswoman Dana Loesch (2017) calls “punk rock conservatism.” This provocative political style rejects the mainstream right’s colorblind conservatism and moralizing metaphors, replacing them with populist, transgressive speech and explicit calls to White racial consciousness. In far-right forums, public education is a hoary vision of socialist indoctrination and in book groups, Breitbart, memes, and message boards new forms of conservative education fester.

Beginning with the French New Right, far-right groups have increasingly fought cultural or metapolitical battles (Taguieff, 1983). Reactionary groups have been called “Gramscians of the right” (Taguieff, 1983) as they draw on Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s exploration of the power of cultural hegemony and common sense—especially through education (Hall, 1988). Henry Giroux (2011) notes right-wing media is itself a kind of public pedagogy. Extending this, I argue that the Alt-Right now takes up a postmodern conceptual grammar, of transgressive, affective language play, and critical

anti-foundational thought. The “Gramscians of the right” might be considered become “Deleuzians of the right,” employing anti-fascist language for fascist ideas, using critical pedagogy to create the intellectual dark web.

In this paper, I explore the public pedagogy of the Alt-Right, specifically the language they use to critique public education and shape their own alternatives. Online, they use transgressive, liberatory, postmodern language, to promote anti-modern, racist, conspiratorial ideas. In education, this transgressive discourse takes the language of diversity, criticality, anti-hegemony to promote a reactionary populist commonsense. The right frames the left as dull PC schoolmasters. The right frames themselves as critical warriors—they speak post-truth to power.

Through digital ethnography of conservative media, I develop the concept of postmodern reactionary populism to analyze how right populist educational discourse and organizing co-opts the critical voices of the left. I ask:

- How does the far-right take on the anti-fascist, anti-foundational, affective, and fluid language of the left?
- How does the vocabulary of critical pedagogy re-appear as the language of “race realism,” “western chauvinism,” or “White identity”?

Informed by four-year experience as an instructor in a critical media literacy course, I begin to answer these questions with digital ethnographic methods. I explore the edges of the “fachosphere,” the online right of memes, forum posts, and videos on education, using data collected over nine months from a range of right-wing media circulating on Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube as well as the farther right Reddit r/Redpill and Stormfront.

First, I situate Alt-Right educational discourses within rightist media and conservative cultural politics (Greene, 2019; Hendershot, 2011; Peck, 2019), and their broader public pedagogy (Giroux, 2011). Then, I theorize postmodern reactionary populism, applying Callinicos’ (1990) reactionary postmodernism to Binder and Wood’s (2014) work on the populist style in political organizing. Next, I explain my digital ethnographic data and methods and present three findings: speaking post-truth to power, reactionary multiculturalism, and teaching for White lives. I conclude with a discussion of redpilling, exploring its implications for critical education.

### **Postmodern reactionary populism**

Henry Giroux defines critical pedagogy as a critical perspective on truth that “enlarged one’s perception of the larger social order” (2011, p. 55).

He notes that media is a central part of shaping public perception, a public pedagogy. Work in media studies and critical theory has explored how varied forms of rightist media define the borders of politics and shapes “the passions of popular commitment” (Grossberg, 2014, p. 596). Studies explore how radio shaped conservative ideology (Hendershot, 2011), right-wing book clubs, and alternatives to academic truth (Mayer, 2018) how Fox News shaped a populist political language that challenged media norms of truth (Peck, 2019), and how digital media facilitated extreme right humor that troubled linguistic norms of sincerity and earnestness (Greene, 2019). Others look more closely at right-wing political speech. Kellner (2016, 2017) describes the post-truth politics of Donald Trump as authoritarian populism and media spectacles, not truth but propaganda, affective speech that creates anger, idolatry, and magical idealization in his followers (Kellner, 2018). A few studies have explored the contemporary far right’s implications for democratic education. Kress (2018) addresses the difficulties of this administrations post-factual orientation places on teachers, and on critical pedagogy’s constructivist orientations to truth. However, these works have not looked at the right’s understanding of education or their digital critical pedagogy.

I understand Alt-Right and their post-truth discourses as “reactionary postmodernism” (Callinicos, 1990). Postmodern, they mobilize affect and transgressive language and an anti-foundational discourse, but reactionary, affect in the service of re-right-wing culture wars. The visual and linguistic registers of the Alt-Right are transgressive, affective, provocative, and anonymous—these provocative registers are what Binder and Wood (2014) describe as a populist political style. Their study of political style distinguished between an elite conservatism and a populist political style, where the latter was provocative, transgressive, and intentionally planned in in large state universities which were presumed to be liberal, as well as in in anonymous zones, especially online, and in conservative satirical publications. This political style is shocking; for example, the campus conservative protests where students dressed in diapers, transgressive, employing slurs and sexualizing vocabulary, and ironic or playful, allowing an element of both “just for the lulz” ironic distancing and transgressive joy. This is not just play; as Greene (2019) notes, Neo Nazi Andrew Anglin’s “A Normie’s guide to the Alt-Right” calls for this ambivalent use of postmodern irony and satire to recruit and radicalize. Transgressive language is both racist and designed to look like just a joke, or simple “free speech” opposed to the dull norms of “PC culture.”

This postmodern reactionary populism uses the language of the left, the anarchic, artistic, anti-truth of the French postmodernists for reactionary ends; building a nation, a people, and a regressive nostalgic vision of

cultural purity. Post-truth discourses both destabilize understandings of fact and reassert what Stuart Hall (1988) called traditional wisdom. They present as transgressive “redpills,” what an earlier generation or right-wing activists would have called Christian family values. In this way, they mobilize understandings of language as playful, fluid, affective, ironic, yet critical and anti-authoritarian that characterized postmodernists like Derrida, Lacan, or Deleuze. They take up critical language, but in the service of reifying dominant understandings of binary gender, male dominance, and White supremacy. Deleuze, when he said he desired to *enculer* [sodomize] his authors in order to create monstrous infants, may not have imagined children like this.

### Deleuze and the fachosphere

Postmodern language is affective and anti-foundational. Deleuze (1980) describes it as inherently transgressive, and it works against hierarchical notions of truth and authority called *les mots d'ordre* [commanding or organizing terms] to free the play of signifiers and the circulation of intensities and affects called *le corps sans organes*. Lyotard (1974) describes this circulation as *la bande libidinale* a sexual pun around “bander” [to get hard] worthy of the Alt-Right. Deleuze’s language is a rhizome; it is anarchic, nomadic, fluid, horizontal opposed to rigidly hierarchical, sedentary logic. It is defined by multiple and heterogeneous connections, without foundation, hierarchy, or totalitarian frame. The rhizome is described as a “nomadic war machine” which can use circulating language to disrupt dominant truths.

The right-wing Internet, or fachosphere, follows similar elements and adapts the anti-fascist structure of the rhizome to convey far-right ideas. Their language deploys a continual play of signifiers whose meanings shift, play, and elude, in opposition to the dull convention of the politically correct. Digital media, like the rhizome, creates multiple diverse connections between videos, message boards, images. There seems to be no center, and a continually shifting border of online right as they move from Twitter to 4Chan to Reddit, and as they push the images of our discourse. Finally, the online right is a nomadic war machine, using affect, play, and provocation to disrupt what they see as the liberal social and moral order—questioning prevailing values of anti-racism, education, and truth. They use this anarchic language of equality and connection to institute its opposite, challenging equality and instilling racism, sexism, and hierarchy.

Perhaps the most explicit statement of this postmodern reaction comes in the pseudo-philosophy of the thinkers associated with the Dark Enlightenment. This deliberately paradoxical term refers to a group of thinkers who challenge

progressive thought, egalitarian values, and democracy. Chief among these is Mencius Moldbug, who argues that liberal elites promote a universalist vision of truth and equality in order to secure their own power (Tait, 2019). This is in many ways a similar vision to the critical pedagogs who oppose colorblind racism; but the thinkers associated with the Dark Enlightenment instead use irony and digital media (Tait, 2019) to promote an epistemological populism (Saurette & Gunster, 2011) that centers on a rejection of racial and gender equality and reinforces White male dominance and a traditional worldview. New visions of post-truth take new language, in the service of old values, destabilize academic truth in favor of individual men's perceptions.

## Method

In this paper, I analyze the transgressive political style (Binder & Wood, 2014) of Alt-Right media. I understand the alt right as part of an “digitally mediatized communicative and discursive relation” (Maly, 2018, p. 20). I use a digital ethnographic approach (Boellstorff, 2012; Maly, 2018; Pink et al., 2016; Varis, 2016) to focus on right populism in online spaces, and the way it weaponizes the language of the left.

Digital ethnography applies the tools of ethnography to explore the virtual as a field (Boellstorff, 2012), exploring media as communication. To build on studies (Greene, 2019; Hendershot, 2011; Peck, 2019) of populist style in media, I use anthropological research on digital media (Ludemann, 2018; Mendoza-Denton, 2017). I draw on work on minor media (Spitulnik, 1996) and digital media (Boellstorff, 2012) that looks closely at inter-indexicality, how language circulates and shifts meaning across contexts to the online right. These digital ethnographic frameworks emphasize language as communicative interaction, circulation, affect, and researcher positionality.

Data for this paper is taken from my dissertation research on the women educators and the far right. I used a daily media log which involved three modes of digital ethnography: observation in online forums for conservative women and teachers on Reddit and Facebook, the creation of personal conservative media accounts on Instagram and Twitter, and watching in online education on YouTube. Each day I stored media in Evernote and created a daily media log with media analysis and personal reactions.

Right-wing and far-right approaches to educational organizing are multiple, varying according to the affordances of media. In this paper I focus on three elements of the Alt-Right educational organizing on social media:

1. Social groups and forums
2. Feeds of reposted articles and memes
3. Online educational platforms

These three elements work together (and with other media types) to construct online communities of activists, educators and parents, circulate and comment on news stories about schools, and promote racist and conservative ideological education.

Over nine months I collected media from multiple sources, focusing in particular on media depicting and addressed to women. First, I created a blank Instagram account and followed White nationalist accounts like “White people of the world” and hashtags like #tradwife. I initially viewed 30–50 posts per day, and saved representative posts, sites, or images in a daily “fachosphere media” log. Second, I visited conservative education and women’s forums, “redpillwomen,” “Conservative Teachers of America,” and “Stormfront.” Third, I visited two alternative education sites, PragerU, and YouTube channel RedIce where I would make digital field notes on one to three videos per session. I observed but I did not interview or use data gathered from exchanges with individual users. This was due to my institution’s limitations and respect for forum moderator’s privacy concerns.

I was careful in how I participated in the far right media ecosystem, avoiding both participation and deception. I did not like or share right-wing images on Facebook or on Instagram, or create any content that could be re-used by the right. On YouTube, I did not subscribe to any right-wing content because subscriber numbers are directly linked to monetization of accounts - instead I searched each time. I did not use deception for any of the accounts. I used my name and personal account on Facebook. Although I did have a right-wing Instagram feed that was separate from my personal feed, this was necessary in order to separate out the right-wing images and to compare and contrast with my own account. I repurposed an old personal account that shared a dozen photos of smoothies and vegan food. While I did not have any images of me or those close to me, I did not create a fake user profile or use this account to contact any other users. For the data in this paper, I simply observed public profiles; for my larger dissertation all users were contacted with my personal Facebook profile, made aware of my identity as a researcher and given informed consent. As all data here was public, no specific approval was needed; however, University of Massachusetts Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted for my dissertation research.

Each day I would look up media for between one and two hours. I began with the conservative Instagram accounts I follow, and then the conservative facebook and reddit accounts. I then wrote my digital field notes; I noted key themes in the far-right discussions of public education, often connected to responses to news stories or provocative media events. I then explored connections, for example if these forums or feeds link to any other key right-wing sites, such as RedIce YouTube videos about White genocide.



For this analysis, I began with my collected media and traced vocabulary, choosing a keyword that the far right had taken up from the left, for example, diversity or identity, and tracing it across conservative and right-wing sites. Finally, I wrote responses to the media; anger, disappointment, lack of surprise at far-right discourses, but also my own connections and entanglements as a White woman.

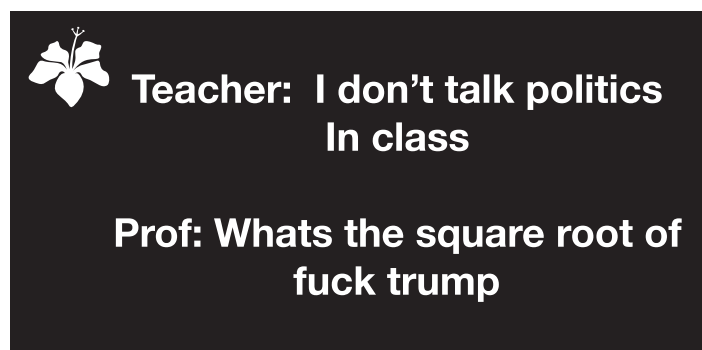
### **Positionality**

I am a middle class white woman who looks not unlike many of the women featured in these discourses. I grew up very conservative in a middle class college town so white it could have been an ethnostate. I am working towards becoming the critical socialist feminist educator the right complains about.

### **Speaking post-truth to power**

First, I explore how the language of oppression and indoctrination appears in memes and far right news headlines. In any of these images the far-right frames itself as speaking truth to cultural elites. The right opposes the “politically correct” as though it was the legacy of the Berkeley protests of the 1960s, rather than the shocked suburbanites of the silent majority. Positioning the left as hegemonic in education permits the right to advocate for and gain cultural power. It erases differences within conservatives and constructs the powerful as an oppressed group; forgotten men, silent majorities, the left behind, the “poorly educated.” Positioning themselves against hegemonic liberal “indoctrination,” rightists shape new discourses of truth, education, and oppression.

First, they construct teachers as illogical ideologues. In a riff on a common meme that compares high school to college teachers, they suggest all college professors hate Trump. This meme often simply contrasts high school teachers’ disciplinary style with professors’ laxity, for example “high



**Figure 1.** A common meme the difference between professors and teachers is here used to mock liberal universities.



school teachers: write me 20 pages. College teachers: if you write more than five pages, I will kill you.” However, on the right these explicitly call out professors’ politics.

One of several Memes suggests liberal politics are both omnipresent and irrelevant to real academics (see [Figure 1](#)). While some conservative students may feel that college professors are more liberal than they are (Binder & Wood, 2014), this meme goes beyond joking about tweedy professors. This construction opposes the good “neutral” teacher with the bad professor and implicitly aligns the former with conservatism. This works to present conservatism “as merely the accumulation of disinterested knowledge” (Giroux, 2011, p. 59), while it satirizes and reduces critical education to irrelevant ideology. With this satirical and playful language, i.e., “the square root of fuck trump,” they paint liberalism as omnipresent, part of everything including math, and just as irrelevant to education as my feelings about Trump are to geometry. All professors are liberal, trying to indoctrinate you, and the real free thinker is the conservative.

Next, conservative discourses suggest schools overall are liberal and left institutions, not only professors. This is echoed in other conservative humor. Conservapedia (2020), a paleoconservative and ironic version of wikipedia, defines schools as follows:

Public schools have become predominantly liberal and atheistic[1][2][3][4] government institutions that employ 3 million people and spend more than \$410 billion annually at a cost of more than \$10,000 per student. Liberals censor classroom prayer, the Ten Commandments, sharing of faith in classrooms during school hours, and teaching Bible-based morality.<sup>[5][6]</sup> Mandatory homosexual indoctrination is common as early as elementary school in more liberal states.<sup>[7]</sup> The failures of underperforming public schools are a paradigm of socialism, along with landfills and the Canadian health care system.

Conservapedia presents public schooling as simultaneously a failing institution and a powerful indoctrination center. Comparing them to landfills, this entry cites “underperforming schools” and their high costs as paradigms of socialist failure. Secondly, liberal education is represented as expensive atheistic repression of bible-based morality and homosexual indoctrination.

This image of schools as liberal hegemony is reflected in many conservative social media sites. In Facebook groups, Instagram, and Twitter, right-wing users circulate headlines about the new anti-White-male studies, diversity courses, or how Trump supporters are criticized and alienated in public schools. Dozens of news headlines are shared where teachers regulate, berate, or exclude Trump supporters. Liberal thought is presented as hegemonic and an imposition, and conservatives as the critical outsiders.

Below are details about multiple images from far-right news circulating on Facebook ([Figure 2](#)).



**Figure 2.** Headlines like these are common in right-wing news.

One frequently circulating story is one where a student is kicked out of class for supporting trump or wearing a trump hat. One example reads: “High school student wears MAGA hat, gets berated by leftist teacher and told he’s not entitled to learn, then evacuates class!”<sup>1</sup> This circulation of headlines like these creates an idea of leftist educational hegemony. They construct the right as a marginalized group, and the liberals who criticize them as the bigots and oppressors.

Right-wing users also borrow left language to comment on these posts. They tell liberals to “check their privilege” in ironic imitation of leftist campus discourse. In posts like “My Coming Out as A Conservative Teacher,” they use the language of gay rights to describe public schools as inherently hostile to conservative views. The use of this language does not suggest affinity for the gay community, and in the same group they describe conservative textbooks as marginal, in a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) curriculum pushed by the NEA. This ranges from complaints about NEA mailers on “teaching the rainbow” to users who describe the NEA as the “communist progressive teacher unions,” which need to be ejected from schools to “save the American republic.”

On the farther right, schools become indoctrination centers. It may be satire when Conservapedia (2020) describes schools as “homosexual indoctrination,” but visions of schools as indoctrination camps are discursive figures central to far-right media. Breitbart has an entire rubric entitled “Indoctrination of Youth.”<sup>2</sup> This rubric features articles about suicide bombers and articles about public school curriculum presenting them seemingly equivalent. Even more shockingly, perhaps is the headline from the far-right news source TruNews, “Rick Wiles: Liberals Intend to Put Conservatives in Concentration Camps.” For the far right, schools are not just sites of liberal hegemony but indoctrination centers, camps, cultural marxist madrassas.

The right-wing humor of memes, satirical encyclopedias, conspiratorial language, and ironic clickbait about “coming out as conservative” frame the

right as traditional wisdom or epistemological populism (Hall, 1988; Saurette & Gunster, 2011), beyond the machinations of the leftist-globalist-feminist agenda. They present themselves as marginalized to preserve their own dominance. Ironically, opposing the “cultural Marxists” uses a lot of postmodern language. Right-wing media is fluid, affective, transgressive. It is ironic, full of flashy angry parodies of left-wing language around sexuality and criticality, anti-foundational and anti-institutional, a carnivalesque of hate, fear, resentment, conspiracy, and war against state indoctrination. Right-wing media deploys anti-foundationalist and satirical language to construct academic critique as the imposition of leftist power, and progressive education as cultural-marxist-banking-pedagogy. To them, “conservatism is the new punk rock,” a joyously offensive, transgressive truth, and right-wing media is the new critical pedagogy.

### Reactionary multiculturalism

In this section, I look at how the terms “diversity” and “multiculturalism” are taken up in right-wing discussion forums. In addition to circulating stories and posts about education, right-wing social media is characterized by very active forums, comments sections, and discussion boards. These far-right discussion sites often link to, comment on, and recirculate other memes, articles, and other media; much like Deleuze’s rhizome, a right-wing news story on reddit about liberal hegemony in education will be accompanied by several interpretations, evaluations, links, or extensions. These comments and discussion provide a closer understanding of how some of the conceptual vocabulary of liberal anti-racist education is understood, reframed, and redeployed.

Right-wing education has long framed racism as traditional wisdom, or epistemic populism. Racial difference is what I see, I feel, I experience, and it does not reflect social inequality but my own affective, perceived truth. Ken Jones’s (1989) manifesto on conservative education, *Right Turn*, expresses approval for the political tactic of profanity and racial slurs. The linking of vernacular vocabulary and everyday racism was a populist appeal and presented racist thought as a frank reading of the world (Freire, 1970). This appropriation of critical literacy continues in contemporary Alt-Right discourses on schooling.

Pretending to unpack or critique leftist language about diversity, [Figure 3](#) below represents White supremacy as self-evident truth and White identity as under attack.

These images are taken from the reddit forum *r/the\_donald*, a well-known pro-Trump forum that brings together users from across the



**Figure 3.** Memes similar to these frequently compare diversity to an attack on whites.

Alt-Right. Users reposted a tweet and commented below to extend and shape its interpretation in a new dictionary of White nationalist hate. The initial post asserts that multiculturalism is opposed to western culture, both that the so-called western culture is not included in multiculturalism and that this same imagined western culture is uniquely responsible and blame-worthy. This goes beyond White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) to a White identity politics, a full-throated defense of privileges in response to a perceived status threat (Jardina, 2019; Mutz, 2018). They assert multiculturalism is a threat to White identity. Continuing this, and essentially unpacking the dog whistle of the original tweet; a user states western culture = White people, and another user states Diversity = no Whites. Regardless of their seriousness here, these definitions are consistent across Alt-Right media. This reframes calls for inclusive, responsive, humanizing education as a hegemonic, anti-White agenda. This isn't simply conservatives alienated by liberal schools, but the use of the language of oppression, diversity, and culture to preserve White dominance.

In addition to reframing diversity as anti-White, White supremacists online have co-opted the term to call racism “human biodiversity.” Human biodiversity is often referred to HBD, or in the original Nazi, race science. Evolutionary psychology, sociobiology (social Darwinism), and academic discourse are used to justify bigoted ideas of race and gender.<sup>3</sup> HBD is gender essentialist; women are naturally endowed with particular characteristics of support and submission, while men are natural leaders. This ideology of gender essentialism is shared across a broader swath of social conservatives. The Alt-Right uses biology rather than Christianity to justify this gender divides—but the result is the same. Together these ideas are used to delegitimize public education as a feminist indoctrination center; women teachers taking on places of leadership outside the home, teaching men, questioning gender ideologuy, and forcing “cultural Marxist” diversity on students as opposed to the natural hierarchy.

One major blogger, HBD chick, demonstrates how the language of diversity is taken up by White nationalists, and how racism is framed as

common sense. Her blog rejects any idea of equality as cultural Marxist nonsense. In one post called “reality check,”<sup>4</sup> she describes HBD as “Biology 101, Crimethink, Different peoples is different, duh!” These terms suggest that it is at once a science, a self-evident analytical truth, and a socially stigmatized belief or crimethink. In another, called “what human biodiversity (HBD) is not” she begins with a discussion of a 7th grade reading comprehension test, simultaneously critiquing public schooling and naturalizing her race science as a kind of reading the world” (Freire, 1970). In contrast to liberal education’s postmodern Marxist afflictions, she suggests human biodiversity is apolitical difference—physical differences between races have biological bases. Then, once you accept this, she asks you to believe that social differences between races do as well. You can “read” these differences with your own eyes; she seems to suggest. You aren’t racist, you’re just seeing what the liberals don’t want you to know.

The current moment is distinguished by a renewal of scientific discourses that aim to position racism as self-evident truth. Hawley’s (2017) Alt-Right is distinguished from other forms of conservative thought by an explicit “race realism,” the middle letters there don’t change the meaning, and this is just racism with a scientific veneer. While one side of the Alt-Right is calling politicians “cuckservatives,” another, more nefarious, side is using the tools of academic inquiry to naturalize racism. “The intellectual dark web” is the most prominent example of this; the thinkers who are a part of this collective often feel they have a stigmatized truth about racial or gender difference. This scientific racism is often part of right-wing alternative education platforms, such as Stephan Molyneux’s podcasts and YouTube videos about IQ and immigration. These Alt-Right “educators” co-opt the left’s critique of colorblind racism—but their problem is that it isn’t racist enough.

### **Teaching for White lives**

Third, I explore how the language of culture and identity is taken up in right-wing educational sites. I look at the forum Conservative teachers of America, as well as the online school PragerU and the Far Right YouTube Channel RedIce. Right-wing users adopt discussions of culturally sustaining curriculum to call for a White idenititarian pedagogy—a White power curriculum they disguise in calls for a return to a traditional curriculum, a patriotic curriculum, and above all a curriculum that valorizes the western world. This idea of the “West,” and a classical curriculum that valorizes it, is a theme that moves to the conservative PragerU, into White nationalist spaces like RedIce. To twist Wayne Au’s words, they want to teach for White lives.

The Conservative Teachers of America Facebook page suggests that the group is dedicated to: “preservation of the revolutionary spirit that completely changed the Western world.” As noted earlier, this suggests that the spirit of the west is under threat or in need of preservation. Their mission statement notes they support “good literature,” and “the truth about America,” phrases which equate conservatism in the curriculum with the traditional canon. This is a “populist-intellectual tactic” (Peck, 2019) that appeals to cultural authority and traditional wisdom; many of their posts refer to texts that reinforce conservative social values, and especially those that begin with patriotic themes that honor and support their vision of America. The West in a curriculum means then both using traditional, canonical texts, and teaching nationalist themes such as A Patriot’s History of the United States a clear parody of Howard Zinn’s People’s History of the United States.

Conservative Teachers of America frequently links to the online education site PragerU (2020). Set up by the Christian Nationalist Dennis Prager, PragerU boasts that it has over two billion views. It is accessible on YouTube and Instagram, as well as the site, and may be one of the largest conservative alternative education sites. It offers several hundred animated five-minute videos, as well as longer talks starring conservative and right-wing thinkers like Ben Shapiro and “fireside chats” by Dennis Prager himself. These videos cover a variety of topics connected to western civilization, Christianity, and capitalism. These mix a social conservative discourse of biblical morality and biological difference, and a libertarian insistence on capitalist rationality. Or, in their own idiom, “The perfect harmony of Jerusalem and Athens,” as Ben Shapiro (2019) describes the essence of the so-called Western thought.

Video series like *Mythbusting History* that assert things like “the British empire brought freedom to the world,” while *What’s Wrong with Feminism* uses facile notions of biological difference to support traditional gender roles. These videos bring together a libertarian, nationalist, “western chauvinist” curriculum that links Christianity, capitalism, and the classical world. This supports epistemological populism (Saurette & Gunster, 2011) or appeals to the common sense of a White middle class audience. With Prager’s producerist language and avuncular style, it equates business elites with everyday practical knowledge (Peck, 2019), further naturalizing this populist knowledge compared to the political games, social engineering, of academic elites. Women are different, because they look different. Muslims are bad because they are zealots. Capitalism is good, because it makes money. God is a man, because that is the best. Videos take a critical perspective and anti-foundationalist language to suggest the left is lying, power hungry, indoctrination against simple self-evident truth. Their important



“truth,” however, seems nothing more than the belief that White men are the best the world has to offer.

In addition to these videos, and key to the site’s effectiveness, PragerU offers a series of other forums, links and organizations—a sort of Deleuzian nomadic war machine of students, memes, videos, and teachers literally called the “Prager force.” Students are asked to commit to sharing one post per week to become privates in their digital army. For parents and home-schoolers, they have a series of auxiliary learning materials, from worksheets, commentaries, and tests reinforce the academic credentials of this site. More troubling, they developed an “educators’ corner” where teachers can sign up to be a part of Prager and use these materials in the classroom from elementary school until college (PragerU, 2020). And indeed, several of the active members of Conservative Teachers of America speak about trying to use these in their classrooms.

They describe the role of the educator’s corner as “Bringing Truth Back to Education” (PragerU, 2020). They say students are no longer taught America is “a land of opportunity, a defender of freedom around the world, and a source of pride” (PragerU, 2020). Pride is not, of course, a fact but it is taught as though it were indisputable. The description of the educator’s corner continues “Instead they are taught that America is a land of inequality, racism, imperialism, and ultimately, shame . . .” (PragerU, 2020). Income inequality may be a fact, but it is shown as shame and political machinations. This mission statement plays with the boundaries between facts and feelings, truth, and interpretations. It insists on patriotism and presents it as under threat by leftist schooling in order to naturalize it as truth. Leftist critical inquiry is seen as indoctrination and shame, and rightist ideology is facts, power, and pride. Prager’s students are called the “truth squad,” but what is promoted here is power—freedom, pride, and nationalism.

This discussion of the classics makes right-wing education seem reasonable, in discourse with theorists of the canon like Harold Bloom rather than theorists of the Bell Curve Herrnstein and Murray; they want to appear as if arguing for Britannica’s Great Books or more classics courses but their aims go much farther. PragerU is in many respects in line with mainstream “Fox Populism” (Peck, 2019), but this call for western curriculum extends to the much farther right. That this language is more than a call to classical curriculum is shown on the neo-Nazi forum Stormfront.

Inside these forums, users explain their ideas for educational organizing, within and outside their school systems. They ask each other for advice on curriculum, how to start schools, or how to set up Nazi organizations within their schools. One thread is devoted to trying to found a White pride club. Forum participants suggest to get it past the administration, and he should rename it the “western culture club.” This reveals the



deliberate strategy of using the language of canon and culture to support White identitarians.

A curriculum of White pride is found online in the educational videos of RedIce, the YouTube channel of a Swedish-American Alt-Right Barbie and Ken, Henrik Palmgren, and Lana Lokteff. In their videos, they extend PragerU's dog whistle about western civilization to a much more explicit discussion of White culture, White nationalism, and education. In addition to a weekly news show and multiple channels, they offer topical "culture wars" videos on education, race, and indoctrination. In their video on this topic, entitled *Public School: A Conspiracy against Ourselves*, schools are deliberate engines of broader moral, cultural, and social, and physical decline. These videos start from the premise that White culture is under attack by liberal, Jewish, globalist forces of indoctrination through our public schools. Schools are seen as central to the feminist destruction of the family, by taking children out of the home. Changing the curriculum to focus less on White canonical authors becomes a proxy for broader fears about demographic change and "White genocide," the replacement of White Europeans by immigrants.

Henrik interviews two educational scholars: Richard Grove, a paleolibertarian, and John Gatto, a conservative Catholic. Grove is a former schoolteacher and founder of a tutoring company located in New England. He speaks about the difference between "schooling" or following the rules and memorizing the curriculum, and a self-directed free education. With this contrast between schooling and a relevant curriculum that supports the whole person's development, he almost sounds like he is talking about John Dewey or Paolo Freire. However, he sees this critique of schooling not as democratic education but as a gateway to libertarian ideas; he says attacking schools is a way to get young people to think of government as oppression, and adults to think of it as taxes. In the second interview, Gatto also speaks for the need for self-directed education, and builds on this theme of power and indoctrination in a more White-nationalist direction. The interview suggests that the government is teaching anti-White values, that they are taking children away from their families and putting them under government control, leading to the enfeeblement of the White race. Throughout, Gatto cites German philosophers, British economists, and American theologians. In these videos, identity and the canon are explicitly mobilized for Whiteness.

PragerU's classical curriculum is capitalist, Christian nationalist, and RedIce are White nationalist; the call to the western canon is about White power disguised in odes to iambic pentameter. This tactic of reframing White pride in the language of western culture and White identity is currently employed by other far-right groups such as Identity Evropa, now the American Identity Movement. In education, this means presenting their views

as identity, patriotism, and culture—heritage, not hate. Soon there will be a call for a White culturally sustaining pedagogy in the face of the far right’s imaginary White genocide. Neither will be about facts, but about the power, feelings, and meaning that these narratives create for those on the right.

### **Discussion—Redpilling and rhizomes**

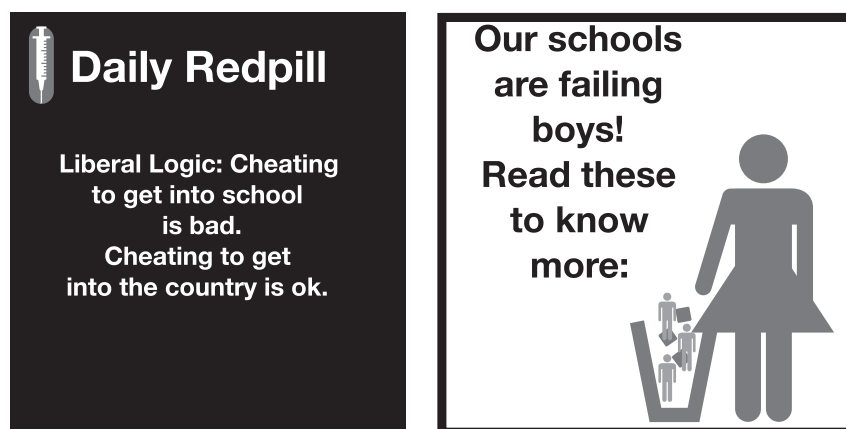
In this paper, I have explored multiple forms of right-wing digital media, and how they work together to put leftist words at the service of right-wing public pedagogy. This digital pedagogy has taken up concepts of hegemony and oppression, diversity and multiculturalism, identity and culture. Together right-wing educational discourses do the following:

1. Construct a unifying vision of right as oppressed majority which allows them to present progressive ideals as political indoctrination, and their own ideals as both natural truths and forbidden, stigmatized knowledge.
2. Circulate media to produce outrage, co-opt leftist voices, and provide alternative visions.
3. Create curriculum and maintain alternative educational curriculum and platforms online.

Overall, the right provides a media web with multiple points of access centered around a manichean story of popular truth and oppressive academic indoctrination. All these themes come together in the idea of “redpill” or transgressive right-wing alt-fact.

“Redpill” is itself a leftist word taken up by the right, taken from the Matrix, a movie created by two trans women. It refers to the pill taken to see the reality beyond the simulation of 1990s neoliberal urban spaces. Early uses of “redpilling” were by vegans and leftists. Now, it is used predominantly by the online right. It implies a truth that allows members to see beyond political correctness and social indoctrination. Each redpill represents a traditional rightist ideology, for example that men are more rational than women, as a forbidden truth. They make traditionalism transgressive, sexy.

Second, “redpill” is the title of both a Reddit forum and a Facebook group dedicated to the far right. Redpill sites are rhizomatic, connecting diverse forums, discussions, circulating media, videos, and comments to allow multiple points of access to right ideology. “Daily redpill” Facebook groups recirculate rightist content from across the Internet. These can include stories of left-wing education, immigrant crime, or as in the figure below, “liberal logic” that paints the left as irrational. Users are encouraged to consume more and more redpills, part of an intellectual journey into the far right.



**Figure 4.** Communities devoted to “redpilling” contain discussions similar to these.

Finally, “to redpill” means to share a truth that will convert others to the right; they are nomadic culture war machines. Users create redpills, rightist curriculum, and teach each other. These groups maintain an active network of teaching and learning from this media. In the Reddit redpill forum, users share and discuss videos, strategize, chat, and hold right-wing book groups. The redpill women’s group, for example, has discussions of gender essentialism, anti-feminist videos, beauty tips, and book group devoted to the anti-feminist text *Fascinating Womanhood*.

Below are two examples of redpills: first, an anti-immigrant tweet, and second, a more extensive anti-feminist curriculum on reddit. Users share a YouTube video about the end of masculinity, offer comments, and additional reading by Christina Hoff Summers. Summers is an anti-feminist, known by the Alt-Right as “based mom,” a slang term for a redpilled or conservative older woman. Other users may post further readings and textual analysis.

The two redpills shown here fill two connected roles (Figure 4). The first shows liberal truth as incoherent, inconsistent, just ideology. The second represents traditional understanding as repressed by this liberal ideology; here that masculinity is strength, and strength and competition are the key and perhaps sole, aspect of male identity and success. Redpill’s discursive style lets this old ideology of gender difference be presented as a new and transgressive idea. Little boys playing outside is at once normal and the critical perspective the loony liberal establishment doesn’t want you to see.

Redpill uses both a reactionary postmodern transgressive style and regressive cultural knowledge, framing itself as truth against the dull schoolmarm PC police and the ridiculous spectacle of social justice warriors. It uses race realism and gender realism as part of this appeal, reframing these 1950s ideologies as electric, exciting, stigmatized truth. Second, red pills are rhizomes and nomadic culture war machines, and they interconnect to a web of rightist resources for indoctrination. The right creates new pedagogical models for

epistemological populism—swallow the red pill and see the truth you’ve wanted to believe in all along. Last, they create their own curriculum with multiple points of entry. The redpill is fed to you by a mix of Archie Bunker and Morpheus, and underneath the Matrix is a beautiful suburb where father knows best.

### **Implications—Beyond progressive neoliberalism**

In this paper, I have looked at how the right borrows the language of critical pedagogy to put critique in the service of hegemonic ideology, diversity in the service of racism, and culturally responsive pedagogy at the service of Whiteness. To do this it effectively uses Deleuzian tools to shape a reactionary postmodernism; memes use affective and transgressive language, interconnected media forms rhizomes, and redpills are nomadic war machines. In the final section, I ask what critical educators and researchers can learn from this discourse. This right-wing digital media is racist and reactionary, but its use of left language may hint at some shared critiques of liberal education. A study of the right also illuminates real weaknesses, contradictions, and harm in liberal educational philosophy and policy.

Rightists can borrow progressive language in part because neoliberalism has already unmoored it from material social justice. In an era of progressive neoliberalism (Fraser, 2017), where corporations and states focus on representation not redistribution, the language of justice, equity, and diversity already been recuperated to reinforce corporate aims. Cut-off from broader cultural and political-economic struggle, we speak of lean-in feminism, rainbow capitalism, and corporate diversity so feminism, anti-racism, become empty corporate signifiers. We have feminist business schools like Sister that sell “business birthing handbooks.” In schooling, democratic aims for critical pedagogy, anti-racist and anti-sexist education are subsumed by neoliberal imperatives to improve test scores (Nygreen, 2016, 2017). Bilingual and culturally responsive pedagogy is often divorced from materialist critiques (Block, 2017) and becomes a tool of gentrification (Flores & García, 2017). So, it is perhaps unsurprising that progressive discourses are appropriated by the right; their caricatures of liberal indoctrination do point out entanglements between the language of justice and the practices of capitalism.

Like far-right politics flourishes in austerity, far-right public pedagogy might be fueled by the limits of the neoliberal university. While unwavering in the condemnation of their solutions, we can draw some uneasy but hopeful implications in the right’s diagnosis of contradictions between critical education and liberalism, within our teaching practices and our universities. “Diversity requirements” may uneasily combine the language of criticality with hidden curriculum of disinterested facts and testing. Or, as we teach the language of justice, college grows ever more unjust. It becomes expensive,

selective, market-oriented, a means for social sorting and debt. The right's vision of globalist indoctrination sees real problems worth noting.

At the end of the tide of racism, reaction, and resentment politics, there is perhaps some hope. Do not take the right's embrace of "post truth" as a call to return to the pseudo-neutral fact, doubling down on STEM, testing, and the common core. Instead, leftist educators may embrace the right's post-truth stance, as a challenge and an opportunity for more critical education. The popularity of redpills and right-wing media suggests that there is an appetite for funny, engaging, and interconnected media that continues to question received truths and mock dominant ideologies. Right media has led to a shared critique of common core and the liberal professor, perhaps its populist language could lead to openings to critique financialized capitalism or the neoliberal university. Post-truth and affective language, transgressive humor, the style and media strategy of the right could also be used by the left. Within the Redpill is poisonous racism, but also a slight opening for critical education for all.

## Notes

1. This story was picked up by the National Review, among others. For more information on the original story see here: [https://dailycaller.com/2018/11/27/class-evacuated-trump-hat/?fbclid=IwAR0YUPKHLnUPf4yL3sMl5p7TiG1jMD7cq9q7lofiyCLdgSF2toKQ\\_BFEXXg](https://dailycaller.com/2018/11/27/class-evacuated-trump-hat/?fbclid=IwAR0YUPKHLnUPf4yL3sMl5p7TiG1jMD7cq9q7lofiyCLdgSF2toKQ_BFEXXg)
2. <https://www.breitbart.com/tag/indoctrination-of-youth/>
3. See for example the far right forum UNZ review <http://www.unz.com/akarlin/northern-europes-late-development-as-argument-against-race-differences-in-iq/>
4. <https://hbdchick.wordpress.com/category/reality-check/>

## Notes on contributor

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