

Behind *the* MASK

In an internet-based era, consumers need to be wary of the origin of memes

We exist in a massively meme-oriented culture. The online forum nerds that coined the term at some point in the past decade would have never fathomed a meme's far-reaching power today. They also would've never imagined that memes would develop a more insidious edge.

My younger brother recently had a friend over to hang out. It wasn't long before they were wildly sharing memes back and forth, racing to the edges of the internet for that top-tier content.

There were the usual America's Funniest Home Videos-type gags, some bizarre left-field internet humor and amusing Twitter screenshots; all par for the course.

However, as the night went on, my brother's friend began hesitantly offering memes that, according to him, "are definitely not for normies."

For those uninitiated, a "normie" is anyone whose taste in memes is especially surface-level (eg. your aunt that reposts all those funny cat videos on Facebook). In this context, though, the flip-side of "normie" memes led down an alarmingly warped rabbit hole.

Private Instagram accounts shrouded in disclaimers housed anti-Semitic cartoons, videos of white frat bros hazing their non-white pledges and more than a few iterations of a certain green frog glorifying white supremacists.

This is the deceptively alluring face of the alt-right. Many impressionable kids have no idea that what they're looking at crosses the line beyond memes worth a late-night laugh.

Members of the alt-right utilize social media savvy like ice cream offered out of the sketchy white van. It's by no mistake that the breeding grounds for their hateful ideology is practically indistinguishable from any other sources of online entertainment.

Underneath their aesthetic sheen, the alt-right is nothing more than another hate group carefully cultivating chaos in America.

Zach Green *creative director*

It's not only young meme-hunters that I see falling into this alt-right trap. Many insecure white men feeling "left out" of the national conversation on race relations have found solace in the pseudoscience behind alt-right dogma.

When the alt-right began materializing as an informal group earlier this year, I was dumbstruck. As a young, white man, I sat squarely in the crosshairs of their target audience, and still failed to see the appeal.

In hopes of developing an understanding, I reached Henry Wolff, a editor of American Renaissance. The online publication regularly delivers white supremacist philosophies under the guise of faux-scholarly writing.

"Whites are awakening to the fact that they're facing a future as a minority in a country that their forebears created, and perhaps a hated minority," Wolff said.

He continued on about the biological inferiority of non-white people in a tone that was terrifyingly pleasant. The conversation was carried on as if we were chatting over sandwiches at a family picnic.

For many, the events in Charlottesville last month were a wake-up call. Perhaps the most unsettling part was that this tiki torch-wielding manifestation of the alt-right looked alarmingly familiar. Stern dads in khakis, polo-ed co-workers, wide-eyed students -- all marching in the name of white supremacy.

When most people picture "hate group," that image is far from what comes to mind. This invisible cloak is what makes the alt-right so exceptionally dangerous.

No, they don't have secret underground meetings. No, they don't have an identifiable dress code (unless the Old Navy clearance rack counts).

No, they don't have one evil leader. They hardly have any central leadership, but in the internet era, that's not a major setback for them.

Their power is ultimately rooted in numbers. Like a frog lured into a boiling pot of water, their followers will have almost no awareness of the danger of this situation until it's too late.

ANTIFA

A loosely organized group of autonomous cells, Antifa focuses on dispelling neo-fascism through the use of force and militaristic tactics. Antifa often uses counterprotests to advance its agenda of anti-fascism, showing up to neo-nazi rallies and engaging in violent conflict.

The Alt-Right

A term coined by Richard Spencer in an attempt to make racist ideologies seem not so bad, the Alt-Right movement rejects moderate conservative views in favor of a white nationalist state void of racial and ethnic diversity. The term is synonymous with white nationalism, white supremacy and neo-Nazism.

Black Lives Matter (BLM)

A black-led protest campaign that formed in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teen. The group has since gained support following the deaths of Mike Brown, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling and Michael Scott. The group calls for true equal protection under the law and an end to latent prejudices within law enforcement, the legislative system and the judicial system.

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK)

A formerly defunct organization, the Klan is back in a big way to advocate for white supremacy and the elimination of diversity in America. Led most prominently by Thomas Robb and the Knights Party, the Klan is still a fully-functioning hate group.

White Nationalism

White nationalism is simply a euphemism for white supremacy, the belief that whites are inherently superior to other races. White Nationalists call for a country that is only populated by white Christians and follows alt-right policies. The term can be used interchangeably with white supremacy.

--compiled by Patrick White

What role should organized protest play in American society?



Deanna Douglass
Sophomore

"I think that protests give people that would not normally have a voice an opportunity to come together and really just express that voice because sometimes the average person can really be overlooked."



Mollie Ping
Senior

"I think a lot more citizens are exercising their First Amendment rights to protest, and as long as it's done peacefully and respectfully, people should be allowed to, and are legally allowed to protest about whatever they choose to."