

# The Resurgence of Neo-Nazism in the U.S.

## Guys/Folks/People:

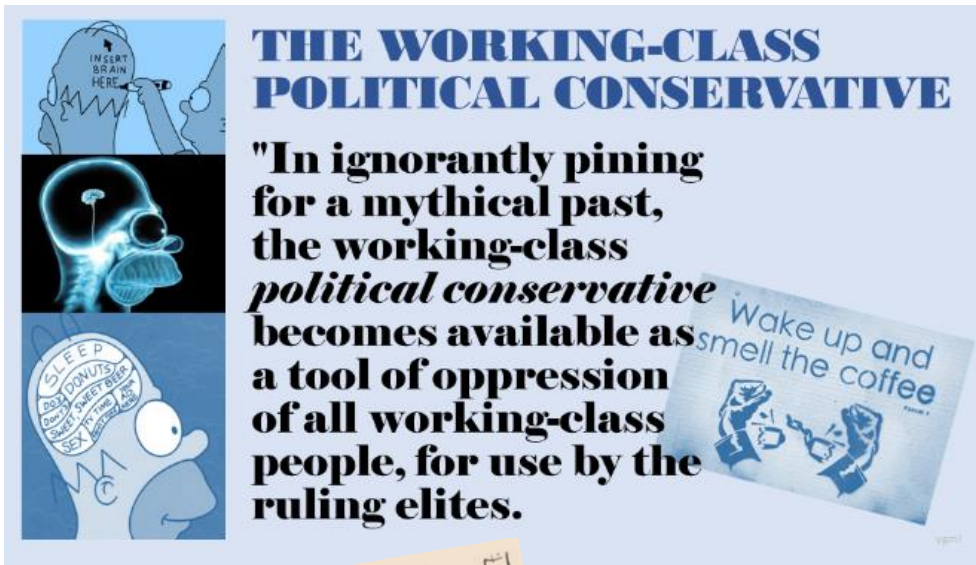
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## Introduction

An important function of racism is the *scape-goating* of the powerless “Other.” Like in many other countries, the United States has a long history of scapegoating the *Other*. Once upon a time, believe it or not, those who were seen as the *Other* included the Irish, the Jews, the Polish, the Russians, the Greeks, and so on. In United States, today, the powerless *Other*—relative to the dominant racial group—are undocumented workers of color and their families, Latina/Latinos, African Americans, Asians, and so on.

Question: so, what are they being scape-goated for? The subversion of the democratic component of the capitalist democratic system (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—specifically, *authentic* democracy) by the bourgeoisie and its allies—the transnational conglomerates—which is manifest in a myriad of ways: from the enormous wealth gap





wealthy to outright corruption among politicians; from pollution of the environment to climate change; from the weakening of the social safety net to an unresponsive electoral system subverted by all kinds of trickery (gerrymandering, etc.), and so on, and so on. Note: some of these problems can be laid directly at the door of an economic ideology that is championed by conservatives; it's called Neoliberalism.

From the perspective of law, a fundamental question that has to be asked is this: Did the framers of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution have in mind the deployment of "freedom of speech" to terrorize the powerless, or did they intend it as a means for the powerless to push back

against the tyranny of the powerful? How would a Supreme Court made up of justices representing the entire spectrum of the various racial/ethnic groups that comprise the U.S. citizenry rule on this question? Is the manufacture of fake news protected by the First Amendment even when it undermines democracy as a whole? Are those who are inherently opposed to democracy (e.g. the Neo-Nazis) entitled to freedom of speech?

By the way, for a definition of the "Other" see the Online Course Glossary.

## The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Folks, note that contained within this single powerful sentence are six fundamental rights. (Two relate to authentic democracy and the rest to procedural democracy.) Question: How many people died to make possible the creation of the U.S. Constitution? Do you know?

# The Alt-Right Curriculum

Teachers are facilitating conversations with students about white nationalism.

[Linda K. Wertheimer](#) Apr 4, 2017 [The Atlantic Magazine](#)

SOURCE: <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/04/the-alt-right-curriculum/521745/>

Dropping a handout with a photo on each student's desk, the teacher Kathryn Leslie asked the teens to study the picture of Richard Spencer, the leader of the "alt-right" movement who advocates for a homeland just for whites. There was Spencer, the image of confidence, smiling in a suit coat and open-collared shirt as he leaned against a brick wall.

Does Spencer, Leslie asked her Brookline High School students, fit the stereotype of a white nationalist? Spencer had no visible tattoos advertising white pride or hate against non-whites or non-Christians. He also had graduated from college.

"Sometimes, our stereotype of a white nationalist can be different than a young, articulate, clean-cut guy who espouses lots of racist views," said Leslie.

The high-school sophomores and their pair of teachers at the suburban Boston high school were tackling a subject that many adults have struggled to understand—the so-called alt-right movement and how it and its main figurehead, Spencer, managed to surface in the mainstream in the 2016 election and afterward. It's a topic many teachers would prefer to avoid, given how polarized America has become over the election of President Donald Trump and anything remotely related.

The subject, though, was a natural for Leslie and Malcolm Cawthorne, who co-teach a course about race and identity in America and how it plays out in students' lives, school, town, and nation. Cawthorne, who is black, recruited Leslie, who is white, to co-teach the elective because he wanted students to realize that many whites care about confronting racism. He and Leslie teach in a school that has gone from 71 percent white [two decades ago](#) to 55 percent [now](#). They are helping their students, many of whom identify with more than one race, sort out their own racial and ethnic identities in two sections of the course.

Spencer, who's credited with coining the term alt-right nearly a decade ago, made national news last November after *The Atlantic* [published a clip of him](#) addressing an alt-right conference in Washington, D.C. He got his group of white male followers to echo his "Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail Victory" rallying cry. Many in the room flashed a "Heil Hitler" type of salute.

Spencer's and the alt-right (short for alternative right) movement's stances conflict with common mores in American society, the Brookline teachers said.



“When it feels more partisan, we walk more of a tightrope. For the ‘alt-right,’ I didn’t feel we had to walk a tightrope,” said Leslie, who viewed teaching about the alt-right as akin to teaching about the KKK. Racism ought to be a non-partisan subject, she said.


Yet, many teachers, regardless of where they stand politically, might lump the alt-right and Spencer into the too-hot-to-touch category. Even during the 2016 campaign, many teachers were afraid of talking about anything related to the election, according to a Southern Poverty Law Center [survey](#), “The Trump Effect, The impact of the presidential campaign on our nation’s schools.” A little

## The “Self-oppression” of Identity Politics

**In an irony of ironies, “identity politics” is exactly what the ruling elites need in their effort to maintain their hegemony.**

### What is Identity Politics?

It is the bizarre position that the agenda of only one’s own group, however one defines the boundary of that group, matters in the legitimate struggles for political, economic, and social justice in a societal context where oppression affects all (even if only to varying degrees), except the oppressors of course—which in a capitalist society is the bourgeoisie; that is, the ruling elites. Strategically, identity politics is the politics of failure because it is divisive politics and not inclusive politics, given its inability to build and sustain alliances in a common struggle against all oppression, whatever its forms (classism, racism, ethnicism, sexism, and so on).



ANGELO LOPEZ 2016

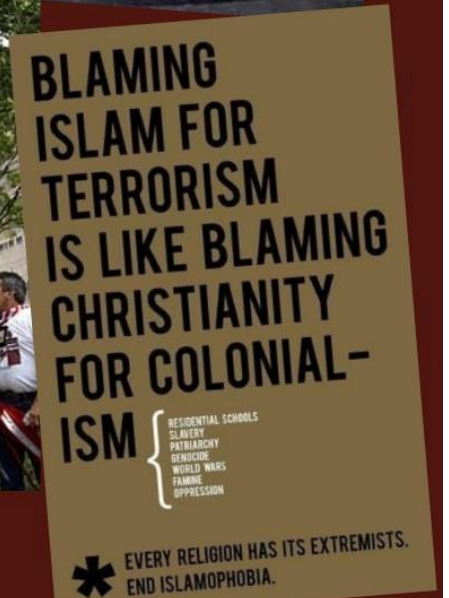
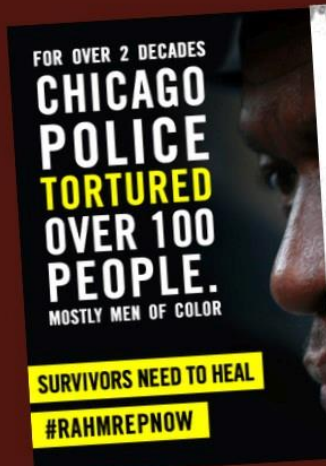
Among the dangerous pitfalls of "identity politics" is the view that one's pain from oppression is the only pain worthy of acknowledgement by all. It is dangerous because it discourages the building of alliances to overcome all forms of oppression, without which one's own oppression will also remain unaddressed. Moreover, it is a morally bankrupt view that suggests that oppression exists only when it affects oneself; the oppression that others face is of no relevance.

more than 40 percent of the roughly 2,000 teachers surveyed said they were hesitant to teach about the election out of concern of backlash from their communities, school administrators, and parents. Those fears have only heightened. In a [November survey](#) of 10,000 teachers, also by Teaching Tolerance, the proportion of teachers nervous to teach about the election and the post-election season rose a little higher to 46 percent.

“We’re hearing from teachers that they’re afraid to talk in favorable terms about diversity, that they really are afraid of being accused of partisanship now and the line about what is partisan has moved since the election,” said Maureen Costello, the author of the Trump Effect report and director of the Teaching Tolerance project at the Southern Poverty Law Center.



# The Faces of "Jim Crow" Today



Nazism, Nativism, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Jingoism, Racism...



and others added. Her project's website provides educational resources to about 500,000 people a month on race and other topics related to prejudice. Teaching Tolerance hopes to create resources on the alt-right for teachers for use next school year. Students, she said, need to learn about extremism of all kinds and how it works for various reasons, including avoiding getting swept up into it themselves.

The white-nationalist groups, based on their tactics, seem to believe that teens and 20-somethings are particularly susceptible to their messaging, said Oren Segal, the director of the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism. Segal noted that the groups are aiming for a younger demographic by reaching out through social media and trying to set up talks on college campuses or disseminate fliers there. Two groups connected to the alt-right, Identity Evropa and American Vanguard, have been responsible for many of the fliers, according to the ADL. Last May, Spencer and the head of the Identity Evropa group held an event at the University of California at Berkeley. As of March 28, the ADL has counted 124 incidents of white-supremacist fliers showing up on 90 different college campuses in 32 states since the school year began, Segal said. Spencer, who also made a [highly publicized visit to Texas A&M University in December](#), announced his own college-campus tour, further fueling concerns about the alt-right.



Spencer, Segal added, presents an alt-right follower as someone different from a Neo-Nazi skin-head, but that's a façade. "All it is, make no mistake, is a repackaging of white supremacy," he said.

The common civic norm of disavowing overt and explicit expressions of racism has not changed, said Meira Levinson, a professor of education at Harvard University.

"A lot of people believe they have the right to be racist and that we have to honor that as a legitimate point of view."

"But the question is, how quickly and to what extent will there be a shift?" said Levinson, who has been coaching educators on how to navigate the 2016 election in their classroom. "It is the case already, thanks to Trump's tweets, statements, and rallies, that he has been redefining certain civic norms and values that had been seen as common and unproblematic."

Important. This is a two-part reading involving text and AV material. First part, read and *study* this entire reading, including studying all the images. Second part, view and study this 1 hour documentary that goes with this reading [here](#). Do not screw up on this assignment!

[...]

"A lot of people have confused the rhetoric the president used to get elected with making it okay to express racist ideas again," O'Keefe said. "A lot of people believe they have the right to be racist and that we have to honor that as a legitimate point of view."

That kind of atmosphere makes her wary about introducing a unit on the alt-right, she said.

Teachers may be censoring themselves more than necessary when deciding what to teach, said Diana Hess, the dean of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Educators should use current events to help students learn about authentic political controversy, said Hess, who co-authored [\*The Political Classroom\*](#) with Paula McAvoy.

Learning about the alt-right, for example, is a lesson in *political literacy*. Teachers should not ask students to decide whether the alt-right is a good thing, but they can teach how it came about and how it has affected the political system, Hess said.

At Brookline High School, Cawthorne and Leslie were aware of the boundaries they must follow when designing the alt-right unit—and, so far, they haven't gotten any pushback in response to their decision to teach it.

"It's not our job ethically to push kids to go against Trump. It's not our job to indoctrinate," said Cawthorne.

Several students in the classroom cringed.

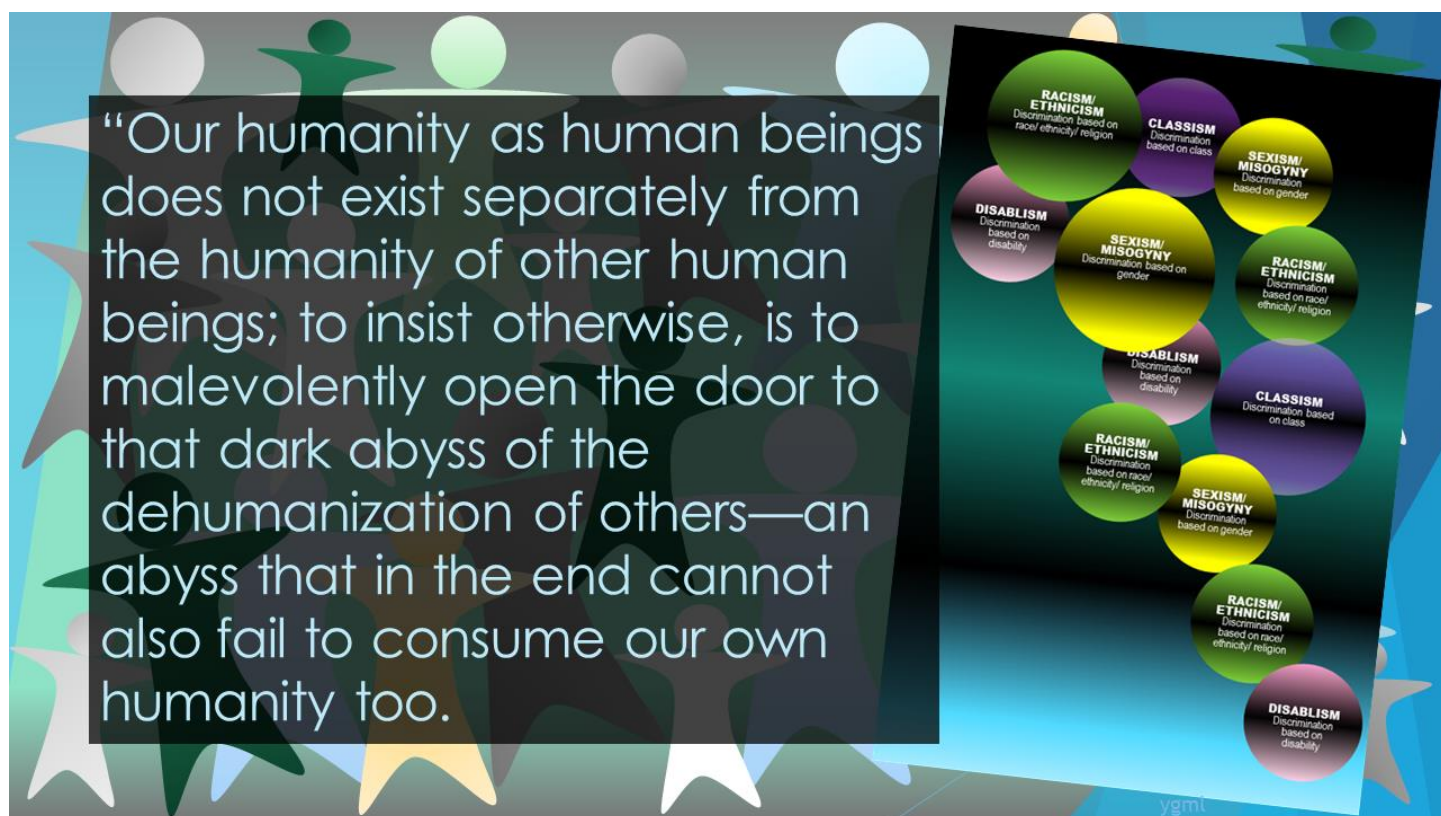


Cawthorne and Leslie developed a class period devoted to the alt-right as part of a larger unit on white identity. Before tackling the alt-right, they talked to students about the concept of white identity and white fragility, the idea that whites can get so overwhelmed with guilt about the state of racism in American society that they simply cannot and will not talk about race. They also talked about how the concept of whiteness and who is white has changed in America as various groups of immigrants—whether they were Jews, Italians, or Irish—went from being considered second-class citizens and essentially of another race to part of the white majority. There was a diversity of whiteness in the 19th century that has largely disappeared, Cawthorne told the students.

Discussions about the alt-right fit into lessons on the complexities surrounding just what it means to be white in America, the teachers said. To prompt nuanced discussion backed up by facts, they first gave students a news-article explainer about the alt-right, then pushed the students to describe what they thought followers of the alt-right believed. The students saw the movement as leaving out people of color and focusing on America as a country for whites. They viewed the alt-right as a way for white people to take pride in themselves when they feel they have been pushed aside.

Then, the teachers played a recording of a 23-minute episode of the [Reveal](#) podcast titled “A Frank Conversation with a White Nationalist.” Al Letson, an African American journalist and anchor of the podcast, interviewed Spencer. Letson, in his introduction, described Spencer as a white nationalist who “sees Trump’s election as the first solid steps toward a new post-America whites-only nation.” (Spencer did not respond to emails requesting his input for this story.)

During the Reveal interview, Spencer lamented how Americans now lived in a world with a “white-guilt complex,” where it was seen as good if a person of color became a CEO.





Letson countered: “What you’re talking about is the country is trying to find a balance where everybody gets a seat at the table.”

On a few occasions, Spencer referred to whites as “my people” and said his notion of a white-ethno state was a grand goal. “We want a new type of society that would actually be a homeland for all white people,” he told Letson. Several students in the classroom cringed.

Letson, who kept his tone civil and polite just like Spencer’s, pushed harder. “What’s the difference between you and the racists that hung people up from trees? What’s the difference between you and the Klansmen that burned crosses on people’s lawns?”

Spencer refused to comment on what he called “hypothetical Klansmen.” When Letson kept pushing, Spencer said he was not those people. Asked who he is, Spencer said he’s a European person, born in Massachusetts and raised in Texas, who likes mountain biking.

Nearly every student gasped as soon as Spencer said Massachusetts. That Massachusetts, viewed as generally a liberal place, was Spencer’s birth state flabbergasted many of the teens—even though their own school has not been immune from racist and anti-Semitic graffiti and incidents during the past few years.

Asked to react to the podcast, nearly every student raised a hand to offer an opinion. While many could understand how white nationalism might increase as a reaction to the country’s changing demographics, some were shocked to hear that Spencer would want whites to live in a separate country. Others said little surprised them, given personal experience with racism in Brookline, a town known for its liberal-progressive bent.



The phrase “my people” particularly grated on white students. Many see themselves as more than simply white. Their religion and family backgrounds play a role. One is part Syrian. Many are Jewish, given Brookline’s large Jewish community; Brookline is home to 14 synagogues and Jewish worship groups; combined with neighboring Newton and Brighton, it makes up nearly 30 percent of the Boston area’s Jewish population, according to a Brandeis University [study](#). What does “white” even mean?

The student Hassan Abdirahman, who is black and Somalian American, thought it weird that as a white man in America, Spencer described himself as European. “Why doesn’t he go to Europe?” Abdirahman asked.

Cawthorne advised students to be careful about wishing the same thing for Spencer that he wished for people of color by advocating for a country or homeland for whites only. In Spencer’s interview with Letson, he rejected the idea that blacks and whites could live in peace together, saying he thought the two races actually kind of hate each other.

“Some people in our class didn’t know about it. That is enough to make it worth teaching.”

Cawthorne, as a teacher, said he wanted Abdirahman to think more deeply about what he was saying because racists have told black people they should go back to their own country. “I find it ironic he didn’t say where in Europe,” he said of Spencer’s description of his own identity. “I identify myself as African American, no hyphen, because where in Africa?”

Satchel Tsai, who is half white and half Asian, saw Letson’s handling of the interview as a model for other Americans. “It was very civil. It’s important to be civil when you talk about race,” said Tsai.

While Tsai had previously read news about the alt-right, her classmate, Richard Desir, who is black and Haitian American, had never heard of it. He was perturbed that Spencer could not understand that people of color did not have a chance to succeed for such a long time and that there still isn’t an even playing field based on race.

Alexis Raitt, who’s Jewish, wrinkled her face in disgust throughout most of the podcast. She had heard of the white-nationalist movement but hearing the smooth-talking Spencer in his own words was chilling for her. The 38-year-old Spencer, according to a [profile of him in \*Mother Jones\*](#), had made it as far as a Duke University doctoral program before dropping out. Raitt normally would have seen someone like Spencer as ignorant and uneducated but he was educated. Listening to Spencer made her want to go out and educate peers that this kind of thinking existed.

“Some people in our class didn’t know about it. That is enough to make it worth teaching,” she said.

Sari Gubar, also Jewish, speculated that schools’ emphasis on European history could make people like Spencer feel empowered to believe that ‘Yeah, Europeans did it all.’ She told her teachers that the ideas Spencer promoted were “really creepy.”



“Yes, it should be creepy,” Leslie said. “If you weren’t freaked out right now, we wouldn’t be doing our job.”

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